LONDON! O MELANCHOLY!
THE ELOQUENCE OF THE BODY IN THE TOWN
IN THE ENGLISH NOVEL OF SENTIMENT

by

GEORGE MACGREGOR MORGAN

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Abstract

Morgan reads the treatment of gesture in *Clarissa* (Richardson, 1747 - 48), *Amelia* (Fielding, 1751), and *Cecilia* (Burney, 1782) to study the capacity the sentimental novel attributes to physical forms of eloquence to generate sociability and moderate selfishness in London. He argues that the eighteenth-century English novel of sentiment adopts a physiology derived from Descartes’s theory of the body-machine to construct sentimental protagonists whose gestures bear witness against Bernard Mandeville’s assertions that people are not naturally sociable, and that self-interest, rather than sympathy, determines absolutely every aspect of human behaviour. However, when studied in the context of sentimental fiction set in the cruel and unsociable metropolis of London, the action of this eloquent body proved relatively ineffectual in changing its spectators for the better. In the English novelistic tradition that stems from Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747 - 48), selfishness lies at the roots of civilization, and inculcates modern urban people with instinctively theatrical mores: metropolitan theatricality, marked out in the gestures of the polite body, works to vitiate the sociability that might naturally animate everyday human intercourse. *Clarissa* responds to the dilemma of the intrinsic theatricality and self-interestedness of modern civil society with a heroine whose gestures (that is, whose physical states) demonstrate an eloquence that partially counteracts some of the *effects* self-love has upon the metropolis. But while sympathy and natural eloquence do little to diminish London’s submission to selfishness, they remain, in *Clarissa*, unequivocally good. In contrast with *Clarissa*, Henry Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751) and Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* (1782) criticize both phenomena. In these novels, both by written by socially conservative authors, natural
eloquence and sympathy do not generate sociability in London at all and do not even ensure personal virtue unless they are tempered by the discipline of some kind of theatricality. For Fielding and for Burney, unregulated sympathy becomes a problem to which the best remedy is a modicum of stage-craft. But, strangely enough, all three novels indirectly licence the principles of the self-interest they ostensibly attack. Ultimately, these novels of sentiment self-consciously position sympathy and natural eloquence as supplemental discourses that might protest against the dominant practices of Mandevillian self-interest that produce the social order of the metropolis. The net result is that the novel of sentiment implicitly tolerates the dominance of self-interest in the areas of public activity that lie mostly outside the subject-matter with which sentimental fiction principally concerns itself.
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Preface

This is a study of a single aspect of urban affect in eighteenth-century sentimental fiction in England. My subject is London’s imprint on personality as represented in three novels of sentiment, with particular emphasis on the effects of the metropolis on the body-machine. The novels are Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747 - 48), Henry Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751), and Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* (1782). The following chapters investigate these sentimental fictions to determine how urban environment undermines natural sociability in them, and whether they endow the effects of natural sympathy in the human organism with any power to repair the damaged social fabric of the town.

Since I chose this topic because it matched a gap in the existing scholarship on the representation of urban affect in eighteenth-century British literature, I would like to describe the hole I set out to fill. The initial inspiration for this thesis came from books like John Bender’s *Imagining the Penitentiary* (1987) and Terry Castle’s *Masquerade and Civilization* (1986), which historicize eighteenth-century fiction by reading it in the context of institutions which structured contemporary London. Both studies invest in narratives of urban discipline. In these books, the new-model prison and the masked assembly exhibit a marked tendency to alter personality, in former case, by inducing penitence, and in the latter, by a temporary relaxation of social constraint. According to Bender and Castle, the formative influences of these urban structures, as well as those of their associated social systems, lay in their capacity to institutionalize or inculcate theatre-like behaviour. Indeed, the word ‘masquerade’ is the closest equivalent in eighteenth-century English to the concept this thesis denotes as
'theatricality'. Similarly, Bender attributes some of the psychological effects of both the eighteenth-century novel and the theoretical eighteenth-century penitentiary to an internalization of theatricality. In Bender and Castle, then, the theatricality of urban institutions seems to stand for the theatricality of London itself.

I therefore adopted the working hypothesis that, in the eighteenth-century English novel of sentiment, theatricality is one of London's defining attributes. Thus, my question became whether, in the novel of sentiment, metropolitan theatricality shapes personality systematically, and, if so, how and by what means. Adopting this question meant I had to specify the organizing principle of London as it is described in the eighteenth-century novel of sentiment. In other words, I needed to identify precisely what quality might mark the metropolitan action of an English novel of sentiment as distinctively and unmistakably urban, apart from the fact that the action takes place in London.

Obvious though it may seem, this question had seldom been considered, possibly because Anglo-American criticism written after the Second World War did not take much interest in the novel of sentiment as a discrete object of study before the publication of R. F. Brissenden's *Virtue in Distress* (1974). Late twentieth-century studies of the treatment of London in eighteenth-century English literature rarely single out the representation of the metropolis in the novel of sentiment for extended discussion. Raymond Williams' *Country and the City* (1973), for instance, barely mentions eighteenth-century sentimental fiction and cites *Clarissa* primarily to illustrate the Harlowes' efforts to improve their country estate by proposing that their daughter marry the adjoining land-owner (64 - 65).

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1 While arguing that the idea of theatricality dates from the eighteenth century, Tracy C. Davis attributes the first appearance of the word in print to Thomas Carlyle (2003).
The discussions of literary representation of the metropolis in Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) and later, in Max Byrd’s *London Transformed: Images of the City in the Eighteenth Century* (1978), afford even better examples of the benign neglect I have just described. For Watt, the urban character of the eighteenth-century novel consists in its being ‘less concerned with the public and more concerned with the private side of life’ than any previous literary form:

... the world of the novel is essentially the world of the modern city; both present a picture of life in which the individual is immersed in private and personal relationships because a larger communion with nature or society is no longer available ...

(209 - 210).

Still, the contrast between Defoe’s urban novels and *Clarissa*, published a generation later, is informative. Watt observes that the London represented in Defoe’s novels differs from the more modern metropolis that Richardson describes in that despite ‘its selfish and sordid aspects’, it remains ‘a community composed ... of parts which still recognize their kinship’ (205). Although Watt does not make the point explicit, it is clear that in his view economic self-interest dominates the metropolis depicted in Defoe’s fiction, and that any sociability London might exhibit in these novels springs more from self-interest than from any natural love that Londoners might bear towards one another (cf., 143). For Watt, then, the motive forces of Defoe’s London would resemble those that Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees* ascribes to the urban hive. Oddly, however, Watt seems to attribute the fear and distrust of London that *Clarissa* expresses to Richardson’s neuroses and personal sense of alienation instead of to any sentimental aversion for the dominance of selfishness in the metropolis.
Max Byrd’s study, *London Transformed*, follows in much the same vein as Watt’s discussion of urbanization: the only novel that Byrd discusses at length are Defoe’s, and the position that the novel of sentiment might have held in the study’s critical narrative is occupied instead by Boswell’s *London Journal* (1762 - 63) and by the writings of Samuel Johnson. Predictably, the final two chapters of the book discuss Blake’s and Wordsworth’s London. Here as elsewhere, critical awareness of the presence of the metropolis in eighteenth-century sentimental prose disappears into the crack that separates Defoe and the Augustan poets from the Romantics. There seemed, then, to be room for a study of representation of the town in the English novel of sentiment. Moreover, the worthiness of the subject seemed self-evident. On one hand, *Clarissa*, the greatest novel of sentiment written in English, would be inconceivable in the absence of metropolitan theatricality. On the other hand, the prominence of urban scenes of sentiment in the London novels of Charles Dickens, written a hundred years later, suggests the strength of a tradition that associated metropolitan settings with spontaneous expressions of natural sympathy well into the following century, and that in popular culture at least, continues to do so even today.

This thesis takes the position that London is theatrical in root and branch in the eighteenth-century novel of sentiment because its constitutive principle is the passion of self-love, or, if you prefer, its self-regard. *Clarissa, Amelia,* and *Cecilia* consistently represent metropolitan theatricality as the behavioural correlative of the selfishness that dominates the town. The argument that organizes the project is the assertion that the novel of sentiment, like a good deal of eighteenth-century social theory, moral philosophy, and writing on rhetoric and acting, describes urban civilization as an essentially rhetorical construct. Rhetoric, that is to say, theatricality, makes the city what it is. According to the literatures I have just mentioned, a
problematic theatricality produces the self-interested sociability that generates urban
civilization. The novel of sentiment responds to the problem of metropolitan theatricality by
recourse to a natural eloquence that I discuss in the following chapters. In these sentimental
novels, the eloquence of the body answers, and in some degree challenges, London’s
theatricality.

The metaphors that sustain these assertions are iatromechanical ones which are traceable
to Descartes’s writing (primarily The Passions of the Soul) and which are absorbed into the
English novel of sentiment through a variety of intermediary sources that include physiological
literature and acting theory. In other words, I sing the persistence of the body mechanical in
English sentimental fiction, which seeks to engage that body’s intervention in what Fielding
once called the ‘vast machine’ of the world (Tom Jones, V, iv). And, in a curious way, by
relying on the logic of the body-machine, I have converted my dissertation into a history-of-
science project which happens to use evidence drawn from Clarissa, Amelia, and Cecilia to
buttress theses deduced, initially, from moral philosophy, physiology, and rhetoric. In approach
and theoretical orientation, this dissertation more closely resembles Joseph Roach’s The
Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting (1985), than it does Imagining the
Penitentiary (1987) or Masquerade and Civilization (1986), even though all three were
published at about the same time. What follows is an exercise in old historicism, not New
Historicism: as an account of how the science of the body affects the representation of
metropolitan theatricality in the eighteenth-century novel of sentiment, much of this thesis
constitutes a straight-forward history of ideas. For this reason, I frequently read texts from a
variety of domains without much attention to genre. Gentle reader, brace yourself for some
exegesis that is not terribly literary.
Dedication

To my mother and the memory of my father,

George M. Morgan (1931 - 2002):

printer, Protestant, theatre-lover.
CHAPTER ONE

Theatricality and civilization;
or, whether the eloquence of the body promotes sociability

1.1 Introduction

As I suggested in the preface, this thesis attributes an iatromechanical model of the body to the eighteenth-century novel of sentiment: updated theatricalized versions of the body-machine that Descartes built in the seventeenth-century dominate the action in these novels, articulate the connections between the passions and their expression in external gesture, and determine the degree to which the execution of sympathetic passion in bodily movement succeeds or fails in generating sociability. The thesis's anchoring concepts — metropolitan theatricality and natural eloquence — both depend on the iatromechanical model in the respect that the social effects of each require that a certain set of passions be embodied, externalized, expressed, or, to use another synonym, performed. My objectives in this project are to explain the iatromechanical model (in the present chapter), to describe the application of the model in Clarissa (in Chapter 2), and then to ring the changes on the variations on Richardson's use of the model, as they are evinced in Amelia and Cecilia (in Chapters 3 and 4).

However, the reworked edition of the body-machine on display in these novels of sentiment differs in at least one important respect from its Cartesian original. According to the model described in The Passions of the Soul (1649), the passions, including those that involve
moral feeling, are hardwired into the human organism and are housed completely inside the body. For Descartes, the passions are not ultimately social in origin or nature. Instead, producing emotion is the equivalent of ‘expressing’ feeling in the mechanical sense of ‘pressing’ passion out of the human container in which it is packed so that it becomes visible in the form of gesture. Like Descartes, the novels discussed in this thesis adopt the model of a body-machine equipped with physical structures, namely the nervous system and brain, in which sentiment or moral feeling is constituted. In one form or another, physiology is the framework for eighteenth-century sentiment in that both sympathy (for Hume and Smith), the ‘moral sense’ and the ‘public affections’ (for Hutcheson and, I would submit, for Henry Fielding) are hardwired into the body-machine. However, in the physiological model advanced in the eighteenth-century novel of sentiment, the sympathetic passions are also inextricably social in the respect that they are constituted at least some of the time on a public stage and, given the right conditions, will extend spontaneously from one body to another. If, as Robert Lovelace believes, ‘passion ... is catching’, then emotion must have a social dimension (Cl., 706).

Admittedly, the sympathetic passions require physical externalization in the form of gesture in order to give rise to sociability. But inevitably, the novel of sentiment ascribes any failure of gesture to generate sociability in an audience to some deficiency in the spectators’ physiology. Should the spectator fail to sympathize in response to the heroine’s display of sympathy, it is because his urban environment has damaged the hardwiring of his ‘machine’.

For an exposition of the opposing view, that the hardwiring of the body-machine in eighteenth-century novel of sentiment, specifically, Sarah Fielding’s The Adventures of David Simple (1744), denies that ‘emotions are irreducibly social’, please see Daniel M. Gross’s The Secret History of Emotion (2006).
Conversely, should gesture succeed in giving rise to sociability in its audience, it is because three conditions exist. First, the performer’s passion and the performer’s gesture must be exactly congruent. In other words, gesture and body must become, respectively, authentic and transparent. Second, almost invariably, the performer’s gesture must be at least partly involuntary: the physical movement must be an automatic and ‘mechanical’ expression of a passion, one that escapes the direction of the will. Third, the performer’s sympathetic passion will only reach her spectators if urban environment has not destroyed her observers’ sensibilities beyond all hope of recovery. That is, a display of sympathy can initiate the recuperation of impaired moral reflexes, but cannot repair the sympathetic responses of a body-machine that the corruptions of London have irretrievably damaged.

Consistent with the model I have just outlined, then, this is a study of how three eighteenth-century novels of sentiment — Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747-48), Henry Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751), and Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* (1782) — address the question of whether the gestures and sympathetic passions of the body-machine have any useful role to play in regulating the machine of civil society as it is represented in the metropolis of London. Like most sentimental fictions, these urban novels suggest that sympathy could predominate in determining human action but for the corrupting influence of civilizing institutions, including those of the metropolis. These authors chose to represent the eloquence of the body against the backdrop of London precisely because the town evinces less natural sociability and more selfishness and duplicitous theatricality than any other place in the kingdom. For none of these novelists, however, is theatricality evil in itself. Indeed, the problem of whether gestures that externalize or solicit sympathy enhance sociability in London (or anywhere else, for that matter) opens debates as to whether sympathy requires the discipline of theatricality.
This thesis examines how *Clarissa*, *Amelia*, and *Cecilia* represent the confrontation between natural eloquence and metropolitan theatricality and the degree to which that confrontation characterizes sympathy and sensibility, the principles that actuate the eloquence of the sentimental body, as potentially problematic. This dissertation argues that *Clarissa* sets up the paradigm, representing the body-machine as endowed with a natural eloquence capable of cultivating sociability in London by establishing bonds of sympathy. In *Clarissa*, the heroine’s sympathy, made manifest in her gestures, creates sentimental community and moderates the selfishness of the fashionable metropolitan world known as the town: the eloquence of her body proves equal to the task of modifying London, however slightly. By definition, however, sympathy can only exist on the margins of a civil society dominated by theatricality and selfishness. Even when the heroine wins a victory of sorts, her triumph would not be sentimental if it were not Pyrrhic.

Henry Fielding’s final novel, *Amelia*, written in emulation of *Clarissa*, adopts the same model of natural eloquence and tests the model under the same metropolitan conditions. Unlike Richardson’s experiment, however, Fielding’s suggests that the eloquence of the body must inevitably fail to moderate London’s intrinsic selfishness, not least because the author objects to men and women relying on sympathy alone as a means to morality or social order. In the debate over natural eloquence and theatricality, *Amelia* strongly favours tempering natural feeling with doses of prudential stage-craft, even at the cost of occasional outright deceit. Moreover, sympathy, the principle that underlies the body’s eloquence, opens the body to the shaping influence of other people’s passions, whether social or unsocial. Fielding implies that in an environment as depraved as the town sympathy is more likely to corrupt than reform.
Like *Amelia, Cecilia*, Frances Burney's second novel, written thirty years later, is pessimistic about the ability of natural eloquence to improve the sociability of a corrupt urban world. *Cecilia* makes a grim joke of the heroine's belief in the persuasive power of the sentimental body, even arguing that untrammeled sensibility leads to immorality and requires the regulation of a judicious theatricality. Indeed, the vigor Fielding and Burney bring to their objections against the theory that natural eloquence can and should promote sociability and revise social order may arise from their conservative political views. Writers like Richardson who impute some efficacy to the capacity of the eloquence of the body to generate sociability tend to believe that civil society has inherent powers of self-regulation. In contrast, writers like Fielding and Burney who contest the link between natural eloquence and sociability tend to believe that civil society does not have such powers.

To establish the argument I have just outlined, I would like, in the present chapter, to explain how the criticism of the last thirty years represents the history of mid- to late-eighteenth-century sentiment as a process in which writers come to recognize sympathy and theatricality as conditions whose problems inform one another mutually. At the same time I hope to demonstrate a critical tradition of reading the representation of the body in eighteenth-century literature in the context of acting and rhetoric manuals that seem to share Richardson’s belief in the efficacy of natural eloquence. After a detour to discuss the meanings that this dissertation assigns to the words ‘sympathy’, ‘sensibility’, and ‘sentiment’, I examine two eighteenth-century expositions of the premise that self-love, and the theatricality it engenders, sustains civil society and the modern metropolis. These are *The Fable of the Bees*, a statement of Mandeville's antisentimental theory that innate selfishness is the root cause of language, eloquence, and social progress, and *The Second Discourse*, Rousseau's sentimental plea for the
cultivation of sympathies that might ameliorate the ravages of *amour-propre*. Mandeville’s and Rousseau’s theories of theatricality bracket the representation of the body in the metropolis in the English novel of sentiment, in the first case by supplying a target, and in the second by articulating ideas of natural eloquence that underlie much sentimental fiction. As a means of locating the premise of the language of the body in a specifically English context, the penultimate section of the present chapter traces the theorization of natural eloquence in eighteenth-century British rhetoric and acting manuals, with particular emphasis on the influence of Aaron Hill’s *The Art of Acting* on the representation of the body-machine in Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*.

### 1.2 Theatricality and the problematization of sympathy

In the 1980's Michael Fried and David Marshall published several studies that argued for eighteenth-century sentimentalism as a means by which art, literature, and polite society might, in theory, become less theatrical and less inimical to sympathy. These studies explain sympathy and theatricality in relational terms. For instance, in *Absorption and Theatricality* (1980), a study of Diderot’s analysis of how Greuze’s and Chardin’s sentimentalism changes spectatorship, Fried argues that the *philosophe* demands that painting deny the presence of audience by representing the central characters as so completely caught up in a passion or action that their sympathy with that passion or action becomes the opposite of theatricality. Fried asserts that Diderot indicts the theatrical relations of spectacle to spectator that define unsentimental spectatorship, condemning them as modes of alienation rather than modes of sympathy. For Diderot, then, successful artifice depends on achieving an appearance of
untheatrical spectatorship: the essence of sentimental artistic practice lies in the fiction of the audience's exclusion from the scene of representation.

Marshall's books, *The Figure of the Theatre* (1986), and *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy* (1988), extend Fried's analysis of sentimental spectatorship to treatments of the reciprocity of theatricality and sympathy in moral philosophy and in the novel of sentiment. This reciprocity replicates the process by which the novel evolves out of drama, eventually displacing it as the most popular narrative art form. According to Marshall, philosophy and fiction formulate sympathy and theatricality as dilemmas that mutually define and inform one another: the problem of the theatre-like behaviour and relationships that civil society institutes gives rise to sympathy (by making it necessary) and responds to sympathy (by regulating it). Just as the novel of sentiment represents sympathy against a backdrop of theatricality, the theatrical mores of polite societies, like those of London or Paris, give rise to anxiety about a withering of sympathy in the modern world (1988: 38 - 39, 5).

Criticism such as Marshall's, which treats of the imperfect dichotomy of sympathy and theatricality, stems in part from a vision of the history of sentiment which has become more or less standard since the publication of Brissenden's *Virtue in Distress* (1974). According to Brissenden's account, although *Pamela* and *Clarissa* initiate a vogue for sentimental fiction which peaks in the 1770's, the popularity of the pathetic mode of writing, as well as a growing anxiety regarding the social effects of unregulated sympathy, engages a counter-reaction in polite society in Britain. This reaction, says Brissenden, culminates in the late-century conservative consensus that blames sensibility for the French Revolution. But Brissenden's telling of the history of the novel of sentiment postulates that polite British writers seldom conceived sympathy as wholly unproblematic, even at mid-century, and increasingly came to
see it as worrisome as its grip on the popular imagination strengthened. Versions of this narrative appear in critical studies like Janet Todd’s *Sensibility* (1986) and Markman Ellis’s *The Politics of Sensibility* (1996), and in general histories like Paul Langford’s *A Polite and Commercial People* (1989). In addition, a couple of critical studies inflect this narrative to identify internalized theatricality as a procedure which eighteenth-century writers recommend as a means of refining sympathy into sentiment, as Marshall does in his chapter on ‘Adam Smith and the Theatricality of Moral Sentiments’ (1986: 167 - 92). John Mullan’s tracing of the history of sympathy, first in Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) and later, in Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), is a version of the same argument (1988: 18 - 56). Even scholars who, like Burgess, do not make the problematization of sympathy their central focus nonetheless rely on it as a narrative that sustains their argument (2000).

Adopting an approach generically similar to Marshall’s, several studies published in the last twenty years examine the role of theatricality in regulating passion, sympathy, or sensibility in eighteenth-century acting and rhetoric treatises. Working in this vein, Joseph R. Roach’s *The Player’s Passion* (1985) demonstrates that mid-eighteenth-century acting theory retains its position as a branch of rhetoric while gaining new foundations in one of two different but related physiological models: first, the Cartesian model of a body-machine endowed with a language which affiliates each passion with a corresponding gesture according to natural, universal law; and, somewhat later, the ‘vitalist’ model of sensibility which conceives the skill and range of the actor as a function of the nervous responsiveness of his or her particular body. In either case, passion or sensibility requires to be shaped and directed by theatrical skill. Accordingly, Roach studies treatises that adopt either of these models to consider the theatricality they recommend for externalization of passions likely to affect an audience.
Jay Fliegelman's *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language and the Culture of Performance* (1993), which studies the literature of the Revolution in the context of developments in the theory and practice of rhetoric in eighteenth-century America and Britain, takes a similar set of texts as its point of departure. Fliegelman argues that much eighteenth-century rhetorical writing seeks to discover a natural rhetoric or natural theatricality (79). In naturalizing theatricality and seeking to institute an eloquence derived from the body, a great deal of eighteenth-century rhetorical theory blurs the distinction between natural sympathy and the artificial management thereof. Though intended to ensure transparent communication of sympathy from speaker to audience, this modern eloquence, founded on the ideal of a natural language of the body, necessarily raised fears that the sympathy and sensibility on which depends the involuntary responsiveness of the body-machine might reduce it to involuntary subjection.

Similarly, Paul Goring’s *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (2005) reads the representation of gesture in sentimental fiction against the background of rhetoric and acting treatises to argue that in both sets of texts natural eloquence promotes highly prescriptive modes of sociability. According to Goring, most of this writing describes a natural eloquence which arises out of sympathy yet still requires the discipline of theatricality. In keeping with this premise, Goring submits that in Richardson’s fiction sympathy effects moral reform in the degree that the heroines’ performances are ‘endowed with the capacity to transform those who witness them’ (155). At the same time, Goring castigates natural eloquence as coercive and seems to approve late-century antisentimentalism which rejects the language of gesture as founded upon theatricality rather than natural feeling (179 - 80).
Like Fliegelman’s and Goring’s studies, Scott Paul Gordon’s *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640 - 1770* (2002) looks at the sentimental novel in the context of rhetoric or acting theory. Gordon argues that sentimental fiction and the schools of natural acting that spring up after Garrick seek to subordinate theatricality to sensibility, in counterdistinction with Hobbes’s and Mandeville’s theories of agency which instead insist on the principle of universal self-love and on a theatricality that demands the subject’s command of his body. The novel of sentiment and moral sense philosophy respond to Mandeville’s theory that *all* behaviour is theatrical with the assertion that the body-machine is subject to the involuntary operations of feelings which enable disinterested moral action at least some of the time. Thus, the power of passivity consists in the subject’s submission to his own sensibility — that which inheres in his nervous system. In contrast, agency, which secures self-interest, resides in a theatricality that requires the subject’s control of his or her body. To sustain this argument, Gordon postulates that just as theories of natural acting present the sentimental responses of Garrick’s audience as proof that sensibility, not theatricality, controlled his performances, so too does *Clarissa* offer the responses of the sentimental reader, marked out on the body in the form of disinterested involuntary tears, as evidence of the heroine’s sincerity. The eloquence of the heroine’s body, evinced in the responsiveness of the reader’s body, shows that sensibility can occasionally overpower theatricality, at least in sentimental fiction.

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I hope to tailor parts of Gordon’s argument to my own needs. If the reader credits the practices of natural eloquence enacted in *Clarissa*, these practices demonstrate the existence of a principle of sympathy whose embodiment in gesture is theoretically capable of generating a sociability which transcends selfishness, thereby contradicting Mandeville’s assertion that all externally observable behaviour is theatrical in the
sense that it proceeds exclusively from self-love (Gordon, 2002: 202 - 4; Mullan, 24). But first, in order to make natural eloquence intelligible as a response to Mandevillian theatricality, I need to explain how the existing criticism, and this dissertation, deploy the concepts of sympathy, sensibility, and sentiment.

1.3 Sympathy, sensibility, and sentiment

To reformulate the claim I have just made in the technical terms of the eighteenth-century language of feeling, this dissertation argues that the principle that actuates natural eloquence is best described as sympathy, or, perhaps, sensibility, and that natural eloquence is a form of sentiment. Since each of these ‘s’ words has separate meaning, I must now discuss how they have been used in criticism since the 1970's, and how I use them in this dissertation. Because my purpose is to differentiate between the eighteenth-century meanings of the terms ‘sentiment’, ‘sensibility’, and ‘sympathy’, I will review studies that make distinctions instead of collapsing them.³ Although there is a range of usage, certain trends emerge. First, sensibility and sympathy enjoy stronger physiological connotations than sentiment and sentimentalism do. Second, critics generally assign the production of sentiment to the faculty of sensibility or the mechanism of sympathy; sensibility or sympathy generate sentiment but usually not the reverse. To quote Janet Todd, whereas sentiment is moral reflection or rational opinion, sensibility is the capacity for refined emotion or for displays of compassion for suffering (1986: 6 - 9). Third, most studies associate sensibility with the body and sentiment with the mind. In one of the

³ See, for example, The Politics of Sensibility (Ellis, 1996) or The Culture of Sensibility (Barker-Benfield, 1992), which insists that it is ‘a truism one may find ... everywhere in literary history’ that sentimentalism is a cognate of sensibility (xvii, 397n).
more elegant formulations of the distinction between visceral sensibility and cerebral sentimentalism, Jerome McGann argues that sensibility connotes ‘the mind in the body’ (‘the sensate heart’), and sentimentality, ‘the body in the mind’ (‘the feeling mind’) (1996: 7, 96). For McGann, sentiment reflectively appropriates the spontaneous wisdom that sensibility represents. Sensibility is primitive, instinctive, and involuntary; sentiment, sophisticated and self-conscious.

However, recent critical history of the definition of the eighteenth-century language of feeling starts with Brissenden. *Virtue in Distress* (1974), a treatment of philosophy and fiction as parallel exercises in experimental method, sees belief in benevolence at the roots of both, describing novels of sentiment as inquiries that test certain essential sentimental hypotheses, such as natural sociability. Brissenden’s discussion of the role moral philosophy assigns to feeling in the formation of moral judgement grounds sensibility and sympathy more fully in physiology than sentiment, and defines sympathy as the physiological basis of sentiment and sociability. Jessie Van Sant’s rigorously iatromechanical *Eighteenth-century Sensibility and the Novel* (1993) follows Brissenden’s practice of reading novels in extraliterary context by examining the connections between the languages of physiology and psychology. So strong are the associations of sensibility with scientific description of the nervous system that even when used psychologically, the term retains physiological import. Hence, sensibility affords a physiological basis for a psychology of sympathy. Sensibility produces sympathy since the spectacle of the sensibility of the person principally concerned may act upon the spectator’s sensibility to effect a sympathetic exchange of places. Moreover, ‘probing’ sensibility tests the immediate, involuntary physiological reflex known as sympathy.
John Mullan’s *Sentiment and Sociability* (1988) rejects Brissenden’s assessment that belief in the vitality of sympathy underlies either moral philosophy or the sentimental novel, which, he argues, represents sociability as just barely surviving in an evil modern world. Still, the history of sympathy reveals a project of theorizing sociability. Sympathy, says Mullan, is central to Hume’s analysis of society in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) because it generates sentiment, ‘the movement of passion and feeling which registers the fact of social being’. Sympathy produces sociability by reconciling interests and enabling a vicarious experience of other people’s emotions. In contrast, sympathy enjoys less prominence in Hume’s later work, *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751); here, the subject’s rejection of self-love depends upon sympathy indirectly, as mediated through ‘sentiments’ of humanity or fellow-feeling. Mullan sees a similar demotion of sympathy in Smith’s *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), where the theatricality of moral sentiment excludes the natural ‘mutuality of passions and sentiments’ and where sympathy regulates behaviour by means of the sentiments of the impartial spectator (45). Thus, in Hume’s *Treatise* sympathy underpins a theory of sociability that the sentimental novel questions by showing benevolence as essentially conservative and by characterizing sympathy as an ‘unusual and fleeting’ emotional state (56, 144 - 46).

Like Mullan’s study, Miranda Burgess’s *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order* (2000) reads the sentimental novel in the context of moral philosophy and political economy, looks for the connections between feeling and social regulation, and disputes the

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4 Rather than from sympathy, the merit ‘ascribed to the social virtues ... arises chiefly from that regard, which the natural sentiment of benevolence engages us to pay to the interests of mankind and society’ (Mullan, 1988: 24 - 25, 30, 36, 39; Hume, THN, 317; EPM: 218 - 19, 230).
premise that sentimental fiction represents sympathy as capable of producing sociability. Still, according to Burgess, political economy and the novel of sentiment assign sympathy a primary role in regulating society, by producing and circulating sentiment. In contrast with sympathy, sensibility seems to derive from sentiment: by late century, sensibility could represent sentiment’s ‘corrupt double’ (that which the speaker or writer regards as debased, overwrought, or distasteful), but could also function as ‘a retrospective synonym for Richardsonian, or for Humean moral sentiment’ (79).

Having sketched out the range of usage that present-day criticism assigns to the terms sympathy, sensibility, and sentiment, I would like now to address how this thesis uses these terms, and how, generally, they relate to sociability. Consistent with the critical trend just outlined, this dissertation relies on sympathy as the common principle that underlies the representation of the eloquence of the body in all three novels, and treats sentiment as a derivative of sympathy: in principle, sympathy, by producing sentiment in the form of natural eloquence, generates sociability. Except in Chapter 4, where the theatricality of moral sentiment in Cecilia is my subject, I use the words sympathy and sensibility in preference to sentiment, since the iatromechanical and physiological associations of the first two terms are stronger than those of the third. To quote Van Sant, sensibility (and, I would submit, sympathy, as well) ‘is associated with the body, sentiment with the mind. The first is based on physical sensitivity and the processes of sensation; the second refers to a refinement of thought’ (1993: 4). Generally, however, I am compelled to use the term ‘sentimental’ as the adjectival form of the noun ‘sensibility’ simply because present-day English usage affords nothing better: while a man of no sensibility may be an insensible being, a man of sensibility is certainly not a sensible
The difficulty in distinguishing between sensibility and sympathy lies in the broader application of the latter, which can encompass almost any concordance of function or feeling inside or between organisms. In the first sense, Robert Whytt writes of the sympathy of the nerves with the mind, or of the members of the body with each other; in the second, Johnson’s Dictionary defines sympathy as ‘mutual sensibility’. However, the advantage of using sympathy to study the capacity of gesture to generate sociability in the metropolis is that the word does not connote fragility, adoration, and excess as much as the word ‘sensibility’ does, even when it is used charitably. Hence, this dissertation denotes the animating principle of the sentimental body as ‘sympathy’, but occasionally, in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, uses ‘sensibility’ as an alternative expression.

The principal differences between the terms ‘sensibility’ and ‘sympathy’ are as follows. The property of the body that in eighteenth-century vitalist physiology and fiction ensures receptivity to internal and external stimuli is sensibility. It is, to adopt Van Sant’s definition, an organic sensitivity dependent on brain and nerves and underlying a) delicate moral and aesthetic perception; b) acuteness of feeling, both emotional and physical; and c) susceptibility to delicate passional arousal. Though belonging to all, greater degrees of delicacy of sensibility — often to the point

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At least one critic, Chris Jones, comments on ‘the inconvenient absence of an adjectival form for ‘sensibility” (1993: 5). Also see Todd, who argues that A Sentimental Journey (1768) helps change the meaning of the adjective sentimental: ‘Before Sterne used it in his title, the noun of ‘sentimental’ was commonly ‘sentiment’ and it suggested richness in moral reflection; after his use it tended more often to apply to sensibility and its emotional and physical manifestations, and to indicate the heart rather than the head’ (1986: 9).
of fragility — are characteristic of women and the upper classes.

Excessive delicacy or acuteness of feeling produces an impaired or diseased state (1993: 1).

Both physiological and psychological in nature, a property of the body which nonetheless affects the mind, sensibility resides in the acuity of the nervous system. As phenomenon and object of representation in physiology, philosophy, and fiction, sensibility is, however, more a capacity than a psychological or physiological mechanism. Sensibility, a secularized version of the soul, is the ghost in the body-machine. Sympathy shares the dual psychological and physiological nature of sensibility but differs in that moral philosophy theorizes it as a mechanism. Thus, sensibility measures the responsiveness of a subject’s nervous system, since receptivity to impression determines the efficiency with which the subject’s powers of sympathy translate impressions into passions and ideas, or passions and ideas into gestures. A body endowed with lively sensibility enjoys prominent involuntary reflexes, including powerful reflexive sympathy, whereas a body in which sensibility has grown dull or sluggish demonstrates weak involuntary reflexes.

The differences between the terms matter in Clarissa primarily to the extent that any lasting sentimental conversion, such as Belford’s, revitalizes the subject’s sensibility, physiologically modifying his nervous system so that the ‘vibrations’ sympathetically inscribed in the medullary substance change fundamentally, becoming more lively than they had been prior to the subject’s exposure to the sentimental stimulus. Henceforth, the energy of the convert’s nervous system oscillates at higher frequencies, the way it had before moral corruption had dulled his sensibility. Like a rewiring of the subject’s mother-board, this change in the acuity of his sensibility is understood to represent his physical transformation.
The contiguity of the terms sensibility and sympathy in eighteenth-century British parlance depends on context. On one hand, Robert Whytt's *Observations* on nervous disorders speaks with equanimity of either the sensibility or the sympathy of the 'medullary substance'. In a similar manner, the novel of sentiment often blurs the differences between 'sensibility' and the cognates of the word 'sympathy', using the two as though they were interchangeable. On the other hand, Hume and Smith distinguish sharply between sensibility and sympathy and construct their systems almost exclusively on the latter: God forbid that any self-respecting man should abandon himself to sensibility. In Hume's and Smith's systems, it is not sensibility but sympathy, the psychological event on which all vicarious mental experience depends, that ensures sound moral and aesthetic judgement.

Sympathy is central to Hume's moral system, particularly in *A Treatise of Human Nature*. According to the *Treatise*, although 'reason and sentiment concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions ... the final sentence' in moral judgement, 'that which renders morality an active principle ... depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species'. Sentiment, this 'internal sense or feeling' is generated not by a faculty of moral sense, but by sympathy, which functions in parallel with reason in moral judgement. In its capacity to guide human action, 'sympathy is exactly correspondent to the operations of our understanding; and even contains something more surprizing and extraordinary', namely, the power to convert ideas into impressions 'by the force of the imagination'. Sympathy is the means by which the agent identifies with another person's experience, so that the idea of the other person's passion becomes an impression of that passion on the part of the spectator himself.6

6 *THN*, 3.1.1 - 2, 293 - 302; *EPM*, 172 - 73; *THN*, 2.1.11.8, 208, *THN*, 2.3.6.8, 273.
Hume’s sympathy makes the body-machine an instrument for copying and communicating passions and ideas, since sympathetic translation of ideas into impressions and vice versa is automatic and usually unconscious. Impressions of the agent’s passions copy themselves onto his or her body in the form of gesture, which the spectator then observes. Sympathy then converts the impression of the sight of the gesture in the spectator’s mind into an idea of the corresponding passion, and then reconverts it into another impression which represents a facsimile of the passion that originated in the mind of the agent. Sympathy, then, accounts for the transmission of passion — by contagion, so to speak — from one body to another. But because the mind can only copy the idea of another person’s passion from its observation of the effects of that passion on that other person’s body, passion is spectacle:

When I see the effects of passion in the voice and gesture or any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself. In like manner, when I perceive the causes of any emotion, my mind is convey’d to the effects, and is actuated with a like emotion (THN, 3.3.1.7, 368).

Since opinion is passion and transmissible by the same means, sympathy explains sociability, the formation of public opinion, and collective political behaviour of any kind. The social and political efficacy of sympathy depends on the power of the spectator’s imagination to relate the observation of the causes or effects of the other people’s experiences to him or herself.

Smith extends Hume’s perception in ways that conflate the operation of the subject’s sympathy with the fellow-feeling (good or bad) it excites in her. Sympathy gives rise to a state of passionate arousal that finds expression in the substantive emotion of, say, pity, as a
consequence of vicarious imaginative identification of the self with another's passion.

Sensibility, then, is a complex physiological predisposition to sympathize involuntarily with another's suffering, whereas sympathy is the mechanism by which body and mind assemble the individual events that together constitute sensibility. To illustrate, in explaining sympathy, Smith observes that persons 'of delicate fibres and weak constitution of body' (that is, persons of acute sensibility) 'in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the streets, ... are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the correspondent part of their bodies' (TMS, 1.1.1.3, 10).

1.4 Mandevillian theatricality and Rousseau's response to it

Having dispensed (I hope) with the meanings of the words 'sympathy', 'sensibility', and 'sentiment', I would now like to return to the eighteenth-century debate as to whether sociability arises out of sympathy or self-love. To investigate this question, this section advances Mandeville's and Rousseau's conjectural histories of the origins of language, civility, and sociability as evidence of the horizon of expectations against which Clarissa, Amelia, and Cecilia were written and read. Richardson, Fielding, and Burney write in the belief that self-liking, not sympathy, dominates civil society, the town, and modern eloquence, and that metropolitan theatricality brings direct physical expression to the principle of selfishness. Mandeville and Rousseau agree on these points, but take opposing positions on the value of selfishness: The Fable of the Bees, aggressively antisentimental in outlook, advocates self-liking and theatricality, while the poem's sentimental obverse, the Second Discourse, condemns them. Indeed, the reaction against Mandeville's vision of the metropolis is overt in Amelia.
(Chapter 3), which often reads as a diatribe against the primacy of self-love in London.

Unlike classical rhetoricians, who attribute the origins of civility to the power of eloquence to make men subordinate self-interest to the good of the *polis*, modern materialist social theorists, such as Mandeville, ask that oratory incite selfish passion instead of restraining it. For Mandeville, eloquence remains the key to maintaining social order but acquires the new function of domesticating passion by opposing it with a stronger and countervailing passion. Accordingly, Mandeville writes that though pride is ‘not to be destroyed by force, it [may] be governed by stratagem, and ... the best way to manage it, is by playing the passion against itself’ (II, 78 - 79). But applying this principle means recognizing universal human selfishness and rejecting Shaftesbury’s beliefs that human beings are naturally sociable and predisposed by natural sympathy to love their own species. This natural affection we are said to have for one another ... is neither instrumental to the erection of societies, nor ever trusted in our prudent commerce with one another, when associated, any more than if it had no existence. The undoubted basis of all societies is government ... (II, 183 - 84).

7 Quintilian’s *Institutes* assert that the founders of cities would never ‘have induced their unsettled multitudes to form communities’, or ‘to submit themselves to the yoke of law’, ‘had they not moved them by the magic of their eloquence’ (II, xvi, 9). Cicero’s *De Oratore* places slightly greater emphasis on the role of oratory in persuading men to accept civic institutions: ‘... what other power could have been strong enough either to gather scattered humanity into one place, or to lead it out of its brutish existence in the wilderness up to our present condition of civilization as men and as citizens, or, after the establishment of social communities, to give shape to laws, tribunals, and civic rights (I, viii)?’

