BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

THE SIBLING IN THE SELF:

KINSHIP AND SUBJECTIVITY IN BRITISH ROMANTIC LITERATURE

by

TALIA MICHELE VESTRI

A.B., Vassar College, 2005
M.A., Boston University, 2010

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

2018

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Approved by

First Reader ______________________________

Charles J. Rzepka, Ph.D.
Professor of English

Second Reader ______________________________

Julia Prewitt Brown, Ph.D.
Professor of English

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DEDICATION

In memory of my Papa,

who taught me that family, love, and laughter go hand in hand,

and who showed me the value of bringing a sense of humor with me everywhere.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During my time at Boston University, I have been blessed with a number of mentors, colleagues, and friends whose ongoing support and feedback has held me up through this era of personal and professional transformation. First and foremost, I am grateful for the wisdom, patience, and most of all kindness exhibited by my advisor, Charles Rzepka. His continual encouragement and his enthusiasm for this project have helped turn what was once a nugget of an idea about the Wordsworths into what has become the passion fueling my intellectual career. I can only hope one day to model his integrity, dedication, and brilliance with my own students. Throughout the development of this dissertation, Julia Brown's gentle guidance has propelled me forward. Carrie Preston's abundant compassion has shown me what true mentorship looks like, both inside and outside the classroom. Erin Murphy's probing Socratic method has consistently demonstrated the intellectual rigor that I aim to emulate. As this project began wrapping up, I was fortunate enough to solicit the contributions and support of Joe Rezek, as well as Jonathan Mulrooney at the College of the Holy Cross, both of whom exemplify a personal approachability, copious good humor, and scholarly incisiveness that I am eager to learn from. Lastly, I am continually grateful for the pedagogical examples set by Amy Appleford, Anna Henchman, Laura Korobkin, and James Winn.

In addition to these remarkable faculty members, I am greatly indebted to my fellow classmates in the English department at BU, several of whom have become my dearest friends as well as my professional colleagues. Lia Sloth Calhoun and Claire Kervin read some of the most embryonic iterations of these chapters, and their continual

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input has been invaluable to shaping my project. Most importantly, their willingness to share themselves and to commiserate over many, many cups of coffee have sustained my sanity in ways that I cannot begin to explain. Shannon Burke Draucker has been a phenomenal reader, critic, and collaborator throughout the final years of this project's development, and I am endlessly grateful for her consistent insights and inspirations. I would also like to thank the many other Ph.D.-ers at BU who have provided levity and support at various stages, including Heather Barrett, Paul Edwards, Pardis Dabashi, Emily Gowen, Liam Meyer, and Melissa Schoenberger, and to those fellow students involved in the English department's writing workshops. A special thank you to members of the Graduate Student Caucus of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism for holding me to high standards. And, lastly, thanks to my new colleagues at Holy Cross who have welcomed me with open arms—and open office doors.

Finally, I am inexpressibly grateful for my nuclear and extended families, both biological and chosen, who have helped to shape me into the person I have become during this journey of self-discovery. To Jessica DiMenna, Katie Holmes, and Erica Mazaika: thank you for always reminding me to breathe, one day at a time. To Chris: for getting me to where I needed to be. To Jamie Dahmer: thank you for being there through good times and bad, for being my surrogate sister over the past sixteen years. And to my Nana, T, Mom, and Dad: thank you for putting up with this rollercoaster ride, and for loving me through all of it.

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TALIA MICHELE VESTRI

Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2018

Major Professor: Charles J. Rzepka, Professor of English

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role of sibling kinship in shaping the poetry, drama, and fiction of English Romanticism (1789-1832). While critics have long associated Romanticism with a myth of solitary authorship and an archetype of isolated genius, I demonstrate that Romantic authors imagined subjectivity in the plural, curating a vision of identity-formation that is collective, shared, multiple, and relational. Embodied in the portrayal of sibling relationships, this inter-subjective paradigm delivers new frameworks for understanding the Romantic self as situated within networks of others—networks of those who are not quite the same yet not quite different; those who are both familiar and yet unknown. My study is the first to present a sustained consideration of the way Romantic writers invoked literary siblinghood as a model for the collaborative and collective nature of selfhood, and I propose that this focus on lateral sibling kinship offers alternatives to the conventional reproductive lenses through which the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century family has been previously understood.

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Drawing from recent work in feminist and queer theory, psychology and psychoanalysis, and sociocultural histories of kinship, this dissertation contributes new readings of canonical texts by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Joanna Baillie, William Wordsworth, Jane Austen, and Mary Shelley. Chapter One considers two stage dramas by P. B. Shelley and Baillie as rewritings of Sophocles's *Antigone*. In both plays, sisters use their fraternal-sororal relations to redefine familial systems of reproduction via horizontal means of transmission rather than through vertical lines of biological inheritance. In Chapter Two, I extend this discussion of sibling networks to Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, where, I suggest, we find trans-subjective inter-relations that define the poet's vision well beyond autobiographical references to his sister Dorothy. Austen's novels serve as the focus of Chapter Three, which argues that the self-contained "I" of the *Bildungsroman* genre, as Austen incorporates it, in fact depends upon intimate epistemological exchanges between sororal characters who undergo a mutually influential process of development. Chapter Four concludes with a discussion of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. I suggest that the author critiques her central male protagonist for his failures to recognize how the reciprocity of male-female sibling sympathies underlies homosocial bonds. Taken together, these readings advance a version of Romantic subjectivity based upon lateral integration rather than egotistical solipsism.

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INTRODUCTION

From Solitude to Sorority: Re-Imagining the Romantic Self

If Romantic poets and novelists had sought a visual avatar for their conception of creative subjectivity—a creative self that is isolated, solitary, independent, and exceptional—then surely Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (fig. 1) would have served that purpose. William Wordsworth, for one, would have identified this image of spiritual and meditative introspection with his own pensive pauses amongst the peaks of the Alps; Percy Bysshe Shelley could have visualized the ravine of the Arve lurking under such cloudy mists. Literary critics can likewise recognize in Friedrich's portrait a familiar rendition of the Romantic ego. The *Wanderer* resembles the kind of "solitary musing" that, for William Hazlitt, distinguished Wordsworth as "the most original poet now living" and which later led Geoffrey Hartman to define Romanticism's zeitgeist as "consciousness of self raised to apocalyptic pitch."[1] Friedrich's distinctive *Rückenfigur*,[2] which now ornaments the fronts of so many Romantic texts,[3] thus seems to

Figure 1. *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, or *The Wanderer above the Mists*, 1818, Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

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[1] Hazlitt, "Mr. Wordsworth," from *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), in *Selected Writings*, ed. Jon Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 350, 351; Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 17.

[2] German artistic term for a turned figure seen from the back. For discussions of Friedrich's *Wanderer* as *Rückenfigur*, see Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009); William Vaughan, *Friedrich* (London and New York: Phaidon

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have been adopted as the