8 Albert O. Hirschman’s *The Passions and the Interests* (1977) succinctly sets out the political history of the principle of the countervailing passion.
Since sociability proceeds from selfishness rather than from sympathy, it is not ‘perceptible in individuals before great numbers of them are joined together, and artfully managed’ (II, 188). Hence, the origins of civil society consist in a three-stage progress which sublimates self-love into eighteenth-century politeness. In the first stage, fear drives men to associate for defense against wild animals; in the second, by living in association, men develop new and more sophisticated forms of self-love: envy, avarice and ambition, and so forth. But as these take hold men learn that other men are their greatest danger and that ‘their unruly passions, and the discords occasioned by them’ will not ‘suffer them to be happy’. In the third stage, the need to regulate passion and discord, and to refine language drives men to invent literacy, which enables the instituting of law, contract, and government, since it is only ‘[w]hen laws begin to be well known, and the execution of them is facilitated by general approbation, [that] multitudes may be kept in tolerable concord among themselves (II, 266 - 69, 300). The final step towards civility depends upon language, a social invention, and not upon sympathy: sociability ‘is acquired, and comes upon multitudes from their conversing with one another’. Men are not naturally endowed with speech and sociability, but ‘by care and industry ... may be taught to speak, and be made sociable, if the discipline begins when they are very young’ (II, 189, 191). In locating the origins of language in self-love and applying that narrative to buttress his history of civil society, Mandeville makes eloquence a ‘machine’ to which ‘the laws and established economy of a well-ordered city may be ... justly compared’ (II, 322 - 23).

Historically, however, the language of gesture preceded literacy, eloquence, and even speech itself. Hence, the first wild human couples had no spoken language, but instead ‘an instinct to understand one another’ which they lost when they became civilized, and which supplied ‘the want of speech’ with ‘dumb signs’, since it was ‘more natural to untaught man to
express themselves \textit{(sic)} by gestures, than by sounds’.

How universal, as well as copious, is the language of the eyes, by the help of which the remotest nations understand one another at first sight, taught or untaught, in the weightiest temporal concern that belongs to the species (II, 284 - 87)?

In contrast, civilized discourse obscures the transparency of gesture: all speech is rhetorical and therefore political. Since self-love inheres in spoken language, the purpose of speech is to conceal thought, and not to make it known:

The first sign or sound that ever man made, born of a woman, was in behalf, and intended for the use of him who made it; and I am of the opinion, that the first design of speech was to persuade others, either to give credit to what the speaking person would have them believe; or else to act or suffer such things, as he would compel them to act or suffer, if they were entirely in his power (II, 289).

Still, speech and action are ‘more persuasive jointly than separately’. Mandeville concludes that action is more natural and ancient ‘than speech itself’, and that ambition and the desire to persuade and dominate are occasions for the use of the ‘bewitching engine’ of eloquence, which is often a matter of delivery: ‘The weakness of the language itself may be palliatively cured by strength of elocution’ (II, 290 - 91). Hence, in the third step towards civility, selfishness gains control of gesture, and, acting through the eloquence of the body, generates the politeness of modern society. Once self-love has made a creature endowed with speech and understanding ‘scrape together every thing it wanted for sustenance’, self-liking
makes it 'seek for opportunities, by gestures, looks, and sounds, to display the value it has for itself, superior to what it has for others' (II, 133). The increased pride that comes with civility gives rise to the wisdom that the best way to manage pride is 'by playing the passion against itself' (II, 79). This principle of the counterbalancing of passion, whether in governing the body or in the arts of persuasion, is the essence of Mandeville’s social theory. In Mandeville’s system of education, pride and shame, specialized forms of self-liking, generate sociability by making men internalize the codes of civility for fear of disgrace, dishonour, and discredit. The shame a polite education inculcates enforces rules which ‘consist in a dextrous management of our selves, a stifling of our appetites, and hiding the real sentiments of our hearts before others’ (I, 68).

Like the art of the courtier, polite self-command, though useful ‘in speaking, writing, and ordering actions to be performed by others’, (II, 141) is absolutely essential to the orator-statesman who aspires ‘to direct and manage the whole machine of government’:

He must moreover be a great master in concealing the sentiments of his heart, have an entire command over his features, and be well skilled in all the wiles and stratagems to draw out secrets from others (II, 330 - 31).

By the skillful management of other people’s self-liking, the ‘dextrous politician’ converts private vices into public benefits. In principle, self-interest was to rationalize civil society by introducing reliable and predictable standards of behaviour (Hirschman, 48 - 56). Self-interest, the private good that self-liking always chooses, would direct the execution of gesture in polite society, both in the metropolis and elsewhere.
Shockingly, for Rousseau, Smith, Fielding, and many other eighteenth-century writers, Mandeville’s theory of theatricality counsels his readers to comply with self-liking as a passionate discipline of the body, and to reject the promptings of sympathy. For Mandeville, sympathy, the centre of the moral sense philosophy he seeks to discredit, is itself rhetorical, easily counterfeited, and unreliable as a principle of approbation, since civility requires the agent to manufacture a facsimile of compassion that resembles his emotional response to the fictions of the stage and requires a similar suspension of judgment.

Those who have a strong and lively imagination, and can make representations of things in their minds, as they would be if they were actually before them, may work themselves up into something that resembles compassion; but this is done by art, and often the help of a little enthusiasm, and is only an imitation of pity; the heart feels little of it, and it is as faint as what we suffer at the acting of a tragedy; where our judgment leaves part of the mind uninformed ... (I, 257).

Moreover, sympathy easily counterfeits moral virtue. Because the spectacle of pain raises sympathy in the bad as well as the good, sympathetic response to the *sight* of suffering does not evince virtue: a pig eating a baby disconcerts a highwayman as much as ‘a man of humanity’. In contrast with sympathy, self-liking achieves consistent and rational response to the *fact* of suffering, as distinct from the *spectacle* of suffering (I, 254 - 57). In addition, the spectacle of suffering does not reliably motivate moral action. This is because sympathy motivates the spectator to relieve his own unease and does not usually move the spectator to want the victim’s well-being independently of the spectator’s relief: sympathy is itself a form
of self-love.

This is an equation that Rousseau, Mandeville's most famous critic, can never accept. Rousseau concurs in Mandeville's account of language as an agent of sociability, as well as in his theory that the progress of self-love, in giving rise to civility, theatricality, and articulate speech, also weakens sympathy and instinctive expressions of sympathy in mute gesture (Hundert, 92). But unlike Mandeville, who unmasks the theatricality of civil society as a caution to the wise, Rousseau does so to initiate a politics of sympathy in which men and woman might regain some of the natural eloquence humanity knew before they succumbed to rhetoric. This 'mode of speaking', writes E. J. Hundert, would 'command the affections without appealing to interest' (111). Thus, Rousseau's primitives differ from Mandeville's in responding to sympathy as well as to self-love. The Second Discourse (1754) argues that nature gives man sympathy to temper 'the ardor he has for own well-being by an innate repugnance to see his fellow suffer', and that from sympathy alone flow 'all the social virtues [Mandeville] wants to question in men'. It is evident, however, that 'commiseration' is the stronger as 'the observing animal identifies himself more intimately with the suffering animal', and that this sympathetic identification 'must have been infinitely stronger in the state of nature than in the state of reasoning' that succeeds it in civil society: 'Reason engenders amour-propre and reflection fortifies it; reason turns man back upon himself, it separates him from all that bothers and afflicts him' (36 - 37).

The evolution of articulate language plays a role in this process of rational self-alienation. Denying that society already existed 'among the inventors of language', the Second Discourse postulates that primitive men initially 'did not require a language much more refined than that of crows or monkeys' and that 'for a long time inarticulate cries, many gestures, and
some imitative noises must have composed the universal language’ (29, 45). But

When the ideas of men began to spread and multiply, and when
closer communication was established among them, they sought
more numerous signs and a more extensive language; they
multiplied the inflections of the voice, and joined to it gestures
which are more expressive by their nature, and whose meaning is
less dependent on prior determination (31).

Speech emerges from a more naturally expressive language of cry and gesture only
when men evolve institutions of family and property and establish fixed settlements where
mutual reliance and reciprocal obligation demand a common tongue. However, the event that
converts pre-political community into civil society, and sustains its civility, is the
institutionalization of spectacle, and of urban habits of self-comparison and mutual observation.
For Rousseau, the corrupt sociability of the first village contains, in embryo, the social
aggressions of the salons of an eighteenth-century city:

People grew accustomed to assembling in front of the huts or
around a large tree; song and dance, true children of love and
leisure, became the amusement or rather the occupation of idle
and assembled men and women. Each one began to look at the
others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had
a value. The one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest,
the strongest, the most adroit, or the most eloquent became the
most highly considered; and that was the first step toward
inequality and, at the same time, toward vice. From these first
preferences were born on one hand vanity and contempt, on the other shame and envy; and the fermentation caused by these new leavens eventually produced compounds fatal to happiness and innocence (47).

Rousseau responds to Mandevillian theatricality, by arguing that a symbiosis of *amour-propre* and spectacle gives rise to civility, political inequality, and the characteristic evils of the metropolis: rank, property, specialization, and corrupt manners. Hence, if Rousseau is right, the same passions that generate eighteenth-century politeness also enfeeble sympathy and natural sociability, particularly in the *beau monde* of the metropolis where the London action of *Clarissa, Amelia, and Cecilia* takes place. However, the notion of a natural eloquence which counteracts the town's corrosion of natural sympathy, and which the novel of sentiment adopts as a partial corrective to metropolitan callousness, probably originates, as Mandeville's social theory does, in the physiological model of the body-machine. In the following discussion I would like to suggest how acting manuals and rhetoric treatises filter the idea of natural eloquence — in essence, an iatromechanical concept derived from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century physiology — into the novel of sentiment, initially by way of *Clarissa*.

### 1.5 Natural eloquence and sociability in rhetoric and acting treatises

We must not judge so unfavourably of eloquence as to reckon it only a frivolous art that a declaimer uses to impose on the weak imagination of the multitude, and to serve his own ends. 'Tis a very serious art; designed to instruct people; to suppress their passions; and reform their manners; to support the laws; direct
public councils; and to make men good and happy (Fénélion, 1722: 229 - 30).

In his Lettre à l’Académie, Englished by the approving hand of William Stevenson in 1722, François Fénélion rehearses one of the favourite anxieties of eighteenth-century rhetoric. How might the use of sentiment rescue eloquence from self-love and self-interest, and rededicate it to the service of sociability? Clearly, the instituting of a new and socially-conscious eloquence would need to proceed by changing the forms approved for the rhetorical use of language. Accordingly, though the classical grand style, with its syllogisms, artistic proofs and intricate tropes and figures remained popular, the trend in the study and practice of polite letters and public speaking in eighteenth-century Britain, particularly from mid-century, is towards a new eloquence that favours relative simplicity, inductive reasoning, and arguments derived from facts instead of from topoi (Howell, 1971: 441 - 47; Fliegelman: 28 - 35).

In addition, the new eloquence assigns more prominence to passion: the eighteenth-century science of persuasion assimilates the classical objective of influencing audiences by galvanizing feelings and interests, but attaches heightened importance to the role of sympathy, emotion, and the body in ensuring communication. Since the emotion of an oration or performance is more effective than its rational content in winning assent or producing sociability, affect becomes a dominant object of communication, and the persuasiveness of discourse comes to depend on the embodiment of sentiment and passion in voice, gesture, and demeanour. Persuasion and conviction come to consist in the speaker’s transmission of sentiment and passion from his own body to those of the spectators, by means of the spectators’

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9 For an account of Fénélion as apologist for eloquence founded in sentiment, please Christine A. Jones’s article, ‘Eloquence for the Age of Enlightenment’ (2006).
observation of the speaker’s voice and movements. To persuade, the speaker must either
genuinely feel the passion by which he intends his audience to be affected, or generate inside
himself a good facsimile of that passion, or pretend to be himself affected by it. The
communication that a successful exchange of sentiment involves occurs when an audience
watches a performer visibly and subjectively experience his own supposedly authentic passion.

If the new eloquence seeks to overcome the opacity of the body, and a man is a
container of hidden and constantly-shifting passion, then the orator’s duty is make himself
transparent by externalizing feeling in outward signs. The more modern versions of the new
eloquence, such as Adam Smith’s, describe sympathy as the mechanism that communicates
passion from body to body and assists the speaker’s engagement in the sentiment he seeks to
express. By ensuring the correspondence of expression with inward sentiment, sympathy could
save eloquence from the excessive reliance on tropes and figures of which the new rhetoricians
accuse classical oratory. Thus, Smith’s Lectures on Rhetoric affirm that ‘all that is passionate,
tender and moving’ is not found exclusively in ‘figurae sententiarum’:

> When the sentiment of the speaker is expressed in a neat, clear,
> plain and clever manner, and the passion or affection he is
> possessed of and intends, by sympathy, to communicate to his
> hearer, is plainly and cleverly hit off, then and then only the
> expression has all the force and beauty that language can give it

However, as Howell’s history of eighteenth-century British rhetoric emphasizes, those
who reformulate or reject the classical systems divide into two traditions with differing
objectives. The more sober of the two are the ‘new rhetoricians’, who study the arts of
invention, disposition, and literary style (those that relate to composition) and believe that
delivery is best understood and practiced in the context of these other departments. The
students of the new rhetoric include men such as Smith, Hugh Blair, and George Campbell.
The second tradition, the elocutionary movement, virtually renounces the parts of classical
rhetoric that derive from the mind, namely, invention (inventio), disposition (dispositio), style
(elocutio), and memory (memoria), and instead concentrates on the fifth part, action
(pronuntiatio or actio), which is seated in the orator’s control of his body.

Action (also known as delivery) consists in voice, as well as in gesture, which is
understood to comprise all bodily movement, including gesticulation, facial expression, and
demeanour. Thus, an anonymous translation of Le Faucheur’s Traité de l’action de l’orateur,
the first substantive treatise on elocution in English, probably published in 1702, asserts that the
ancient masters of rhetoric initially established all the other parts of oratory, but later added
action, in order to acknowledge the power of the passions in directing human behaviour.
Indeed, Le Faucheur’s translator writes that ‘action is that faculty of oratory which Tully calls
the eloquence of the body’ (1702: 8). In developing this principle into rules for management
of voice and body, the Essay upon the Action of the Orator, like the elocutionary treatises that
follow it, appropriates for delivery the same functions that style assigns to tropes and figures.
While eloquence does not lie ‘in the heels, nor rhetoric in frisking and gesticulations’, the

10 Tully is Marcus Tullius Cicero. Le Faucheur’s translator draws his quotation from De Oratore (III, xli, 222). The relevant sentence reads, ‘Est enim actio quasi sermo corporis, quo magis menti congruens esse debet’. J. M. May and J. Wisse provide the following modern translation: ‘Delivery is, so to speak, the language of the body, which makes it all the more essential that it should correspond to what we intend to say ...’ (2001, 294). William Guthrie’s translation of 1742 reads: ‘Action is, as it were, the language of the body, and therefore ought to correspond to the thought’ (397). George Barnes’s translation of 1762 reads: ‘... action is as it were the speech of the body, wherefore there is the strongest reason why it should accord with that of the soul’ (455).
business of a speaker is not complete until ‘the feet can speak figures and the hands plead causes’ (8). Moreover, the Essay commits to a natural eloquence that effectually transmits affect from one person to another:

Passions are wonderfully conveyed from one person’s eyes to another’s; the tears of the one melting the heart of the other, and making a visible sympathy between their imaginations and aspects (1702: 189 - 90).

Following in the same tradition in the second half of the century, the elocutionists, who number John Mason, James Burgh, John Wilkes, Thomas Sheridan, John Walker and Gilbert Austin, and so forth, seek to redefine the purpose and nature of language. Rejecting the concept of rhetoric as a stylistic exercise that marshals topically-generated arguments for or against a proposition, they favour instead an oratory of persuasion. Critical to this redefinition is the assertion of speech as performance over speech as argumentation. Voice and gesture therefore gain an importance they had never known previously. Unlike the new rhetoricians, whose writing is generally more scholarly in tone, the elocutionists are often actors, preachers, or clergymen-teachers who wish to evolve an educational system. And, as might be expected, their treatises are often almost indistinguishable from acting manuals and can, in fact, be used as such.

The elocutionists believe that eliciting sociability or conveying meaning depends less upon the words spoken than upon ‘the manner of speaking them’, as James Burgh puts the matter in 1764. Thomas Sheridan elaborates the point: ‘All writers ... forget that the passions and the fancy have a language of their own, utterly independent of words, by which only their exertions can be manifested and communicated’ (1762: x). Like Le Faucheur, Sheridan restates
the classical formulation of the objectives of eloquence but infuses them with the principle of sympathy, so as to make sociability the proper foundation of civility. The speaker who combines the ‘language of emotions’ with the ‘language of ideas’ will correct ‘the propagation of selfishness’ that ‘the ascendancy which the written language has obtained amongst us, over that which is spoken’. In Sheridan’s estimation, natural eloquence may excite sociability in an audience. In other words, the effects of the eloquence of the body are the opposite of those that arise from the theatricality that Rousseau believes lies at the roots of urban civilization. Thus, Sheridan writes that when the language of gesture is joined to the ‘language of ideas’

... there is no other situation in which the social disposition of mankind is so exquisitely gratified. They assemble at such meetings with satisfaction in their looks, from expectation of the delight which they are to receive; they part with mutual congratulations, on account of mutual benefit, and entertainment.

Such an intercourse, frequently repeated, tends to eradicate all selfish passions, and to bring forward and invigorate all the fine emotions of benevolence, and the great duty of Christian charity.

.... [This delivery] alone can tend to make us, what we were designed to be, social beings (1762: 181 - 83).

Such remarkable confidence in the power of the expressive language of gesture to unify an audience, however fleetingly, is reflected in a series of treatises that systematize the theatrical passions, such as Wilke’s General View of the Stage (1759), Burgh’s Art of Speaking (1761) and Walker’s Elements of Elocution (1781). In ways that may puzzle present-day readers, some of these treatises even postulate that a player’s gesture gives the audience direct, unmediated
access to the passion to which it corresponds, free from the corrupting interference of articulate speech:

There is something expressibly eloquent in a proper and just action, which words can never describe: it is the language spoken by the soul, which penetrates directly to the heart, and that undisguised natural eloquence which only is universally intelligible (Wilkes, 1759: 114).

But although these treatises agree that a speaker must conceive a passion to execute the corresponding voice and gesture convincingly, they seldom describe the iatromechanical features of the human organism that unite mind and body in supporting this function. Du Bos’s translator, for instance, names sensibility as the genius that makes a player ‘enter mechanically, but with affection, into the sentiments of the personage he acts’, but contents himself with a circular definition of the principal term. Sensibility, he writes, ‘consists in a mechanic disposition to be actuated easily by all those passions, which [the actor] has occasion to represent’ (1748: I, 338).

But to find an account of a physiology which underlies the iatromechanical production of the signs of the passions, and which, by way of Clarissa, is absorbed into the novel of sentiment, we need look no farther than the writings of Samuel Richardson’s friend, the actor Aaron Hill. Hill’s acting theory, developed in his journal, The Prompter (1734 - 36) and later in an expository poem and a prose essay, both called The Art of Acting (1746, 1754), systematizes the theatrical passions according to the scheme and the physiology set out in Descartes’s The Passions of the Soul. Since Samuel Richardson printed the journal and the versified essay and wrote to Hill while writing Clarissa to describe how reading the poem had
‘nervously affected’ his ‘whole frame’, it seems reasonable to assert direct influence.\textsuperscript{11}

Hill’s theory of natural eloquence is mechanical in its reliance on the automatic copying of the player’s imagined ‘idea’ of a passion onto the outward signs of his body. The actor

... is not to begin to utter, even so much as a single word, till he has first reflected on and felt the idea [of the passion]; and then adapted his look, and his nerves to express it. But as soon as this pathetic sensation has strongly and fully imprinted his fancy, let him ... attempt to give the speech due utterance. — So shall he always hit the right and touching sensibility of tone, and move his auditors, impressingly ...

Should the actor fail in ‘the due adaptation of his look and muscles; to the meaning proper to the passion, he will never speak to hearts; nor move himself, nor any of his audience, beyond the simple and unanimaing, verbal sense’. He will, moreover, speak ‘without the spirit of the writer’, and from a ‘voice that neither touches, nor is touched by, character’ (351 - 52).

In inquiring into the iatromechanical principles by which the organism embodies emotion Hill’s system derives every application from a single general rule (384):

To act a passion well, the actor never must attempt its imitation, ’till his fancy has conceived so strong an image, or idea, of it, as to move the same impressive springs within his mind, which form that passion, when ‘tis undesigned, and natural (339).

\textit{The Art of Acting} postulates the automatic responsiveness of the body-machine to ‘ideas’ formed by the imagination, articulating a four-step process for the conversion of the idea of

\textsuperscript{11} Letter of October 29, 1746 (Carroll, 1964: 74).
passion into the sign of gesture. First, the imagination conceives ‘a strong idea of the passion’. Second, the idea of the passion, once conceived, ‘impress[es] its own form upon the muscles of the face’. Finally, the ‘look’ of the passion, ‘muscularly stamped’ upon the face, communicates, ‘instantly, the same impression to the muscles of the body’, which, ‘by impelling or retarding the flow of the animal spirits, transmit their own conceived sensation, to the sound of the voice, and to the disposition of the gesture’ (340). These mechanical agreements of mind with body work in both directions. So strong is the bond between the idea of passion and the impressions excited in the muscles, that the actor may will gestures to strengthen the idea of the associated passion:

... before fancy is become ductile enough, to assume such impressions at will ... the actor taking the shorter road, above promised him, may help his defective idea, in a moment, by annexing, at once, the look to the idea ... (346).

Owing to these internal concordances of the body-machine (which the physiologist Robert Whytt calls ‘sympathies’) a skillful player could induce the idea of a subsidiary passion, such as grief, by replicating the corporeal modifications matching the dominant passion from which it derives, such as fear. Thus, an actor ‘who would impress his imagination with a natural idea of fear, will most effectually represent it by assuming the same languor, in look, and in muscles, that was, just now, described, as peculiar to grief’ (350).

In Chapter 2 I argue that Richardson’s understanding of how sensibility translates passion into gesture and how the sentimental reader or performer relies on her body for a conversion of the ‘ideas’ of a text into passion and action generally applies an iatromechanical model similar to Aaron Hill’s. There are, however, a couple of important differences. First,
Richardson assigns to ‘sympathy’ the same functions that Hill allocates to Cartesian ‘spirits’. Second, whereas Hill confines his interest to the means by which natural eloquence might move spectators to share an actor’s passion, Richardson entertains a further question, the matter of whether moving an audience might also make them more sociable.

1.6 Natural eloquence, theatricality and their effects on sociability

Having outlined metropolitan theatricality, as Mandeville enunciates it, and natural eloquence, as described in writing on rhetoric, as well as the involvement of both in an eighteenth-century debate as to whether human beings are naturally sociable, I would like to discuss how these two concepts affect the representation of the body in novels of sentiment set in the metropolis. In particular, I would like to argue that Clarissa, the first important novel of sentiment set in London, represents a natural eloquence that attempts to remedy the damage theatricality does to sociability. Setting matters because, in sentimental fiction, the town becomes the principal locus of theatricality precisely owing to its selfishness. Although Richardson, Fielding, and Burney deny the moral legitimacy of a civil society built on self-love, all seem to agree that the predominance of selfishness in London explains metropolitan theatricality. The novels studied in this dissertation assume that the luxury and refinement of modern society impair natural sympathy and cultivate self-regard, and that this heightened selfishness is more visible in the metropolis than anywhere else.

Though Amelia investigates the consequences of the primacy of self-love in London in more detail than the other two novels, Clarissa and Cecilia present similar critiques of metropolitan selfishness. Because it supplies powerful motives for dissembling and hypocrisy,
the preponderance of self-love in London affects behaviour, or, to use the preferred eighteenth-century term, ‘manners’. However, the representation of the behavioural results of selfishness in these novels does not concentrate on the rule of self-love in the metropolis as a whole but upon the part of London known as the ‘town’. Most of the relevant action in these novels takes place in the neighbourhoods bounded on the West by the royal parks and palaces of St. James’s and Whitehall, and on the East by the City of London, known as the ‘City’.

As I suggested earlier, eighteenth-century rhetorical treatises, acting manuals, and moral philosophy evince belief in a body-machine that moves the passions of its spectators according to a physiological model in which sympathy (or something very much like it) is the coordinating principle: in *Clarissa, Amelia,* and *Cecilia* sympathy, the foundation of the iatromechanical metaphor and of the eloquence of body, functions paradigmatically. Accordingly, Chapter 2 argues that *Clarissa* embraces sympathy by representing the eloquence of the sentimental body as capable of moderating the effects of the selfishness and theatricality that impair sociability in the town. Richardson’s formulation of the eloquence of the sentimental body remodels the connections between sociability and the passions of the body, initiating a set of conventions that other writers acknowledge as establishing the practices, problems and methods of the novel of sentiment. At the same time, these conventions succeed by being open-ended. The popularity of sentimentalism arose from the freedom it gave writers to question sympathy while continuing to work within the models it provided.

In practical terms, however, problematizing sympathy means interrogating the implicit condemnation of theatricality found in *Clarissa*. Fielding’s final novel and Burney’s second one illustrate this observation: Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 argue that *Amelia* and *Cecilia* address the paradigm of the sentimental novel by problematizing sympathy and sensibility, and by
representing a metropolitan world in which people who cannot master London’s codes of behaviour are pathetic rather than admirable. Hence, Chapter 3 suggests that in *Amelia* Fielding attempts to abandon his accustomed literary mode in order to emulate *Clarissa* by writing a sentimental novel set in London. Although this experiment does not work very well, the open-endedness of the sentimental mode still allows Fielding to write a fiction that criticizes the principle of sympathy. *Amelia* represents a metropolis where the predominance of self-love ensures the defeat of natural eloquence and where unguarded sympathy does not even point the way towards virtuous behaviour. Instead, in London, as represented in *Amelia*, theatrical self-command is essential to effective morality, since the cardinal virtue of prudence always has a theatrical dimension.

The third novel studied in this dissertation, Frances Burney’s *Cecilia*, invests more than *Amelia* does in the conventions of natural eloquence but still finds room for a critique of sensibility. Chapter 4 argues that Burney’s narrator warns the reader against the twin dangers of unregulated sensibility and fashionable metropolitan theatricality. Instead, *Cecilia* recommends that the agent tame sensibility by means of a theatricality of moral sentiment similar in structure to the supervision of the imaginary impartial spectator that Adam Smith postulates in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In *Cecilia*, the eloquence of the heroine’s sensibility becomes an effective means of eliciting sociability only after undergoing a course of sophistication in London that heightens her command of her body.
CHAPTER TWO

Clarissa:
the eloquence of the body in the metropolis

2.1 Introduction

Few critics deny the theatricality of Samuel Richardson’s fiction, and almost all recognize that drama intimately informs the form and content of his novels. Ira Konigsberg’s *Samuel Richardson and the Dramatic Novel* (1968), for instance, argues that the *oeuvre* synthesizes elements borrowed from the dramatic literature of the Restoration and the early eighteenth century, including the narration of scenes as though they were happening on stage, into a genre ‘responsible for the subsequent course of the English novel’ (4). Konigsberg observes that Richardson’s subject matter, character types, and methods of writing are ‘best understood in relation to the techniques of the playwright’ (103). Adopting a similar approach, Mark Kinkead-Weekes’ *Samuel Richardson, Dramatic Novelist* (1973) characterizes the novels as essentially theatrical, rather than epistolary in form, urging that the letters that comprise *Clarissa* function primarily as a means to drama. Kinkead-Weekes credits Richardson with the invention of a vision of the novel as drama that pushes fiction as far towards the theatrical as possible: in *Clarissa*, dramatic literature and the conventions of the stage lie behind plotting, language, style, and characterization, as well as behind the technique of writing to the moment and the representation of multiple and conflicting points of view. At the same time, this study
notes that *Clarissa* evinces Richardson’s unease regarding the moral ambiguity of theatricality. Finally, Margaret Anne Doody’s *A Natural Passion* (1974), like Konigsberg and Kinkead-Weekes, argues that Richardson owes his primary inspiration to drama, even while she dedicates several chapters of her treatment of *Clarissa* to influences other than theatrical ones.

All three studies agree that Lovelace embraces theatricality, and that Clarissa generally does not: he, the master rhetorician, scripts, acts, directs, and stage-manages from start to finish, but she, the plain-speaker, remains more or less innocent of conscious artifice. Needless to say, several more recent pieces of scholarship, written under the influence of deconstruction and reception theory, attack this consensus by asking whether the heroine’s body becomes a rhetorical instrument, motivated to some degree by self-interest, or whether instead it remains disinterested, sincere, and actuated by natural sympathy. The strongest indictment of Richardson’s heroine as a thoroughgoing rhetorician is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, William Beatty Warner’s *Reading ‘Clarissa’* (1979). Terry Castle’s feminist counterattack, *Clarissa’s Cyphers* (1982), is informative on this point. While agreeing with Warner’s characterization of the text as a hermeneutic battle-field in which Clarissa and Lovelace fight their wars of interpretation, she condemns Warner for failing to recognize that the heroine’s use of language demonstrates that rhetoric is never effective ‘unless grounded in political power’, a thing that the heroine manifestly lacks (25). Ultimately, Warner and Castle concur in seeing the language of the body, including Clarissa’s, as freighted with self-interest and directed towards the persuasion of its spectators. Tom Keymer’s *Richardson’s ‘Clarissa’ and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (1992) takes the same view, acknowledging a similarity in the ways Lovelace and the heroine deploy their respective forms of rhetoric. In ‘the hands of Clarissa and her antagonists’, he writes, the letter ‘increasingly resembles a weapon ... and each one is carefully
fashioned to its purpose’ (124).

Entering this debate, Scott Gordon’s recent study *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640 - 1770* (2002) rejects readings of Clarissa’s body as rhetorical and self-interested, arguing instead that Richardson counts not on reason but on his reader’s involuntary physiological responses to prove the sincerity of the heroine’s gestures. Gordon observes that the involuntary gestures solicited by the sentimental action *Clarissa* presents *cause*, rather than represent, the emotional bonds that arise between the heroine and other characters, and, of course, between the heroine and the readers of the novel. The novel’s sentimental conversions become ‘irresistible, physical responses to the letters themselves’, which, in turn, depict the involuntary physical responses of the heroine herself (196 - 97).

In this chapter I would like to side both with Warner, Castle, and Keymer, for whom Clarissa’s body is rhetorical and self-interested (to some degree), and with Gordon, for whom the involuntariness of that body’s eloquence compensates for the heroine’s desire to move her audience. This chapter looks at how the eloquence of the heroine’s body contends against metropolitan theatricality, with emphasis on representation of the effects her gestures have on sociability in London. To elaborate, in *Clarissa* the town, the quintessence of civil society, appears under the figure of a theatricality that controls the polite body. This theatricality entails a training of speech and gesture, manifest in Lovelace and other ‘town’ characters, that corrupts the language of the body and suppresses the natural physiological reflexes that animate men and women of sentiment. These reflexes include the inner, invisible response of sympathy and its external marker, sentimental gesture.

London deadens sensibility, detaching gesture from its foundations in the social passions, and, by shaping outwards behaviour to reorder inner sentiment, installs in their stead
the unsocial passions governed by selfishness. A town education consists in this substitution of one set of passions for another: civil society effects a theatrical training of the gestures of the body-machine that destroys sympathy and deforms moral judgement by means of iatromechanical processes seated in the associations between psychological and physiological events in the nervous system and brain. However, the same iatromechanical processes can also be used to call up the sympathies on which natural sociability depends. Accordingly, as I argued in Chapter 1, the novel of sentiment, eighteenth-century rhetoric, and sentimental theories of acting all presuppose the efficiency of a model of the body by means of which orators, actors, and even moral agents might learn to cultivate forms of eloquence that spring from and speak to the passions.

The complete sentimental agent is she whose cultivation of the passions automatically produces the apt gesture. According to this formulation of the art of moving the passions, the eloquence of the body depends on a two-fold process of sympathetic induction that explains both how the theatricality of civil society destroys sympathy, and how public performance of the gestures of suffering or compassion might revive it. On one hand, induction operates internally, by means of the sympathy of the agent’s organism with itself, copying the affective marks of the body’s outward gestures onto the mind in the form of passion. On the other hand, the same process operates externally, by means of the sympathy of one human body with another, copying the gestures of the speaker, performer, or moral agent onto the minds of any spectators, also in the form of passion.

In Clarissa, the spectacle of virtue is, almost invariably, a spectacle of involuntary sentimental gesture. This kind of spectacle enjoys the affective force of a telling argument to engage the involuntary consent and cooperation of the spectator with the person principally
concerned: the heroine’s most moving oratory, the spontaneous modification of her body, circumvents her spectators’ reason and acts directly on the passions most likely to motivate them to virtuous action. To the extent that the effects of Clarissa’s eloquence are non-rational, her gestures constitute what Samuel Johnson would call ‘persuasions’ rather than ‘arguments’. ‘Persuasion’, he writes, ‘seems rather applicable to the passions, and argument to the reason’. Persuasion, moreover, is ‘the act of gaining or attempting the passions’.\textsuperscript{12} Hence, the spectacle of Clarissa’s body moves the passions independently of the rational faculties, occasionally even driving her spectators to act against self-interest. An iatromechanical physiology that locates moral judgement in the passions of the body will, perforce, assign the creation of that judgement, and even the making of natural justice itself, to the signifying actions of the body; natural justice requires sentiment more than reason.

The appeal of Clarissa’s eloquence to the sympathetic passions explains both its weakness and its strength. Most of the time, especially early in the novel, Clarissa’s physiological capabilities are negative in their immediate effect. For one thing, her power to affect others stems in large measure from her imperviousness to their argument and oratory. Thus, seeing bewitching art in her ‘immoveableness’, the Harlowes confine her to her chamber for fear that her physical presence may affect them (205). John Harlowe, the heroine’s uncle ascribes the clan’s solidarity to their need to make common front against the girl’s skills: ‘But since you have displayed your talents and spared nobody, and moved everybody without being moved, you have but made us stand closer and firmer together’ (253). Moreover, the heroine ‘moves’ others primarily by persuading them not to take action against her. Only after her oratory has taken a full grip on her auditor’s passions do some of them abandon omissive virtue

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Dictionary of the English Language} (2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 1755 - 56, vol. 2).
in favour of commissive engagement on her behalf.

In this novel, the eloquence of the sentimental body consistently and automatically elicits a vicarious reflexive response in any spectator in whom sensibility is not absolutely dead. For this reason, the performance of involuntary sentimental gesture is instrumental in repairing reflexes damaged by metropolitan theatricality. The literal acting out of suffering and compassion attempts the sentimental reform of the ‘wicked town’, so that gesture may reframe civil society along sentimental lines. As social program, sentimentalism is inseparable from action, since the agent’s sympathy cannot cause the spectators’ sympathy unless performed as gesture. *Clarissa* naturalizes the eloquence of a body that speaks in a universally intelligible language of involuntary gesture. The test of the expressive power of this language is its efficiency in the town. Later in this chapter I hope to demonstrate that even in London sentimental gesture temporarily trumps the worst corruptions of civility, speaking to the morally-sound in the arrest scene, neutralizing the morally-ambivalent, at Hampstead Heath, and intimidating the morally corrupt in the pen-knife scene. In naturalizing the effects of the eloquence of the body in a polite urban setting, *Clarissa* represents a materialist and passion-driven program of urban sociability, one that depends on the body-machine to recalibrate the machine of civil society, the springs, cogs, and wheels of which reside in the human organism.

The eloquence of Clarissa’s body depends upon the town for its articulation and development in the degree that the sentimental character of involuntary gesture, the bodily locus of sympathy, is defined by its immunity from the corruptions of civil society.\textsuperscript{13} In

\textsuperscript{13} Involuntary gesture sustains the transparency Clarissa pleads to justify herself: ‘You seem to think me faulty: I should be glad that all the world knew my heart. Let my enemies sit in judgement upon my actions: fairly scanned, I fear not the result. Let them even ask me my most secret thoughts, and whether they make for me or against me, I will reveal them’ (822).
locating its principal action in the town, *Clarissa* demonstrates that the heroine's body retains its telling force in the part of civil society least conducive to the survival of sympathy and most systematically dedicated to self-interest, self-love, and theatrical dissimulation. The capacity of the eloquence of the body to make the town deviate occasionally from its accustomed norms seeds sympathy in the hostile terrain of London. In principle, these isolated and redemptive moments of urban fellow-feeling promote sociability and strengthen community of sentiment in the town and in civil society.

This is not to say that *Clarissa* evinces any real confidence that the eloquence of the heroine’s body will reorder England or London into sentimental commonwealths. Miranda Burgess’s explication of this problem is informative. Granted, men and women are born sociable and remain so unless and until education or environment corrupts them. In theory, then, natural sociability, sentiment, and sympathy, have the potential to maintain social order, even under modern eighteenth-century conditions. But in practice *Clarissa* represents civil society as regulated by ‘passion’, by which Richardson almost always means excessive selfishness. *Clarissa* demonstrates the prevalence of a Mandevillian practice in which self-interest and self-love, instead of sentiment, form the bonds that unify the polity (2000, 71). Given these circumstances, Clarissa ‘cannot survive, let alone transform’ a society disfigured by selfish passion.

Still, the claim of an ‘ordered public sphere ... persists despite its particular failures’ (59). I would like to concur in Burgess’s suggestion that this novel’s authority to sustain this assertion is founded upon extensive fictional documentation of evidence which supports the existence of sentiment and sociability in Britain, but which also proves that the real existence of these impulses does not cause the emergence of an entire social order based on justice,
humanity, and sympathy. While in principle sentiment and sympathy could produce the
peaceable kingdom, in practice they do not and cannot. The efficacy of natural eloquence
remains relatively modest even where it appears in its greatest strength: precisely because self-
love, not sentiment dominates civil society, Clarissa positions sentimentalism and natural
eloquence as a supplemental discourse that seeks to moderate the effects of the dominant
practices of selfishness and theatricality that produce the social order of the country and
metropolis depicted in the novel.

The spectacle of the heroine’s body does not secure structural transformation of civil
society; it may, however, modify the operation of the passions inside specific individual human
bodies. Indeed, the specificity of iatromechanical processes, and their basis in physiology
accounts for the uneven audience reception Clarissa encounters. Because eighteenth-century
theories of sentiment take cognizance of the particularity of individual bodies, physiological
variation affords Richardson an explanation for the differences that self-love introduces into
human behaviour despite ‘the theoretical universality of sentiment’ (Burgess, 59, 63). I would
like to suggest that for Richardson the anomalies that vitiate ‘the theoretical sameness of human
physiology’ spring from such training of the nervous system and mind as arises from the effects
of the subject’s environment. In this chapter, I argue that Clarissa postulates that the damage
that physiology sustains through constant exposure to the selfishness and theatricality of the
town accounts for the variations in individual responsiveness to Clarissa’s eloquence in
London. Moreover, the cumulative, iterative, and even posthumous effects of Clarissa’s
eloquence on her spectators are more impressive than the impact of any individual spectacle of
sympathy.
Perhaps the best exemplum of the slow-working power of Clarissa's eloquence is Belford's gradual conversion to her cause. The heroine's physical effects on Belford begin to take hold during their first encounter at Mrs. Sinclair's on May 1, impressing him to petition Lovelace not to ruin Clarissa. Belford 'cannot devise' whence arises his solicitude for Clarissa, but thinks it might derive from her 'aspect': 'were I to have the virtues and the graces all drawn into one piece, they should be taken, every one of them, from different airs and attitudes in her' (555). In the weeks preceding the rape, Belford is moved to write three letters asking Lovelace either to abandon his attempt on Clarissa or to observe principle in testing her. Initially, Belford divides his loyalties between the lady and his friend: 'If she yield to fair seduction ... if thou canst raise a weakness in her by love, or by arts not inhuman; I shall the less pity her' (560).

Belford's revulsion for Lovelace's wickedness deepens after the rape, but it takes Clarissa's gestural response to the injury her mind sustains from her public arrest at Covent Garden to crystallize Belford's sentimental conversion and to galvanize him to active sympathy. The relevant scenes take place in the heroine's cell in Rowland's jail in High Holbourn, where Belford reports that he 'could not ... help being visibly affected':

She waved her hand two or three times towards the door, as if
commanding me to withdraw; and displeased at my intrusion; but
did not speak. ... as if struggling in vain for words, she seemed
to give up speech for lost, and dropped her head down once more,

with a deep a sigh, upon her left arm; her right, as if she had not
the use of it (numbed, I suppose), self-moving, dropping down on
her side (1066).

Physical and unconscious display of sensibility draws a parallel motion of sensibility
from its witness. Observing in himself evidences of the ‘capacity of being moved by the
distresses of our fellow-creatures’, Belford describes how his ‘heart’ and his ‘eyes gave way to
a softness of which (though not so hardened a wretch as thou) it was never before so
susceptible’: ‘She lifted up her sweet face once more and beheld me on my knees’ (1066).
Henceforth, Belford’s protection of Clarissa grows increasingly aggressive, causing the
gentleman to regret his earlier half-heartedness (1080). For her part, Clarissa takes Belford into
her confidence and confirms his conversion by formally nominating him as her editor, trustee,
and executor (1329). But as far as I can determine, Belford is unique among the characters of
*Clarissa, Amelia* and *Cecilia* in the capacity of his reawakened sensibility to remain
uncoarsened in London. Because he does not backslide even though he settles permanently in
the town after Clarissa and Lovelace are dead, he is, perhaps, the only exception to the rule that
people of feeling and converts to sensibility must die or retreat to the countryside to keep their
virtue: at the end of *Clarissa*, Mowbray and Tourville, the two surviving members of
Lovelace’s confederacy of rakes, convert their fortunes into ‘annuities for life’ and retire to
their native counties, while Belford stays on in London as their town-agent, ‘managing their
concerns for them’ (1490).
2.2 Metropolitan theatricality belongs to the town, not to the City

As I have already suggested, in *Clarissa* natural eloquence opposes the theatricality that dominates civil society and the town. Moreover, theatricality, while not evil itself, cannot be permitted to corrupt the City. As Richardson insists in his conduct manual for young tradesmen, *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (1734), the play-house has its proper place, but not in or near the City. While commanding apprentices not to 'haunt play-houses', the pamphlet allows that 'under proper regulations' the stage may serve 'excellent purposes, and be a useful second to the pulpit itself' (9). As civic pageantry, spectacle can even promote commerce and mercantile virtue. Before 'the luxury of the present age', shows were exhibited once a year at the annual fair of 'every trading town or populous city':

> It was then that Bartholomew Fair for the City, and that of Southwark for the borough, were the only times in which the industrious citizens indulged, or their well-regulated families desired to be indulged in that sort of diversions (14 - 15).

Richardson's belief that theatricality and modern politeness reinforce one another anticipates the views that Rousseau expresses later in the *Second Discourse* (cf., Chapter 1). With increasing refinement, writes Richardson, 'the middling sort of tradesmen' gradually succumb to an appetite for theatre: 'But now we are grown much more polite, forsooth; our young men aspire to the taste of their betters' (15). This new love of the stage exposes youth to a repertory 'entirely unsuitable to people of business and trade', for all but one 'modern play', and particularly the plays of the reign of Charles II, are pernicious to the manners of citizens (9 - 11). In deference to genre, as well as to ethical content, Richardson makes an exception for
George Lillo’s *The London Merchant* (1731): this lurid tale of embezzlement and murder rehearses, in dramatic form, a natural eloquence similar to that exhibited in *Clarissa*. Lillo’s sermonizing on the role of feigned and real passion in the ruin and repentence of the apprentice George Barnwell instantiates the success of *tragédie larmoyante* on the English stage. Whereas self-love destroys the young man, an interchange of ‘sympathizing sorrow’ restores his humanity: ‘Since you propose an intercourse of woe, pour all your griefs into my breast, and in exchange take mine’ (V. i. 19; V. v. 46 - 48).

The novelist’s ambivalence regarding public spectacles responds less, as Thomas Keymer observes, to ‘any inherent malignity in the theatre’ than to the misuse of its power (1992: 149). Unlike Lillo’s tragedy, the typical fare of the English stage of the 1730’s appeals to the passions in ways that impair work discipline. Since tradesmen are ‘the most useful underwheels of the Commonwealth, that keep the great machine of trade and manufacture going’, installing play-houses in the City would retard the smooth operation of ‘this excellently well-governed Corporation’ on which the wealth of civil society depends (18 - 19).

The pamphlet does not, however, apply the same logic to the regulation of fashionable society: ‘the play-houses at the gay end of the town may be tolerated for the amusement of persons in upper life, who would not perhaps, as the world now stands, otherwise know what to do with their time’ (16). Richardson’s metropolis would manage the passions according to the tenors of its various precincts: while the theatricality of polite consumption may define the manners of the

15 Like the *Vade Mecum*, *Clarissa* represents the City as better-disposed than the town to regulate the passions. Lovelace, for example, finds that the City interferes his power, since it is where he must go to negotiate at Doctor’s Commons for a marriage-licence. For her part, the heroine would prefer to live in Norfolk Street instead of Dover Street ‘for its neighbourhood to a city so well governed as London is said to be’: ‘Nor should I have disliked a lodging in the heart of [the City], having heard but indifferent accounts of the liberties sometimes taken at the other end of the town’ (471).
town, the labouriousness of impolite ‘trade and manufacture’ must dictate those of the City.
The author’s second novel follows the same metropolitan division of labour recommended in
the *Vade Mecum*, insulating the City from spectacle, and setting all the novel’s fully dramatized
London scenes exclusively in the town.\(^{16}\) City and town must exist side by side yet separately,
the City’s labour subsidizing the town’s politeness. In rejecting theatricality on civic grounds,
the *Vade Mecum* moralizes this separation and advances reasons why the stage might corrupt
and disorder the City. *Clarissa* reverses the terms of this argument and represents a process in
which natural eloquence might improve civil society under the emblem of the town: the oratory
of the heroine’s body occasionally makes converts in London, but cannot do the same in the
country until it has proven its mettle in the town.

Consistent with this distinction, the town, not Harlowe-Place, takes the brunt of the
novel’s invective. Despite the dominance of selfish passion at Harlowe-Place, Clarissa’s family
mobilize the potential of setting far less inventively than Lovelace, who seems to find
inspiration everywhere in the town, and even indulges the conceit of London as a stage
designed to mold Clarissa to his will: \(^{17}\) the ‘scenery for intrigue’ in which he regales at St.
Alban’s, just before entering the metropolis, are the settings of the town (413). So convinced is

\(^{16}\) London portion of *Clarissa* deploys exactly five scene changes, all of them
outside the authority of the City: Mrs.Sinclair’s brothel near St. James Square, Mrs.
Moore’s at Hampstead Heath, the Smith’s town-house in King Street, Covent Garden, the
chuchyard of St. Paul’s, Covent Garden, where the arrest scene takes place, and Mr.
Rowland’s sponging-house in High Holbourn, which lies west of Holbourne Bars and
therefore outside the City.

\(^{17}\) Lovelace admits his theatricality stems from self-love before he arrives in London.
Only his pride in managing Clarissa’s family enables him to ‘bear their insults’. Lovelace’s
self-regard can control his resentment because of the pleasure he takes in ‘danc[ing]’ James
Harlowe ‘upon my own wires’, ‘cooling, or inflaming, his violent passions, as may best suit
my purposes’: ‘By this engine, whose springs I am continually oiling, I play them all off’
(144 - 45).
Lovelace of his control over matters theatrical that he dichotomizes art and nature only to deny the latter any autonomy all. In Lovelace’s view, artifice subsumes nature, reducing civil society to a set of theatrical constructs (Castle, 1982: 84).

Therefore, Lovelace brings Clarissa to town, where he believes that an intrinsic symbiosis of setting and selfishness makes theatre supreme. In London Lovelace can rightly insist that the properties he needs inhere in setting, and that his invention works with found materials, without need for contrivance: ‘No machinery make I necessary. No unnatural flights aim I at. All pure nature, taking advantage of nature, as nature tends’ (716). By integrating his ‘machines’ with the machinery of the town, Lovelace initially executes his will but later restricts it. Over the long run, Lovelace’s theatricality damages his judgement so badly that it precludes him from choosing good even when it coincides with self-interest. As he admits on June 10, two days before the rape, his ‘engines’ have narrowed his agency:

... I am sorry at the present writing, that I have been such a foolish plotter as to put it, as I fear I have done, out of my own power to be honest. I hate compulsion in all forms; and cannot bear, even to be compelled to be the wretch my choice has made me! — So now, Belford, as thou hast said, I am a machine at last, and no free agent (848).

Lovelace’s regrets spring from the ambivalence of civil society, since the metonym that grounds his invention in the scenery of London also ensures his defeat by the gestures that externalize Clarissa’s exquisite feelings: her sensibility occasionally stalls his machinery, since the

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18 Lovelace reiterates this sentiment elsewhere: ‘... what force have evil habits upon the human mind! When we enter upon a devious course, we think we shall have it in our power, when we will, to return to the right path. But it is not so, I plainly see ...’ (915).
spectacle of her virtue can induce sentiment in such rakes as Belford, eventually one of her closest disciples, and even, from time to time, in such false and hardened metropolitan actors as Lovelace or Tomlinson.

However, though seated in the iatromechanical processes of sensibility, the responsiveness of a rake's sympathy to the sight of virtue or suffering requires the assistance of education to become active again after its period of dormancy. We are given to understand that Clarissa's eloquence forces her spectators to sympathize with her irrespective of their interest or intention. But the pedagogical effects of Clarissa's body must act against the training Lovelace's body has received already. Lovelace's theatricality stems from what Clarissa calls the capacity of 'education and custom' to 'make a second nature, as well in good as in bad habits' (702). In Lovelace, the two coincide, so that his education, initially in his family and later in London, reinscribes the effects of inclination. The town frees Lovelace's pride, heightens his theatricality, and vitiates him by nourishing his selfishness. By the time the heroine appears on the scene, London has perfected Lovelace's skills as impresario, actor, and dramaturge.

Lovelace, a 'Proteus' whose judgement complies with whatever theatricality asks of him, understands character as externally-observed and obedient only to the needs of internal consistency (1243, Doody, 1974: 106 - 16). If character is the image of the self in the eye of the world, the vision of the self known best to its spectators, then Lovelace's only obligation is to act in character (1107). Moreover, if the most important component of personality is extrinsic and theatrical, reputation ought to determine how the town judges character:

I have ever been for forming my judgement of the nature of things and actions, not so much from what they are in themselves,
as from the character of the actors. Thus it would be as odd a thing in such as we to keep our words with a lady, as it would be wicked in her to break hers to us (767).

Lovelace, who is happy to be held, together with the heroine, to strict construction of the principles their manners imply, extrapolates his theory of character into a precept of evidence:

I ought to have been a little more attentive to character than I have been. For, notwithstanding that the measures of right and wrong are said to be so manifest, let me tell thee that character biases and runs away with all mankind. Let a man or woman once establish themselves in the world’s opinion, and all that either of them do will be sanctified. Nay, in the very courts of justice, does not character acquit or condemn as often as facts, and sometimes in spite of facts (862, emphasis in original)?

Clarissa, slow to grasp that the ‘world’s opinion’ dictates all behaviour, is a ‘silly soul’

... to depend upon the goodness of her own heart, when the heart cannot be seen into but by its actions; and ... to neglect to cultivate the opinion of individuals, when the whole world is governed by appearance (789)!

Lovelace’s obedience to theatricality corrupts his judgement, since his need to comply with ‘character’ subjects him to the rule of pride and deadens him to sympathy. This scheme for managing the passions subordinates all desire to a single appetite in exactly the manner Mandeville recommends. Impressed, Clarissa observes that self-love, not sympathy, places Lovelace above avarice and motivates his showy beneficence: ‘Money he values not, but as a
means to support his pride and his independence’: ‘it is easy ... for a person to part with a secondary appetite, when, by so doing, he can promote or gratify a first’. She infers that by ‘some fault in his education’ his family failed to attend to his ‘natural bias’ towards pride, and instead instructed him ‘to do good and beneficent actions; but not from proper motives’ (698).

Lovelace’s town education proceeds according to theories of contagion founded in the iatromechanical model of the body. The reader learns, for example, that the passions of the town have corrupted Lovelace’s judgement by infection, shaping the composition of his letters. On June 12, the day of the rape, he writes:

I imagine that thou wilt be apt to suspect that some passages in this letter were written in town. Why, Jack, I cannot but say that the Westminster air is a little grosser than that at Hampstead; and the conversation of Mrs Sinclair and the Nymphs less innocent than Mrs Moore’s and Miss Rawlins’s. And I think in my heart, that I can say and write things at one place, which I cannot at the other; nor indeed anywhere else (870).19

Lovelace knows his association with Mrs. Sinclair, ‘the true mother of [his] mind’, suppresses his natural sympathy (1433). Hence, writing from the King’s Arms, Pall Mall, he acknowledges that Clarissa’s behaviour in the fire scene has ‘exalted’ her in his eyes, but pauses to wonder: ‘Whence, however, this strange rhapsody? — Is it owing to my being here? That I am not at Sinclair’s? But if there be infection in that house, how has my beloved escaped it?’ (735).

19 For further discussion of how London air corrupts by contagion, see 4.6.
Having dealt, in the previous section, primarily with London’s contribution to Lovelace’s theatricality, I would now like to turn to Clarissa’s eloquence and its sources. If there be, as Lovelace believes, infection in London, Clarissa escapes it owing to her natural eloquence. This protects her from selfishness and from the power of spectacle to vitiate moral discernment. Unlike the ‘underbred and unwary audience’ to whom the *Vade Mecum* fears ‘the heightened action and scenical example’ of the stage may spread immorality, the heroine is capable of seeing ‘the moral’ through ‘the glittering and dazzling scene’ (*VM*, 11 - 12, 17).

Clarissa loves tragedies ‘for the sake of the instruction, the warning, and the example generally given in them’, and easily penetrates the dazzle of the stage to extract the ‘useful application’ of the live performance of Otway’s *Venice Preserv’d* (1682) that she attends with Lovelace on May 20 (618). Her prior experience of the text’s power to move the sympathetic passions enables her to penetrate into its meaning. Because Otway’s play is ‘a deep and most affecting tragedy in the reading’, Anna ‘will not wonder’ that the heroine was ‘greatly moved’ at seeing it represented on the stage, especially considering that Mr. Lovelace, ‘one of the most hard-hearted men in the world’, was ‘very sensibly touched with some of the most affecting scenes’.

*Venice Preserv’d* was famous, even in the eighteenth century, for confusing audiences as to where to place their sympathies (Kelsall, 1969: xvi; Aikens, 1986).20 Still, the play’s application to *Clarissa* most likely stems from a sentimental reading by means of which the heroine might have identified with both of the play’s central characters. In *Venice Preserv’d* Jaffeir and Belvidera, a virtuous but over-heated married couple, find themselves caught

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20 For an alternative reading of this play, see Janet E. Aikens’ article (1986).
between the sordid city-state of Venice and a slightly less-sordid conspiracy against the city, which Jaffeir joins to revenge himself against his cruel father-in-law, Senator Priuli. Like Belvidera, Clarissa suffers under a paternal curse; like Jaffeir, she aspires to modify a corrupt urban society and is tortured by passions that pull her in opposite directions. Initially, however, Clarissa’s strongest affinities seem to lie with Jaffeir. Just as Clarissa is torn between her sympathy for her family and her attraction to Lovelace, Jaffeir is divided between compassion for his wife and father-in-law and homosocial passion for his friend and co-conspirator, Pierre. And like Clarissa, Jaffeir breaks moral law. Clarissa acknowledges the similarity of her betrayal with Jaffeir’s in Paper X, where she quotes the lines in which Otway’s hero expresses remorse for abandoning Pierre to the Venetian government (IV, ii, 106 - 09), but the ‘guilt’ she admits is the offence of leaving her father’s garden to join Lovelace:

Lead me, where my own thoughts themselves may lose me;

Where I may doze out what I’ve left of life,

Forget myself; and that day’s guilt! —

Cruel remembrance! — how shall I appease thee (893)?

In the ensuing action Jaffeir at first clings to his wife, begging her to calm his passions in lines that Clarissa also quotes in Paper X (IV, ii, 298 - 302), again with slight alteration, this time to ask Miss Howe to save her from insanity:

And speak the words of peace to my divided soul,

That wars within me,

And raises ev’ry sense to my confusion,

I’m tott’ring on the brink

Of peace; and thou art all the hold I’ve left (893)!
However, the most germane application of *Venice Preserv'd* to *Clarissa* lies in similarities in their representation of the natural eloquence of their heroines' bodies. In the play, the effects of Belvidera’s eloquence closely resemble those of Clarissa’s in certain scenes I analyze later in this chapter. For example when Jaffeir blames the eloquence of his wife’s body for his betrayal of Pierre, his accusation implies that the heroine’s gestures have ‘told’ on him:

... Hark thee, traitress, thou hast done this,

Thanks to thy tears and false persuading love.

How her eyes speak! Oh thou bewitching creature (IV, ii, 388 - 90)!

Realizing that he is powerless to erase his dishonour by murdering Belvidera, Jaffeir relents and implores her to use her eloquence to revive Priuli’s compassion to compel him to save Pierre:

‘Speak to him with thy eyes, and with thy tears / Melt the hard heart and wake dead nature in him’ (IV, ii, 426 - 27). Compliantly, Belvidera pleads with her father, appealing to his sympathy:

Nay, do not call to memory

My disobedience, but let pity enter

Into your heart, and quite deface the impression (V, I, 51 - 53);

Belvidera’s sentimental intercession wins the tribute of her father’s tears, and a promise to ask Senate to spare Pierre’s life. In the event, Priuli’s appeals to the Senate fail only because of the corruption of the city’s government, and because they come too late (V, ii, 104 - 05): the futility of the insurrection and Priuli’s efforts to save Pierre do not lessen the sentimental import of the tragedy. Belvidera loses her mind and dies at her father’s feet but leaves him a changed man and a lesson to all unnatural families, including, presumably, the Harlowes. In his final speech, Priuli begs his servants to leave him alone to meditate on his daughter’s death.
‘Sparing no tears when you this tale relate, / But bid all cruel fathers dread my fate’ (V, iv, 36 - 37). In Otway’s tragedy, then, the eloquence of the body proves itself worthy despite its failure to awaken sociability in the fallen metropolis.

Having dealt with the representation of the eloquence of the body in Venice Preserv’d I would now like to consider Richardson’s representation of the effects of reading or performing on an acute sensibility. As I suggested in Chapter 1, the iatromechanical model on which Richardson relies to explain these effects is traceable to Descartes and most likely came to the novelist at least partly through his knowledge of the writings of Aaron Hill. The interpretative practices that Hill’s acting theory prescribe apply equally to the stage and the closet. Thus, although Clarissa praises the ‘author’s performance’ of Venice Preserv’d more highly than the actors’, (640) her reception of an enactment of the play at public theatre in London rehearses her memory of how readings of the same script at Harlowe-Place had once agitated her body. As a woman of feeling, Clarissa will perform the sentiments of any text she encounters, so that her eloquent body feels the passions in the words on the page. Moreover, an acute sensibility, such as Clarissa’s or Richardson’s, may agonize in consequence of a sentimental reading. The fictional heroine shares this susceptibility with her real-life creator. In his letter of October 29, 1746 to Aaron Hill, written during the composition of Clarissa, Richardson gently complains of the suffering his friend’s poem, The Art of Acting (1746), had caused him. Ironically, in abandoning the mental habits of a typesetter Richardson submits to the tyranny of the Cartesian body-machine Hill depicts in his writing on acting theory. The copying of Hill’s body-machine looks very much like that of a press, since the novelist’s jangling nerves and twitching muscles can no more resist the impressions of ideas stamped on the mind than a sheet can deny the striking of inked type: ‘Last Sunday I attempted to read [The Art of Acting] not as a printer;
and; was not aware, that I should be so mechanically ... affected by it’ (Carroll, 1964: 74).

When Richardson writes that he ‘endeavoured to follow’ Hill’s ‘wonderful description of the force of acting, in the passion of joy, sorrow, fear, anger, &c.’, he means that in reading the piece in private he embodied these passions according to the acting lessons set out in the poem.

Here, for instance, is the application of Hill’s ‘dramatic principle’ to the passion of joy. The first half of the stanza describes the process of raising and cultivating the passion in the mind, and its spontaneous transmission to the ‘fibres’ of the body:

Search the soul-pleasing passion’s power, within,
Find your smile’s force, before some faithful glass,
Heedful, to let no faint impression pass:
There, to touch’d gladness, thought-form’d features train,
‘Till each crisped fibre feels th’ enrapturing strain (III, 396):

The remaining seven lines adumbrate the action, air, attitude, and tone of voice that involuntarily arise in the members of an eloquent body as they respond to the ‘impressions’ that emanate from the printing of the ‘ideal pathos, on the brain’ (III, 408):

Then, (stretch’d) behold your op’ning forehead rise.
Beck’ning, in boastful sense of sparkling eyes.
Brac’d your press’d joints — neck, knee, feet, shoulders, hands,
Treading on air, each step new soul displays,
Your limbs all lighten, and your looks all blaze:
Then, speak, – answers; every sound its own:
Musick, and rapture, mix’d, in transport’s tone (III, 397).
Dutifully, the novelist reports back to Hill that the poet’s dramatic exercises had registered
upon Richardson’s body in gestures corresponding to the intended passions:

And my whole frame, so nervously affected before, was shaken
by [The Art of Acting]: I found, in short, such tremors, such
startings that I was unable to go thro’ it; and must reserve the
attempting it again, till your oak tincture ... has fortified the too
relaxed, unmuscled muscles, and braced those unbraced nerves.

The dominant thrust of Hill’s mechanization of the passions is to emphasize the
involuntary obedience of the nerves and muscles of the body-machine to the sovereign power of
the imagination:

... No visage can conceal,

What the mark’d muscle bids the spirit feel:

Still, as the nerves constrain, the looks obey,

And what the look enjoins, the nerves display:

Mutual their aid, reciprocal their strain,

Will but commanding, face and nerves explain (III, 394 - 95).

If the reader, actor, or elocutionist can but call up a lively memory of a passion and impress it
on the mind, the imagination automatically ‘strikes’ impressions of that passion onto the
muscles and nerves, thereby generating the right delivery. But a careful reading of Hill shows
these impressions act both ways: the action of nerve and muscle strikes back upon the brain,
etching the initial image of the passion more sharply and deeply into the mind. Thus, Hill’s
system of eloquence presumes the reciprocal agreement of the parts of the body-machine, even
though he never uses the term ‘sympathy’ to denote those concordances. It is on this copying of
corporeal passion onto the mind that Clarissa, the sentimental auditor of Otway’s dramatic poetry, depends for her penetration into its deeper meaning. At the play-house, the heroine relives in memory how earlier readings of Venice Preserv’d had made her body feel.

The play-text raises the passions that agitate the player’s body, or, for that matter, the elocutionist’s. The reading of Venice Preserv’d Clarissa has in mind in her letter of May 21 could as easily be a vive voce drawing-room rendition as a silent perusal in her closet. In a eulogy to her friend, Anna writes that even before she came to London, the heroine, ‘an admirable mistress of all the graces of elocution’, excelled in the art of vocal interpretation:

    She was the most graceful reader I ever knew. She added, by her melodious voice, graces to those she found in the parts of books she read out to her friends; and gave grace and significance to others where they were not. She had no tone, no whine. Her accent was always admirably placed. No buskin elevation, no tragedy-pomp, could mislead her; and yet poetry was poetry indeed when she read it (Cl., 1932: IV, 494, 498).

From this sensibility develops the oratorical power that the heroine unleashes against Lovelace in London, but it needs the metropolis to bring it out properly. Clarissa’s eloquence, centred in her actio and pronuntiato, is feared, initially by her family and later, in town, by Lovelace and his confederates. The heroine gives proof of her prowess in a recital of Cowley’s Ode of Wit at her first meeting with Lovelace’s fellow-rakes at Sinclair’s on May 1, performing the apostrophe ‘with so much graceful ease, and beauty, and propriety of accent, as would have made bad poetry delightful’. This blow to their self-esteem puts the company out of countenance. Belford reports ‘how much it put us out of conceit with ourselves, and made us
fear her’ (711 - 12).

2.4 Lovelace's theatricality struggles with Clarissa's eloquence

Lovelace's theatricality springs from a command of the body that is one of his greatest 'natural' talents: the antagonist's organism physiologically and mechanically predisposes him to theatrical skill. Thus, after poisoning himself with ipecacuanha to feign an illness that might win Clarissa's pity, he gleefully writes:

I am a better mimic at this rate than I wish to be. But every nerve and fibre of me is always ready to contribute its aid, whether by health or ailment, to carry a resolved-on roguery into execution (676).

Except when Clarissa's bodily eloquence cancels the effects of Lovelace's constitutional predisposition to play-acting, his theatrical self-command seldom falters, even in the face of his genuine grief over the heroine's imminent death. As he reminds Belford, his performance of 'levity' on September 1 testifies to a self-command worthy of '[y]our Seneca's, your Epicetuses, and the rest of your stoical tribe' (1310). In his own eyes, at least, exquisite self-discipline, not self-indulgence, lies at the root of the mastery of the body-machine that defines his powers as actor and impresario. Like James and Monckton, the male villains of Amelia and Cecilia, Lovelace's theatricality partakes of stoicism. Hence, every time the heroine manages to excite her antagonist's sympathy, his pride suffers. Lovelace decries his sympathy as a mechanical and autonomous power of a body over which his control has weakened, when he writes:
Yet ‘tis poor too, to think myself a machine — I am no machine — Lovelace, thou art base to thyself, but to suppose thyself a machine ... And yet I don’t know how it is, but this lady, the moment I come into her presence, half assimilates me to her own virtue — Once or twice ... I was prevailed upon to fluster myself, with an intention to make some advances, which, if obliged to recede, I might lay upon raised spirits; but the instant I beheld her, I was soberized (sic) into awe and reverence: and the majesty of her even visible purity first damped, and then extinguished, my double flame (658).

In contrast with Lovelace, the power Clarissa’s natural oratory has over other characters is seated in the involuntary actions over which her will has little or no control: Clarissa’s eloquence differs from Lovelace’s theatricality in requiring, instead of excluding, the automatic action of the body. The mechanisms of her body, ‘this charming clock’, as Lovelace (in a Cartesian turn of phrase) calls it, occasionally neutralize him, reminding him that he too is a machine (1343). Moreover, unlike Lovelace, Clarissa seeks justification in her reflex actions. For, in Clarissa the term ‘machine’ usually connotes body as object of iatromechanical description, ready for dissection by a physiologist or novelist, but no longer the servant of its owner’s will. These failures of agency may stem from either mental distress or physical illness.

21 On September 6, the day of Clarissa’s death, Lovelace writes that the heroine’s doctor ‘deserves the utmost contempt for suffering this charming clock to run down so low. What must be his art, if it could wind it up in a quarter of the time he has attended her, when at his visits the springs and wheels of life and motion were so good that they seemed only to want common care and oiling (1343 - 44)!’ Similarly, The Passions of the Soul, Part I, Art. 6, asserts that the body of a living man differs from that of a dead man as much as a watch that works differs from a watch that is broken (1989: 21).
On one hand, the heroine, observing her own trembling complains of ‘what a poor passive machine ... the body [is] when the mind is disordered’ (303). On the other hand, Belton, one of Lovelace’s rakes, complains his diseases have made him ‘a passive machine ... to be wrought on by you people of the faculty’ (1240).

Only in the former case does involuntary gesture signify the transformative passions of the sentimental agent: as a set of practices, natural eloquence presupposes that spontaneous physical reaction is the least theatrical form of response because it signals inward passion more reliably than voluntary gesture. Accordingly, Clarissa sometimes presents her gestures as suppressions of self-awareness in the face of unbearable suffering:

I could hold no longer; but threw myself at [my mother’s] feet ... I arose trembling and hardly knowing what I did, or how I stood or walked, withdrew to my chamber (103).

At other times, the heroine attributes volition to parts of her body wholly devoid of consciousness: ‘My feet moved (of themselves, I think) farther from the parlour where [Mr. Solmes] was, and towards the stairs ...’ (115).

Even though Clarissa’s reflexes do not always work to her advantage or protect her virtue, they almost always betray what she actually feels, even when she will not admit to her feelings. Usually these slips are harmless, as they are when she bemoans the consequences of ‘having too little command’ of herself in reflexively switching chairs to relieve the pressure of Mr. Solmes’s ‘ugly weight’ on her skirt-hoop: ‘It gave my brother and sister too much advantage. I dare say they took it — but I did it involuntarily, I think; I could not help it — I knew not what I did’ (87). However, the gesture that seals Clarissa’s moral fall, and condemns her to suffering and death is reflexive, authentic, and unsentimental. The unconscious step that
exiles her from the relative safety of her father’s garden springs, in part, from Clarissa’s selfish passions. The pace that responds to Clarissa’s sexual desire for Lovelace’s body, a passion to which she never admits, mechanically carries her outside the garden wall and into destruction:

I ran as fast as he, yet knew not that I ran; my fears at the same
time that they took all power of thinking from me adding wings
to my feet: my fears which probably would not have suffered me
to know what course to take, had I not had him to urge and draw
me after him ... (380).

In keeping with the function of reflex in this novel, Clarissa’s body transparently discloses her lust in the escape scene, a fact that she comes close to acknowledging in her letter in which she begs Anna to learn from her example:

Learn, my dear, I beseech you learn, to subdue your own
passions. Be the motives what they will, excess is excess. ...

Your ever obliged, / Or, if you take so rash a step,
Your forever disobliged, / Clarissa Harlowe (550)

Having successfully staged the escape scene, in which Clarissa’s body takes her off guard, Lovelace spends the rest of the novel in a series of futile attempts to surprise his beloved into some similar corporeal expression of passion. These include the fire scene, the episode in which he poisons himself, which I cited earlier, and the beginning of the pen-knife scene, which Lovelace initiates in hopes of putting Clarissa on trial.

Most of Lovelace’s attempts on Clarissa’s virtue conform to a policy of engagement he announces early in the novel. Unlike the heroine’s miserable and cowardly family, Lovelace elects to confront and fight Clarissa’s eloquence, instead of struggling to contain and avoid it,
as the Harlowes have done (Castle, 1982: 81). Clarissa’s ‘address’, the eloquence of her body, captivates Lovelace’s imagination:

Then is this lady a mistress of our passions: no one ever had to so much perfection the art of moving. This all her family know, and have equally feared and revered her for it. This I know too; and doubt not more and more to experience (Cl., 1932: II, 252).

Lovelace describes the logic of his policy of engagement in a letter written April 13 at St. Albans’ two weeks before the couple’s arrival in London (426ff). Clarissa fascinates Lovelace because her affecting presence challenges his own persuasiveness, but he judges her according to himself. Naturally, he sees her eloquence as a version of his own arrogance. Pride, the love of dominance that rules Lovelace’s conduct, must, he thinks, be the secret force driving Clarissa’s actions. The need to expose her eloquence as theatricality, and therefore as identical to his own behaviour, becomes Lovelace’s justification for locking her up in a whorehouse in St. James’s. He rationalizes his systematic testing of Clarissa in London as a means of determining whether selfishness motivates her exemplary self-command: if she be the daughter of a family ruled by ‘Harlowe-pride’, ‘may not her virtue be founded rather in pride than principle?’ (740; 426).

Lovelace believes his campaign will bring symmetry to his moral relations with Clarissa. Since her willingness to tolerate his physical presence precedes from a false belief that she might reform him, his program of ordeal is merely the reverse of her program of improvement:

Am I not justified in my resolutions of trying her virtue, who is resolved, as I may say, to try mine? — who has declared that
she will not marry me till she has hopes of my reformation (431)?

The importance Lovelace assigns to this rationale is suggested by the desperation with which he clings to it on the eve of the rape, when Clarissa’s eloquence is about to seize control of the action: ‘Don’t tell me that virtue and principle are her guides on this occasion! — ‘Tis pride, a greater pride than my own, that governs her’ (868). Lovelace, then, quite early in the novel, sets out to furnish public proof that pride, not ‘principle’, ‘reason’, ‘virtue’, or ‘sentiment’ (in the form of disinterested concern for his moral well-being) controls Clarissa’s behaviour. In other words, Lovelace takes the Mandevillian position that Clarissa’s selfishness explains her escape from Harlowe Place, as well as her need to conceal the reasons for that flight since, as *The Fable of the Bees* points out, half the work of self-love lies in concealing its own existence (II, 78 - 79). Thus, Lovelace’s determination to unmask what he sees as Clarissa’s pride is the classical Mandevillian exercise of looking for the self-love in acts of apparent sympathy.\(^{22}\)

Nowhere is that quest half so congenial as it is in the town, which, in *Clarissa* is as much the throne of self-love as it is in *Amelia*; only in the town is the antithesis of refined selfishness and natural sympathy as sharp. Converted into forms of physical performance, these master-passions become, respectively, metropolitan theatricality and natural eloquence.

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\(^{22}\) Since Hutcheson refined his doctrine in critiques that defend Shaftesbury against *The Fable*, sentimental morality by definition condemns Mandevillian self-love. But although Richardson may have known these critiques of Mandeville, (Sill, 155 - 58) and definitely knew *The Fable*, which Lovelace quotes (*Cl*. 847), Tauber’s argument that *Clarissa* ‘constructs a world on Mandeville’s principles’ and tests his propositions seems thin and speculative (55 -107).
2.5 The eighteenth-century language of gesture and scenes of natural eloquence

As the previous section suggests, in *Clarissa*, 'artifice' typically denotes theatricality, particularly Lovelace's, and 'eloquence', sentiment, particularly the heroine's (902). In the London action, the struggle between the theatricality of the polite body and the eloquence of the sentimental body works itself out in a series of episodes which contest control of Clarissa's corporeal machine. In these scenes, Clarissa's oratory is often almost indistinguishable from that of a skilled actress, except in the spontaneity and power of her involuntary gesture to secure a measure of involuntary assent from her spectators. Consider, for example, the role of Clarissa's gestures in Belford's ongoing sentimental conversion. In Belford's account of one of these incidents, the heroine, 'clasping her hands together, uplifted, as were her eyes', hopes her father may set a pattern of forgiveness to which she might aspire by learning to pity her destroyers. Her 'noble speech and behaviour' affect Belford, engaging reflexive movements of mind and body: 'Methinks, said I (and I really, in a manner involuntarily, bent my knee), I have before me an angel indeed. I can hardly forbear prostration ...' (1102). As do all dramatic scenes in *Clarissa*, this vignette realizes its action in a stylized and technical language of rhetorical gesture which embarrassed many twentieth-century Richardson critics. In an article published in 1963, for example, Leo Hughes concludes that Richardson's reliance on dramatic method and theatrical convention for inspiration may have led him into the 'error' of writing 'in the manner of high tragedy, stage machinery and all' (250). In similar fashion, J. M. S. Tompkins, writing thirty years earlier, accepts the 'stylized gesture' of the 'sentimental parts of

23 *Clarissa* often prefers gesture to dialogue as a vehicle of expression. In Letter 245, for example, the heroine, Lovelace and Tomlinson conduct an entire conversation primarily in the language of the body (844, paras. 6 - 10).
eighteenth-century novels’, but complains that ‘like all artificial tradition’, it ‘obscure[s] the view of the real’ (352-53). From Tompkins’s perspective, the gestural conventions of sentimental fiction occlude the innate transparency of the realistic eighteenth-century novel, interposing a filter between the reader and the action disclosed to his or her view through the mediation of the text.

This perception continues to colour reception of this novel. Many first-time present-day readers find that Clarissa’s dramatic scenes evoke mental images of action transpiring not, say, in the dining room at Mrs. Sinclair’s, but instead inside the proscenium of a stage-setting which represents that dining room. The genuine but unintended alienation that arises from a first encounter with Richardson’s scenes of sentiment stem from the difficulty that today’s readers see two layers of artifice where many eighteenth-century readers may have seen only one. For the most avid members of Richardson’s original audience, public knowledge of the language of gesture made the novel of sentiment transparent by infusing it with theatricality. Far from ‘obliterating the view of the real’, Clarissa’s stage gestures guided the reading of an enthusiastic eighteenth-century public, allowing Richardson to appear to depict the passions authentically, by replicating gesture consecrated by theatrical convention.

Thus, as soon as Clarissa arrives in London on April 26, her reliance on the gestural conventions of the eighteenth-century stage comes to her aid in reading her captors’ characters. For example, according to Charles Gildon’s 1710 acting manual, a ‘frequent winking, or tremulous motion of the eyes, argues malicious manners, and perverse and noxious thoughts and inclinations’ (44). Hence, although Clarissa does not know she is living in a brothel, or that her new acquaintances are prostitutes, she can tell that their ingratiating whores’ eyes, Mrs. Sinclair’s ‘odd winking eye’ and Dorcas Sykes ‘half-confident’, ‘strange sly eye’, portend evil
In the vocabulary of eighteenth-century theatrical gesture, a transparent body discloses its passions as reliably as it does personality (McMaster, 2004). The significations acting and elocutionary manuals assign to the most important marks of the body remain remarkably stable throughout the era. In *Clarissa*, one of the most prominent of these pairings of passion and posture, leaving aside the obvious ones of tears, kneeling, and prostration, is the lifting up of eyes and hands; without explaining the meaning of the gesture, or even citing any occurrences, Leo Hughes counts ‘nearly a hundred’ instances in this novel (1963: 240 - 41). John Bulwer’s *Chirologia* (1644), an early-modern taxonomy of gesture, denotes this modification of the body by the Latin tag *admiror* (‘I admire’): it is the throwing of hands ‘up to heaven’ in ‘an expression of admiration, amazement, and astonishment’ (33). Charles Gildon (1710) attributes to this motion a similar range of connotation. ‘In lifting up hands’, the student actor must hold them neither ‘above the eyes’ nor very little lower’, since

... this posture being general on some surprise, admiration, abhorrence, etc. which proceeds from the object, that affects the eye, nature by a sort of mechanic motion throws the hands out as guards to the eyes on such an occasion (77).

John Walker (1781) adheres to the analysis favoured by the elocutionary movement, first, in breaking the underlying passion into a series of stages, and, second, in imputing a partially reflexive character to *admiror*. ‘Wonder is involuntary praise’, but the spectator’s ‘discovery of something excellent in the object of wonder excites ‘admiration, which is a mixture of

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24 In *Amelia* the heroine’s friend Mrs. Bennet observes the same facial expression in her step-mother: ‘I own she had a cast with her eyes which I never liked’ (VII, ii, 273).
approbation and wonder'. In this state, 'the eyes are raised, the hands lifted up, or clapped together, and the voice elated with expressions of rapture' (II, 347 - 48). Similarly, Gilbert Austin, writing in the 1790's, observes that: ‘If admiration arise from some extraordinary or unexpected circumstances, the hands are thrown up supine elevated, together with the countenance and eyes’ (488).

As I have just suggested, Richardson avails of a well-developed iatromechanical language of the body to describe, say, Lovelace’s awed reaction to the dignity of Clarissa’s demeanour, or Lady Sarah’s and Lady Betty’s astonishment at Lovelace’s arrogance. Consistently, however, the preponderance of the power of gesture lies, literally, in Clarissa’s hands. In order to review some of the evidence for this proposition, I would now like to examine some scenes in which Clarissa’s natural eloquence compels the assent of her audience. These scenes include, first, the conversation between Clarissa and Lovelace on June 18; second, certain episodes at Hampstead Heath; and, third, the pen-knife scene. I will consider the role of natural eloquence in the arrest scene in the following section, at the very end of this chapter.

Most of these scenes represent moments of high feeling in which gesture has the power to coerce the passions of the spectator, and to compel his body to respond in gesture. An instance of this pattern occurs on June 18, during Clarissa’s and Lovelace’s ‘first sensible interview’ after the rape (894). Lovelace receives Clarissa in his apartment at Sinclair’s, expecting to ‘gaze in her downcast countenance’, and ‘look her into sweet confusion’. Instead, he finds his ‘whole frame ... shaken’, ‘for not only her looks and her action, but her voice, so solemn, [is] inexpressibly affecting’ (898 - 900). Clarissa appears ‘dressed in a white damask

25 ‘I lifted up my hands and eyes in silent admiration of her’ (797); ‘The ladies are silent. So they were; lost in admiration of me, hands and eyes uplifted’ (1029).
night-gown', in the guise of a suffering queen in an early-eighteenth-century tragedy (Konigsberg: 33 - 35; Hughes, 1963: 242 - 43). Lovelace recounts, ‘She entered with such dignity in her manner, as struck me with great awe’, and with ‘an air and action’ he ‘never saw equalled’, animated by ‘a fixed sedateness in her whole aspect, which seemed to be the effect of deep contemplation’ (899). An effort of prior preparation, a gathering of ‘the whole day ... in her intellects’ (she has just tried to escape) allows her ‘to collect all the powers of her eloquence’. In a startling change in register repeated several times in the novel, Clarissa’s speech shifts in single sentence from plural second-person address to the intimate yet masculine and theatrical ‘Roman’ form favoured in the Belford-Lovelace correspondence. In this ‘interview’, whenever Clarissa’s soliloquies do not silence her assailant, gesture picks up the slack: ‘thus she proceeded, waving her snowy hand, with all the graces of moving oratory’ (900).

Clarissa’s composure affects by its decorum. With ‘no design of moving [Lovelace] by her tears’, she struggles to conceal what she cannot restrain. Lovelace, who wishes in this letter to ‘do her justice’, sees in Clarissa’s demeanour a tasteful and prudent regulation of the passions that defeats his program of metropolitan trial (Letter 110):

... I had prepared myself for high passion, raving, flying, tearing, execration: these transient violences, the working of sudden grief and shame, and vengeance, would have set us upon a par with each other, and quitted scores. These have I been accustomed to: and, as nothing violent is lasting, with these I could have wished to encounter (900, emphasis supplied).
Seeing in her eloquence ‘irresistible proofs of the love of virtue for its own sake’, Lovelace drops to his knees, and, ‘absolutely in earnest’, promises to marry her (902). Although this offer is not what Clarissa wants from Lovelace — rather, she needs acknowledgment of her liberty to leave Sinclair’s house — it presages the inroads she is about to make into his power.

The humiliating episode of June 18, the one I have just recounted, is not Lovelace’s first serious loss of face. Rather, in the Hampstead Heath sequence, which his letters appropriate as a ‘narrative of the dramatic kind’, and divide into acts and speeches, Clarissa’s natural eloquence subverts his theatricality, thwarts Tomlinson’s bodily self-command, and reduces Lovelace himself to tears (764). What makes this even more embarrassing for Lovelace is his initial intention, which had been to use a series of staged situations to test Clarissa’s goodness according to the plan he describes in Letter 110. Late in the Hampstead sequence Lovelace reveals that he enlisted Tomlinson to deceive Clarissa in order to determine whether virtue or self-love actuates her:

... let me, first, to gratify my pride, bring down hers. Let me see that she loves me well enough to forgive me for my own sake. ...

Neither her virtue nor her love can be established but upon full trial ... (838).

The Hampstead scenes are, then, similar to the pen-knife scene in representing Lovelace’s efforts to overwhelm Clarissa’s eloquence by ambush.

At Hampstead the heroine’s displays of sensibility stall Lovelace’s engines, temporarily inducing sympathy in two town-hardened actors. While there is no indication that McDonald, the middle-aged ne’er-do-well hired to play Captain Tomlinson, has ever worked as a
professional actor, his politeness consists in the same pliability of mind and body. Though manufactured out of McDonald, 'Tomlinson' does not exist outside the *mise-en-scène* his master contrives at Mrs. Moore's (747). Unfortunately for Lovelace, McDonald's self-command and self-interest prove no match for his sympathy in these episodes, where the heroine's eloquence underwrites the representation of her sensibility. Natural eloquence and metropolitan theatricality, both performative, differ in the degree to which each obeys the conscious control of the social actor. In the conflict between the two, Clarissa's spontaneous displays of anguish gradually decimate the opposition.

Like wish-fulfilment, her 'violent tragedy speech' against Lovelace, slowly comes true over the course of the novel: 'Oh that it were in my power, in mercy to my sex, to look thee first into shame and remorse, and then into death!' (775). In the end, the power of Clarissa's body does all these things. Lovelace commences his overtures on a strong footing (he is trying to persuade Clarissa to agree to her uncle's mediation) but soon finds himself at the mercy of her 'affecting eloquence'.

By my soul, Belford, the little witch with her words, but more by her manner moved *me*! Wonder not then, that her action, her grief, her tears, set the women into the like compassionate manifestations (794).

The involuntary movements of Clarissa's body soon have Lovelace losing control of the action, as the spectacle of her virtue wins over Tomlinson, as it has already conquered Belford. Lovelace recounts that her tears 'even affected [Tomlinson], who, brought to abet me, was himself all *Belforded* over'. Keenly aware of the social character of gesture, the protagonist is not surprised to see 'the women, so used to cry without grief, as they are to laugh without
reason, by mere force of example ... pull out their handkerchiefs’. But he is shocked that he himself, ‘between confusion, surprise, and concern, could hardly stand it’ (823).

Sympathy, reawakened by natural eloquence affects Tomlinson and Lovelace involuntarily, temporarily counteracting self-interest and self-regard. Like seizures of sensibility, Tomlinson’s sympathy disrupts his command of his body. After Clarissa ‘hold[s] out one hand, with inimitable dignity’, Tomlinson recants his intentions to return to London: ‘Capt. I will not go, madam, his eyes twinkling (again seized with a fit of humanity!). I will not go if my longer stay can do you either service or pleasure’ (830). Moreover, his nervous system translates the passion Clarissa’s gesture elicits into appeals to Lovelace’s sympathy: ‘For Heaven’s sake, said the penetrated varlet, his hands lifted up, for Heaven’s sake, take compassion upon this admirable lady! — I cannot proceed ...’ (831). But the outer signs of Tomlinson’s body also mark the process by which self-interest and theatricality regain dominion when natural sympathy drains away after Clarissa’s exit removes its stimulus:

He sobbed up his grief — turned about — hemmed up a more manly accent — Wipe thy cursed eyes — He did. The sunshine took place on one cheek, and spread slowly to the other, and the fellow had his whole face again (831).

Consistent with the early-modern tradition of the Protean actor whose body infuses his auditors with passion by forming physical bonds with them, (Roach, 44 - 47) Lovelace describes how Clarissa’s feelings penetrate into Tomlinson’s body, reactivating his sensibility.

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26 Cf., ‘The women pitied me. Honest souls! — they showed that they had each of them a handkerchief as well as I. So, hast thou not observed ... every man in a company of a dozen or more, obligingly pull out his watch, when some one has asked what’s o’clock?’ (776).
Tomlinson finds this piercing all the more unsettling for the reflexive quality of its registration on his internal organs: ‘He told me that just then, he thought he felt a sudden flash from her eye, an eye-beam as he called it, dart through his shivering reins; and he could not help trembling’ (824).

Faced with his machine’s breakdown, Lovelace cannot at first remember the name of the aptitude revitalized in Tomlinson by the action of natural sympathy: ‘But didst thou think, Jack, that there was so much — what-shall-I-call-it? — in this Tomlinson?’ In the discussion that follows, Lovelace uses ‘nature’ as a synonym for ‘sensibility’. Astonished ‘that such a fellow as that had bowels’, and that ‘nature, so long dead and buried in him as to all humane effects, should thus revive and exert itself’, Lovelace complains that Tomlinson and Belford have succumbed to ‘the like compassionate sensibilities’ (838).

If pliability of mind and body be the essence of theatrical persuasion, sensibility, by making bad actors, brings dramatic misfortune. Conversely, the suppression of sensibility is marked by a smoothing of the ruffles it makes on the face. All Capt. Tomlinson can say for himself is that he is ‘dough’ in Lovelace’s hands, ‘to be moulded into what shape you please’, in which office his master commands him to ‘resume [his] former shape’:

He bowed assent and compliance: went to the glass; and began to untwist and unsadden his features: pulled his wig right, as if that, as well as his head and heart, had been discomposed by his compunction ... (838)

This ductility accounts for Tomlinson’s fate. Though his change of heart is genuine, forcing Lovelace to abandon his services, it does not last. Unlike Belford, he returns to his ways, is wounded during his arrest at ‘the head of a gang of smugglers’ and later dies in prison (1434).
Physiological recuperation of sociability, of the kind seen in the June 18 episode and at Hampstead, recurs in the pen-knife scene. Clarissa’s eloquence again penetrates Lovelace’s body, her gestures eliciting sympathy that momentarily cancels the self-regard and self-interest of morally corrupt Londoners. Here, the gestures that externalize her indignation copy it onto her spectators’ minds in the form of self-disgust, driving Lovelace to report that all he has gained is ‘to be despised by her I doat upon; and, what is still worse to a proud heart, by myself’ (952). To prevail, Clarissa assimilates aspects of his theatricality to her eloquence, including reliance on props and stage business, but continues to infuse her performance with sentiment.

Her self-abandon recontextualizes Lovelace’s effort to stage a trial into a spectacle of sentiment. For Clarissa, giving free rein to conscious indignation gives rise to self-forgetfulness; for Lovelace, the reverse is true. Hence, as between the two, the heroine is the sentimental performer. Lovelace enters the dining-room in a state of high indignation carefully manufactured from his discovery of the promissory note with which Clarissa bribed Dorcas to assist her escape — ‘How my temper changed in moment!’ (946) — but quickly finds his anger and his demands for ‘justice’ overmatched by his adversary’s. Levelling Lovelace so low his only solace is that his confederates ‘could not laugh at the poor figure I made’, Clarissa reframes his trial as ‘farce’: part of her power derives from renaming Lovelace’s genres of choice. At the same time, in cancelling the existing script, Clarissa sets the stage for her own indignation to call Lovelace to account. Her ‘embodiment of innocence’ overawes Lovelace and his female accomplices:

- a majesty in her person and manner that is natural to her ...
- shone out in all its glory! — Every tongue silent, every eye awed,
- every heart quaking, mine, in a particular manner, sunk,
throbless, and twice below its usual region, to once at my throat

— shameful recreant (949)!

Violent passion excludes articulate speech. Clarissa’s anger silences both her and her spectators:

She would have spoken, but could not, looking down my guilt into confusion ... She passed to the door, and back towards me, two or three times, before speech could get the better of indignation, and at last, after twice or thrice hemming, to recover her articulate voice (949).

Abandon redeems Clarissa’s eloquence from suspicion of theatricality. Beside herself with rage, she seizes the high ground by reminding Dorcas that she has acquitted her theatrical obligations but not her moral ones:

Thou hast too well acted thy part to be blamed by any here but myself ... Thy shameful, thy poor part thou hast as well acted as the low farce could give thee to act! — as well as they each of them ... thou seest, can act theirs (949 - 50).

Clarissa’s indignation secures the involuntary assent of her spectators: ‘as I hope to live, the wench [Dorcas], confoundedly frightened, slunk away’. Moreover, when Lovelace, having sufficiently overcome his shame to recover command of his body, ‘advanc[es] towards [Clarissa] with a fierce aspect’, her gesture forces his compliance with the bodily response she demands: ‘Stop where thou art! Nor with that determined face, offer to touch me’. The threat which accompanies her action, that ‘The LAW shall be all [her] resource’, strikes ‘panic’ in her audience not by the strength of her argument, but by the eloquence of a body that speaks.
directly to her auditors’ passions. The non-rational effects of Clarissa’s presence cause the
prostitutes to ‘retire[ ] at a distance’, and Lovelace to adopt an a supplicant’s attitude:

Holding out my arms, and kneeling on one knee — Not a step,
not a step further, except to receive the death myself at that
injured hand that threatens its own. I am a villain! the blackest
of villains (950)!

Like Belford and Tomlinson, the prostitutes, though opposed in interest to the heroine, are
moved to tears by sympathy, and weep for Clarissa instead of Lovelace in a scene of tragic
sentiment:

The mother twanged her damned nose; and Sally and Polly pulled
out their handkerchiefs, and turned from us. They never in their
lives, they told me afterwards, beheld such a scene — (951)

The prostitutes and Lovelace respond to an unconscious registration of passion raised in
Clarissa by her conscious intentions. As though she is about to faint, the heroine’s eyes roll
back in her head as she voluntarily prepares to kill herself:

Polly says the whites of her lovely eyes were only visible: and, in
the instant that she extended her hand assuredly to strike the fatal
blow ... she cast her eye towards me, and saw me at the utmost
distance ... and her charming cheeks that were all in a glow turned
pale, as if terrified at her own purpose (951).

In response to Clarissa’s wild heaven-ward glances, ‘the women looked up to the ceiling, and
trembled, as if afraid of God’s eye’. Without reforming Lovelace or the nymphs, Clarissa’s
natural eloquence silences and immobilizes them: ‘... she turned from us; and away she went,
unmolested. Not a soul was able to molest her’ (951).

2.6 The sympathy of the vulgus mobile

Although, as we have just seen, Clarissa’s natural eloquence has limited opportunity to garner active sympathy inside the London brothel, she encounters new problems as soon as she steps into the street outside the bordello. During her escape from Mrs. Sinclair’s on June 8, the first time she ventures into the streets of the town unaccompanied and on foot, Clarissa attracts the wrong kind of interest:

From these appearances, the fellow who gave this information had the curiosity to follow her, unperceived. She often looked back. Everybody who passed her, turned to look after her; passing their verdicts upon her tears, her hurry, and her charming person (739).

The street is a paradox: on one hand, the callous curiosity that makes the chairman trail Clarissa establishes its general tone; on the other, the detachment that usually prevents the street from supporting sentiment actually heightens pathos whenever sympathy springs up between the heroine and her spectators. By investing beholding with compassion for the object, sentiment redeems the settings in which spectacle takes place. Moreover, the scenery required for this redemption is natural to the town and found on location. Like a stage, even an upper-floor window in the Smiths’ shabby town-house in King Street can frame and isolate gesture, elevating it above the view-point of a spectator, in this case, Mr. Hickman as he leaves Clarissa’s lodgings:
... when I was in the street, [I] cast my eye up at her window:

there, for the last time I doubt, said he, that I shall ever behold

her, I saw her; and she waved her charming hand to me, and with

such a look of smiling goodness and mingled concern, as I cannot
describe (1131).

This self-conscious framing of the gestures of sympathy accounts for its affect, but so does the
presence of audience. Clarissa’s distresses require witnesses to confirm their sentimental
character (no spectators means no sympathy) and to enable her eloquence to mediate between
immediate setting and the larger metropolis of which it forms part. A familiar theatrical
convention marks indoor scenes of distress as figuratively public by populating them with small
groups of spectators, usually in threesomes, who represent a London not directly present to the
eyes of the reader. In an instance of this, the onlookers at several scenes of Clarissa’s final
illness comprise stock City types: ‘the good doctor, and the pious clergyman, and the worthy
apothecary’ (1349).

Clarissa’s distresses stake every setting, domesticating the places of the town, often by
temporarily breaching the partition between public and private. When Clarissa begins to make
intimate gestures in public, she raises the figuration of her violation to new heights. The site of
many of these gestures, and of Clarissa’s flights and failed escapes is ‘the street’, a scene more
likely to evoke shame and horror than compassion, as Bella demonstrates in wishing that her
sister ‘may be seen a beggar along London streets’, or the heroine, in deploring having been
‘levelled with the dirt of the street, [and] classed with the vilest of her sex’ (510, 912). Leaving
aside prostitutes and servants, the street’s population, the vulgus mobile, mostly comprises
‘fellows’, the hardened plebeian men who gain their living there, vending and delivering. Since
these labourers witness every public event, Lovelace orders his servant Will, after both of
Clarissa’s escapes, to make ‘inquiry whether the lady was seen by any of the coachmen,
chairman, or porters, plying in that neighbourhood’ (967, 739). The street’s instinctive
contempt for virtue speaks in the mouth of one of these men: ‘a third fellow replied, That this
might be a Doe escaped from Mother Damnable’s park’ (739).

The hoi polloi plays an ambivalent role in investing the street with sympathy. In
extreme hazard, their concern for the heroine becomes a source of justice, but their curiosity
may violate her modesty, since gazing on a lady without sympathy is necessarily an act of
violence. Thus, Clarissa, who causes a stir everywhere she goes, agonizes over the propriety of
coach-travel in London during one of her church-excursions:

... [Lovelace] opened the street door, and taking my resisting hand

led me, in a very obsequious manner, to the coach. People

passing by stopped, stared, and whispered — But he is so

graceful in his person and dress, that he generally takes every eye.

I was uneasy to be so gazed at ... (581)

The full recovery of Clarissa’s eloquence and her new-found willingness to use it to
solicit the sympathy of plebeian Londoners mark the reactivation of her will after the rape. In
effect, Clarissa’s suffering teaches her how to be brazen. When she alights from the coach into
‘Dover Street’ at Mrs. Sinclair’s door-step on June 12, the day of the rape, the presence of
plebeian spectators still frightens her:

A crowd by this time was gathered about us; but I was too much

affected to mind that. Again the pretended Miss Montague urged

me ... Lord, my dear, said she, who can bear this crowd? — What
will people think? And thus pressed and gazed at (for then I
looked about me), the women so richly dressed, people
whispering; in an evil moment, out stepped I, trembling ... (1008)

On June 19 some of her demureness is gone. She has, as Lovelace puts it, ‘found her voice to
call out for help from [the neighbours], if there were any to hear her’ (908). Clarissa now
knows how to ask for sympathy and can yell out the window to strangers when necessary:

Insolent villain! said the furious lady. And rising, ran to the
window, and threw up the sash. (She knew not, I suppose, that
there were iron rails before the windows.) And when she found
she could not get out into the street, clasping her uplifted hands
together — having dropped her parcel — For the love of God,
good honest man! — For the love of God, mistress — to two
passers-by — a poor, poor creature, said she, ruined! — I clasped
her in my arms, people beginning to gather about the window:
and then she cried out, Murder! Help! Help! — and carried her
up to the dining-room ... (905 - 06).

The heroine’s intervention incites the rabble outside the brothel to insult Mrs. Sinclair
and the nymphs, and to threaten ‘broken windows’ unless the madam produces ‘the young
creature who cried out’. The riot verges on judicial: ‘While the mobbish inquisitors were in the
height of their office, the women came running up to me to know what they should do; a
constable being actually fetched’. Lovelace gets rid of the intrusion from the street, inviting the
constable ‘with three or four of the farthest of the mob’ into the parlour for a dram or two,
but the heroine’s new resolution alarms him ‘not a little’, as, indeed, it should (908). On June
22, following yet another failed break-out, Clarissa is again yelling out the window to passers-by:

I ... found her once more at the street door, contending with Polly Horton to get out. She rushed by me into the fore parlour, and flew to the window, and attempted once more to throw up the sash — Good people! Good people! cried she (935).

In her rage and bitterness, Clarissa would now break glass for justice, as she announces before her second and final escape on June 28:

She went up half a dozen stairs in her way to her own apartment: but, as if she had bethought herself, down she stepped again, and proceeded towards the street parlour; saying, as she passed by the infamous Dorcas, I'll make myself protectors, though the windows suffer ... (964 - 65)

The plebeian sympathy to which Clarissa’s suffering appeals in this episode culminates in the arrest scene at St. Paul’s, Covent Garden. In the interim, however, she receives and refuses several offers to help her escape from the town. In one case, the reason she gives Anna for declining to retire to the safety of the countryside is that leaving London would interfere with her daily missions for the justification of the metropolis which she had just begun to ‘practise’ when the arrest disrupted them. In these acts of intercession, undertaken for the sake of town, Clarissa embraces a salvation London is determined to reject: ‘this great town, wicked as it is, wants not opportunities of being better; having daily prayers at several churches in it; and I am desirous ... to embrace those opportunities’ (1139 - 40). Her pilgrimages to two churches in the West End, namely, St. Paul’s, Covent Garden, and Lincoln Inn Chapel, and to a
third one in the City, St. Dunstan’s in Fleet Street, oppose sympathy to the savage self-interest that animates London. In these spiritual and physical exercises, Clarissa walks or ‘takes chair’ to churches at twenty-minutes distance from her lodgings in King Street for the sake of a mild corporeal discipline that maintains her mental order. She acts for herself, as well as for the town:

This method pursued, I doubt not will greatly help ... to calm my disturbed thoughts, ... to bring me that perfect resignation which I aspire after ... and ... to support my staggering reason (1140).

Convenience and association determine the selection of churches: St. Paul’s for proximity, and Lincoln’s Inn for law, and the Fleet Street church for London’s most famous spectacle of public automation. By ‘a kind of whimsical conceit’, St. Dunstan’s displayed the wooden figures of ‘two savages, carved and painted, as big as life, which with knotted clubs alternately strike the hours and quarters on two bells hung between them’ (Noorthouck, 656).

On July 14, as punctually as the savages, the heroine’s ‘method’ and the autonomous functioning of Lovelace’s ‘barbarous work’ converge in Clarissa’s recapture on the steps of St. Paul’s, while she is leaving morning services, by an arrest party that knows when and where to find her.

Belford pauses to wonder how much longer civil society will ‘herd’ with Lovelace before driving him back to join his ‘fellow-savages’ in the ‘Libyan wilds and deserts’. Belford’s script-like letter of July 16 seeks to move the rapist to sympathy in a direction opposed to self-interest: it is ‘a scene that wants but [Clarissa’s] affecting pen to represent it justly; and it would wring all the black blood out of thy callous heart’. At a minimum,

\[27\] Kent, 119; Panton, 374; Maitland, 30; Goldsmith, 193 - 94.
Clarissa’s eloquence may compel Lovelace to acknowledge himself ‘the author of her calamities’: ‘This last act, however unintended by thee, [is] yet a consequence of thy general orders’ (1050 - 51).

As usual, the heroine’s engagement in Lovelace’s latest ‘engine’ is theatrical. The setting, not Covent Garden Square but the churchyard on the west façade of St. Paul’s, becomes a kind of theatre in which the novelist assembles his *dramatis personae* around the church’s principal entry-way. In the ensuing distress, a cast of sheriff’s officers, chairmen, ‘gentlemen’, ‘fellows’, and the ubiquitous London crowd come to support either Clarissa or the arrest party. The action enfolds completely in dialogue in twenty-five consecutive speeches marked with parenthetical insertions of stage directions indicating movement, such as ‘They offering to put her into the chair’. Although the lines are short and plain, with few declamatory flourishes and no soliloquies, this is, undeniably, a novelized play-text.

To avoid public notice, the bailiffs lower their voices as they approach the heroine: ‘And as she came out of the church, at the door fronting Bedford Street, the officers stepping to her, whispered that they had an action against her’. Clarissa’s terror is written on her body in the reflexive signs of trembling and palour, but she takes refuge in her knowledge that her conscious deeds are above reproach: ‘Action! said she. What is that? — I have committed no bad action!’ As soon as the sight of Lovelace’s accomplices dispels her confusion, she applies directly to her audience in the square, using the language of heroic she-tragedy, as she had earlier at Mrs. Sinclair’s: ‘She then spied thy villain — Oh thou wretch, said she, where is thy vile master? — Am I again to be his prisoner? Help, good people!’ (1051 - 52).

Clarissa’s response is sentimental and untheatrical in the sense that her gestures proceed from sensibility *instead* of from a self-interested desire to win the support of her audience.
Hence, she completes four exchanges with her captors before the narrator notes the presence of spectators: 'A crowd had before begun to gather'. Despite her address to the 'good people' of London, she remains otherwise oblivious to their scrutiny. Obedient to the conceit of the fourth wall, the heroine does not consciously play to her audience. Instead, it is her abandonment to her passion that moves the uncorrupted members of her audience to a redemptive moment of sympathy. Her eloquence depends on externalizing passion, not on restraining it. Her persuasiveness differs from that of the gentlemen whose propriety dominates the scenes of public execution and torture that illustrate Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, since she secures her spectators' sympathy without moderating her passion and, instead by sharing it at its full, natural pitch. In a concession to gender, the conventions of natural eloquence that govern her performance allow her to violate the ethic of self-command, provided she does so involuntarily.

The action of the arrest scene moderates the selfishness of the town by investing it with sympathy by the display of a body infused with sentimental passion. In this scene, Clarissa's natural eloquence temporarily ameliorates London's theatricality and selfishness. By externalizing her passion in gesture, Clarissa promotes sociability in London, since, according to the conventions of natural eloquence, externalizing passion in gesture can physically modify spectators, thereby modifying civil society. In this novel, scenes depicting the operation of involuntary gestures of sentiment in London occasionally create a community of sentimental spectators whose presence may make the town more benevolent. In this work of justification and socialization, the eloquence of the body engages sympathy and creates new sentimental spectators because the sentimental actor behaves as if her spectators were absent. Unlike *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, *Clarissa* postulates that a spectacle of self-forgetful suffering is as
likely to elicit sympathy as a spectacle of self-command, provided, of course, the sufferer is a woman. The paradox that denial of audience builds sentimental community inheres in the text from the very first letter. The heroine would rather die than make a spectacle of herself and, in fact, dies after the arrest scene forces her to become one. Clarissa only learns to become a spectacle gradually, reluctantly, and under the tutelage of Lovelace, whom she is made to emulate. Thus, as Anna tells her friend, ‘everybody pities [Clarissa]’ because she is ‘so desirous ... of sliding through life to the end of it unnoted ... not wishing to be observed even for [her] silent benevolence’ (39 - 40).

The arrest scene judges the audience’s response to the spectacle of Clarissa’s distress, distinguishing those in whom sympathy remains lively from those in whom it is dead. Most but not all are ‘struck with compassion’: ‘A fine young creature! — A thousand pities! some — while some few threw out vile and shocking reflections... ’ (1052). With the symmetry of a play-text, two sets each of two kinds of stock characters, ‘gentlemen’ and ‘chairmen’, respond in bracketed pairs of speeches, one gentleman examining the arrest warrant, two chairmen affirming his advice, and a second gentleman seeking to soften the law. However, regard for legality sets the limits of sympathy: once the men establish the writ’s authenticity, and the identity of the woman it names, they comply with procedure and negotiate instead of resisting.

You *must* go with these men, madam, said the gentleman:

they have authority for what they do. He pitied her, and retired.

Indeed you must, said one chairman.

Indeed you must, said the other.

Can nobody, joined in another gentleman, be applied to,

who will see that so fine a creature is not ill used?
Terms settled, the scene closes in a vignette of the arrest party mired in the square, as seen through the eyes of the heroine. In a further act of reflexive self-abandon, Clarissa ‘starts’ in despair at the sight of the throngs blocking the yard’s exits, and throws herself on the seat of the sedan chair, ‘in the utmost distress and confusion’:

Looking about her, and seeing the three passages, to wit, that
leading to Henrietta Street, that to King Street, and the fore-right
one, to Bedford Street, crowded, she started ... (1052)

This suppression of agency culminates in the sublime. In fulfilment of her prophetic dream that Lovelace would carry her ‘into a churchyard’, and murder and bury her there, (342 - 43) Clarissa demands obliteration, which she receives as her chair disappears into the undifferentiated multitude of London, in a movement that prefigures her death. The infinite expanse of the town and its crowds overwhelm her mind:

Carry me, carry me out of sight — Cover me — Cover me up —
for ever! — were her words. Thy villain drew the curtains: she
had not power; and they went away with her, through a vast
crowd of people (1052).

The audience’s sympathy for the heroine is effectual, causing several of them to follow her chair to the jailer’s house in ‘a wretched court’ in High Holborn, where Sally Martin, one of Mrs. Sinclair’s genteel prostitutes, disperses the inquirers with assurances ‘that the young gentlewoman would be exceedingly well used’ (1053).

Clarissa maintains some composure for parts of the scene, yet remains largely oblivious to the action, compelled to rely on cues and prompts from her audience. Since only their sympathy enables her to act in concert with the directions of the assembled company, the scene
presumes natural sociability, even in the town. The characters play their roles properly because they know them in advance: the inner voice of sympathy tells them what to do. The arrest scene, then, discloses two parallel performances, since Clarissa's eloquence elicits a responding exhibition of benevolence from her spectators. The public spectacle of the arrest causes redemptive public sentiment, converting a common crowd into a community that coheres for an instant in disinterested concern for the welfare of a fellow being. This collective pity gives the scene a touching air of faint optimism. Clarissa, like Christ, will die, but every Londoner who sympathizes, including, by extension, the wicked town itself, improves by vicarious experience.

The sociability of strangers, in perusing the warrant, negotiating terms, and walking Clarissa to the door of her prison, embodies and responds to natural sympathy. Just as at Hampstead Captain Tomlinson's involuntary compassion for the heroine revives 'nature', or sensibility in him, so, in Covent Garden, the sympathy of Londoners shows the effects of the eloquence of gesture in the public places of the town. But if the novel of sentiment privileges involuntary gesture as the form of response most likely to guide the subject to the expression of his best instincts, it also evinces the belief that nature needs the benefit of education and training. In Clarissa, the public places of London, though ostensibly inimical to sympathy, occasion spectacles of suffering and sentiment that teach benevolence to town and reader.

For Richardson, the education of the body matters because an important caveat attaches to the spontaneity of Clarissa's gestures; the reader has to accept the heroine's performance of her passion as authentic even when it is demonstrably subject to theatrical shaping. Externalization of passion in Clarissa is seldom completely unrestrained. Sincerity is deemed to consist in congruence of passion and gesture even in cases where physical action is partly under the control of the agent, provided that the gesture has an involuntary element and
persuades the spectator. In *Clarissa*, and in the eighteenth-century novel of sentiment, self-abandon is usually relative, not absolute: a certain attention to form persists in the heroine’s most ‘natural’ movements.

In this chapter, then, I have argued that in *Clarissa* the spectacle of gesture — that is, the physical execution of the movements of the body — alters the physiological constitution of spectators, so that the actions of the eloquent body-machine are represented as capable of manufacturing sentiment, sociability, and assent in other bodies. Next, in Chapter 3, I argue that Henry Fielding’s *Amelia*, published in 1751 in response to *Clarissa*, does not endow the body-machine with this kind of power. Rather, *Amelia* is more concerned with the capacity of the metropolis to heighten selfish or unsociable impulses already present in the body: in Fielding’s last novel, London’s influence seems to act on the body by suppressing its benevolent reflexes. In *Amelia*, ‘character’ becomes a creation of gesture and of the automatic actions of the body-machine, unless the moral agent has learned how to ‘reflect’ on his or her impulses. However, since the ‘moral sense’, the faculty of reflection, is more or less inborn, those in whom it is weak will fall victim to their physiological reflexes the moment they stray into an environment as corrupt as modern eighteenth-century London.
CHAPTER THREE

Amelia:
the defeat of natural eloquence in the metropolis

3.1 Introduction

A great deal of the criticism on the representation of sociability in Fielding’s fiction struggles with the problem of determining the quality and degree of his debt to the tradition of sentimental moral philosophy that commences, in Britain, with Shaftesbury. In an early instance of this, Martin C. Battestin, writing in 1959, asserts Fielding’s belief in natural sociability, tracing it to the influence of several popular Low Church latitudinarians, including Isaac Barrow, but acknowledges that these gentlemen hold much in common with Shaftesbury (11 - 12). In Battestin’s submission, Fielding joins in a latitudinarian opposition to the philosophy of self-love advanced by Hobbes and Mandeville (53). Morris Golden takes a similar approach, arguing in Fielding’s Moral Psychology (1966) that the author vacillates between the benevolent views of human nature proposed by the latitudinarians and Shaftesbury and the perspectives of Hobbes and Mandeville, which assume the innate selfishness of all human beings (3).

In the same manner, Bernard Harrison studies Fielding’s relationship to sentimental moralism and to Hobbes and Mandeville (1975: 70). Harrison, however, argues that Fielding’s belief that virtue becomes an active principle capable of determining behaviour only when it springs from natural feeling affiliates him with Hume’s theory of sentiment and distinguishes
him from Shaftesbury (115 - 120). Like Harrison’s study of Tom Jones, Battestin’s article on Amelia finds a Humean source for the sentimental psychology Fielding uses to attack what he sees as the dominance of Mandevillian selfishness in civil society. In ‘The Problem of Amelia’ (1974) Battestin contends that in Fielding’s final novel, ‘but in none of his previous works’, he struggles to accommodate aspects of Hume’s theory of sentiment within a system of sentimental latitudinarianism while using Booth’s belief in the power of the ‘predominating passion’ as a target to attack other aspects of Hume’s program.

In contrast with Battestin’s article, Geoffrey Sill’s recent study, The Cure of the Passions (2001), argues that the vision of sociability and the repudiation of Mandevillian selfishness set forth in Amelia are more heavily indebted to the moral sense philosophy of Francis Hutcheson than they are either to Shaftesbury or Hume, who respectively precede and follow Hutcheson in the sentimental tradition. In this connection, Sill writes:

Fielding was in no sense a ‘Hutchesonian,’ but he clearly had the advantage of entering the debate on the passions after Hutcheson had clarified the way in which Shaftesbury’s moral sense is not only an aesthetic faculty, nor merely a sentimental state of feeling, but the means by which the passions move us to moral action (155).

In this chapter, I adopt Sill’s suggestion that Hutcheson informs the sentimental critique of metropolitan selfishness which is such a prominent feature of Amelia. It is not Hume’s theory of sentiment but Hutcheson’s, much of it worked out in polemics against Mandeville’s doctrine of self-love, that best explains the means by which London corrupts Booth’s capacity to make sound decisions. My reasons for attributing the sources of Fielding’s understanding of
sociability to Hutcheson instead of Hume are simple. Even leaving aside the fact that
Hutcheson fits *Amelia* better than Hume does, the reach and initial publication dates of the
works on which I rely, Hutcheson's *Inquiry concerning Moral Good and Evil (MGE)* (1725)
and *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections (NC)* (1728), make them
far more likely to have exercised an early influence on Fielding.

Furthermore, it is central my argument that in *Amelia* Fielding appropriates an older and
more sober theory of sentiment, one remarkably similar to Hutcheson's, in order to criticize
another, more recent theory of sentiment that he may have believed was Hume's. *Amelia*
expresses the belief that neither institutions nor sympathy contain selfishness or generate
sociability. At the same time, despite the experimentation with the sentimental Richardsonian
mode which distinguishes this book from the rest of Fielding's corpus, the author's deep-seated
distrust of pathos never entirely dissipates. *Amelia* is, therefore, a critique of the kind of
sympathy that excludes prudence, self-control, and a modicum of theatricality.

Fielding's tragic sense of the fragility of sociability, as well as his obvious discomfort
with his novel's scenes of pathos, locate *Amelia* as a precocious instance of the reaction against
passion and sentiment which began to appear in polite society in England in the second half of
the eighteenth century, and which Frances Burney's *Cecilia* (1782), the subject of Chapter 4,
exemplifies. As I argued in Chapter 1, several standard accounts of the history of the novel of
sentiment, including Brissenden's and Todd's, maintain that this conservative resistance begins
in earnest shortly after the height of the vogue for sentiment in 1770's, and comes to a head in
response to the radicalization of the French Revolution in 1793. My business in this chapter is,
among other things, to emphasize that the rebellion against sentiment, and against the
elocution of the sentimental body probably took hold almost as soon as *Pamela* came tumbling
However, a proper charting of the critique of sympathy presented in *Amelia* first requires a recapitulation of its principal events, especially in view of the book’s obscurity. Fielding’s final novel is the story of a poor young army officer, Captain William (‘Billy’) Booth, who falls in love with the heroine, Miss Amelia Harris. Amelia’s mother and sister, Mrs. Harris, and Miss Betty Harris, at first oppose the match, but grudgingly agree to it through the intercession of Dr. Harrison, a benevolent Anglican priest who regards Amelia as a favourite and works behind the scenes to protect the Booth family throughout the novel. Not long after the wedding, Booth’s regiment is transferred from England to Gibralter. Because Amelia initially cannot join Booth overseas, she sends her foster-brother, Joseph Atkinson, to accompany Booth as a servant-soldier. Unbeknownst to the Booths, Joe, a simple, honest man, maintains a chaste love for Amelia that compels him to steal a gold-framed miniature of the heroine from his master. Later, unable to bear the separation from her husband, Amelia travels to Gibralter to keep Booth company in the field, where the couple befriends three characters whom they eventually re-encounter in London: Colonel James, Colonel Bath, and Miss Bath. Colonel James, who is Booth’s dearest friend, and, Booth believes, a wonderfully kind man, later marries Miss Bath. While the Booths are still living overseas, they learn that Mrs. Harris has died leaving a will that bequeaths all but £ 10 of her estate to Miss Betty.

After the hostilities end, Booth leaves the Army as a half-pay officer and returns to England where Dr. Harrison lends the young man money to start a living as a gentleman-farmer in the country. This, unfortunately, marks the first of the Captain’s many disasters. Although Mr. Booth is a thoughtful student of what he calls his ‘doctrine of the passions’, his theory of human nature does not assist him in the prudent management of his life. Owing to his vanity
and extravagance, he soon goes bankrupt. Leaving his family in the countryside, Booth moves into London in hopes of avoiding creditors and winning an officer’s commission, since no other career is open to him. But as soon as the Captain arrives in town, he is arrested while protecting another man from a beating and appears before a corrupt judge, Mr. Thrasher, who throws him in Newgate prison, where he receives his first real instruction in the ways of London. While in Newgate, Booth debates philosophy with a cardsharp named Mr. Robinson and reacquaints himself with a fallen woman named Frances Mathews, whom he had known before his marriage. Miss Mathews is in prison for attempting to murder a recent lover and has recently rebuffed the advances of Colonel James, who is now living in London. Despite his great love for Amelia, and contrary to the dictates of prudence, Booth spends a week sleeping and consorting with Miss Mathews. But just as Miss Mathews secures discharges allowing the two of them to leave prison, Amelia appears at Newgate and claims Booth in a sentimental reunion scene.

Tortured by remorse, Booth breaks off his adulterous relationship and spends the rest of his time in London fending off Miss Mathews and trying to keep Amelia ignorant of the affair. After the Newgate reunion scene, which marks the beginning of the Booths’ ten-week sojourn in London, the reader learns that James hates Booth because James wants to possess Miss Mathews and Amelia, both of whom are in love with Booth. Since this double triangle motivates much of the novel’s action, it seems fair to assert that the two most important couples in Amelia are Captain and Mrs. Booth and James and Frances Mathews.

The Booths find lodgings with Mrs. Ellison, a vulgar middle-aged woman who keeps a house in the Verge of the Court, the famous debtor’s haven north of Whitehall and St. James’s Palace. As the Booths re-encounter the friends they had made during the Captain’s military
service overseas, they gradually discover that self-love, the opposite of sympathy, is the organizing principle of life in the metropolis. London attracts self-centred ‘characters’ and damages them further by heightening their existing selfishness. Under the influence of the town, Colonel James develops into a moody, erratic philanderer, while his partially-estranged wife, Mrs. James, turns into an unspeakable snob. In a similar manner, Mrs. James’s brother, Colonel Bath, becomes so insanely sensitive to imagined slights to his honour that he forces Booth to duel with him in Hyde Park. Only Joseph Atkinson remains loyal and affectionate.

One day, quite by accident, the Booths meet Joe in London when he intervenes between Captain Booth and an armed guard who has beaten the Booths’ son for walking on the grass near the Parade. Joseph begins visiting the Booths’ lodgings, where he meets and eventually marries Mrs. Bennett, a pretty young widow who was once a tenant of Mrs. Ellison’s, as the Booths are now.

However, like every other place in London, the Verge of the Court is a den of iniquity. Although the Booths are unaware of it, their landlady, Mrs. Ellison is a procuress for the nobleman who occasionally visits her house and who interests himself in the children, in their beautiful young mother, and in finding ways to use his influence to further Booth’s career. In conniving to put the Booths in a position where the Captain will give Amelia to the nobleman in exchange for a commission, Mrs. Ellison offers the heroine a masquerade ticket to an assembly that the nobleman is going to attend. Mrs. Bennett, however, warns Amelia not to go.

In a passionate conversation two Books long, the widow tells Amelia how the same nobleman had lured her to a masquerade and then seduced her. Indeed, a review of this novel would have difficulty finding a single scene in which the presence of the heroine’s body in any public place in London — even at an oratorio — does not endanger her chastity in some way. During
the Booth family’s visit to the Vauxhall gardens, for example, Amelia is accosted and humiliated by two rakes even though she is attended by her children and by several priests.

After the Booths have been in town a few weeks, Dr. Harrison forms the false impression that London has corrupted the Captain past all hope of recovery and, acting out of concern for Amelia, has him arrested on an action for debt. While Booth is in prison, Colonel James courts Amelia, arranges Booth’s release, and offers his wife a deal: Booth will go to the West Indies as a commissioned officer, while Amelia and her children will live with James during Booth’s absence. Prudently, Amelia rejects James’s offer as well as Mrs. Ellison’s masquerade ticket. With Amelia’s collusion, Mrs. Atkinson disguises herself as the heroine and accompanies Booth to the masquerade in her stead. At the masked assembly, Mrs. Atkinson, still pretending to be Amelia, persuades the evil nobleman to arrange a commission for her husband, Joseph Atkinson. This offends Amelia so deeply that the two women break off their friendship for a while.

While this is happening, Booth runs deeper into debt gambling with another of the corrupt nobleman’s procurers, an officer named Captain Trent. Unsurprisingly, when Booth tells Trent about the nobleman’s designs on Amelia, Trent explains the sexual economy of the town: a more clever man than Booth might have made ‘a complete fool’ of the nobleman, while advancing his career at the same time and at little danger to his wife’s virtue. Moreover, says, Trent, merit alone never wins commissions. Slightly later, Dr. Harrison is told exactly the same thing by a lord who has just refused to recommend Booth for a post. In modern eighteenth-century British politics, preferment is an exchange for private service, and has no regard for merit or for the public good. In short, the force that dominates public and private life in London is self-love.
In the concluding section of the novel, Amelia and Mrs. Atkinson are unexpectedly reconciled when Joe Atkinson calls the heroine to his sickbed in order to reveal that he has always loved her and to return the valuable miniature he had stolen from her husband. Because she and her family are now destitute, Amelia immediately takes the miniature to a pawnbroker’s shop, where, unbeknownst to herself, her suffering is glimpsed by Mr. Robinson, Captain Booth’s former prison mate from Newgate. The same day, Trent’s bailiffs imprison Booth and Amelia receives, reads, and destroys a letter from James which accuses Booth of visiting Miss Mathews and challenges him to a duel.

In the nick of time, Dr. Harrison returns from the countryside and springs into action to extract the Booths safely from London. After ordering Amelia to pack her bags, Harrison makes James promise not to pursue his grudge against Booth, and then visits the bailiff’s house, where he finds the Captain in a state of contrition. After reading a course of Dr. Isaac Barrow’s sermons, Booth has imbibed enough sentimental latitudinarianism to embrace the Christian religion. Harrison stands bail for Booth but is called upstairs to receive a death-bed confession from Robinson. As a result of his brief encounter with Amelia in the pawnshop, Robinson has suffered a temporary change of heart — in fact, a sentimental conversion — and now wishes to confess his part in defrauding the heroine of her estate. It turns out that Robinson and Mr. Murphy, the Harris’s family lawyer, had forged the will that gave Mrs. Harris’s estate to Miss Betty. Armed with this knowledge, Harrison chases Murphy through the streets of London and, with the help of a sympathetic populace (which hates lawyers) arrests and imprisons him. Owing to the status of forgery as a capital offence, Murphy later hangs at Tyburn. The restoration of Amelia’s estate solves all the Booths’ problems and closes the action. Since Captain Booth no longer needs a commission to support his family, the couple
and their children settle happily in the Harris's house in the country, leaving the metropolis as irredeemably selfish and unsociable as it was on the day that the heroine first entered it. The characters who are left behind in London are destroyed by their favourite vices — gambling, venereal disease, drinking, or duelling — and the novel ends.

3.2 The ambivalence of sympathy and natural eloquence in Amelia

As the outline I have just provided may suggest, Amelia shows Fielding departing from his accustomed aversion to Richardsonian pathos, but unable to overcome his distrust. His attempts to suspend his antipathy towards the pathetic mode and to write a fiction in the sentimental mode do not quite succeed. Amelia, an uncomfortable and self-conscious response to Clarissa, experiments awkwardly with the resources Richardson's writing assigns to the body. According to the conventions of the eloquence of the sentimental body, discussed in Chapter 2, the efficiency of the gestures of sentiment in inducing sympathy in the best cases, or shame, remorse, humiliation, rage, indignation, and so forth in other cases, should, in theory, generate sociability, create communities of sentiment, and change opinion and belief. Up to a point, Fielding's final novel adheres to this paradigm. For example, since only transparent bodies ensure correspondence of gesture and passion, Amelia evinces admiration in principle for a universal and natural language of the body. At the same time, the novel doubts the capacity of sympathy or natural eloquence to socialize the metropolis. Because sympathy cannot guarantee sound moral judgement or virtuous action in London, the gestures of an eloquent body seldom incite metropolitan spectators to sympathy in any lasting way.
While sympathy opposes self-love in the town in *Amelia*, as it does in *Clarissa*, the later novel rejects the belief in potential universal benevolence reflected in Fielding’s earlier fiction. Indeed, the author chooses a metropolitan setting for *Amelia* because it is easy to make a case for the town’s depravity. The moral careers of Mrs. and Captain Booth in London illustrate the theatrical imperatives of the fallen metropolis: since the town exacts stage-craft, Amelia can submit to sympathy most of the time, perform in ‘artificial character’ at others, and conceal from Booth knowledge that might compel him to fight a duel with Colonel James. Conversely, the lack of bodily self-command that prevents Booth from acquiring some theatricality suggests that his virtue is mediocre and will never mature because it will never learn prudence. Because London’s selfishness reaches such heights that virtue demands command of the body and a knowledge of the artificial rhetoric of the body, a moderate, defensive theatricality is consistent with goodness. But in *Amelia*, any practice of an artificial rhetoric of the body that is not punctuated by moments of spontaneity entrenches self-love more deeply in the mind and hardens the subject to the effects of natural eloquence.

Theatricality and self-love hold London in an unbreakable grip, exclude most movements of sympathy, and establish conditions of spectatorship under which the eloquence of the body seldom moves an audience or brings lasting change into their hearts. While natural eloquence generally fails to compel assent in metropolitan spectators, occasionally the opposite dynamic takes hold, allowing the heroine’s sympathy, manifest in the gestures of sentiment, to soften and contain the preponderance of selfishness in the civil society that London represents. As Amelia’s name implies, her corporeal action sweetens the effects of London’s passionate excesses. It does not, however, correct them. Instead, most virtue wilts in the face of the selfishness London exhibits as the centre of the ‘state lottery of preferment’, or ‘the great mart
of all affairs ecclesiastical and civil’ (VII, v, 289; XII, ii, 509). These markets, where relationships transmute into property and vice versa, also serve as theatrical settings, since none of these transactions works properly unless the participants know how to play-act in pursuit of self-interest.

Whereas theatrical self-command usually arises from self-love, its opposite, weakness of corporeal self-control often springs from sympathy. For this reason, the sympathy that animates Booth’s unruly body most of the time keeps him from dealing in the town’s sexual marketplaces, partly because the bodily self-command they demand excludes the display of the involuntary gestures of sentiment. Booth’s reflex actions, the ones he cannot prevent, guarantee that he succumbs to the lesser corruptions of London, while keeping him from the greatest: the thought of pimping Amelia in exchange for an officer’s commission makes him physically sick.

At the same time, gesture, the medium that sustains exchanges of sympathy, also transmits Mandevillian self-love from body to body in the metropolis, driving Billy to increased self-involvement and decreased responsiveness to the eloquence of his wife’s body the longer he stays in town. London’s theatricality consists in submission to the gestures of self-regard. Since the gestures of mere civility externalize the purest selfishness, town manners are the most theatrical behaviour country-bred innocents like the Booths will encounter anywhere in England.

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29 As discussed in Chapter 1 ‘gesture’ has the meaning eighteenth-century rhetoric and acting theory assign to it, comprising any modification of the body which an external spectator can observe, and which that spectator may understand to designate some inward ‘passion’ of the agent, regardless of whether that passion is authentic or the product of stagecraft. Observable modifications of the body include air, demeanour, action, attitude, facial expression, gesticulation, and so forth.
Metropolitan theatricality defeats natural eloquence partly because urban self-love abets Booth's surrender to his own selfish feelings, and because his exposure to self-love does not teach him prudence. Fielding's skepticism regarding the efficiency of natural eloquence in London arises from his belief that sympathy and good nature are as naught without the discipline of prudence and stage-craft. The pervasiveness and success of theatrical strategy in *Amelia* reflect Fielding's conviction that urban conditions of spectatorship usually defeat the eloquence of the body, and that sympathy unguarded by prudence is inimical to effective virtue precisely because prudence itself has a theatrical dimension. This belief underlies the scheme of characterization that governs the representation of the pair of couples whose fortunes and desires drive the principal action of the novel: Amelia and Booth, and Frances Mathews and Colonel James. Booth, for example, emerges as an incompetent and untrainable player who is driven off the 'stage' of the town because, unlike Amelia, he cannot control his passions or their bodily expression.

Regardless of the legitimacy of a character's interests, the performance that best advances them in London proceeds from detachment, self-possession, and a rigorous command of the body, such as James and sometimes the heroine demonstrate. Conversely, performances that abandon the body to the violent passions that arise from the subject's unmediated response to a situation often injures his or her interests. Thus, the failure of ill-natured Frances Mathews and good-natured Billy Booth to prevent their gestures from disclosing their passions is blameworthy as well as comical; by the same token, the prudent self-mastery with which ill-natured Colonel James and good-natured Amelia conceal their actual passions in awkward situations is, at some level, admirable. In London, then, imprudence condemns Booth and Miss Mathews to the parts of good- and ill-natured *comédiens sensibles*, while prudence equips
Amelia and James for the parts of cool-headed, self-possessed players. Sympathy untempered by stage-craft is as disturbing as goodness of heart unguarded by prudence. While sympathy may guide the moral sense to the right decision and motivate right action, virtue still needs mastery of an artificial rhetoric of the body, and a modicum of theatrical competence, to enable the agent to survive in the corrupt town.

In practical terms, this critique of sympathy consists mainly in the representation of Booth’s moral failure in the metropolis. Contrary to Ronald Paulson’s puzzling assessment that ‘the Booths’ (both of them, husband and wife) ‘have chosen to be virtuous’, and then ‘starve and suffer for their virtue’ (1967: 161 - 62), Captain Booth bankrupts himself out of pride, spends his first two weeks in London fornicating with Miss Mathews, cannot stay out of a fist-fight, a duel, or a prison-cell, and drinks, gambles and borrows while his wife and children slide deeper into destitution in the Verge of the Court. In light of this consistent pattern of delinquency, it is reasonable to conclude that Booth’s instinctive refusal to prostitute Amelia does not evince high-minded morality. Instead, the novel’s central dilemma is, as Terry Castle suggests, whether Amelia’s natural eloquence will work as a principle of active goodness ‘to draw Booth definitively into the camp of the virtuous’ (1986: 203). The text’s response to this question is unequivocally negative. Sympathy occasionally even promotes evil, as we see in Atkinson’s sick-bed scene, where Amelia and Joe discover their mutual sexual attraction in the eloquence of their bodies, and during the trial scene at the end of the novel, where fellow-

30 Fielding’s scheme of characterization on this point is analogous with Diderot’s condemnation, in Paradoxe sur le comédien, of actors who depend on sensibility, as opposed to actors who instead exercise self-control in the execution of their craft: both writers refuse to establish the eloquence of the sentimental body as a criterion of moral or aesthetic excellence. This coincidence, though striking, remains peripheral to the central arguments of this chapter.
feeling becomes mob violence, even though it works to the Booths' advantage. Moreover, the predominance of self-love in London makes Booth less and less responsive to the corporeal language of sympathy. In demonstrating that the body loses much of its eloquence in a setting as corrupt as the metropolis, *Amelia* calls the conventions of Richardsonian sentiment into question.

Furthermore, Fielding can never entirely approve solicitations of sympathy that evade reflection, especially when the reason circumvented is his own. The letter to Richardson in which he recounts his reading of the fifth volume of *Clarissa*, commencing with the heroine's return to Mrs. Sinclair's on the eve of the rape, discloses these misgivings. Conceding that he could not resist his body's response to Clarissa's agony, Fielding ascribes his receptiveness to the action of passion independent of rational judgement: 'Let the overflowings of a heart which you have filled brimful speak for me'.[^31] He then describes how the gestural representation of 'some natural effects of [Clarissa's] despair' that temporarily disable Lovelace's aggression also marks those 'effects' onto Fielding's body, engaging his sympathy and moving him to tears of pity against his will: 'I then melt with compassion, and find what is called an effeminate relief for my terror'. Owing to the contrast it affords with the much less vivid episodes of pathos found in *Amelia*, I would like to quote the moment of natural eloquence in response to which Fielding 'melted', as well as Richardson's observation of Lovelace's reaction to the heroine's passion. Clarissa's is a tough act to follow.

She tore off her head-clothes; inquired where I was: and in she came, her shining tresses flowing about her neck; her ruffles torn, and hanging in tatters about her snowy hands; with her arms

[^31]: Letter of October 15, 1748 (Battestin, 1993: 70).
spread out; her eyes wildly turned as if starting from their orbits
— Down sunk she at my feet, as soon as she approached me; her
charming bosom heaving to her uplifting face; and, clapping her
arms about my knees, Dear Lovelace, said she, if ever — if ever
— if ever — And, unable to speak another word, quitting her
clasping hold, down prostrate on the floor sunk she, neither in a
fit nor out of one.

I was quite astonished — All my purposes suspended for a
few moments, I knew not what to say, nor what to do (Cl., 880).

Fielding’s letter reminds his rival that his ‘heart’ judges such performances differently
than his ‘head’ (Scott, 1997: 485): ‘... nothing but my heart can force me to say half of what I
think of the book. And yet what hinders me?’ (71). At the same time, the power of the
sentimental text to test character, disclosing the good- or ill-nature of individual auditors in
gesture, deeply impresses Fielding: ‘God forbid that the man who reads this with dry eyes
should be alone with my daughter when she hath no assistance within call’. The man whose
body does not respond to the spectacle of Clarissa’s grief cannot be trusted. Consistent with
this proposition, Fielding claims that the eloquence of the body in Amelia should have the same
power to reveal an audience’s sincerity, even though that eloquence repeatedly fails to elicit
sympathy in London.

The ‘good-natured reader’, the uncorrupted man or woman whom the narrator
apostrophizes, and whose heart may be affected by Fielding’s prose, retains a natural sensitivity
to the spectacle of suffering, but still requires to be tested by the sentimental text, as the narrator
implies in the prolix title of Chapter 2, Book II.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{quote}
\textit{In this chapter, there are some passages that may serve as a kind of touchstone, by which a young lady may examine the heart of her lover. I would advise, therefore, that every lover be obliged to read it over in the presence of his mistress, and that she carefully watch his emotions while he is reading.}
\end{quote}

If the sentimental lover reads as he should, his affection will compel him to respond in countenance and body as Booth does to Amelia’s presence. In this chapter he initially forbears from ‘falling prostrate’ at Amelia’s ‘manner, look, [and] voice’ by a temporary ascendancy of pride over love, but finds, as ‘tears stream[] from her bright eyes’, that he can ‘endure it no longer’. A reflexive motion on his part, a genuflection, elicits a fainting spell on hers: ‘a torrent of contending passions, together with the surprise, overpowered her gentle spirits, and she fainted away in my arms’ (II, ii, 64). This moment of sentimental transference is typical in that the lovers discover the sincerity of their passion in their mutually responsive involuntary gestures. However, the reciprocity of sympathy between husband and wife decreases as the London action progresses. After the couple moves into town, passages like the following, in which Amelia’s expressions of love elicit outpourings of sympathy from Booth, become rare:

‘Thou heavenly angel, thou comfort of my soul’, cried Booth tenderly embracing her. — Then starting a little from her arms, and looking with eager fondness in her eyes, he said, ‘Let me survey thee, art thou really human, or art thou not rather an angel in human form (X, vi)?’

\textsuperscript{32} Preface, 3; V, iii, 201; VIII, ii, 319; XI, v, 483.
As I have already argued, the rarity of sentimental transference between the Booths in London suggests that in *Amelia* sympathy and natural eloquence have little power to reverse the effects of metropolitan selfishness or to generate sociability. However, this distrust of natural eloquence and of the Richardsonian mode may well be seated in a rejection of sensibility as a physiological model for representing the relationship between passion and gesture. For better or for worse, sympathy plays a central role in moral reasoning in this novel. In contrast, sensibility, understood as an acuity of nervous responsiveness that instinctively guides the agent to the right action, absolutely does not. True, the effects of metropolitan self-love as seen in corrupt town characters in *Amelia* approximate the weakening of sensibility evident in Tomlinson and others in *Clarissa*. But the attentive reader will observe that the word ‘sensibility’ appears only once in Fielding’s final fiction and otherwise form part of the novel’s physiological vocabulary: generally, the narrator attributes the weakening of Booth’s compassionate reflexes not to the town’s enfeebling of his ‘sensibility’, but to a temporary vitiation of his ‘moral sense’ and ‘good nature’. Booth does not lose his capacity for sympathy; instead, he loses his aptitude for acting on sympathy.

Sensibility in the vitalist sense, understood as a susceptibility to sensation evenly distributed through the tissues of the body and sustained by ‘vibrations’ that course through the brain and nervous system, does not account for the transparency of the sentimental bodies featured in *Amelia*. The eloquence of Amelia’s body differs from Clarissa’s in that it entails no sympathetic transmission of vibrations from her nervous system to those of her spectators.

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33 When, at her husband’s insistence, Amelia to decline Mrs. Ellison’s invitation to attend Ranelagh with her, Booth says: ‘... you oblige me beyond my power of expression by what you say; but I will endeavour to show you both my sensibility of such goodness, and my lasting gratitude to it’ (VI, v, 248).
Amelia’s gestures are not outward markers of sensibility that in turn reawaken the ‘nature’ of sensibility in her observers’ bodies. In the Newgate scene, for instance, there is no evidence that the sensibility of Amelia’s flesh actuates her physical response to her reunion with her husband.

While *Amelia* attributes the most dramatic gestures of its virtuous, or mostly virtuous, female characters to sudden surges of sensation in an overly-delicate body-machine, the iatromechanical processes that account for these ‘disorders’ do not refer to sensibility but to the circulation of ‘spirits’ inside the organism. In *Amelia*, any passion whose pitch becomes so violent as to disrupt the balance of the mind ‘disconcerts’ or ‘overpowers’ the spirits, which transpose that mental violence onto the muscles of the body and face in the form of involuntary gesture or involuntary corporeal disablement. A character’s spirits translate disorders of the mind into disorders of the body, and vice versa. To return, for example, to the Newgate reunion scene, where Amelia appears in London for the first time, the heroine faints at the sight of her husband, but ‘soon recover[s] the disorder which the violent agitation of her spirits had caused’.

In this scene, in keeping with the same iatromechanical description of gesture, Miss Mathews ‘spirits’ are so ‘disconcerted’ by the passion of ‘the extreme horrors which she conceive[s] at the presence of her rival’ that they mark her countenance with ‘visible confusion’ (IV, ii). In the same vein, Mrs. Bennet later recounts how, after leaving her father’s house, the ‘agitation’ of her mind ‘so overpower[s] her spirits’ that she faints when taken from her horse, and, in Book VIII, a passion ‘almost too strong for [Amelia’s] delicate constitution’ ‘overpower[s]’ her ‘spirits’, causing her to give ‘vent’ in the gesture of tears (VII, iii, 279; VIII, iii, 321).

In this Cartesian description of the body-machine, spirits liaise between passion and involuntary, authentic gesture, but the joint operation of the passions and the spirits in actuating
eloquent gestures that could cause lasting change in their spectators is never as effective as sensibility. In *Clarissa*, sensibility is a hard-wiring of the body for the reception and transmission of sensation. Because the characters of Fielding’s novel do not possess that kind of sensibility, natural eloquence cannot secure the same permanent and physical modifications of ‘character’ that it does, occasionally, in the earlier of the two novels.\(^3^4\) Still, the immediate effects of certain scenes, such as the Booths’ reunion in Newgate, approximate those of similar spectacles in *Clarissa*: the Newgate reunion, of which, more later, directs Amelia’s sympathy against Booth’s self-love, and in some degree against selfish intention in other spectators, as well (II, iv).

### 3.3 Reflecting on sympathy

As I have already suggested, the iatromechanical processes that account for the means by which London corrupts Booth’s capacity to make moral decisions entail not the dulling of his sensibility but the vitiation of his moral sense. In other words, the sentimental psychology Fielding uses to explain Booth’s moral fall in the metropolis is Hutcheson’s, not the one described in *Clarissa*. The psychology to which *Amelia* adheres resembles Hutcheson’s in imagining judgement as a product of the operation of a faculty, known as the ‘moral sense’, whose ‘reflection’ approves or disapproves motivations supplied by one of two opposed master passions, each of which controls a host of subsidiary passions, and which compete for influence in the mind and civil society. For Hutcheson, the ‘public’ passions, identical in their effects to what later Scottish moralists would call sympathy, are other-directed and compassionate,

\(^{34}\) Cf., Gordon on the capacity of physiological response to transform sentimental readers and characters physically (1997: 496).
whereas the ‘private’ passions, those controlled by self-love, are egocentric. In *Amelia*, the contagion of metropolitan self-love infects and disorders the minds and bodies of most of the characters who come to London, corrupting good nature by impairing the capacity of the moral sense to approve the various forms of sympathy, including love of family, wife, friends, and country, and to disapprove the interested passions controlled by self-love.

But unlike Mandeville, Hutcheson denies that self-love *always* determines approbation. While admitting that self-love is essential to survival, Hutcheson insists on the need to cultivate the ‘public affections’, which are similar to sympathy and which generate sociability. Hence, Hutcheson recommends not the complete suppression of selfishness, but a ‘balancing’ in the mind of sympathy against self-love, by means of which the agent might attain the ‘calm desire’ for public good known as ‘benevolence’. To achieve this balance, the agent must check violent passion and abstain from violent pleasure, since these corrupt the moral sense and suppress sympathy (*NC*, 31, 55, 72, 114 - 16). Fortunately, nature assists in the matter, since spectacle engages the moral sense the same way it does the ‘sense of beauty’ responsible for aesthetic judgement: spontaneously, involuntarily, and prior to calculations of interest. For this reason, in the degree that a good or bad action strikes the mind as a spectacle, the sympathy and moral sense of an *uncorrupted* agent will work together to pass judgement without undue recourse to considerations of self-interest. Indeed, sympathy, by automatically moving the spectator to respond to the sight of suffering, proves the existence of the moral sense, since it represents a natural predisposition ‘to study the interest of others, without any views of private advantage’ (*MGE*, 216). In principle, sympathy (‘public affection’) and the

moral sense secure the agent's legitimate interests as effectively as self-love would.\footnote{Mandeville argues that private interest secures public benefits, Hutcheson, that the moral sense causes us to secure private interest \textit{while} pursuing the public good. It is 'a determination of our minds to receive amiable or disagreeable ideas of actions, when they shall occur to our observation, antecedently to any opinions of advantage or loss to redound to our selves from them' (\textit{MGE}, 114, 123 - 24).} The system therefore depends on the motivational efficacy of passion, whether selfish or 'public'.

However, Hutcheson also reserves an important role for 'reflection', which is seated in the moral sense. Hutcheson divides affect into desire, affection, and passion, each of which is progressively less amenable to reflection and reason. Whereas 'calm desire' for a good inclines the agent 'to pursue whatever objects [are] apprehended as the means of securing the good', the same is not always true of passion. 'Passion' as distinct from 'affection' includes

\begin{quote}
\hspace{1cm} a strong brutal impulse of the will ... occasioned or attended by
\hspace{1cm} some violent bodily motions which keeps the mind much
\hspace{1cm} employed upon the present affair, to the exclusion of every thing
\hspace{1cm} else, and ... prevent[s] all deliberate reasoning about our conduct
\end{quote}

\textit{(NC, 28 - 9).}

Similarly, 'calm desire', as it appears to 'reason or reflection', is distinct from 'the particular passions towards objects immediately presented to some sense'. Hutcheson postulates that the agent 'obtain[s] command over the particular passions, principally by strengthening the general desires through frequent reflection, and making them habitual' \textit{(NC, 29 - 30)}. It is this discipline of the heart that Fielding most probably has in mind when Booth's stoic interlocutor lectures him on the 'philosophy'

\begin{quote}
\hspace{1cm} which, when once by a long course of meditation it is reduced to
\hspace{1cm} habit, teaches us to set a just value on every thing; and cures at
once all eager wishes and abject fears, all violent joy and griefs
concerning objects which cannot endure long, and may not exist a
moment (VIII, x, 354).

The moral sense, that ‘secret chain between each person and mankind’ which ‘makes rational
actions appear beautiful or deformed’, (MGE, 111) also accounts for the eloquence of the body:

Upon this moral sense is founded all the power of the orator. The
various figures of speech are the several manners which a lively
genius, warmed with passions suitable to the occasion, naturally
runs into ... and they only move the hearers, by giving a lively
representation of the passions of the speaker; which are
communicated to the hearers ... (MGE, 237).

Conversely, the eloquence of the body demonstrates ‘how wonderfully the constitution of
human nature is adapted to move compassion’:

Our misery and distress immediately appear in our countenance,
if we do not study to prevent it, and propagates some pain to all
spectators; who from observation universally understand the
meaning of those dismal airs. We mechanically send forth
shrieks and groans upon any surprising apprehension of evil; so
that no regard to decency can sometimes restrain them: Thus all
who are present are roused to our assistance, and sometimes our
injurious enemy is made to relent (MGE, 216 - 17).

Spectacles of virtue or suffering, manifest in action, elicit the uncorrupted spectator’s sympathy,
assisting the moral sense in forming judgements. While only sympathy supplies ‘the immediate
motive to virtuous actions’, or constitutes the ‘springs of the actions which we call virtuous’, the moral sense must approve those virtuous impulses before they result in virtuous action (125, 143). Spectacle, including gesture, induces passions which prompt the moral sense to approve or disapprove the spectator’s feelings regarding his or her own actions. For example, the sight of virtue in the form of a good deed cultivates sympathy and soundness of moral sense in the spectator, spurring him or her to acts of emulation. In Amelia, as in Hutcheson’s philosophy, the passions and affections of the body act in conjunction with the approval or disapproval of the moral sense (which Fielding denotes as ‘good- or ill-nature’) to shape assessments of right and wrong and to motivate the subject to good or evil. But neither Hutcheson nor Fielding denies the role of prudence or ‘calm deliberate reasoning’ in shaping those assessments.

In keeping with the primacy Fielding assigns to reflection, Amelia examines its role in countering metropolitan selfishness. Amelia revisits the concerns of Fielding’s Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men (1743), which distinguishes ‘good nature’ from both ‘ill nature’ and the ‘good humour’ that hides an unkind heart. Despite his many flaws, Booth possesses ‘good nature’, which Fielding defines as

... that benevolent and amiable temper of mind which disposes us to feel the misfortunes, and enjoy the happiness of others; and consequently pushes us on to promote the latter, and prevent the former ... (Miscellanies, 158).

In contrast, the theatricality of mere ‘good humour’ (as exhibited, for example, in Colonel James) proceeds from the predominance of self-love, which consists in ‘the triumph of the mind, when reflecting on its own happiness’ (155).
Metropolitan theatricality gives a foil to the involuntary gestures of sentiment, marking them as the only reliably transparent parts of the language of the body, since only in actions outside the will’s control is gesture coterminous with passion. *Amelia* and the *Essay* attribute to reflex movements the role the passions exercise in shaping moral judgement and character: involuntary gestures often externalize the balancing of the mind between sympathy and self-love. Thus, while

self-love may make us pleased with seeing a blemish in another

which we are ourselves free from, yet compassion on the first

reflection of any unhappiness in the object, immediately puts a

stop to it in good minds (*Miscellanies*, 159 - 60).

Like the passions to which they correspond, the involuntary gestures that respond to another’s distress invite the spectator to **reflect** as to whether these reflexes are shameful or praiseworthy. Cumulatively, these acts of reflection create and reveal character. Fielding illustrates with an example of urban humiliation well-known to his readers. There are, he argues, ‘few who would not laugh’ at the sight of ‘a person well-dressed [who] should tumble in a dirty place in the street’ (160). But fortunately it is the response of the moral sense to the initial reaction that generates ‘character’, not the reaction itself. While admitting that the ‘convulsive ecstacy’ of laughter ‘savour[s] of ill-nature’, since it is occasioned by self-love, or, as Fielding puts it, ‘by the contemplation of our own happiness, compared with the unfortunate person’s’, it is a ‘spontaneous motion[ ] of the soul, which few ... attend to, and none can prevent’, and, therefore, ‘doth not properly constitute the character’.37 Hence, reflection on the

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37 The reflex of laughter can, however mark the response of a good-natured mind to the ‘true ridiculous’ whose source is ‘affectation’. Again, an urban spectacle illustrates this proposition. If ‘any man living’ saw ‘a dirty fellow ... descend from his coach and six, or
stimulus creates good- or ill-nature and character:

When we come to reflect on the uneasiness this person suffers,
laughter, in a good and delicate mind, will change itself into
compassion; and in proportion as this latter operates on us, we
may be said to have more or less good-nature (160).

Good- or ill-natured character arises in the spectator in proportion as the reflection of
the moral sense approves sympathy, which establishes imaginative identity with one’s fellows,
or self-love, which sets up relations of judgmental detachment. Where self-love predominates,
as it does in London, the spectator glories in ‘the contemplation of [his] own happiness,
compared with the unfortunate person’s’. Since obsession with status, form, precedence, and
display governs town manners, difference, not identity, defines the relations of metropolitan
spectators to their fellows, and specifies urban character.

3.4 How Booth’s doctrine differs from Mandeville’s self-love and Hutcheson’s sentiment

Though never actively evil, Booth falls victim to London’s temptations and to the naive
belief in sympathy which his doctrine of the predominating passion implies, and which his
misadventures in the metropolis eventually force him to reject. This ‘doctrine’ (for that is what
he calls it) is about natural sociability. Booth discloses his ideas to Frances Mathews in

bolt from his chair with his hat under his arm, he would then begin to laugh, and with
justice’ (JA, 52 - 53). Accordingly, the Booths share a ‘taste and enjoyment of the
ridiculous’ that assists in moral judgement (121). Their sense of humour aids the moral
sense in its labour of discrimination, unveiling self-love for what it is. Billy in particular
ignores his mirth at the peril of his virtue. His instinctive amusement at Mathews’ absurd
insincerity and malice should have warned him: ‘At this remark, Booth, though enough
affected at some parts the story, had great difficulty to refrain from laughing’ (I, viii, 43).
Newgate prison, revealing ‘that the doctrine of the passions had been always his favourite study’, and ‘that he [is] convinced every man acted entirely from that passion which was uppermost’ in his mind at a given moment (III, iv, 103). Booth’s ‘doctrine of the passions’ draws on the Cartesian tradition of the body-machine and reads like an unsophisticated caricature of Hume’s theory of sentiment but does not precisely match any contemporary system. Since Booth adopts sympathy not as a principle of moral approbation but as a pretext to do as he pleases, his philosophy is not sentimental in the formal sense of the word and does not become so until his conversion in prison at the end of the novel. Booth’s doctrine adapts neither stoicism, nor self-command, nor the self-love and self-interest Hobbes and Mandeville espouse, nor even Hutcheson’s system of moral sense and public affection.

Overall, Booth’s doctrine is best explained as a bastardization of Hutcheson’s system for the conduct and management of the passions. Booth follows Hutcheson in the belief that the subject is predisposed to adopt the course of action indicated by the relative balance of self-love and sympathy in his mind at a given moment. In addition, Booth accepts the part of Hutcheson that Fielding’s narrator rejects, namely, the sanguine benevolence that insists that because ‘love’ (that is, public affection or sympathy) ‘exists in the mind of man’ as surely as selfish passion, it will predominate with sufficient frequency to ensure natural sociability (III, v, 108). Booth rejects Mandeville’s principle of the permanent predominance of self-love in the body. Thus, he cannot stay silent at Miss Mathews’s disclosure that she has regarded the words virtue and religion ‘as cloaks under which hypocrisy may be better enabled to cheat the world’ ever since she has read ‘that charming fellow Mandevil (sic)’. Instead, Booth, who initially disbelieves the theory of pervasive depravity that underpins the novel’s sense of the metropolis, defends the power of sympathy to generate sociability:
‘Pardon me, madam,’ answered Booth, ‘I hope that you do not agree with Mandevil (sic) neither, who hath represented human nature in a picture of the highest deformity. He hath left out of his system the best passion which the mind can possess, and attempts to derive the effects or energies of that passion, from the base impulses of pride or fear (III, v, 108).

Although he succumbs repeatedly to selfishness, Booth trusts in sympathy so much that he does not think he has any duty or ability to restrain his own self-love, since ‘inevitable fatality’ prescribes that the passion uppermost in a man’s mind at a given moment determines the action of the body-machine: ‘a man can no more resist the impulse of [the uppermost passion], than a wheel-barrow can the force of its driver’ (I, iii, 22 - 24). Hence, moral reasoning cannot effect action unless the reasoning itself is seated in the uppermost passion. Booth uses his belief that passion dictates moral approbation as a permanent excuse to deny accountability for his actions. As he puts it after his repentance, ‘my chief doubt was founded on this, that as other men appeared to me to act entirely from their passions, their actions could have neither merit nor demerit’ (XII, v, 522). Unlike Hutcheson, then, Booth admits no role for reflection in directing human behaviour, except in the degree that passion, remorse for example, might cause reflection.

Booth’s infatuation with his doctrine of the passions stems from his belief that the motivational force of emotion exceeds that of reason. Locked in debate on stoicism, the Captain doubts the practical efficacy of reason, since ‘we reason from our heads, but act from our hearts’ (VIII, x, 354). In contrast with reason, passion should have the same power in all minds, regardless of wisdom or rank. If Booth is right, sympathy has as good a chance as self-
love in determining the action of the body-machine: ‘Love, benevolence, or what you will please to call it, may be the reigning passion in a beggar as well as in a prince; and wherever it is, its energies will be the same’ (III, vii, 118). But as the novel draws to a close, Booth’s growing disillusion with London compels him to question the wisdom of these beliefs. A few days before he rejects them he contradicts what he said earlier, chiding Amelia that he had often told her that all men ‘act alike from the principle of self-love’. What follows initially seems to endorse Mandeville’s doctrine that self-love motivates all apparent goodness, and that a self-interested relief of distress can derive from love of admiration or from ignoble selfish guilt:

Where benevolence therefore is the uppermost passion, self-love directs you to gratify it by doing good, and by relieving the distresses of others; for they are in reality your own.

But his next words show he has misused the technical language of moral philosophy, and that he means benevolence can prompt sympathetic adoption of another’s distresses as one’s own. Booth has said ‘self-love’ when he means sympathy:

But where ambition, avarice, pride, or any other passion governs the man, and keeps his benevolence down, the miseries of all other men affect him no more than they would a stock or stone

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38 Even Booth is surprised at the inconstancy of his sympathy and at the speed with which ideas and their associated passions succeed each other in his mind. The succession of his ideas following the death of his sister Nancy shows him the strength of his affection for Amelia: ‘I now soon perceived how much superior my love for Amelia was to every other passion; poor Nancy’s idea disappeared in a moment’ (II, v, 72). But he is shocked when the joy of rejoining his regiment drives Amelia’s ‘idea’ from his mind: ‘I passed several happy hours, in which poor Amelia’s image seldom obtruded itself to interrupt my pleasure’. To his credit, he acknowledges this forgetfulness as contemptible (III, iv, 103).

39 Like Hutcheson, Smith later argues against this assertion (TMS, 308 - 14).
In other words, Booth has finally seen the pervasive dulling of sympathy that Fielding’s narrator attributes to the victory of selfishness in civil society:

... while wantonness, vanity, avarice and ambition are every day rioting and triumphing in follies and weakness, the ruin and desolation of mankind, scarce one man in a thousand is capable of tasting the happiness of others (IV, iv, 165).

In Booth, then, Fielding creates an anti-hero who rejects reflection in favour of unassisted sympathy, and proves unable or unwilling to balance sympathy against self-love, or to check violent passion in aid of calm, deliberate reasoning. In place of a conscience, Booth has an involuntary predisposition to good which afflicts him when he does evil, but which does not suffice to motivate him to virtuous action. Because all Booth’s moral discernment resides in the passions of his body, his move into London, the realm of unfettered self-love, increases his reliance on feeling to dictate action and accentuates his involuntary movements. The town induces in Booth a violent self-love that vitiates his good nature because it corrupts his moral sense. This is why Harrison advises the heroine that if she is wise she will not trust her impulsive and easily-led husband ‘a day longer in this town’ (XII, iii, 515). In the metropolis, the eloquence of Amelia’s body fails to move her husband to a recovery of his good nature as it might, hypothetically at least, in the countryside.

In the result, London’s selfishness abets the narrator’s anxiety to acquit Booth of responsibility for his own self-love, and instead to fault the conditions of his life in the metropolis, as the reader sees when the text blames ‘several unlucky circumstances which concurred so critically’ for the hero’s infidelity with Miss Mathews (IV, i, 148). Absolving
Billy entails damning the town and representing his deeds as involuntary responses to external agency. Nature cannot account fully either for Booth’s indiscretions or for the evil perpetrated by the men and women of the town. Thus, when Dr. Harrison condemns nature’s dishonesty for having sent people as depraved as Colonel James into the world under the ‘false recommendation’ of a ‘good face’, he is, in fact, blaming the corruptions of civil society and not nature itself. Almost in the same breath, Harrison defends ‘the nature of man’, which, he says, ‘abounds with benevolence, charity and pity’. Only the environmental circumstances of ‘Bad education, bad habits, and bad customs, debauch our nature, and drive it headlong as it were into vice’ (IX, v, 381).

3.5 Mandevillian self-love as London’s dominant passion

The representation of the Booths’ misadventures in London condemns Mandevillian selfishness as prescriptive morality but substantiates it as a scientific description of the means by which self-love gives rise to theatricality, manners, and character in the urban hive. In Amelia, self-love controls most social and political relationships in London, including, obviously, the distribution of state patronage in the form of commissions, benefices, and places. The ‘glaring evils, as well public as private’, exposed in the novel all arise from self-love (3). Accordingly, self-love asserts itself as soon as the novel’s London action commences, as the force that lands Booth in Newgate. The narrator lays part of the blame for the preponderance of selfishness in London on the moral philosophy of The Fable of the Bees. Mr. Thrasher, the judge, before whom Booth appears after his arrest on charges of assault, is ‘well versed in the laws of nature’ formulated by Mandeville and his coterie:
He perfectly well understood that fundamental principle so strongly laid down in the institutes of the learned Rochefoucault; by which the duty of self-love is so strongly enforced, and every man is taught to consider himself as the centre of gravity, and to attract all things thither (I, ii, 16).

Mandeville’s contribution to the predominance of selfishness in civil society is one of this novel’s constant themes. Thus, late in the action, while debating the merits of the patronage that governs London, Dr. Harrison argues that even ‘the most narrow and selfish system of politics’, implicitly, Mandeville’s system, cannot justify ‘favour and partiality’ in the distribution of preferment, since ‘such conduct is sure to create universal discontent and grumbling’. In conversation with a lord to whom he has applied for a commission for his protégé Booth, Dr. Harrison warns that unless England’s moral decline is reversed ‘Roman and British liberty will share the same fate; for corruption in the body politic as naturally tends to dissolution as in the natural body’. Thanking Harrison for the simile, the nobleman periodizes it into a conjectural history of the progress of civilization. In its youth, the body politic

... rises by arts and arms to power and prosperity. This it enjoys and flourishes with a while; and then it may be said to be in the vigour of its age .... At length this very prosperity introduces corruption; and then comes on its old age. Virtue and learning, art and industry, decay by degrees. The people sink into sloth and luxury, and prostitution. It is enervated at home, becomes contemnible abroad; and ... resembles a man in the last decrepit stage of life ... (XI, ii, 468).
Although this diagnosis of political disorder adapts civic corruption theory to describe the fall of the metropolis,\textsuperscript{40} the narrative depends for its resonance on its use of an iatromechanical language that locates social decay in the passions of the body natural. Political corruption springs from the disordered passions of the body natural. Thus, London represents the triumph of system over the providential order that controlled the action of Fielding’s earlier novels.\textsuperscript{41} But contrary to C. J. Rawson’s argument on this point, the brutal forces the Booths encounter in the town are never ‘unpredictable’ (1972: 83). Rather, they mark out a coherent program of rational cruelty. None of the Booths’ misfortunes happens by accident. Instead, every time Fortune appears to interfere with the couple’s happiness, the true culprit is self-love, either Billy’s or someone else’s. Indeed, the narrator states that this novel’s ‘model of human life’ seeks to account ‘by natural means’ for the ‘miseries in which men of sense sometimes involve themselves by quitting the directions of prudence, and following the blind guidance of a predominant passion’ that invariably turns out to be self-love (I, i).

In London, ‘the duty of self-love’ actuates the behaviour of officials in an impersonal manner that frequently engages no malice towards its victims. Just as Thrasher is ‘never indifferent in a cause, but when he [can] get nothing on either side’, so the bailiff who later arrests Booth on Dr. Harrison’s orders has ‘no more animosity against the bodies in his custody, than a butcher hath to those in his’, and is driven exclusively by avarice: ‘His desire was no

\textsuperscript{40} J. G. A. Pocock’s \textit{Machiavellian Moment} (1975) and \textit{Virtue, Commerce, and History} (1985) remain the most comprehensive studies of the eighteenth-century civic critique of the tendency of commercial refinement and luxury to corrupt mores and undermine virtue.

\textsuperscript{41} Although I cannot prove my intuition on this point, I suspect that \textit{Amelia} might represent Fielding’s rejection of the idea of ‘system’, as distinct from ‘order’. For a brief history of theories of ‘system’, please see the first chapter of \textit{The Business of Common Life} (Kaufmann, 1995).
more than to accumulate bail bonds’ (VIII, i, 317). In one form or another, self-love constitutes London. Leaving aside the sexual urges that ignore the well-being of their objects, urban selfishness finds expression in revenge, hatred, and envy, as well as in a cluster of passions Fielding mentions as a group at least three times: avarice, ambition, and pride.\(^42\) In the town, pride or ‘vanity’ predominates as the passion that gives rise to theatricality, manners, and character.\(^43\) To reformulate this in one of Mandeville’s expressions of the power of civility to engender theatricality, ‘self-liking’ will inevitably make a ‘rational creature ... seek for opportunities, by gestures, looks, and sounds, to display the value it has for itself, superior to what it has for others’ (II, 133).

Even essentially good-natured characters like Booth and Mrs. Bennet are not immune to selfishness. Although Booth is not selfish all the time, every time he quits ‘the directions of prudence’ it is, without exception, in response to the prompting of self-love. The Booths’ distresses stem from the dominance of self-love in London and Billy’s eagerness to abdicate moral responsibility by abandoning himself to self-love. Inevitably, Booth’s obedience to self-love becomes more conspicuous when he leaves the country for the town. Indeed, it is ‘vanity’ that compels Booth to keep a coach as though he were a gentleman and initiates the bankruptcy that forces him to flee to London, where his selfish urges enthrall him even more than they had in the country, depressing the capacity for sympathy on which his responsiveness to Amelia’s natural eloquence is based, and vitiating his goodness (III, xii, 143-44; IV, iii, 160).

\(^{42}\) IV, iv, 165; IX, xi, 407; X, xi, 458. Also see VI, i, 232.

\(^{43}\) Battestin argues that this passion is ‘the ultimate object of [Fielding’s] corrective ridicule’. Vanity ‘is to Fielding what self-love is to Barrow and the latitudinarian opposition to Hobbes and Mandeville — the chief vice subsuming all others, the root of uncharitableness’ (1959: 53).
3.6 Metropolitan self-love disjoins the language of the body

Metropolitan self-love and the suffering it causes undermine the physiological basis for the eloquence of the sentimental body because selfishness and pain disjoint the natural language of the body, severing gestures and facial expressions from their associated passions. Town character is ‘human nature depraved’, disfigured by institutional corruption and individual selfishness, and marked out in gesture. Consequently, even practiced observers such as the narrator or Dr. Harrison cannot always infer character from gesture in London. It is impossible, for example, ‘to conceive a greater appearance of modesty, innocence and simplicity, than what nature displayed in the countenance’ of the famous courtesan, Betsy Careless (I, vi, 36).

Similarly, the portrait of Blear-eyed Moll, the first person who accosts Booth in Newgate, is ‘productive of moral lesson’ less because her temperament contradicts her appearance than because it belies the narrator’s reading of her objective circumstances: ‘however wretched her fortune may appear to the reader, she was one of the merriest persons in the whole prison’ (I, iii, 21). This lesson holds true for the balance of Booth’s first stay in jail where, as the narrator’s survey of the prisoners demonstrates, facial expression reveals character about half the time. The ‘very pretty girl’ with ‘great innocence in her countenance’ proves a street-walker, but the discharged soldier who bears ‘in his countenance, joined to an appearance of honesty, the marks of poverty, hunger, and disease’, is exactly what he seems (I, iv).

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44 The frankness with which town characters declare themselves votaries of self-interest varies. Trent, product and adherent of the system of self-interest, signals affiliation by announcing that it is but ‘human nature’ that the peer should scheme to seduce Amelia ‘under the colour of entertaining the highest friendship’ for Booth (X, vii, 446).
The tour of Newgate in the first three books of the novel signals Booth’s and the reader’s admission to a world where the principle of a natural bodily rhetoric has limited heuristic value: *Amelia* recounts London’s betrayal of the ideal of a natural language. But while passion and gesture seldom coincide in London, the reader can never get over the feeling that the narrator wishes they would. Fielding’s desire for a natural language of the body, one underwritten by natural eloquence, grows in inverse proportion to the persuasiveness of the evidence amassed to the contrary. As Castle asserts, the narrator’s longing for ‘complete rhetorical transparency’ including a transparency of the body, is, ‘if anything, stronger in *Amelia* than anywhere else in Fielding’s fiction’ (1986: 198). Accordingly, in good earnest of belief in transparency, Fielding creates a protagonist whose trust in countenance and whose incompetence in penetrating imposture are rooted in an essential though corruptible goodness. Sad to relate, Booth’s good nature and sympathy often prevent him from seeing through obvious deception.

### 3.7 Metropolitan self-love engenders artificial character

In *Amelia*, the morbid awareness of self-as-spectacle that permeates the life of the town also governs character: the men and women of London particularize the effects of self-love on gesture and personality. Thus, vanity predominates in Bath, in Mrs. James, and particularly in Miss Mathews, for whom the metropolis has become a theatre of self-comparison (III, viii; IV, vi). Living in concubinage in an ‘obscure court in London’, Miss Mathews is ruled by fear of the sight of her fellows:
Abroad I scarce ever went, lest I should meet any of my former acquaintance; for their sight would have plunged a thousand daggers in my soul. My only diversion was going very seldom to a play, where I hid myself in the gallery ... O Heavens! When I have seen my equals glittering in a side-box, how have the thoughts of my lost honour torn my soul (I, ix, 48)!

Miss Mathews's vanity shapes her actions, her judgment, and her character. Although Amelia obviously relies on representation of the movements of the body to externalize the personalities of its *dramatis personae*, gesture also embodies passions that guide moral judgement and 'constitute the character' in the manner in which Fielding uses the phrase in *Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men*. In this novel, gesture produces character as well as showing it: action is both a cause and a sign of personality. It follows that London shapes character by demanding the execution of a certain set of gestures. Hence, by appealing to Colonel Bath's and Miss Bath's preoccupation with appearances, the town fixes them in the physical and mental attitudes of their respective characters: the 'man of honour' and the 'fine lady'. In Colonel Bath's case, the vanity that dominates his mind and body produces character by inducing reflexive gestures that have become so ingrained that he can no longer change them:

... he had so long accustomed himself to one and the same strut, that as a horse used always to trotting can scarce be forced into a gallop, so could no passion force the colonel to alter his pace (V, v, 206).
At ‘a coffee-house near St. James’s’, Booth witnesses the manner in which a man’s reflexes may constitute his character. The Colonel, ‘a most erect and stately figure indeed’,

... having entered the room walked directly up to the upper end,

where having paid his respects to all present of any note, to each

according seniority, he at last cast his eyes on Booth, and very
civilly, tho' somewhat coldly, asked him how he did (V, i, 191).

Similarly, Mrs. James’s selfish passions, ‘calm’ though they be (IV, iv, 163), also find expression in gestures that constitute her character. At her first meeting with Amelia in London, Mrs. James, dazzled by her new importance as a rich man’s wife ‘put[s] on as formal a countenance, and [makes] as formal a courtesie (sic) to her old friend, as if she had been her very distant acquaintance’ (IV, vi, 175).

However, small amounts of theatricality do not necessarily corrupt moral judgement or damage ‘character’ in this novel, particularly in cases where legitimate self-defence requires a measure of play-acting. Fielding’s narrator frequently reminds the reader that, in the duplicitous town, stage-craft is essential to prudent self-management, and that absolute transparency does not point the way towards effective virtue. Thus, the acting with which Amelia responds to Mrs. James’s aggression in the scene just recounted is consistent with the heroine’s goodness:

Poor Amelia ... was struck motionless by this behaviour; but

recollecting her spirits, as she had an excellent presence of mind,

she presently understood what the lady meant, and resolved to

treat her in her own way.
Having regained her composure, the heroine ‘perform[s] her part to admiration; so that a by-
stander would have doubted, in every article other than dress, which of the two was the more
accomplished fine lady’ (IV, vi, 176). Nor is this scene an isolated event. Earlier, when the
heroine and her fiancé seek refuge in her nurse’s cottage during their elopement, it is she, not
Booth, who initiates the pretense that they are already married. Later in the narrative she
reveals the prudence she learns in London by depriving Billy of knowledge that might cause
him to fight a duel or lose important connections. Hence, Booth’s opinion that his wife is
guileless and has ‘no idea of deceit’, underestimates her theatricality (II, ii, 62; IX, viii, 395).

If Amelia can temporarily adopt an ‘artificial character’ without destroying herself
morally so, up to a point, can other people: while self-love heightens theatricality and the
synthetic aspects of personality, it can also leave a foundational layer of character concealed but
mostly intact. ‘Artificial character’ proceeds from self-love and corrupts the moral sense but
may fail to vitiate the mind completely. Instead, as I have already argued, sympathy and
selfishness, real and artificial character, may contend for dominance in the same person. Thus,
we eventually learn that despite her pretensions, Mrs. James remains ‘at bottom a very good-
natured woman’, and capable of sympathizing with Amelia’s misfortune. For this to happen,
however, the ‘fine lady’s’ sympathy must temporarily defeat her self-love and self-control:

... besides that of a fine lady, which is all mere art and mummery,
every such woman hath some real character at the bottom, in
which, whenever nature gets the better of her, she acts. Thus the
finest ladies in the world will sometimes love, and sometimes
scratch, according to their natural dispositions ... tho’ both of
these are equally inconsistent a fine lady’s artificial character

(VIII, xi, 348).

This is not, however, to suggest that self-control is root of all evil. Rather, self-control, understood in its literal sense, as command of the body, is as essential to effective virtue as it is effective wickedness. As though to highlight the importance of theatricality in supporting both morality and immorality, Fielding’s narrator seems to represent the two ‘couples’ at the centre of the action, namely Mathews, James, Amelia, and Booth, as if to compare the acting skills of each of each of these characters. This scheme of representation seems to assess the craft of two cool-headed, self-possessed actors (Amelia and James) against the lesser skills of two hot-headed passion-driven actors (Mathews and Booth). In other words, the narrator’s anxieties regarding theatricality shape characterization in Amelia. Since I have already considered Amelia’s qualities as a player, I will now review the novel’s representation of the theatrical competencies of Miss Mathews, Booth, and Colonel James, in that order.

Like Booth’s, Miss Mathews’s performances persuade only when her passions and her gestures coincide exactly. However, the specific gestures that externalize her self-love (‘sneers’ for contempt, ‘leers’ for lust) are often at odds with the theatricality with which she struggles to conceal it. Miss Mathews’s reflexes conflict with her command of body, since her voluntary gestures (those inculcated by her polite education) are false, whereas her involuntary ones, which she cannot control, are authentic, and far more persuasive, because they express true passion. At first, her civility prevails over her selfishness, so that even after seeing her admitted to prison on charges of murder Booth judges her according to her artificial character:
... he hardly thought she could so far have changed her nature as
to be guilty of a crime so very incongruous with her gentle
manners; for Miss Mathews had both the birth and education of a
gentlewoman (I, iv, 28).

However, that 'education' remains incomplete. While she is a 'perfect mistress' of 'an air of
most bewitching softness', the sweetness of 'her gentle manners' alternates with 'vents' of rage,
malice, and vengefulness, which find expression in her action: she shocks as much by the
unevenness of her performance as by the violence of her passions. Miss Mathews, an
incompetent actor, modulates carelessly between feigned, voluntary gestures of sympathy,
calculated to arrest Booth's attention, and unfeigned reflexive gestures of selfishness, but the
latter persuade Booth more than the former, and more quickly elicit the involuntary movements
that mark his conviction. Miss Mathews' authentic selfish tears of shame and rage strike silent
'astonishment' and 'amazement' in Booth, just as the demeanour with which she delivers her
violent tragedy speech turns the 'poor gentleman ... pale with horror':

... for her voice, her looks, her gestures, were properly adapted to
the sentiments she expressed. Such indeed was her image, that
neither could Shakespeare describe, nor Hogarth paint, nor Clive
act a Fury in higher perfection (I, vi, 35).

Miss Mathews is a comédienne sensible whose eloquence depends on the expression of
passions she actually feels, and who succeeds best in characters that match her real emotions.
For this reason, her coy efforts to counterfeit hurt feelings by casting herself as the heroine of
The Fair Penitent are never very persuasive. Rather, her oratory depends on the expressiveness
of body, which the narrator describes in the language of the eighteenth-century stage. When ‘her eyes, the most eloquent orators’ on ‘occasions’ of ‘tenderness’ exert ‘their utmost force’, ‘she cast[s] a look as languishingly sweet, as ever Cleopatra gave to Antony’. The ensuing silence marks the triumph of her eloquence over her lover’s passions (III, ix; VI, ii; II, ii; II, vii; IV, I, 146).

Like Mathews, Booth is a *comédien sensible*, an actor who does not have and can never acquire the skills needed for prudent self-management in the metropolis. The indiscipline of the Captain’s body unfits him for the performances demanded by the town, since his life in London consists in yielding to his passions in a manner consistent with the theory to which he adheres intellectually. As long as he remains in London, Booth’s literal embodiment of his belief that a man obeys his ‘uppermost passion’ establishes his character and limits his theatricality and agency.

Booth’s unruly body dictates a course of mediocre virtue that prevents him from complying either with the false prudence of the town, advocated by Trent and James, or with the true prudence recommended by Harrison and Amelia. Booth’s imprudence, and the gestural incontinence that attends it, is failing and virtue, since it excludes ethical consistency while setting a minimum level of goodness below which he is constitutionally incapable of sinking. Booth’s virtues and vices lie in abandonment to passion, not in self-command.⁴⁵ And because Booth’s automated moral reasoning relies on passion, not reflection, he is most effective when his body activates in response to external stimuli. Usually, moral action in Booth is immediate, physical, and violent, as it is in his interventions in the fistfight at the beginning of the novel, or

⁴⁵ He is capable of unpremeditated but not ‘*premeditated* inconstancy’ (X, ii, 421).
in the scuffle between his son and the guard on the Parade. But the weakness of Booth’s powers of calculation also means he has no head for the intrigues of London, and therefore cannot consider or even recognize opportunities to use his wife as bait. In a novel where the protagonist must decide whether to traffic in his wife’s body, as the town demands, Booth is prevented from considering Trent’s advice not by principle but by passion in the form of revulsion (X, vii).

In other words, the Captain’s virtues and failings are those of which Sir John Hawkins accuses Fielding: ‘His morality, in respect that it resolves virtue into good affections, in contradiction to moral obligation and a sense of duty, is that of Lord Shaftesbury vulgarized’. Billy’s goodness of heart, that soundness of moral sense that weakens in London but recovers at the end of the novel before he retreats to the country, is as dumb, unthinking, and automatic as ‘the virtue of a horse or a dog’ (1787: 215). Booth’s unreflective passion-driven judgements and decisions disclose themselves in the involuntary modifications of his body. Unlike Colonel James, he is not one of those men who are ‘entirely masters of their passions’ and know how to conceal ‘this fire ... at their pleasure’ (II, ii, 59 - 60). His performances are eloquent when they are involuntary, and when word and action coincide with passion, as the Captain reveals when, during his escape from Mrs. Harris’ house, he responds to Amelia’s voice in dramatic poetry:

I answered in a line of Congreve’s, which burst from my lips spontaneously; for I am sure I had no intention to quote plays at that time, ‘Who calls the wretched thing that was Alphonso?’ Upon which a woman leapt into my arms ... (II, vi, 76)
In contrast, when he tries to act in the artificial character of Amelia’s husband (the couple are not yet married), he behaves ‘so awkwardly and foolishly’ as to raise immediate suspicion in the most innocent of minds (II, vi, 79).

Booth cannot counterfeit gestures that find no support in his passions. Instead, his involuntary gestures externalize the reflexes of his moral sense, locating his moral judgement in his flesh: the bodily manifestations of his passions, and their guiding of his moral sense, become the physical equivalent of conscience. For example, following his first release from prison, Booth’s remorse over his infidelity proceeds from his body. The ‘disorder’ which attends ‘the depression of guilt’ in a mind ‘not utterly abandoned’ to corruption prevents Booth from counterfeiting cheerfulness because he can find ‘no supply of spirits to carry on this deceit’. Booth cannot hide his passions or produce convincing signs of passions he does not feel. In attempting ‘to act the part of a happy man’, he fails miserably. Moreover, his gestures assist his failing ‘good-nature’ with acts of inadvertent self-revelation: ‘Cold damp sweats’, the outward signs of the ‘melancholy’ that has seized his mind ‘over-spread his person, so that he [is] scarce animated’, reducing him to ‘a dull lifeless lump of clay’ (IV, iii, 156). A similar incontinence of gesture strikes him again when he struggles to conceal his discomfiture from Amelia after his duel with Colonel Bath in Hyde Park. It is impossible for Booth to succeed in the arts of acting ‘for which nature had so entirely disqualified him’ (V, vi, 209 - 10). Not only is he ‘too honest to be good at concealing any of his thoughts’, his whole demeanour announces his passion:

His countenance indeed confessed faster than his tongue denied;

and the whole of his behaviour gave Amelia an alarm, and made
her suspect something very bad had happened ... (V, vi, 210).

In marked contrast with Booth, James, the consummate player in this novel, has internalized artificial character by learning to embody ‘good humour’: though sympathy does not direct James he rarely fails to convince. The Colonel, a model of self-control, is a study in that heightening of self-interest which trains the social actor in the prudence and discipline needed to satisfy the demands of a ruling passion. Accordingly, the supremacy of self-love in James’s mind emerges only after he arrives in London. At first, Booth is so certain of his friend’s good nature and sympathy that he cites James’s ‘behaviour’ as ‘sufficient proof’ that passions are better than scruples: Billy believes that inclination, not principle, lies at the root of Bob James’s apparent kindness (III, v, 108). Ironically, James’s skillful good humour proves so persuasive that Booth is slow to recognize that lust for Miss Mathews has cost him the Colonel’s friendship.

James’s theatricality, the self-discipline that explains his success in deceiving Booth, arises from training and from the natural weakness of his powers of sympathy. To this insensibility, which I shall argue, Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* later identifies as a typical psychological feature of fashionable London society, James brings acquired skills of corporeal self-command. Successful dissimulation requires the art of the courtier. Ambushed by Booth when least anticipated, when he might otherwise have had Amelia to himself, James shows ‘a great command of himself, and great presence of mind’:

> The great joy he suddenly conveyed into his countenance at the unexpected sight of his friend is to be attributed to that noble art which is taught in those excellent schools called the several
courts of Europe. By this men are enabled to dress out their
countenances as much at their own pleasure, as they do their
bodies ... 

In the result, James can ‘put on’ the passion of ‘friendship with as much ease as [he] can a laced coat’ (IX, ii, 367).

The insensibility which underlies James’s skill in the ‘noble art’ of acting wherein Booth proves inept accounts for the failure of the Captain’s involuntary sentimental gestures to elicit a similar response from the Colonel when the latter visits the former in prison (VIII, v, 334 - 35). The reader is treated to half of a complete act of passionate transference. Booth, ‘transported at the sight of the colonel’, spontaneously drops the papers in his hand and ‘burst[s] forth into the highest professions of gratitude to his friend’, whereas James merely ‘behave[s] very properly’ and says ‘every thing which became the mouth of a friend on the occasion’. Moreover, James seems ‘not moved equally, either with Booth or the sergeant; both whose eyes water[ ] at the scene’. After bracketing the failure of the eloquence of Booth’s body to inspire sympathy in James, the text ascribes this to what Richardson or Burney would call a lack of ‘sensibility’:

... the colonel, tho’ a very generous man, had not the least grain of
tenderness in his disposition. His mind was formed of those firm
materials, of which nature formerly hammered out the Stoic, and
upon which the sorrows of no man living could make an
impression.
This stoicism consists in the preponderance of self-love over sympathy. Thus, the friendship of a man of this temper ... is never to be absolutely depended on: for whenever the favourite passion interposes with it, it is sure to subside and vanish into air. Whereas, the man whose tender disposition really feels the miseries of another, will endeavour to relieve them for his own sake; and in such a mind, friendship will often get the superiority over every other passion (VIII, v, 335).

In James, then, metropolitan theatricality hardens its practitioner to the influence of sympathy. An habitual practice of the artificial language of the body deadens the actor to other people's natural eloquence.

3.8 The successes and failures of female sympathy

As I have already suggested, metropolitan selfishness may corrupt even the essentially virtuous, and even the liveliest sympathy might not protect them. Few aspects of this novel illustrate this more effectively than the contrast between Mrs. Bennet's behaviour in Book VII, where she generously shares her life story with Amelia in a lengthy exchange of sympathetic passion, and her conduct at the Haymarket assembly rooms, where she abandons herself to self-love under the influence of the masquerade. Mrs. Bennet's moral fall at the Haymarket masquerade matters because she has not habitually dedicated herself to metropolitan theatricality. Rather, she enters the novel as 'a woman of no form', 'as little ceremonious as ... reported', and painfully aware of how civility undermines sociability: 'what the world generally
calls politeness, I term insincerity' (IV, ix, 188; V, ii, 195; V, iii, 200).

Mrs. Bennet succumbs to London’s selfishness despite a remarkable physical susceptibility to Amelia’s passion which evinces her good nature and which comes out in the mode of her narration. In recounting her story to Amelia, Mrs. Bennet instructs the heroine by transferring passion from her own body to her friend’s: ‘in order to disclose my fears in their just colours, I must unfold my whole history to you’ (VI, ix, 266). Initially, the intensity of Mrs. Bennet’s emotion interferes with its embodiment, preventing her from ‘perform[ing]’ what she has ‘undertaken’: ‘Passion stopped her utterance; and after a minute’s silence she burst into a flood of tears’ (VII, i, 267). In keeping with the pathetic mode Amelia attempts, the eloquence of the body makes up for any deficiencies in the account of Mrs. Bennet’s misfortunes in town: the manner of the story’s unfolding tells on Amelia’s body the same way the reading aloud of Chapter II, Book II is meant to register on the body of the sentimental lover, eliciting passions that bring the heroine to regard Mrs. Bennet as an ‘object of compassion’ (VII, x, 310). In this narration, the eloquence of the body excites passion more readily than speech does. Amelia’s sympathy activates because the eloquence of her friend’s body triggers the involuntary gestural responses of her own, an aptitude Mrs. Bennet finds surprising. Although Mrs. Bennet mistakenly believes that only words transmit strong emotion, she soon discovers that once she has sketched out the cause of her suffering in words, Amelia’s observation of the gestural signs of her agony does the rest. In fact, the speed and ease of the transmission of sympathy between the two women, assisted, no doubt, by their gender, seems consistent with Hume’s description of the copying of the passions from body to body:
When I see the effects of passion in the voice and gesture or any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself. In like manner, when I perceive the causes of any emotion, my mind is convey’d to the effects, and is actuated with a like emotion (THN: 3.3.1.7; 576).

In the same manner, Amelia’s sympathy produces a lively facsimile of Bennet’s mental suffering, copying it from her perception of Bennet’s passion, which she infers more from gesture than from verbal relation. Words assist the transmission of passion, but depend on the signs of the body for their efficiency. Moreover, Amelia’s eloquent body immediately translates the vicarious passion back into gesture, in this case, a faintness that matches the original passion. Referring to the event Mrs. Bennet has evoked, Amelia says, ‘I am so sensible of it, that unless you have a mind to see me faint ... I beg you will order me ... a glass of water’. In contrast, Amelia’s friend initially believes that the heroine’s mind will copy the passion that the memory of the death of Mrs. Bennet’s mother still evokes for her only if she can accurately recount the same visual details that caused her original anguish:

... how can I describe the particulars of a scene to you, the remembrance of which chills my blood with horror .... What we all suffered on this occasion may more easily be felt than described (VII, ii, 270).

Mrs. Bennet’s narrative imbues Amelia with vicarious experience of how the selfishness of the London masquerade entails feminine ruin, and, in fact, in both the masking scenes these
assemblies represent the town at its most theatrical. Because Mrs. Bennet enters the first masked ball ‘entirely void of all suspicion’ and with ‘innocence unguarded’, she is ‘intoxicated with foolish desires, and liable to every temptation’. In imagining that she might give ‘some very distant encouragement’ to the lord’s passion for her, Mrs. Bennet admits that she deceived herself into thinking that she could indulge ‘vanity and interest at once, without being guilty of the least injury’ (VII, vii, 299). According to the logic of Mrs. Bennet’s tale, the woman who appears at a masquerade invites her own sexual ruin because the theatricality of the event excites selfishness and suppresses sympathy. It follows that in sending her friend (already ruined, and therefore less vulnerable) in her stead, Amelia, by prudent complicity in a lesser form of theatricality, avoids the greater impostures of the masquerade and protects herself from her husband’s foolishness: this exchange of roles replicates the kind of stage-craft that in Fielding’s view safeguards virtue instead of destroying it.

In theatrical terms, Amelia temporarily assigns her ‘character’ to Mrs. Bennet, subject to good behaviour. Unfortunately, whereas prudence motivates this delegation of authority, self-love guides its execution, causing Mrs. Atkinson to exceed the terms of her agency. At the assembly rooms, Mrs. Atkinson knowingly carries Amelia’s goods to the market to secure an officer’s commission, just as James has already advised Booth to do, and as Trent will advise him to do a few chapters later. Mrs. Atkinson’s negotiations with the lord, conducted in Amelia’s ‘character’, represent a self-interested pimping of Amelia’s ‘person’. The narrator underlines this point: the lord’s applications, made ‘rather to ... [Mrs. Atkinson’s] avarice and ambition than to her softer passions’ hold her attention because they address the emotions that actuate her at that exact moment (X, ii, 415). By bringing out the worst in Mrs. Atkinson and
Captain Booth, the masquerade again shows the power of metropolitan theatricality to suppress sympathy. The same woman whose kindness saves Amelia, and whose body responds so eloquently to the heroine’s sentimental gestures in Book VII, can also behave selfishly, given the right circumstances. Booth fares no better: as his wife’s friend gaily barters with Amelia’s character, the Captain rashly promises Miss Mathews, disguised as a shepherdess, that he will pay her a visit.

Having discussed how London affects Mrs. Atkinson’s sympathy, I would now like to consider how Fielding represents the heroine’s sympathy as either ineffective or problematic. To do this, I would like to review the representation of Amelia’s sympathy in four scenes: the Newgate reunion scene; the scene on the Parade, in which Booth rescues his son from an assault by a guard; the scene at the Vauxhall Gardens, in which two rakes terrorize Amelia and get away with it; and, fourth, Joe Atkinson’s ‘death-bed’ scene, in which Amelia and Joe mutely declare their mutual passion. In only the first of these scenes (Amelia’s and Booth’s reunion in Newgate) does the heroine’s sympathy do what it is supposed to do. In contrast, in the Parade and Vauxhall scenes, Amelia’s passions do not transfer to her husband at all. Finally, in the ‘death-bed’ scene, the heroine’s sympathy becomes the cause of a shocking but forgivable moment of adulterous passion between her and her foster-brother.

The archetypal scene of sympathetic transference is, then, the first one I consider: during her reunion with Booth in Newgate prison, the eloquence of Amelia’s body appears at its greatest strength, demonstrating the power of gesture to restore sympathy in wayward but good-natured people like her husband, and to check self-love in corrupt town characters. Both effects proceed from the working of her involuntary gestures on her spectators. In the first case,
Amelia's reflex actions elicit the same actions from her husband and copy her passion onto his mind. Amelia's palour and faintness almost make Booth pass out himself: when a 'female spectre, all pale and breathless' rushes into the turn-key's dining room and falls 'into Mr. Booth's arms, where she immediately faints away', Booth makes 'shift to support his lovely burthen; tho' he [is] himself in a condition very little different from hers'.

Like Clarissa's, the modifications of Amelia's body move the passions of her corrupt spectators, irrespective of self-interest, and against their will, by inducing temporary paralysis. The narrator underlines the power of reciprocal involuntary response to affect the minds of the most hardened metropolitan spectators. Like Booth, Miss Mathews is 'struck motionless with the surprize', and even the governor, who is 'not easily moved at sights of horror', stands 'aghast, and neither offer[s] to speak nor stir'. The involuntary effects of the heroine's passion on Miss Mathews subsist after Amelia regains consciousness, causing her rival to continue to stand 'like a statue' and turn 'scarlet' with shame when Amelia speaks to her. When the heroine approaches Miss Mathews to express her sympathy at 'meet[ing] her in such a place', her rival physically recoils: 'Amelia ... advanced still more and more in proportion as she drew back'.

With only a couple of exceptions, moments of sympathetic transference like the Newgate scene I have just recounted do not recur, even when Booth's physical reactions are at their fastest. In the Parade scene, for instance, the Booths' animation presents a spectacle of contrasting male and female involuntarism, giving pride of place to Billy's quick, soldier-like reflexes (IV, vii). As often happens with the Booth family, some unconscious violation of London's rules leads to humiliation. Not knowing 'that people might not walk in the green
fields in London’, the couple’s son strays onto the forbidden fenced-off parterres in St. James’s Park. This innocent trespass provokes great violence: an armed foot-soldier grabs the boy and shakes him. But even when actuated by sympathy instead of self-love, Booth reacts without reflection:

At this sight, without making any answer to his wife, he leapt over the rails; and running directly up to the fellow, who had a firelock with a bayonet fixed in his hand, he seized him by the collar, and tripped up his heels, and at the same time wrested his arms from him.

The sentiment in this scene consists in the horror Amelia feels in response to the danger to which her husband and son have exposed themselves, and in Atkinson’s embarrassed struggle to conceal his passion for her. The heroine’s shock takes the form of nervous disorder: Amelia ‘stagger[s]’ towards her husband, ‘all pale and breathless, and scarce able to support her tottering limbs’. ‘Disordered with her fright’, she does not at first ‘recollect’ Atkinson, is not ‘well able to walk without some assistance’, and fears she shall ‘drop down by the way’. The spectacle of Amelia’s passion affects her husband not all, but Atkinson, very profoundly. The heroine’s symptoms immediately write themselves onto her foster-brother’s body, so that Atkinson ‘turn[s] almost pale as Amelia herself’. Atkinson’s fear that Amelia might faint so affects him that he is ‘unable to speak’. Only an effort of strenuous self-command prevents him from shaking in sympathy with his foster-sister: ‘... had not his nerves been so strongly braced that nothing could shake them, he had enough in his mind to have set him a trembling equally with the lady’. The Parade incident rehearses the strengths and deficiencies of the sentimental
action that closes the novel in acknowledging the power of the gestures of sympathy to establish sentimental community in town, while denying the capacity of gesture to improve London, since the metropolis remains just as squalid and depraved as the end of the sequence as it was at the beginning. Amelia's embodiment of sympathy reunites her family with Sergeant Atkinson, but fails to affect her husband or to ameliorate the inhumanity the sentry's cruelty exemplifies.

The trend I have just outlined continues in the scene at the Vauxhall Gardens, where theatricality and self-love again triumph over natural eloquence and sympathy. In this scene two rakish officers, one of them a lord, accost Amelia while she is picnicking with her family, Dr. Harrison, and two other priests. In characteristic form, Booth has disappeared when most needed. Although Booth and his friend Trent return in time to witness Amelia's response to the lord's demand for a kiss but not the request itself, her gestures mark out her terror:

‘Let the devil come as soon as he will,’ cries my lord, ‘d — n me if I have not a kiss.’ Amelia now fell a trembling, and her children perceiving her fright, both hung on her, and began to cry — when Booth and Captain Trent both came up.

Amelia's reflexes barely engage her husband's attention: 'Booth seeing his wife disordered asked eagerly what was the matter'. Under the influence of the town, he has become unresponsive to the signs of his wife's passions, just as his sympathy with her suffering has flagged. Thus, he shows no involuntary response to the gestures that mark her distress. Even after his son tells him that 'those naughty men there have frighted my mamma out of her wits', Booth remains only 'a little moved', and continues to enjoy the gardens, despite Amelia's obvious discomposure. His pursuit of pleasure has dulled his perceptions, making him
inattentive to his wife and family:

Booth now desired his friend Trent to sit down with them, and
proposed to call for a fresh bottle of wine; but Amelia’s spirits
were too much disconcerted to give her any prospect of pleasure
that evening.

Only the excuse of getting her children to bed enables Mrs. Booth to persuade her husband to take her home.

In striking contrast with Booth’s urban temptations, which appeal uniformly to his selfishness, the only authentic testing of his wife’s virtue appeals instead to her sympathy. In a cautionary tale about the dangers of sympathy, the eloquence of Amelia’s body incites her to a moment of adulterous passion for her foster-brother Joe Atkinson, who is also her husband’s former valet. The temptation occurs when Atkinson, who believes he is dying, tells Amelia he loves her and returns the miniature he stole several years earlier. Atkinson’s body gives vent in involuntary signs of grief, disorder, and love: ‘Here he sunk down in his bed, and the tears gushed from his eyes’. Amelia responds by ‘blushing, and looking down on the floor’. When Atkinson begs to kiss her hand, the heroine’s only defence against her unwilling attraction to him is her denial that her gesture of acquiescence is conscious:

‘I don’t know what I am doing — well — there —’ she then
carelessly gave him her hand, which he put gently to his lips, and
then presently let it drop and fell back on the bed (XI, vi, 490).

The narrator then carefully attributes her ‘confusion’ to her involuntary sympathy:
... that heart, which had stood firm as a rock to all the attacks of
title and equipage, of finery and flattery ... was yet a little
softened by the plain, honest, modest, involuntary, delicate,
heroic passion of this poor and humble swain; for whom, in spite
of herself, she felt a momentary tenderness and complaisance, ...
[She] left the house with a confusion on her mind she had never
felt before, and which any chastity that is not hewn out of marble
must feel on so tender and delicate an occasion.

3.9 The role of sympathy in the concluding action

Sympathy, though not Booth's, engages the concluding action of the novel, which
begins as soon as Amelia leaves Joe Atkinson's sick-bed, since Robinson's involuntary
conversion to the heroine's cause is triggered by his glimpsing her at a pawn-broker's shop,
where she has gone to pawn the miniature Joe has returned to her. This accident establishes
conditions for narrative closure by arming Dr. Harrison with the evidence he needs to arrest
Murphy, reverse the effects of Murphy's forging of Mrs. Harris's will, and restore Amelia to
her estate. In the pawn-shop scene, the heroine's body regains the persuasiveness demonstrated
in the Newgate reunion scene discussed earlier. Here, natural eloquence again moves the
passions of a corrupt spectator against his self-interest and his conscious will, and even goes the
additional step of prompting a recovery of his essential 'good nature'.
The effects of Amelia’s presence on Robinson are delayed because poverty, distress, and the shock of seeing her foster-brother have altered her appearance and demeanour: ‘she was scarce able to walk ... for the case of poor Atkinson had much affected her tender heart, and her eyes had overflown with many tears’ (XI, viii, 495). In addition, she has ‘disguised herself so much and pulled her hood so over her face’, that the ‘strong resemblance’ she bears to herself does not strike Robinson until her ‘picture’, the pawned miniature, is placed in his hand (XII, vi, 527). Robinson’s response to Amelia is automatic and corporeal. In the pawn-broker’s account, Robinson, upon learning that Amelia is ‘some poor undone woman, who had pawned all her clothes’, ‘change[s] countenance’, and begs a dram to recover from his faintness (XII, iii, 516). The broker just sees the stimulus and the gestural response, but in Robinson’s more physiological telling of the event he reveals that he experiences his gestures as evidence of his moral guilt, so that knowledge of the body becomes knowledge of the mind:

My guilt immediately flew in my face, and told me I had been accessory to this lady’s undoing. The sudden shock so affected me, that had it not been for a dram which the pawnbroker gave me, I believe I should have sunk on the spot (XII, vi, 528).

The spectacle of Amelia’s disorder excites Robinson’s sympathy, moving him to contrition and tears, just as Clarissa’s weeping incites fits of sensibility in Tomlinson at Hampstead. Amelia’s presence causes Robinson’s sympathy, which revives the activity of his moral sense and finds expression in his involuntary gestures. For Dr. Harrison, the apparent recovery of the cardsharp’s good nature gives grounds for optimism. Harrison, usually a good judge of character, concludes that ‘however Robinson had been corrupted by [Murphy] he had
naturally a good disposition'. In the end, however, Robinson's accustomed depravity overcomes his moral reform. After testifying in aid of Murphy's conviction, Robinson 'return[s] to vicious courses, [takes] a purse on the highway', and hangs at Tyburn as Murphy does. The narrator dourly attributes Robinson's backsliding to force of habit: 'So apt are men, whose manners have been once throughly corrupted, to return ... into the dark paths of vice' (XII, ix, 544).

But for all its instability, Robinson's transformation is nonetheless effected by his involuntary compassion, and thus seems calculated to highlight the purely intellectual complexion of Booth's conversion, which takes place at the same time and in an adjacent cell in the same prison, yet displays none of the features of a movement of sympathy. Shortly before Robinson's confession to Dr. Harrison, Booth, who is back in jail again, tells the priest that he has finally abandoned his doctrine of the predominating passion, according to which 'as men appear [ ] ... to act entirely from their passions, their actions could have neither merit nor demerit' (XII, v, 522). This conversion to a 'doctrine' similar to the narrator's is cerebral, voluntary, and brought about by listening to Dr. Harrison's lectures and reading Barrow's sermons, that is, by virtue of verbal, not physical rhetoric. The conversion confirms the primacy of self-control over sympathy, since the alteration in Booth's 'manners' proceeds from rejecting bad principles and leaving London, and not from a change in character.

 Appropriately, the alteration in Booth's mind and his abandonment of his doctrine of the passions has no footing in the passions. The misfortunes of prison, debt, poverty, and betrayal make him more receptive to reason, but do not induce 'reflection' of the sentimental kind. In contrast with Robinson's conversion, Booth's does not respond to the spectacle of Amelia's
As though Fielding wished to reiterate his anxieties regarding the dangers of sympathy, what follows next is even more disturbing. In the only sequence in this novel in which a London assembly responds to spectacle with sympathy instead of with self-love, Harrison uses Robinson’s confession and the ‘idea’ of Amelia’s innocence to persuade the vulgus mobile to arrest Murphy by hue and cry. The mob’s sympathy secures justice by reuniting Amelia with her inheritance in a spectacle of indignation against the systemic selfishness that Murphy, the bailiffs, and the Judge Thrashers of eighteenth-century London represent. The rabble immediately convenes a popular tribunal:

This action in the street, accompanied with the frequent cry of ‘stop thief’ by the doctor during the chase, presently drew together a large mob, who began, as is usual, to enter immediately upon business, and to make strict enquiry into the matter, in order to proceed to do justice in their summary way (XII, vi, 530).

A vigorous liberty loves neither procedure nor precedence: unfettered fraternity, the political correlative of sympathy, is almost as dangerous as selfishness. The mob’s spokesman ‘preside[s] in this assembly not by soundness of judgement but ‘by a superior strength of body, and of lungs’, voicing decisions in which sympathy predominates over every other consideration. In this scene, common Londoners are moved to identify imaginatively with the suffering of an impoverished family they do not know and will never meet, and to sympathize with Harrison’s efforts to arrest Murphy because they believe that ‘to ruin a poor man is the greatest of sins’ (XII, vi, 531). Spurred by fellow-feeling, the mob yells down Murphy’s ally
the bailiff and unites in a unanimous public sentence: ‘Bring him along, away with him to the Justice’.

At this prompting of communal sympathy, London’s machinery of justice, hitherto the servant of self-love, belatedly springs into action, temporarily restoring the metropolis to a semblance of sociability. In an elaborate civic pageant, the *hoi polloi* prevents Murphy’s escape and follows him at each stage of his committal for trial, first finding a magistrate, next attending at the bailiff’s house as Robinson swears to his evidence, then following the disgraced lawyer to Newgate. Like his hanging at Tyburn for forging Mrs. Harris’s will, Murphy’s progress through London requires the ratification of public scrutiny.

This *dénouement* juxtaposes the heroine’s sympathy and the crowd’s primarily to distinguish one from the other. While the eloquence of Amelia’s body acts indirectly through Robinson and Harrison to secure the sympathy of the populace, writing her passions onto their hearts, the heroine’s sentiments and the mob’s differ in *kind*, since the former is feminine, private, and domestic, whilst the latter is masculine and public. Only after the populace has punished Murphy’s selfishness and the magistrate, Booth, and the other gentlemen have settled down to a celebratory dinner can Amelia’s eloquent body reappear in all its glory, clad ‘in a clean white gown’ redeemed that morning from the pawnshop where Robinson first sighted her. True to the conventions of the sentimental body, Amelia, preoccupied by her ‘fears for her husband’, runs into the dining room, ‘scarce knowing what she did, or whither she was going’, and very nearly faints when she find him in good cheer: ‘so violent a turn was given to her spirits, that she was just able, with the assistance of a glass of water, to support herself’ (XII, vii, 536).
The segregation of the effects of sympathy in these scenes evinces the powerlessness of natural eloquence to create sociability, to engender communities of sentiment in London, or to alter metropolitan manners. In London, sympathy is to self-love as oil is to water: the two are as separate as the heroine’s dress and Murphy’s hanging. In ways that would be unthinkable in Clarissa, the gestures of sympathy coexist in Amelia with those of selfishness but seldom modify the innate self-love of the metropolitan spectator. As I argued in Chapter 2, Clarissa imputes to the body powers of moral self-correction that natural eloquence spontaneously visits on civil society; in contrast, in Amelia the body-machine demonstrates no capacity to calibrate the machine of civil society. Self-love, which deadens most Londoners to the eloquence of gesture, accounts for the failure of the sentimental body to restrain the excesses of the metropolis. Although Fielding acknowledges the eloquence of the sentimental body as an ideal, his final novel expresses so many reservations regarding the efficiency of that language that Amelia practically amounts to a critique of sympathy.

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46 The implication that Clarissa’s natural eloquence could, in principle, awaken a sociability capable of instituting new systems of social regulation evokes Habermas’s argument that expressions of middle-class subjectivity, including expressions of the representative functions of the body, contribute to the creation of an eighteenth-century bourgeois public sphere (Habermas, 1989). While I do not at the moment have time to pursue the connections between Richardson’s whiggery and Habermas’s description of eighteenth-century social theory, I believe they might provide a fruitful line of inquiry.
CHAPTER FOUR

Cecilia:
the ambivalence of sensibility in the metropolis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter argues that *Cecilia*, Frances Burney’s second novel (1782), recommends the regulation of sensibility by means of an internalized theatricality of moral sentiment structurally similar to the operations of the imaginary impartial spectator that Adam Smith postulates in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). In the novel, this theatricality enables the exercise of independence of mind, and proves essential to judgement and to the execution of judgement in corporeal action. Cecilia’s ordeals in London demonstrate the critical importance of regulating sympathy, which, in practice, means asserting independence of mind over the independence of the body which unregulated sensibility usually represents. In achieving independence of moral judgement, the heroine rejects several theories of the body’s relationship with the forms of fashionable society: Monckton’s ‘system’ of conforming to fashionable theatricality, Belfield’s ‘doctrine’ of submitting to sensibility, and Mrs. Delvile’s principle of struggling to comply with the duties of rank, cost what it may, all imply a politics of the body.

To delineate the dangers of unregulated sensibility and fashionable theatricality, Burney places Cecilia in a stylish world where the most threatening form of metropolitan selfishness is middle-class extravagance. The heroine enters London with the false but noble belief that her
displays of unregulated sensibility, expressed in gesture, will suffice to correct the Harrels’ extravagance, thereby reviving their sensibility. In the ‘extravagance plot’ that dominates the first half of the novel (Books I - V), the eloquence of Cecilia’s body fails her miserably in her efforts to alter social order in the metropolis. Fortunately, she learns from her mistakes. In the ‘pride plot’, the basis of the second half of the novel (Books VI - X), Cecilia’s newly-acquired ability to manage her sensibility overcomes the Delviles’ opposition to her marrying Mortimer. In the scenes in which the heroine’s eloquence defeats the Delviles’ pride, it is the theatricality of her moral sentiments that allows her to discipline her sympathy.

To summarize, the eloquence of the heroine’s body arises out of a rigorous theatrical regulation of sensibility that becomes feasible only after she has undergone a process of sophistication in the metropolis. However, the lessons Cecilia learns in London are of no assistance to her while she is still in London: her eloquence proves wholly ineffective in persuading the insensible and fashionable men and women of London to moderate their extravagance. Conversely, after her course of training, Cecilia’s eloquence proves highly effective in persuading Mortimer and Mrs. Delvile, who are both people of feeling, to abandon their prejudices against her. Cecilia’s experiences in London warn the reader against the twin dangers of unregulated sensibility and fashionable metropolitan theatricality, since both of these interfere with independence of mind.

This scheme of argument raises questions that have exercised criticism of Burney’s fiction since the rehabilitation of her literary reputation began in the late 1980's, namely, whether and how Burney’s heroines comply with the demands of sensibility and fashionable society, and whether these demands conflict or not. The view of Burney as a conflicted
conservative adversary of sentimentalism and the sentimental novel, widespread among her critics, necessarily raises the question whether the theatricality that rules the fashionable late-eighteenth-century world her heroines inhabit also controls the display of sensibility in that society. *The Sign of Angelica* affords a typical instance: Janet Todd observes in Burney, coupled with an ostensible rejection of sentiment, an admiration for the ‘ability to understand and conform to social codes’, as well as an expectation that young women should ‘have precisely the qualities that experience could give, but to have them spontaneously’ *as though* they sprang from exquisite feeling (1989: 273, 280). Remarks of this nature, common in the scholarship, may reflect the influence of Joyce Hemlow’s article, ‘Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books’, which examines the novelist’s absorption of a conduct literature that recommends the value of a body that externalizes sensibility (1950). Certainly, most subsequent criticism agrees that a rigorous command of the body is imperative to survival and success in fashionable society. For Terry Castle, for example, the rituals of the masquerade emblematize the power of the fashionable theatricality Cecilia learns to obey following her entrance into the world (1986).

Owing to the foundations of fashionable theatricality in practices of polite consumption variously known as ‘luxury’, ‘extravagance’, or ‘corruption’, it is not unusual to argue that these interfere with the heroine’s pursuit of sympathy and independence in Burney’s novels. Thus, Margaret Anne Doody sees ‘class and money’ as the ‘ruling powers’ that thwart Cecilia’s efforts to confront ‘the problem of when and how she should act for herself’ in London (1988: 113, 119). Similarly, Julia Epstein situates Burney’s second novel as an economic critique of the situation of the polite woman, studying the author’s ‘focus on money as a medium of..."

In contrast with Doody and Epstein, two recent historicized chapter-length studies of Burney, in Deirdre Lynch’s *The Economy of Character* (1998) and Miranda Burgess’s *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order* (2000), emphasize the heroine’s body as machine-like, and as an object of circulation in a late-eighteenth-century cultural economy. Burgess’s study, more carefully historicized than Lynch’s, conflates sensibility with fashionable theatricality, framing Burney’s antisentimentalism as a critique of political economy’s mobilization of sentiment to justify commerce. According to Burgess, Burney’s fiction condemns the premise of the sentimental novel and political economy that the machines of the body and of civil society adequately self-regulate by means of the principle of sympathy. Moreover, the deficiency of the novel of sensibility lies in equating the eloquence of the body with value, and in failing to anticipate the problem of theatricality. In Burney’s fiction, ‘sentiment’ (or what I have called ‘natural eloquence’) ‘has little practical force and only a theoretical, even fictive relation to social order’.

Lynch, who also studies the ambivalence of the polite female body as subject and object, postulates that *Camilla* (1797) converts fashionable theatricality into a drama of self-objectification in which the heroine becomes a subject by vetoing the self-image offered to her. In this chapter, I adopt Lynch’s argument that Burney’s heroines develop psychological sophistication by means of a division of the self into spectator and character that occurs when they learn to juxtapose ‘the view from the inside and the view from the outside’. At the same time, I attempt to extend Lynch’s ideas about theatricality in Burney’s fiction by grounding them in a discussion of eighteenth-century British theories of judgement.
This chapter follows the trend of these studies in relying on eighteenth-century concepts of sensibility and theatricality to historicize Burney’s representation of the eloquence of the body, but differs in approach, subject-matter, and to some degree in its substantive conclusions. The approach derives from the work of David Marshall and Jay Fliegelman, and from the eighteenth-century theories of natural eloquence discussed in earlier chapters. This approach is dictated by the internal conflicts of the primary text: at one and the same time, Burney calls sensibility into question in *Cecilia*, yet writes about its dangers as though only the language of sentiment suffices to externalize her character’s passions. Despite her suspicion of sensibility, Burney remains, to quote Janet Todd, ‘inevitably (and strangely) compromised by the conventions and strategies of sentiment’ (1989: 273).

My purpose, then, is two-fold. First, I wish to follow Lynch’s analysis of Burney by locating the conservative critique of sensibility set out in *Cecilia* not as outright rejection, but as part of a problematizing of sympathy that was widespread in eighteenth-century letters. Second, I would like to adopt David Marshall’s approach to the eighteenth-century problematization of sympathy, as expressed in *The Figure of the Theatre* (1986) and *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy* (1988), by considering the regulation of sensibility in *Cecilia* with specific reference to Adam Smith’s theory of sentiment. To paraphrase Marshall’s assessment of the attitude that Smith, Rousseau, and Diderot take to the matter, Burney invests in the idea of sympathy as a ‘transport’ that ‘would transcend the distance and difference between people’ and allow ‘an exchange between parts, characters and persons’. At the same time, Burney recognizes that theatricality (‘the theatrical conditions in which people face each other as spectators and spectacles’) both causes and responds to the problem of sympathy.
Similarly, for Fliegelman the sympathy of the body is potentially the most theatrical of eighteenth-century social phenomena. *Declaring Independence* (1993) usefully recasts the problem of the theatricality of sympathy in eighteenth-century Anglo-American theories of eloquence into a set of rhetorical concerns that converge in the ambivalence of the body as a machine that both effects and vitiates self-determination. In Fliegelman’s view, this ambivalence inheres in natural eloquence. Since the body is a mechanism whose passions represent springs and levers that may be controlled and manipulated, some of the time the apparatus enhances the self’s independence, enlisting the support of others by projecting the self’s emotional states (Fliegelman, 142). At other times, the same armature simply reduces the self to involuntary subjection.

*Cecilia* criticizes sensibility more charitably than much of the scholarship cited earlier suggests, choosing instead to speak to the same questions Fliegelman raises, namely those of whether, and, if so, under what circumstances, sensibility secures independence. Unlike Hemlow, Todd, Lynch, and Burgess, whose studies focus mainly on *Camilla* (1797), which takes a harder stance against sensibility, this chapter is devoted exclusively to *Cecilia*, in which sensibility is an amiable quality, though not always an admirable one: the most likeable characters demonstrate quick and lively feelings, whereas villains and unpleasant people do not. I would, therefore, differ from Burgess’s assessment to suggest that in this particular novel, sensibility, though far from universal, is intrinsic in those who have it.

In *Cecilia* sensibility is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the exercise of judgement. A modicum of sensibility is essential to moral goodness, but something more is needed, since a powerful and uncontrolled sensibility, such as Cecilia displays in the first half
of the novel, may lead the agent into moral error and contribute to the corruption of those who surround her. Sensibility by itself cannot be entrusted with the proper regulation of the corporeal machine or the machine of civil society, and must be regulated by something else. *Cecilia* represents the painful and protracted process by which the heroine learns to regulate her sensibility by obeying 'reason', but almost invariably, it is bodily self-control, the kind an actor exercises, that executes the commands of reason and ensures virtuous action. In *Cecilia*, the heroine's corporeal machine makes the transition from passive instrumentality in the first half of the novel to persuasive agency in the second half by internalizing a theatricality that allows her to protect her judgement and action from her overactive sensibility. Theatricality is as essential to moral judgement and action as a certain basic level of sensibility. Whereas sympathetic passion is unequivocally on the side of virtue in *Clarissa*, in *Cecilia* it can cause grievous failures of judgement and therefore requires correction.

Finally, since natural eloquence is physiological in *Cecilia*, as it is in all the fictions studied in this dissertation, and since the reader may have forgotten some of the detail presented in Chapter 1, a brief recapitulation of the terms sensibility and sympathy is in order. Sensibility in *Cecilia* constitutes an acuity of nervous responsiveness, distributed evenly throughout the tissues of the subject's body; a physiological receptivity to sensation that ensures that external stimuli easily and involuntarily excite the subject's sympathy, independent of the operations of reason, including those that guide assessments of prudent self-interest. Assessments of the relative weakness or strength of a subject's sensibility measure the speed and efficiency with which her corporeal machine copies marks of external stimuli onto itself.
Sensibility consists in the organism’s capacity to translate the subject’s sensory ‘impressions’ of external events, including ‘impressions’ of other people’s gestures and bodily states, back into vicarious versions of the passions those gestures represent, and thence into physical actions that are marked onto the subject’s body and respond in some way to the external passion that inspired them. But in any such transaction, the sentimental subject moves from a passive receptivity to the agency of eloquence only if the spectator observing her body has some sensibility. In the novels considered in Chapters 2 and 3, the heroines’ eloquence acts on Belford in *Clarissa* and on Mrs. Bennet in *Amelia* because, despite the corruptions of the metropolis, the two characters respectively retain sensibility and lively natural sympathy. *Cecilia* recalls *Clarissa* in attributing the passiveness and the agency of the heroine’s body to sensibility, but *Amelia* in suggesting London deprives that body of persuasiveness. As long as she stays in London, her sensibility traps her in instrumentality, so that she may be acted upon, but may not act. Only when she leaves London and confronts Mrs. Delvile, another woman of sensibility, does her natural eloquence demonstrate real agency.

4.2 The theatricality of sympathy in Adam Smith

By 1780, when Frances Burney began to compose *Cecilia*, a significant portion of polite British opinion had already rejected uncritical admiration for sympathy and sensibility, and had come to see them as morally ambiguous, instead of as unequivocally good (Todd, 1986: 141). Hence, the conflicted antisentimentalism of Burney’s second novel forms part of a large body of writing that reevaluates sympathy. Like *Amelia*, *Cecilia* presents a conservative critique of
sympathetic passion, but unlike Fielding's book, Burney's has the benefit of years of considered
debate on the independence of body from mind known as sensibility, carried out in fiction and
philosophy, and in manuals and treatises on conduct and rhetoric. Indeed, it is well-
documented and well-recognized that Burney's treatment of sensibility evinces her reading
knowledge of popular women's conduct literature, much of it written either by clergymen, such
as James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) or by doctors, such as Dr. John Gregory's
*A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774). But while I do not dispute this influence, I would
like to suggest the extent to which elocutionary treatises and the new rhetoric of the second half
of the eighteenth century affect the representation of sensibility in *Cecilia*, both directly and
through the medium of conduct literature. Each of these bodies of writing influences the other,
and each is informed by Scottish sentimental moral philosophy. Dr. Gregory, for example,
taught moral and natural philosophy at King's College, Aberdeen from 1746 to 1749, belonged
to the Aberdeen Philosophical Society, and later taught medicine at Edinburgh University,
where Adam Smith lectured. Moreover, despite their differing audiences, rhetoricians and
conduct writers both intend to inculcate civility. On one hand, the purpose of much
elocutionary writing is to provide a means by which the middling sort might learn the
pronunciation of the town (Howell, 1971: 240). On the other hand, and precisely because they
draw on the same source materials, women's conduct books also function as simplified rhetoric
manuals. In Sermon VII ('On Female Virtue, with Intellectual Accomplishments'), for
instance, James Fordyce ascribes the talent many women show in the art of reading 'to that fine

47 Hemlow (1950), Gina Campbell (1990), and, in lesser degree, Epstein (1989) and
Burgess (2000) discuss the influence of Burney's knowledge of conduct literature.
feeling of nature and of sentiment, which may be supposed to result from the delicacy of their organs’ (1767: I, 290 - 91).

Like rhetorical treatises, such as Adam Smith’s *Lectures on Rhetoric* (1762 - 63), the conduct manuals Burney read characterize sensibility as a problem that requires the solution of theatricality: a learned discipline of the body that shapes and directs natural sympathy. Through the intermediary of conduct writers, Burney absorbed enough theoretical knowledge of why contemporary moralists regarded sympathy as problematic to formulate the critique of sensibility she presents in *Cecilia*. For the reasons I have just outlined, that critique bears a generic resemblance to Adam Smith’s. Although the positions of the two texts are far from identical, *Cecilia* is broadly analogous to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in adhering to the beliefs: that the body’s persuasiveness is inherently theatrical; that sympathy gains efficacy only when it is subjected to self-command; that the essence of performance lies in the regulation of sensibility; that the body speaks through the containment of sensibility; and, that this internalized theatricality of moral sentiment may usefully direct moral judgement. I therefore now turn to Smith’s conception of the eloquence of the body and his reformulation of sympathy as a problem that demands the solution of theatricality.

As Smith’s editor, J. C. Bryce explains, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *Lectures on Rhetoric* (1762 - 63) comprise two halves of a unified system of natural persuasion, the central concern of which is not just the communication of ideas, facts, and words, but the exchange of sentiments, affections, and passions. Sympathy is the rhetorical instrument that enables the speaker’s transmission and the audience’s reception of passion and sentiment. Just as the agent submits to the judgements of an impartial spectator, whom he must imagine, an
eloquent speaker projects himself into his listener's position, involves himself sympathetically in how the listener might feel, and matches the expression of his passion to the pitch best suited to listener's reception thereof (Bryce, 1983: 18 - 19). Language and delivery have force in the degree that the speaker 'hits off' 'the passion or affection he is possessed of and intends, by sympathy, to communicate to his hearer' (emphasis in original).

Sincere, or apparently sincere, passion, clothed in a 'plain style' of language is far more persuasive than the 'ornamental parts of the Old Eloquence' (Smith, 1983: 25 - 26, 196). Still, Smith tolerates and even urges theatricality in the mobilization of sentiment. In Lecture 11 he postulates that the result of the rules he lays down is

that the perfection of style consists in expressing in the most concise, proper, and precise manner the thought of the author, and that in the manner which best conveys the sentiment, passion, or affection with which it affects — or he pretends it does affect — him, and which he designs to communicate to his reader (1983: 55).

These rules extend to all discourse. The 'best English prose writers' act 'agreeably to that rule which is equally applicable to conversation and behaviour, as to writing'. Just as in prose composition, what 'makes a man agreeable company' is

when his sentiments appear to be agreeably expressed, when the passion or affection is properly conveyed, and when their thoughts are so agreeable and natural that we find ourselves inclined to give our assent to them ...
Smith’s new eloquence sets down rules for performance. ‘A wise man ... in conversation and behaviour, will not affect a character that is unnatural to him’, but will always ‘regulate his natural temper,’ (an act that will clearly involve keeping sensibility in check) ‘restrain it within just bounds, and lop all exuberances, and bring it to that pitch which will be agreeable to those about him’ (Smith, 1983: 51; also see 191 - 92). Smith draws little distinction between propriety of expression and propriety of behaviour. His insistence in the Lectures on regulating ‘natural temper’ as a means of winning the assent of the audience merely revisits the performative ethic of The Theory of Moral Sentiments, according to which the duty of a man facing public execution is to ‘keep time’ with his spectators’ ‘indifference and insensibility’. While the task of a public speaker is less fearsome, the reward for his self-denial is the same:

Approbation, mixed and animated by wonder and surprise,

constitutes the sentiment which is properly called admiration, of which applause is the natural expression ... (TMS, 31; cf., 20).

Although The Theory of Moral Sentiments argues that the desire for sympathy produces the theatricality of civil society, Smith responds to theatricality by placing that desire at the service of stoicism. This is apparent in the duties that devolve upon the actor. The Theory postulates that to act with ‘propriety’, the agent must dedicate himself to performing the role of the ‘just man’ to the approbation of an imaginary ‘impartial spectator’, and ignore the judgements of his actual spectators. The agent’s duties outstrip the observer’s. Since there is less natural obligation to extend sympathy than there is to seek it, the actor’s responsibility to earn sympathy exceeds that of the spectator to grant it: it is natural that the spectator should
grant sympathy to the actor, but not in sufficient quality or amount. The deficit derives from the inadequacy of the imagination to 'copy' impressions of other people's passions vividly. When we see 'our brother' in pain,

[by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we
conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it
were into his body, and become in some measure the same person
with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even
feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether
unlike them (9, emphasis supplied).

While men 'never conceive, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the [actor]', the difference is negotiable. Although the correspondence of the actor's passion and its vicarious reverberation in the spectator may suffice for the two to meet in 'concords', but not in 'unisons', 'this is all that is wanted or required'. 'Concords' occur when spectator and actor simultaneously project themselves in imagination into the other's position, consider the other's perspective, and adjust the intensity and expression of their passions to the needs of the situation: the spectators raise their passions, while the actor lowers his 'to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him' (21 - 22).

Sympathy accustoms the spectator to assume the actor's circumstances, and the actor to assume the spectators', yet teaches 'the virtues of sensibility' to the spectator, and those of 'self-command' to the actor: the former, also known as the 'amiable virtues' of condescension, humanity, and compassion spring from the spectator's efforts to enter into the actor's sentiments; the latter, denoted the 'respectable virtues' of self-denial, self-government, and self-
command derive from the actor’s efforts ‘to bring his emotions down to what the spectator can
go along with’ (23). Clearly, ‘the virtues of self-command’ dominate over those of sensibility
in ensuring moral action. The actor best fitted to harness sympathy to judgement is ‘the man of
real constancy and firmness who has been bred in the great school of self-command’, and who
‘has been in the constant practice’ of ‘modelling ... not only his outward conduct and behaviour,
but ... even his inward sentiments and feelings’ according to those of the man within the breast
(146 - 47).

Just as the breeding of the just man in the ‘constant practice’ of modelling his conduct
and feelings to conform with ‘the sentiments of the impartial spectator’ serves to insulate his
moral discernment from self-interest and from the corruption of worldly opinion, the
‘refinement’ Cecilia imbibes in the metropolis, especially from her association with Mrs.
Delvile, gradually schools her in the management of her sympathy. In Books VI through X, the
heroine demonstrates that she has learned to imagine herself as a character seen from the
perspective of an external spectator, to maintain independence of mind by complying with the
‘exhortations of [her] inward monitor’ and, up to a point, to exercise the virtues of self-
command (VII, vii, 585).49

49 All references to the primary text cite the Oxford World’s Classic edition (eds.,
Sabor and Doody, 1988). Consistent with the practice followed in Chapter 3, I cite book and
chapter numbers in deference to readers who possess other editions.
In *Cecilia*, the death of the heroine’s uncle, ‘the Dean’, compels her to leave the country and move into London, where she is to live until she reaches the age of twenty-one and inherits her estate. Pending Cecilia’s majority, the Dean’s will imprudently divides the management of her property and person among three ‘trustees’ or ‘guardians’ who dislike and distrust each other and who prove unable to make joint decisions. The guardians are a nobleman, Mr. Delvile, a City merchant, Mr. Briggs, and a middle-class man of pleasure named Mr. Harrel, who is married to Cecilia’s girlhood friend. The Dean’s will also requires the heroine to live with one of her guardians until she inherits. Since Mr. Harrel is the only one of the three whose household is even tolerable, these testamentary arrangements practically require Cecilia to share quarters with the most wicked of her guardians: bonds of law and property tie the heroine to a man she cannot abide.

This is not to say that any of the guardians is fit to advise Cecilia in matters that require sound judgement. The heroine’s guardianship forces her to look to her own moral resources. In practice, these resources often prove to be corporeal. Her initial adjustment to living in London is, therefore, a rocky one. Cecilia frequently finds that her wealth and her beauty confine her and prevent her from negotiating effectively for freedom. A scene from the Harrels’ London masquerade party suggests the role this novel assigns to Cecilia’s body in the conduct of these exchanges. Though Mr. Belfield, disguised as Don Quixote, has cornered Cecilia, rather than she him, he facetiously claims the role of the weaker party: ‘graciously permit the most pitiful of your servitors ... to salute the fair boards which sustain your corporeal
Belfield’s gallantry adverts to the ambivalence of Cecilia’s body: while this novel represents the heroine’s organism as an instrument of persuasion, the language of her body equivocates, often compelling the heroine instead of her audience. The novel illustrates both cases. On one hand, fashionable metropolitan society subjects the heroine’s body to unfair external compulsion: in the ‘London’ Books (I - V), Cecilia’s unregulated sensibility weakens her to Mr. Harrel’s rhetoric, converts her into his instrument, and allows him to steal most of her estate in his efforts to stave off bankruptcy. On the other hand, in Books VI through X, which move between town and country, the heroine’s control of her sensibility engages a process of persuasion that overcomes the obstacles to her marrying Delville. Sensibility both frustrates and advances the independence which, as Margaret Anne Doody notes, ‘is everywhere a theme’ in this novel (Sabor and Doody, 1988: xxxvi). The ambivalence of feeling, its role in advancing and undermining individual autonomy is at issue from the first chapter of the novel, which makes the heroine’s body a medium of communication in parallel with her spoken language: ‘her complexion varied with every emotion of her soul, and her eyes, the heralds of her speech, now beamed with understanding and now glistened with sensibility’ (I, i, 6).

Cecilia’s physical impressionability raises moral dilemmas. The legibility of her body, its responsiveness to ‘the region within’, as Mr. Albany puts it, bespeaks susceptibility to impression from without, and, therefore, receptiveness to being re-educated by London (IV, vi, 292). In coming to London, the heroine embarks on a process of sophistication that entails the gaining of ‘a knowledge of fashionable manners and of characters of the times’ (I, ii, 8). This
'refinement' of Cecilia’s ‘ideas’ gradually ‘render[s] her fastidious’. Looking back on her country girlhood after Mrs. Charleton’s death, the heroine acknowledges that she had befriended the kind but foolish old lady ‘before discrimination had made her difficult’ (VIII, x, 712 - 13). But at the same time that she learns elegance, Cecilia gradually secures independence of judgement. For example, despite Mr. Monckton’s efforts to undermine her liberty, Cecilia ‘preserve[s] uncontrolled the right of acting for herself’ (IX, ii, 730).

However, nowhere is Cecilia’s independence of judgement more severely tested than in addressing the problem of how to conduct her relations with her lover, Mortimer Delvile. Initially, Cecilia Beverley cannot wed the young nobleman because her uncle’s will stipulates that she cannot retain her estate (‘3000 l. per annum’) and marry unless her husband gives up his surname and takes hers in its stead (I, i, 5 - 6). The effect of the will’s ‘name clause’ is that Mortimer’s mother, who makes herself a guardian of the family name and aristocratic tradition, cannot consent to the match, even though she can overcome her objections to Cecilia’s relatively inferior social rank. Cecilia’s great love and admiration for Mrs. Delvile, who becomes her closest friend in London, further complicate the decisions the heroine has to make.

However, the narrator gives the reader to understand that although Cecilia considers Mrs. Delvile’s feelings in giving up Mortimer, the heroine exercises her own judgement in making up her mind. In breaking off the engagement, Cecilia acts in accordance with her own sense of right, as settled by her ‘inward monitor’ (VII, vii, 585) and obeys Mrs. Delvile only

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50 Cecilia’s inheritance contains two components, a lump sum of £10,000 from her parents and an annual income of £3,000 from her uncle. In Burney’s estimation it seems to be the second of these that comprises the heroine’s ‘estate’. Please see fn 54 at page 184.
after determining the justice of doing so. But despite her decision to obey Mrs. Delvile, Cecilia’s eloquence consists in regulating sensibility, rather than in suppressing it completely. Decide what she may, Cecilia cannot change her feelings. In the ‘Contest’ scene, sensibility, the independence of body that the heroine displays in acting contrary to duty, propriety, and reason, is the source of her agency, since in the end it is sensibility that overcomes Mrs. Delvile’s opposition.

4.4 The politics of the body

The independence of body Cecilia denotes as sensibility often interferes with the independence of mind in which resides the capacity of character to formulate, withhold, or compel assent. Questions of the validity of assent, and of the degree to which sensibility or fashionable theatricality render assent meaningless, preoccupy the narrative, surfacing in the perspectives of Monckton, Belfield, and Mrs. Delvile. The most strident argument, a debate between radical and conservative ‘tempers’, as Doody calls them, (1988: 113) lies between Monckton’s fierce commitment to selfish self-discipline and Belfield’s equally fiery devotion to sensibility. Even more than Lovelace and Colonel James, the antagonists of Clarissa and Amelia, Monckton elevates fashionable theatricality into a stoic discipline of the body. Monckton’s circumstances attest the prudence of his policy. Born ‘the younger son of a noble family’, he has become ‘the richest and most powerful man in [his] neighbourhood’ by the expedient of marrying a ‘rich dowager’ forty years his senior (I, i, 7).
Monckton’s rival Belfield is also repairing his fortunes, but in a very different way. Although he is the son of a City tradesman, he has been educated above his station and is trying to insinuate himself into the fashionable society of the town by assuming the character and privileges of a gentleman, including the right to wear a sword. Having spent most of his inheritance, he has nothing left to assert but the sincerity of his sentiments. He also needs to consolidate his position, if possible by marrying an heiress. This places Belfield in romantic and political competition with Monckton, who also has designs on Cecilia. As the novel’s action opens, Monckton’s objective is to wait out the death of his elderly wife and to marry Cecilia, as much for her wealth as her beauty. Since Monckton, who is at least in his mid-thirties, has known the heroine as a friend for her entire life, and counsels her on all worldly matters, he starts from a strong position. To succeed he need only increase his influence over Cecilia and fight off other contenders, as he attempts to do, literally, in the masquerade scene, where he appears disguised as Satan: Monckton is the kind of conservative that Burney, also a conservative, despises.

The sparring between the two men pits Monckton’s ‘conformity system’, which codifies fashionable theatricality, against Belfield’s ‘doctrine of a lively imagination’ (I, ii, 13). Although Cecilia never mentions Mandeville by name, Monckton’s system adopts the social psychology of The Fable of the Bees, since it deduces its principle of approbation from self-love,51 and requires stoic restraint of feelings inconsistent with self-interest. For both Monckton and Mandeville, the body must comply, without question, with the gestural norms of fashionable society. In opposition to Monckton’s Mandevillian self-love, Belfield advances a

51 See Smith’s classification of systems of moral philosophy (TMS, VII, iii, 315ff).
system of natural eloquence that rejects convention and looks instead to sensibility as a 
guarantor of sociability. The polemical literature inspired by the American War of 
Independence, in its seventh year when *Cecilia* went to press in 1782, may supply the origins of 
Belfield’s politics of sentiment. In his diatribes against Monckton’s ‘conformity system’, 
Belfield invokes the same universal sensibility that Jay Fliegelman postulates Thomas Paine 
intended by the concept trumpeted in the title of his pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776) (1993: 
45).

Like Paine, Belfield locates the foundations of universal independence in a body that *in 
principle* should speak for itself. Carried to their logical extreme, Belfield’s views make the 
uncompelled body the sole basis of political legitimacy. This, of course, is little less than 
sedition to Monckton, to whom Belfield’s system of assent seems delusional and unlikely to 
survive the test of experience:

> The closet reasoner ... when he mixes with the world ... soon 
> finds the necessity of accommodating himself to such customs as 
> are already received, and of pursuing quietly the track that is 
> already marked out (I, ii, 14).

Dependence, the mark of modernity, enforces assent to convention, compelling the body to 
perform the gestures fashionable theatricality demands. In the ‘regular government’ of a 
civilized country,

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52 In practice, neither man is faithful to his stated profession. Monckton, despite his 
control of stage-craft, eventually destroys himself by overindulging his passion for artifice, 
(II, iii, 126; X, x, 941) and Belfield is one of the most ‘volatile’, affected, and theatrical 
figures in the novel, adopting and discarding one ‘character’ after another.
... one part of the community must inevitably hang upon another, and ‘tis a farce to call either independent, when to break the chain by which they are linked would prove destructive to both (IX, iii, 734).

Social bonds consist not in sympathy or sensibility, but in the self-interest that dictates regard for the forms of politeness:

... do we not bow to the scoundrel as low as to the man of honour? are we not by mere forms kept standing when tired? made give place to those we despise? and smiles to those we hate? or if we refuse these attentions, are we not regarded as savages, and shut out of society (IX, iii, 735)?

Monckton’s description of the effects of the ‘conformity system’ evokes the ambivalence of a corporeal machine that may militate either for or against independence. Natural eloquence implies that the body may be shaped and educated by the forces of society as easily as it may direct its owner towards independence, and Belfield certainly admits this: the fall and the redemption of civil society both proceed from the body. Belfield concedes that as a consequence of the embedding of the body in the web of dependence that enamours Monckton, man is brought up ‘as a mere ductile machine of human formation’ (I, ii, 15).

Belfield, however, insists that the feelings and nervous sensations of the body-machine also raise entitlements that defeat the claims of convention:

53 Again, Monckton’s views on the passionate basis of social organization follow Mandeville’s: Smith writes that according to Hobbes and Mandeville, ‘man is driven to take refuge in society, not by any natural love which he bears to his own kind, but because without the assistance of others he is incapable of subsisting with ease or safety’ (TMS, 315).
Man treated as an automaton ... and considered merely with
respect to his bodily operations, may indeed be called dependent
... but considered in a nobler sense he deserves not the degrading
epithet; speak of him then, as a being of feeling and
understanding, with pride to alarm, with nerves to tremble, with
honour to satisfy, and with a soul to be immortal! — as such,
may he not claim the freedom of his own thoughts? may not that
claim be extended to the liberty of speaking, and the power of
being governed by them? and when thoughts, words, and actions
are exempt from control, will you brand him with dependency
merely because the grazier feeds his meat, and the baker kneads
his bread (IX, iii, 734 - 35)?

As Brissenden points out in glossing the first paragraphs of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, published
the same year as *Cecilia*, the assertion of universal sensibility as evidence of one’s right to the
enjoyment of freedom and individuality would, in 1782, have carried clear revolutionary
implications (1974: 52). Consistent with his ‘doctrine’, Belfield urges that relying on
sensibility as the principle of judgement and action would institute natural eloquence, restore
social transparency, and secure the independence and gestural authenticity of all men:

> I would have *all* men ...whether philosophers or idiots, act for
themselves. Every one would then appear what he is ... and then,
and then only, should we cease to be surfeited with that eternal
sameness of manner and appearance which at present runs

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through all ranks of men (I, ii, 16).

Monckton, then, argues that the body's dependence on civil society ratifies assent to convention, and Belfield, the opposite: independence of body secures independence of mind. Unfortunately, neither of these stances is much use to a woman of sensibility. Owing to her quick and lively feelings and her fear of 'singularity', Cecilia can adopt neither Monckton's egoism nor Belfield's individualism. In contrast with these positions, Mrs. Delvile's ethos of patrician self-command maintains that assent to convention is valid when it is conscious and voluntary and proceeds from control of sensibility. Mrs. Delvile's dominant concerns are duty, propriety, and appearances. In her strongly-held view, nothing is more 'odious' in a woman than 'a daring defiance of the world and its opinions' (VI, viii, 498). However, sensibility has often opposed Mrs. Delvile's assent to the duties of rank:

Ardent in her disposition, and naturally violent in her passions, her feelings were extremely acute, and to curb them by reason and principle had been the chief and hard study of her life. The effort had calmed, though it had not made her happy (VI, iii, 461).

Hence, in appealing to Cecilia's sense of honour to prevent her from marrying Mortimer, Mrs. Delvile is asking the heroine to exercise the same self-command that she herself had once demonstrated in agreeing to marry Compton Delvile against her will. In Mrs. Delvile's view, a proud and voluntary submission to the forms of society ennobles a woman even when she has no independence.
But my point is that the action of the novel seems to suggest the immorality, the danger, or the ineffectiveness of the systems espoused, respectively, by Monckton, Belfield, or Mrs. Delvile. The heroine is constitutionally incapable of accepting Monckton’s advice, and in the extravagance plot learns that involuntary reliance on the eloquence of her body in her dealings with the Harrels is financially ruinous. Even Mrs. Delvile’s ethos of self-command is not effective, since what saves Cecilia in the second half of the novel is not her obedience but the regulation of sensibility in combination with a theatricality of moral sentiment. Cecilia exercises independence of judgement by learning to imagine how her actions would look from someone else’s point of view: her persuasiveness in the pride plot depends on the corporeal self-command with which she attempts to master her sensibility. Sensibility wins the day precisely by being regulated. To become eloquent in any effective sense of the word, so as to form the bonds on which agency depends, the body must submit to a theatre-like discipline.

4.5 How sensibility (the independence of the body) is lost

The gestures of an honest body occasionally declare its independence from the mind. In Cecilia, a body’s ‘animation’ promises an impressionable and sincere character as effectually as an open face. Because the owner of an ‘animated’ body cannot completely control its involuntary actions, he or she can be trusted implicitly. (By the same token, ‘animation’, the quality of almost every man and woman of feeling in Burney’s second novel, is conspicuously absent from the comportment of most of the characters Cecilia encounters in London.) At the height of an argument with the heroine and Mortimer, Mrs. Delvile’s eyes ‘sparkle[ ] with the
animation of reviving hope', Mr. Belfield's face is 'all animation' as he makes his first appearance in the text, and, of course, the younger Delvile 'when particularly animated', can tear confessions from the heroine by his 'impetuous urgency'. Invariably, the 'animation' of the sentimental body is involuntary, not feigned. Thus, early in the couple's courtship, Delvile struggles to maintain a cold and distant manner in his dealings with Cecilia, but, when 'betrayed into acting from nature and inclination ... [is] certain to discover a regard the most animated and flattering' (VIII, vi, 675; I, ii, 11; IV, iv, 555; VI, v, 476).

The liveliness of gesture, speech, and facial expression in which the animation of the sentimental body consists is seated in sensibility, both in the general sense of the awareness that attends a being in possession of its faculties, and in the narrower sense of the acuity of response that distinguishes the man or woman of sentiment: common and acute sensibility are connected since the general level of nervous reflex goes numb when the acute level does, and, of course, vice versa. To illustrate, during Cecilia's private wedding in London, the 'calmness of stifled hope' takes the place of 'quick sensations and alarm', so that the heroine listens to the ceremony 'rather mechanically than with consciousness'. Later, when Cecilia 'wholly recover[s] her senses from the stupor which had dulled them', Delvile is happy to see his bride restored to her 'sensibility' and 'to the animation natural to her character' (IX, xi, 831 - 32).

Just as sensibility accounts for the animation of the sentimental body, insensibility explains the need of characters in whom feeling is dead to find artificial and often external means of actuating their bodies. This difficulty afflicts most of the men and women of fashion Cecilia encounters in London, and accounts for the dependence of the central urban figures on levity, extravagance, and other forms of affectation to enable them to support 'character'.
Gosport, the London satirist whom the heroine meets at her first assembly, explains the matter thus:

Dull and heavy characters, incapable of animating from wit or reason, because unable to keep pace with them, and void of all internal sources of entertainment, require the stimulation of show, glare, noise and bustle to interest or awaken them. ... let there but be action, and they are content ... (I, v, 43)

The metropolitan drive most squarely opposed to animation, sensibility and natural eloquence is extravagance. While self-love rules London as completely in *Cecilia* as it does in *Amelia*, Burney diversifies metropolitan selfishness into three subsidiary forms, classifying each as the characteristic passion of a rank and a London neighbourhood. The novelist sustains this classification of passion by the conceit of Cecilia’s three-man guardianship, which yokes together middle-class Mr. Harrel, of Portman Square, Mr. Delvile of St. James’s Square, a peer-in-waiting, and Mr. Briggs, a ‘man of business’ and citizen of London. The dominant loves of these men are, respectively, pleasure, lineage, and money. Most of the action and intrigue spring from the heroine’s efforts to apply sympathy to the correction of the selfish passions to which the first two objects correspond, namely, Harrel’s extravagance (Books I - V), and Devile’s pride (Books VI - X).

Owing to the complexion of *Cecilia* as a novel of manners set in fashionable London society, avarice, the ruling passion of Mr. Briggs, the third guardian, is too vulgar to achieve much profile, except as a foil to the more elegant failing of extravagance. Extravagance and avarice, the defining passions of the town and the City, differ sharply in the behaviour they
inspire. As Smith explains in *Wealth of Nations*, the effects of these two passions oppose one another. On one hand, extravagance, or ‘profusion, the principle which prompts to expence, is the passion for present enjoyment’. In contrast, avarice, closely associated in *Cecilia* and *Wealth of Nations* with parsimony, is ‘the principle which prompts to save’ (*WN*, II, iii, 203). Avarice, as Burney and Smith use the word, has more to do with not spending than with gaining more property, perhaps because the former usually leads to the latter.

The contrast between Harrel and Briggs affords an object lesson for the heroine on the opposing errors of extravagance and avarice. From Briggs, Cecilia learns ‘that though luxury was more baneful in its consequences’, that is, because extravagance leads to ruin, whereas its opposite does not, ‘it was less disgustful in its progress than avarice’ (II, i, 96). However, the novel singles out extravagance, the characteristic passion of the fashionable middle classes, as the preeminent social evil of the metropolis. In contrast, Briggs’s avarice and Delvile’s arrogance are not morally wrong, but merely offensive to *aesthetic* judgement. Hence, the heroine concludes that although the houses of the merchant and the nobleman are free from the ‘vices’ of ‘dissipation’ and ‘unfeeling extravagance’ that she sees every day at Mr. Harrel’s residence, ‘vulgarity seemed leagued with avarice to drive her from the mansion of Mr. Briggs, and haughtiness with ostentation to exclude her from that of Mr. Delvile’ (II, ii, 100).

In Burney’s view, the middle classes of the town, and not great and powerful families such as the Delviles, are the true arbiters of fashion. Mr. Devile’s mansion in St. James’s Square is, in fact, ‘fitted up not with modern taste, but with the magnificence of former times’ (I, ii, 97). Unfortunately, according to the standards of stylishness that the metropolitan middle classes elect to follow, fashion forces the adoption of extravagance and fashionable
theatricality. Indulging metropolitan extravagance in this manner deadens sensibility, destroys faculties of moral and aesthetic discernment, and hardens the victim to the persuasiveness of the sentimental body. The victim’s conformity with fashionable theatricality is both cause and symptom of the devastation extravagance wreaks on the mind and nervous system.

4.6 The contagion of town air

The dreadful medium that carries the passion of extravagance from body to body, allowing it to attack and enfeeble sensibility is, of course, ‘town air’. By the time Burney published Cecilia, the tradition that the air of London corrodes mechanisms of mind and body was at least forty years old. In adopting the physiological model of the body-machine, polite eighteenth-century fiction espouses the theory of the contagion of the passions, reflecting the fear that in London the subject cannot but imbibe a town education, and that town air communicates selfish passion from body to body by the same means that it transmits tuberculosis and cholera. In Henry Fielding’s Joseph Andrews (1741), for instance, Lady Booby sees in ‘Joey’ ‘the effects which the town-air hath on the soberest constitutions’ (68).

As I have already argued, Clarissa also attributes the corrupting effects of town passion to contagion. London’s selfishness vitiates Lovelace’s judgement by infection, changing how he drafts his letters. On the day of the rape, his most evil act, he writes:

I imagine that thou wilt be apt to suspect that some passages in this letter were written in town. Why, Jack, I cannot but say that the Westminster air is a little grosser than that at Hampstead ....
And I .... think in my heart, that I can say and write things at one
place, which I cannot at the other; nor indeed anywhere else
(870).

Slightly later, Lovelace admits that breathing town air has damaged his sensibility: ‘All I have
to do in my present uncertainty is to brighten up my faculties, by filing off the rust they have
contracted by the town smoke’ (1085).

The same anxiety crops up again in the final chapter of Cecilia, when Dr. Lyster begs
giddy Lady Honoria’s pardon for ‘a certain unguarded warmth [that] comes across a man now
and then, [and] that drives etiquette out of his head and makes him speak truth before he well
knows where he is’ (X, x, 932). Honoria protests she had ‘hoped the town air would have
taught [him] better things’. Alas, responds the doctor, he is not so easily corrupted:
... when a man has been a plain dealer both in word and look for
upwards of fifty years, ‘tis expecting too quick a reformation to
demand ductility of voice and eye from him at a blow (X, x, 933).

Burney’s narrator has been equally precise in describing the role of infection in promoting a
town education from the first book of the novel. She notes, for example, that Mrs. Harrel, by
sucking in air impregnated with luxury and extravagance, had
soon no pleasure but to vie with some rival in elegance, and no
ambition but to exceed some superior in expense (I, iv, 33).

The same figure of the contagion of passion serves Mr. Albany in expressing his fear
that metropolitan extravagance will contaminate Cecilia unless she takes action to assert her
sympathy: ‘Ah lovely, but perishable flower! ... unspoilt by prosperity, unperverted by power!
... unsullied in the tainted air of infectious perdition!’ (IV, vi, 292). All passion, selfish and sympathetic, is catching. Thus, Monckton’s feigned concern for Cecilia’s health has a more genuine level of metaphorical reference. Monckton relies on fear of contagion to warn the heroine against making the benevolent visits to which Mr. Albany has counselled her: ‘the very air in those miserable house is unwholesome for you to breathe; you will soon be infected with some of the diseases to which you so incautiously expose yourself ...’ (IX, v, 769). Monckton is right, of course, but the disease which will infect Cecilia in her visits to the poor of the metropolis is, obviously, the ‘disorder’ of compassion. In these London novels of sentiment — Clarissa, Amelia, and Cecilia — sympathy deploys one form of involuntarism against another. As Lovelace himself says as he ridicules the tears that Clarissa’s eloquence has wrenched from his eyes, ‘Passion, I see, is catching’ (Cl., 709).

4.7 How metropolitan extravagance defeats sensibility

In keeping with ideas of natural eloquence closely resembling those Clarissa articulates, Cecilia enters London cursed with the notion that her sympathetic passions should catch in town as easily as elsewhere. The heroine believes that her display of the passion of generosity will excite the passion of gratitude in the Harrels, which, independent of will or reason, should involuntarily awaken their sympathy for their impoverished creditors, the Hills. To reformulate this proposition in the physiological language of sensibility, the heroine thinks that the spectacle of her sympathy, expressed in the gestures of charity (the giving of loans to Mr. Harrel) should induce a spontaneous state of involuntary nervous response sufficient to motivate the spectator-
beneficiary to practice the virtues of compassion and economy without the intercession of the will. In such an exchange of affect, the heroine’s passion would link with the Harrels’ moral action through the medium of sympathy in the minds and bodies of all three participants. In short, according to belief in natural eloquence, to which the heroine adheres in Books I through V, gesture should succeed in the sympathetic transmission of passion from body to body by means of the associations between ‘vibrations’ in the brain and nervous system, and ‘ideas’ and ‘impressions’ in the mind (cf., Roach, 1985: 107). Sympathy, then, achieves a physical union of two otherwise separate nervous systems, a corporeal connection which allows gesture to move the spectator by acting directly on his passions, independently of his will or his assessment of where his self-interest lies. To the extent that gestural ‘persuasion’ and verbal ‘argument’ speak, respectively, to the passions and to reason, they represent radically different forms of rhetoric.

The rhetoric of sensibility Clarissa establishes as paradigmatic exists in Cecilia, where there is plenty of evidence of the speaking body, especially in the ‘pride’ plot of Books VI through X, but it is not universal. Where sympathy breaks down, as it does in the town, so does natural eloquence. And worse, the sympathy of the sentimental body can even work against it: Cecilia cannot change the town and finds her sense of justice corrupted by her own sensibility. Like Clarissa, Cecilia feels motivated to bring sociability to fashionable society. Thus, during the Harrels’ preparations for the masquerade ball, possibly the most conspicuous display of middle-class extravagance in the novel, the heroine, sobered by the spectacle of ruinous expense, makes the first of several attempts to persuade Mrs. Harrel to adopt a policy of ‘economy’, and to persuade her husband to moderate his spending (II, iii, 105). Cecilia
struggles to open the eyes of Mrs. Harrel to the evils which so apparently threatened her, and press her to exert all her influence with her husband, by means both of example and advice, to retrench his expenses before it should be absolutely too late to save him from ruin (III, i, 175).

At the same time that she tries to coax her friends into spending less freely, Cecilia irrationally lends almost all of her parent’s legacy (£ 10,000) to Mr. Harrel in three separate extensions of credit, even though she knows he has neither intention nor capacity to repay. However, in a way that may seem odd to present-day readers, the narrator attributes the Harrels’ need for the loans and their incapacity to economize precisely to their insensibility. Just as insensibility enables extravagance, the virtue of economy arises out of sensibility, hence, the narrator’s observation that ‘in every thing that regarded expense, Mr. Harrel had no feeling’ (I, iii, 127). Similarly, the remark that Mrs. Harrel’s ‘feelings were not very acute’ carries the implication that the dullness of her sensations contributes to her financial ruin (V, vii, 363).

Once this counterintuitive connection is conceded, it seems more reasonable that Cecilia might hope to bring the Harrels’ accounts back into balance by reawakening their sensibility. Indeed, after the heroine’s first loan to the Harrels, the wife’s response, though not the

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54 In addition to the £ 10,000 bequest, Cecilia stands to inherit an estate of £ 3,000 a year from her uncle, subject to the condition that her husband adopt the surname ‘Beverley’ upon her marriage. The heroine loses the £ 10,000 bequest by lending it Harrel, and the £ 3,000 in income by allowing Devile to retain his name when he marries her. Although Cecilia might, in principle, have secured her loans to Harrel either against the future income from her dead uncle’s estate, or even against the capital portion of the estate, this course of action does not seem to occur to her.
husband's, gives some foundation for this belief. While Mr. Harrel merely thanks Cecilia 'in his usual negligent manner' and pockets the bank-notes, 'Mrs. Harrel seems 'more grateful, and with many embraces [speaks] her sense of this friendly good nature'. The heroine draws some encouragement from her friend's responsive gestures:

Cecilia, happy from believing she had revived in [Mrs. Harrel] some spark of sensibility, determined to avail herself of so favourable a symptom, and enter at once upon the disagreeable task she had set herself, of representing to her the danger of her present situation (III, iii, 192).

But although Cecilia uses 'all the tenderness in her power' to 'conjure[ ]' her friend 'to retrench her expenses, and change her thoughtless way of life', the heroine's sympathy fails to persuade not merely because Mrs. Harrel's 'powers of reasoning' are 'weak', but because 'her infatuation to luxury and expence' is 'so strong' (III, iii, 192 - 94; 197).

Moreover, in a second attack on Cecilia's sympathy, Harrel's melodramatic gestures successfully extort a further £ 7,500 from her: "'My debts! — my creditors! — one way only,' striking his hand upon his forehead, 'is left for me!'". Initially 'checked in the full career of her overflowing compassion, by a sense of the worthlessness of its object', Cecilia gives in to the 'compulsion' of her passions when Harrel appears at his dressing-room door brandishing a razor which he obligingly agrees to close once the heroine swears an oath to save him. Although he promises Cecilia 'the sole guidance of his future conduct' after the bailiffs have left the house, she immediately acknowledges that the responsiveness of her body to Mr. Harrel's passions has made her a 'tool of the extravagance [she] abhor[s]' (IV, v, 264 - 66, 271)
In discussing this episode with Cecilia, Monckton agrees that her sensibility has made her vulnerable, and advises that as long as she lives under the same roof as Harrel, her ‘resolution’ to resist her guardian’s artifices ‘will be as feeble as [her] generosity will be potent’ (IV, vii, 298). Later, on the eve of her third and final loan to Harrel, Monckton again warns the heroine of the dangers of sympathy: ‘A heart so liberal as yours can only be guarded by flight’ (V, vii, 369). This turns out to be true. Cecilia’s compassion has some effect on Mrs. Harrel, whom she finds ‘much softened by her late acts of kindness’, but none at all on Mr. Harrel, ‘whom neither reason nor gratitude could turn from his own purposes’, despite an ‘apparent discontent’ that shows ‘at least some sensibility of his situation’ (IV, vii, 300; V, ii, 343; V, iii, 346).

By the time of the Harrels’ third attempt to coerce Cecilia to another expensive and involuntary act of sympathy, the day before Mr. Harrel’s suicide, she is more adept at discerning manipulation yet just as powerless to resist it. When Mrs. Harrel asks for £ 3,000, Miss Beverley sees that she is ‘again to be played upon by terror and distress’, but soon makes ‘compromise between her judgment and compassion’ and delays her departure from the house even when she knows her friends are about to insist on another loan (V, x, 380, 386). After caving in yet again, and issuing a loan of £ 1,000, Cecilia admits her kindness is nothing but weakness and that prolonged exposure to the Harrels’ extravagance has corrupted her judgement: ‘Oh Mrs. Harrel, I know no longer what is kind or what is cruel, nor have I known for some time past right from wrong, nor good from evil!’ (V, xi, 396).
Cecilia’s gestures cannot reform Harrel because he has few involuntary reflexes on which the eloquence of her body might act. Harrel must maintain a high, steady rate of spending to sustain himself in the role of a man of pleasure because he is one of those ‘dull and heavy characters’ who require external artificial stimulus to ‘awaken them’ (I, v, 43). Thus, extravagance, his ruling principle, is an affectation he adopts because London dictates its stylishness. Harrel is a ‘machine of human formation’ in that ‘his spirits [are] as mechanical’ (that is, as theatrical) ‘as his taste for diversion’ (I, ii, 15; V, xiii, 436). Whereas sensibility animates Cecilia’s body, fashionable theatricality actuates Harrel’s, determining his manners and spurring him in the pursuit of the objects that govern his performances. In Mr. Monckton’s perceptive summation, Harrel’s ‘duplicity’ is compatible with his ‘flightiness’ precisely because ‘his vices [are not] the result of his passions’, but of artifice:

... had economy been as much in fashion as extravagance, he would have been equally eager to practice it; ... he struggled but to be something, and having neither talents nor sentiment to know what, he looked around him for any pursuit, and seeing distinction was more easily attained in the road to ruin than in any other, he galloped along it ... (V, xiii, 436).

Thus, because his character is wholly artificial, his capacity to support it varies in proportion to his ability to obey his governing principle of extravagance: his spirits plunge with the bailiffs’ first invasion of his house, rally in response to Cecilia’s first loan, then flag as his debts of honour accrue. As Harrel enters the Vauxhall Gardens, where unbeknowst to his companions he plans to commit suicide, the novel figures his disarray as the incoherence of weak
... affecting his usual gaiety, [he] struggled to recover his spirits; but the effort was vain, he could neither talk nor look like himself, and though from time to time he resumed his air of wonted levity, he could not support it, but drooped and hung his head in evident despondency (V, xii, 398).

Forced by poverty to ‘cast[] off the mask of levity’, Harrel blows his brains out at Vauxhall at the exact moment that the bailiffs enter his townhouse in the West End (V, xii, 399).

4.8 How learning to regulate sensibility defeats patrician pride

Unlike Books I through V, Books VI through X represent the triumph of Cecilia’s eloquence over a passion that characterizes an entire rank: her sympathy conquers Mortimer’s pride, then Mrs. Delvile’s, and finally Mr. Delvile’s. However, Cecilia’s body speaks through its containment. The quantity that secures victory is her unsuccessful good-faith effort to control sensibility, rather than sensibility in and of itself. The part of her sensibility which she cannot conceal and which shows in her involuntary gestures changes her spectators’ minds. Whereas sensibility ruins Cecilia in the extravagance plot, in the pride plot she learns her duty to control her passions, usually by ‘playing a part’. Cecilia wins Delvile and ‘persuades’ his mother by regulating sensibility (cf., VI, xi, 521 - 28).

Early in the second half of the action, the novel acknowledges that only the body’s persuasiveness can overcome the Delviles’ intractable bias. In a prescient letter to Cecilia,
Delvile writes that the 'principles' and 'opinions' that dictate his parents' prejudice against his marrying the heroine 'have been cherished too long for rhetoric to remove them', or to allow the young man to trust in 'the slow-working influence of argument and disquisition' (VII, v, 564). Delvile's observation tacitly admits that passion is more likely than reason to alter his parents' opposition.

Certainly, Mortimer is in a position to know, since his own intransigence has already succumbed to the eloquence of the heroine's body. Since Cecilia and Mortimer are people of sensibility, that eloquence works in both directions: the conquest is confirmed in several exchanges of sympathetic passion which begin in London and continue in the countryside. These exchanges are only partly articulate. For example, after the storm in the castle's park, Delvile, who knows that he should not, 'almost involuntarily' offers to help Cecilia, and speaks to her 'in a tone of voice the most dejected'. Cecilia, 'confounded and dismayed by what has passed', is 'utterly unable to hold any conversation' (VI, v, 476).

Acutely aware of Cecilia's susceptibility, Delvile is concerned not to exploit it. In the scene in which he explains that the 'name clause' in her uncle's will is the only obstacle to their marriage, he prefaces his explanation with a promise that he will 'offend' neither Cecilia's 'delicacy' nor his 'own integrity, by endeavouring to work upon the generosity of [her] disposition in order to excite [her] compassion' (VI, ix, 510). Later, when he decides that the 'name clause' is not an obstacle after all, he delays proposing to Cecilia for the same reason: 'I would not even wish to take advantage of your agitation in order to work upon your sensibility' (VII, iv, 559). Similarly, in his first proposal of marriage, Delvile insists that he has not suffered his 'eagerness to conquer [his] reason', and that he is 'neither biassed by passion nor
betrayed by tenderness’, but concedes that the ‘pride of heart’ which had once supported him in resisting his attraction to the heroine no longer comes to his aid now that he has known ‘the pitying sympathy of Cecilia’ (VII, vi, 571 - 72). At this critical juncture the lovers fear sensibility may vitiate their independence of judgement, and seem more concerned to restrain sympathy than to give it free rein.

The same anxiety motivates Cecilia to defend the sincerity of Delvile’s proposals and her own rationality in accepting them when she debates the matter with Mr. Monckton: ‘Neither artifice nor duplicity ... have been practised against me. Argument, and not persuasion, determined me ...’ (VII, vii, 581). Attentive to the secondary meaning Samuel Johnson assigns to the latter term, Cecilia observes a distinction that the lexicographer says is sometimes ignored: ‘Persuasion seems rather applicable to the passions, and argument to the reason’. Generally, ‘persuasion’ in Cecilia is vulnerable to accusations of interest and manipulation, whereas ‘argument’ speaks to the evidence and seeks to respect the interlocutor’s autonomy. Thus, Delvile urges that his ‘arguments’ seek not ‘to fetter, to compel’ Cecilia (VIII, i, 618).

Still, scruples of this kind do not seem to trouble the virtuous characters of Cecilia in their dealings with those who themselves have practiced to persuade, or who have little sense of fair play, such as Mortimer’s father, Mr. Delvile. Thus, during Cecilia’s convalescence from her London mad scene, Dr. Lyster, though a professed ‘plain dealer in word and look’, (X, x, 933) shamelessly ambushes Mr. Delvile with the sight of the heroine in her sick-bed to manipulate his passions. Lyster, ‘to complete the work he had begun of subduing the hard

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The definition of ‘persuade’ in the Dictionary (2nd ed., 1755 - 56, vol. 2). The supporting quotation is Sidney’s: ‘Philoclea’s beauty not only persuaded, but so persuaded as all hearts must yield: Pamela’s beauty used violence, and such as no heart could resist’. Johnson’s definition of ‘persuasion’ includes ‘the act of gaining or attempting the passions’.
pride’ of Mr. Delvile, ‘contrive[s], under pretence of waiting for him, to conduct him to the room of the invalid’, where the spectacle of Cecilia’s suffering strikes him with ‘consternation’ and ‘horror’. The effects of the eloquence of the heroine’s unconscious body on Mr. Delvile are involuntary in the sense that they circumvent interest and reason and apply directly to his passions: ‘the remorse she excited being far stronger than pity, he gave an angry glance at Dr. Lyster for betraying him into such a sight, and hastily left the room’. Mr. Delvile, ‘no longer supported by pride, and unable to recover from the shock he had just received’, returns to St. James’ Square, ‘pursued by the pale image of Cecilia’ (X, ix, 912 - 13).

However, in the refined company which Cecilia encounters in Mortimer and in Augusta Delvile dignity seems as important as independence. Indeed, the need for dignity ensures that problems of the morality of persuading people, and of how best to protect judgement from passion, become more subtle and complicated in the second half of the novel than they had been in London. So much more, in fact, that as the couple falls in love in contravention of Mrs. Delvile’s prohibitions, a paralysis of the heroine’s powers of discernment engages a ‘confusion of [her] mind’ (X, ii, 848): ‘Could I tell, could I see ... which way I ought to turn, not a moment would I hesitate how to act!’ (VII, vii, 582). The second half of the novel furthers the deterioration of judgement the heroine admits to Mrs. Harrel near the end of the extravagance plot (V, xi, 396). In this quandary sensibility without more cannot assist the moral agent. In turn, the pride plot proposes theatrical answers for the problems of persuasion and judgement. These solutions redescribe moral obligation in terms of the duties of performance so that the right course of action demands of Cecilia the same command of passion she ‘admire[s] and applaud[s]’ in Delvile. Thus, on occasion, the heroine can give ‘vent’ to her ‘emotions’ only in
private, where she has 'no part to act, and no dignity to support' (VI, x, 520 - 21).

In the pride plot, judgement proceeds from explicit and self-conscious submission to a theatricality of moral sentiment that protects morality from unregulated sensibility. The heroine regains judgement by representing herself to herself as a character subject to the scrutiny of a real external spectator (the patrician gaze of Mrs. Delvile), or an imaginary internal one (the observation of her 'inward monitor'). Both Cecilia and Delvile recognize the importance of discerning the decisions of the latter: 'Where can I,' cried Cecilia, 'find a friend, who, in this critical moment will instruct me how to act!' 'You will find one,' answered he, 'in your own bosom ...' (VII, vi, 572).

In struggling to behave with propriety, Cecilia measures her proposed conduct against her accustomed mode. She believes that 'the remembrance of a wilful fault' will 'blemish in her own eyes the character she had hoped to support', and recollects Mrs. Delvile's 'confidence in her character, which hitherto had been her pride ... with shame and with sadness'. Cecilia's pride, then, assists her sympathy for Delvile's mother in considering the propriety of the secret engagement from Mrs. Delvile's point of view. Self-regard and self-approbation, and not innate love of virtue for its own sake, motivate her to break off her engagement: 'scarce was Delvile out of sight, before she regretted her consent ... as the loss of her self-esteem' (VII, vii, 576 - 77).

Cecilia makes 'character', the figure she imagines she would cut in the eyes of an unbiased observer, the test of morality. Unable to perform both her promise and her character, she chooses to perform the latter: 'Cecilia ... now summoned her utmost courage to her aid, and, after a short, but painful struggle, determined to act consistently with her professions and her
character’ (VII, vii, 584 - 85). Like Adam Smith’s impartial spectator, Cecilia’s inner tribunal stands separate from her sensibility and in judgement over it: the heroine (and her feelings) ‘yield[ ] to the exhortations of an inward monitor, who is never to be neglected with impunity’. The heroine is sufficiently confident that this abstract inner judge of morality inheres universally in human nature to assure Delvile that his own ‘monitor’ would reach the same conclusion as hers, faced with the same set of facts: ‘Consult him yourself; and shall I need no other advocate’.

The self-denial to which the judgements of the ‘inward monitor’ commit Cecilia discloses further theatricality, requiring her to behave contrary to disposition, so that her outward gestures diverge from her inward passions. To break her engagement, as duty demands, Cecilia must bring the discipline of the stage to bear on the execution of morality: ‘She planned an apology for her conduct with all the address of which she was mistress ... yet the part she had to act was both hard and artificial’ (VIII, i, 614 - 15). Indeed, sensibility and the theatricality of moral sentiment exist in constant tension throughout Cecilia. Try as she may, the heroine remains vulnerable to attacks of sensibility that strike her whenever her guard is down. For example, just after the failure of her first attempt to marry Delvile, she succumbs briefly to the eloquence of her body. Conscious that the involuntary reflex of ‘a starting tear’ has betrayed ‘her sympathetic distress’ with Delvile’s grief, she begs him to agree to a mutual restraint of sensibility: ‘Suppress your own feelings, rather than seek to awaken mine’ (VIII, ii, 631 - 32).

Later, when Cecilia struggles to regulate sensibility to act in the character Mrs. Delvile assigns to her, the theatricality of moral sentiment becomes even more important. These
transactions severely tax the principals' 'candour'. As Mrs. Delvile observes, 'We may strive to be disinterested, we may struggle to be impartial, but self will still predominate' (VIII, iii, 639). But the scenes where Cecilia, Mrs. Delvile, and Mortimer argue over the engagement differ from the London extortion scenes in that the characters struggle to restrain sensibility. During Mrs. Delvile's calls on Cecilia to release Delvile from his promise of marriage, Mortimer's mother justifies her intransigence by insisting on the right of 'office' to reject the claims of sympathy:

O little ... do you see the state of my heart, for never have you appeared to me so worthy as at this moment! ... but your sense of duty must something plead for the strictness with which I act up to mine (VIII, iii, 641).

The eloquence of each woman's body acts on the other's: when Mrs. Devile's eyes 'glisten[ ] with tears' as she kisses from Cecilia's cheeks 'the tears that water[ ] them', the heroine's 'pride [has] no power to resist this tenderness' (VIII, iii, 642).

It is for fear of the 'interchange of sentiments' to which the eloquence of the body gives rise that Cecilia is willing never to meet her lover face to face again (VIII, iv, 650):

... she determined not to trust herself in his sight, certain they could only meet to grieve over each other, and conscious that a participation of sorrow would but prove a reciprocation of tenderness (VIII, iv, 646).

Mrs. Delvile concurs in this assessment of the dangers of sensibility:
... acquainted ere you meet that you were to meet him no more, your heart would be all softness and grief, and at the very moment when tenderness should be banished from your intercourse, it would bear down all opposition of judgement, spirit, and dignity ... (VIII, iv, 651).

Recognizing 'her duty to resist her inclination', and the power of her rhetoric to persuade Mortimer, Cecilia surrenders the agency of her body to Mrs. Delvile: 'she resolved to commit the whole affair to the will of Mrs. Delvile, to whom, though under no promise, she now considered herself responsible'. Cecilia resigns to aristocratic authority, promises to be governed by Mrs. Delvile, puts 'every thing' into her power, and even cedes independence in writing (VIII, iv, 646, 650, 655; IX, viii, 809):

... As my own Agent I regard myself no longer; if as yours, I can give pleasure, or be of service, I shall gladly receive your commands. I have the honour to be, Madam, Your most obedient servant ... (VIII, iv, 647).

Receiving commands as Mrs. Delvile’s agent means acting in the character determined by the theatricality of moral sentiment, instead of in the more 'natural' character that sensibility would dictate. Virtue is carried out according to scenographic conceit, in defiance of sensibility:

Cecilia had acted her part, and acted it to her own satisfaction; but the curtain dropped when Mrs. Delvile left the house, nature resumed her rights, and the sorrow of her heart was no longer
disguised or repressed (VIII, vi, 652).

Similarly, on the eve of the meeting at which she is supposed to break off her engagement in person, the heroine passes the night as an actor would, ‘in planning her behaviour for the next day’, to ensure Delvile’s natural eloquence does not engage her sensibility:

To be steady, however, herself, be his conduct what it might, was invariably her intention, and all her ambition; yet ... she dreaded to see the sorrowful Delvile, and dreaded still more the susceptibility of her own heart (VIII, vi, 670).

However, in the ‘Conflict’ scene, which Burney described as the one for which she had written ‘the whole book’, the heroine’s eloquence affects Mrs. Delvile more than it does Mortimer. In this ‘contest’ between pride and sympathy, and between theatricality and sensibility, Cecilia’s passions involuntarily compel Mrs. Delvile’s assent, persuading her to agree to the marriage between the heroine and Delvile precisely because Cecilia does not intend her feelings to have this effect. The pride plot awards Delvile to the heroine for her good faith effort to abstain from using natural eloquence to win him, since any conscious use of the persuasiveness of the body would verge on dirty poker.

Cecilia’s efforts to restrain all visible signs of emotion do not succeed in suppressing the involuntary gestures that evince sensibility:

Cecilia courtсied (sic); but depressed by the cruel task which awaited her, had no power to speak; and Mrs. Devile, finding she still trembled, made her sit down, and drew a chair next to her

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56 Letter to Samuel Crisp, 15 March 1782 (Burney, 1880: I, 418).
Although Cecilia responds to Delvile’s impassioned speeches with anguished silence, sighs, changes of colour, and plaintive turnings of her head, her obedience to ‘character’ wins Mrs. Delvile’s applause: ‘See ... how great a woman can act, when stimulated by generosity, and a just sense of duty!’ Unfortunately, this admirable self-command flags the instant natural character asserts itself. When ‘her voice fail[s] her’ in her attempt to congratulate mother and son on their reconciliation, Delvile is ‘delighted at this sensibility’ (VIII, vi, 676 - 77).

Conscious that she has betrayed herself, Cecilia has just enough composure to restrain her sensibility until Delvile’s exit; when she stumbles upon him in the hallway, where he has paused to collect himself, she faints:

... [Delvile’s] whole attention was upon Cecilia, who, sinking into a chair, hid her face against Mrs. Delvile: but reviving in a few moments, and blushing at the weakness she had betrayed, she raised her head, and, with an assumed serenity, said, ‘I am better, — much better, — I was rather sick, — but it is over ...

(VIII, vi, 679).

With these gestures, Cecilia’s eloquent body speaks in earnest to the Delviles’ eloquent bodies. The figuration of sensibility as ennobling disastrous contagion continues. Together with the effects of Mortimer’s spirited opposition, the outward signs of Cecilia’s disorder sympathetically write themselves onto Mrs. Delvile’s body, seemingly against the older woman’s will: ‘Cecilia ... read[s] with terror in the looks of Mrs. Delvile the passions with which she [is] agitated’. Owing to the acuity of the lady’s nervous responses, the conflict of her
passions registers on her body in the form of a burst blood vessel, attended by speechlessness and fainting: ‘Grief and horror ... rose in the face of Mrs. Delvile, who, striking her hand upon her forehead, cried “My brain is on fire!” and rushed from the room.’ She is next seen ‘extended upon the floor, her face, hands and neck all covered with blood’ (VIII, vi, 680 - 81).

Cecilia’s imperfect self-command earns the admiration and acceptance of her prospective mother-in-law because the acuteness of Mrs. Delvile’s feelings open her to the rhetoric of the body and the persuasions of sympathy. The chastening of the heroine’s sensibility unleashes the full powers of the older woman’s, marking A Contest as the inverse of the London extortion scenes discussed in the previous section. There, the spectacle of sensibility fails to change ‘manners’ because metropolitan extravagance deadens the Harrels’ feelings. Here, restraint of sensibility changes a spectator’s opinions because her feelings remain lively and uncorrupted.

Mrs. Delvile, then, becomes the victim of her sensibility and of the ‘contending passions’ of self-love and sympathy: ‘her frame is too weak for this struggle’ (VIII, vi, 681). Still, natural eloquence achieves far less in Cecilia than it does in Clarissa. The eloquence of Cecilia’s body moderates Mrs. Delvile’s pride and persuades her to alter her opinion regarding the engagement, but there is no suggestion that the heroine’s rhetoric accomplishes a sentimental conversion of the kind that Belfield experiences in Clarissa, or that Mrs. Delvile’s character, as distinct from her views, alters in any way. In Burney’s first two novels, even women of sensibility do not show signs of significant change.57

57 The criticism generally concurs that Burney experiments with representing fluid or volatile identity in Camilla but not in Evelina or Cecilia. Neither Doody nor Lynch includes Cecilia in their observations that Camilla tries ‘the imitation of the mind in flux’ or a ‘rewriting of character as a course of action’. Similarly, Hemlow asserts that Camilla,
Mrs. Delvile’s insanity in ‘A Conflict’ is not an isolated incident in Cecilia. Since acute sensibility, by definition, exposes the mind to the danger of madness, almost every man and woman of feeling in the novel suffers a period of mental confusion, and the heroine and Mr. Albany completely lose their minds. In most cases, the madness is attributable to a specific passion: Belfield’s arises from the wound to his pride, (IV, i, 246) Albany’s, from his remorse over his cruelty to his low-born sweetheart, and Cecilia’s, from her fear that she may have endangered her husband’s life. For each of these characters, sensibility, the principle that animates them, contributes to mental disorder, for sensibility is responsiveness to one’s own passions, as well as to those of others. And since passion is contagious, London’s competitiveness and social stratification give rise to a violence of emotion that can push a sensitive mind over the edge. Breathing town air has divergent effects on the sensibilities of London’s fashionable residents. In those whose ‘feelings are not very acute’ in the first place, the town’s extravagance weakens sensibility, deadens it beyond all hope of revival, and makes its victims impervious to the eloquence of the body. Conversely, in people of feeling, the direct or vicarious experience of the suffering that London causes, such as Cecilia and Mr. Albany seek in the tenements of the capital, heightens sensibility, sometimes to the point of madness.

Metropolitan self-love, the principle that causes the pain to which sensibility responds, is vigorously at work in the mad scene that closes the London action. This episode generically resembles the arrest scene in Clarissa: each heroine is humiliated in the presence of an audience unlike Evelina or Cecilia ‘or, indeed, most of the novels of the age, was a developing and not a static figure’ (Doody, 1988: 256; Lynch, 1989: 189 - 90; Hemlow, 1950: 760).
in the streets of metropolis, sustains a disabling shock to her sensibility, and takes refuge in the upper floor of a shop-keeper’s house. Each, moreover, suffers the terror and horror of abandonment in London. But unlike Clarissa’s agony in the arrest scene, the spectacle of the heroine’s suffering in Burney’s mad scene fails to elicit the sympathy of the spectators in any sustained way.

Already distraught by the news that Delvile has shot and wounded Mr. Monckton, Cecilia finds herself trapped late at night in a hired coach outside a London coffee-house, where she hopes to intercept Delvile and Belfield whom she believes are about to fight a duel over her. When she tries to alight, Mr. Simpkins attracts ‘some gathering spectators’ by officiously disputing the fare with the drunken coachman. This undignified spectacle excites curiosity instead of sympathy. Since the onlookers never make the critical transition from spectators to participants, the scene is theatrical in the negative sense that there is no transfer of passion even in one direction (from Cecilia to her observers), much less in two (cf., Marshall, 1986: 192). Yet again, Cecilia’s sensibility fails to make London sociable:

... a mob was collecting; Cecilia, breathless with vehemence and terror, was encircled, yet struggled in vain to break away; and the stranger gentleman, protesting with sundry compliments, he would take care of her, very freely seized her hand (X, vii, 895 - 96).

In combination with her existing passion, the audience’s withholding of its sympathy causes her sensibility to overcome her understanding, so that ‘her reason suddenly, yet totally fail[s] her’:
... she was wholly overpowered; terror for Delvile, horror for herself, hurry, confusion, heat and fatigue, all assailing her at once, while all means of repelling them were denied her, the attack was too strong for her fears, feelings, and faculties ... 

(X, vii, 896)

In flagrant contravention of the conventions of natural eloquence, Cecilia’s involuntary display of sensibility does not awaken feeling in her London audience, even though she neither plays ‘to’ them, nor is even aware of them. ‘[U]nmoved’, her drunken coachman grows ‘very abusive’ and the ‘gentleman stranger’ seems ‘touched by compassion’ only in giving up his ‘attempted gallantry’. Similarly, the ‘some idle people’, ruled by self-interest, follow Cecilia to her final destination at Mrs. Wyer’s pawnshop merely out of greed and curiosity: ‘neither her terror nor distress had saved her from the daring dexterity of villainy, and her pockets, in the mob, had been rifled’ (X, vii, 898).

In assessing the meaning of the search for system at which Burney hints in the debates between Belfield and Monckton discussed earlier, the contrast between the mad scene in *Cecilia* and the arrest scene in *Clarissa* is instructive. In prescribing method, *Cecilia* goes so far as to indicate the conditions of sensibility, theatricality, and audience that the sympathy of the body needs to confer agency, as it does in the ‘Conflict’ scene, instead of destroying agency, as it does in London, first in the extortion scenes and later in the mad scene. The corporeal machine persuades an audience when the body displays sensibility *involuntarily*, when it is controlled by a tight, theatrical discipline, and when the audience itself possesses acute sensibility. So, the heroine’s decision in the second half of the novel to exercise independence
of judgement by restraining the independence of her body makes her body more eloquent than it
would have been without this discipline.

Unlike Richardson, however, Burney renounces confidence in the eloquence of the body
as a system capable of moderating the metropolitan self-love that causes so much suffering in
London. In *Cecilia*, the machine of civil society does not enjoy any automatic powers of self-
regulation that might spring from sensibility or from the passion of the body, sympathetic or
otherwise. Rather, in the degree that the Burney’s deeply conservative narrator sees system at
work in the public sphere, she concurs with Dr. Lyster’s concluding sentence:

> There is evidently throughout this world, in things as well as
> persons, a levelling principle, at war with pre-eminence, and
destructive of perfection (X, x, 937).
Postscript: manufacturing sociability?

‘London!’ repeated Mr. Meadows, ‘O melancholy! the sink of all vice and depravity. Streets without light! Houses without air! Neighbourhood without society! Talkers without listeners! — ‘Tis astonishing that any rational being can endure to be so miserably immured’ (Cecilia, VII, ix, 609).

The eighteenth-century fictions studied in this thesis relate the effects of involuntary sentimental reflex on sociability in London in a wide variety of tone and style: Clarissa is a dramatic tragedy written in prose, Amelia, a novel of ‘social protest and reform’, and Cecilia, a novel of manners (Battestin, 1983: xv). Still, read as a unit, they recount a familiar narrative of the training of the body in the metropolis. In each, the heroine’s arrival in London is her entrance into ‘the world’. The lady is a beautiful young country girl with a gentlewoman’s education. She is, moreover, of middling rank and stands to inherit a sizeable estate. Her natural talents include a lively native intelligence. Her innocence and relative naivety belie the influence of her environment, for the country teems with selfish, grasping characters. In this malleable and half-formed state, the heroine moves into London under conditions not entirely of her own choosing, where she must live without the benefit of continuous, competent, and benevolent male guardianship. Circumstance compels the heroine to assume responsibility for her exercise of moral judgement, which the novel represents as seated at least partly in
sensibility or sympathy. Location forces her to rely on her own resources, including those that inhere in her body. Unfortunately, the untrained body does not always assist her efforts to survive because in London the heroine encounters refinements of selfishness and theatricality unlike anything she has ever known. The sophistication and self-control she gains from her knowledge of polite urban society do not protect her as well they might (hypothetically) in the countryside. Living in London heightens the expressiveness of the heroine’s body while depressing her audience’s physical responsiveness, thus cancelling much of the power of the gestures of sentiment to instil sociability. In this deliberately cruel and unsociable setting, the heroine struggles, suffers, and succumbs to ruin, sexual or financial. In the end, she goes back to the countryside, either alive, like Amelia and Cecilia, or dead, like Clarissa.

As I argued in Chapter 1, *Clarissa* establishes the model for the role of the body-machine in producing sociability. The heroine’s involuntary gestures, and the involuntary gestures they elicit in spectators, *cause*, rather than represent, the bonds of sympathy that arise between her and the other characters. Sentimental conversions and, perhaps, a modest sociability, ensue from Clarissa’s gestures because her spectators cannot resist their physiological responses to these actions. But to promote sociability in their spectators, authentic and involuntary gestures must strike the senses of an audience *physically* capable of reciprocating sympathy. On one hand, the agent’s gesture must match her passion, but is more likely to do so if it expresses that passion automatically, ‘mechanically’, and without the intervention of her will. On the other hand, the agent’s sympathy reaches her spectators only if the metropolis has not destroyed their sensibilities. A display of the gestures of sentiment can initiate recovery of impaired moral reflexes, but cannot repair the sympathetic responses of a
body-machine that urban corruption has irretrievably damaged.

In contrast with Clarissa, Amelia and Cecilia seem more concerned with the potential of reflex or sensibility to undercut morality. As conservatives, Fielding and Burney are far less willing than Richardson to see in the eloquence of the body a means to justice, sociability, or to the making of dependable bonds of sympathy. This is particularly true of Fielding’s novel, where gesture and the automatic actions of the body-machine are at least as likely to vitiate ‘character’ and ‘good-nature’ as they are to guide the moral agent towards virtue. Depending on the circumstances, on the strength of physiological reflex, and upon acquired skills of prudence, the body’s responsiveness to environment and to its own passions may empower its owner or may merely enslave him or her to the dictates of a corrupt society.

Both agency and instrumentality may spring from the actions of the body and from those actions’ capacities either to secure the assent of the spectator, or to compel the person principally concerned in the action to grant assent, whether he or she wants to or not. In principle, the gestures of a woman of feeling excite sociability in her observers, causing them to set aside selfish intention for the time being. But in practice, the gestures of sentiment usually have little effect on the men and women who witness them. Hence, it is precisely the failures of sentiment that give rise to the need for theatricality. Amelia and Cecilia illustrate this: the unguarded sympathy of essentially virtuous characters becomes the problem to which some form of stage-craft becomes the remedy. The heroine’s self-preservation comes to depend on the cultivation of powers of self-command that she can perfect only in London.

For Fielding and Burney sympathy and sensibility are starting points rather than ends in themselves: they may help qualify the man or woman of feeling for ‘independence’ (understood
as the exercise of moral judgement that does not defer to the customs and prejudices of one’s environment) but do not guarantee it. In Amelia and Cecilia, then, London becomes a kind of finishing school for ‘actors’, a place that instructs the young and feckless in the management of their bodies and their impulses, although usually by way of negative example and at great cost to the student. In combination with some theatricality, sympathy and sensibility definitely improve individual judgement. They cannot, however, do much to make the town more sociable. Indeed, by the 1780's the notion of London’s unsociableness had become so widely accepted (and so laughably trite) that it issues from the mouth of Mr. Meadows, the stylish young ‘insensibilist’ who, in Cecilia, proves too indolent to formulate an original opinion or even to show any real interest in the heroine. Anyone who believes that the town could become sociable is, Burney implies, either foolish or naive.

But in a strange way the novel of the sentiment indirectly licences the underlying principles of the thing it ostensibly attacks. Ultimately, the novel of sentiment positions natural eloquence as a supplemental discourse which might moderate or protest against the dominance of the practices of Mandevillian self-interest that produce the social order of the metropolis. The net result is that the novel of sentiment implicitly tolerates the dominance of self-interest in the areas of public activity that lie mostly outside the subject-matter with which sentimental fiction principally concerns itself. The novel of sentiment consecrates the distinction that political economy makes between distributive justice (obedient to sympathy and directed to charity, benevolence, and private morality) and commutative justice (responsive to self-interest and primarily concerned with obligations defined by legally-enforceable property rights). By conceding the legitimacy of this separation, and by concerning itself mainly with the imperfect
rights that comprise the private realm of benevolence, the novel of sentiment contributes to the process by which Mandevillian self-interest gains legitimacy as the force that drives modern commercial society.\(^58\)

\(^{58}\) On the distinction between commutative justice and distributive justice, and between perfect rights and imperfect rights, see Kaufmann (1995: 40 ff). Kaufmann's discussion traces both distinctions to Francis Hutcheson.
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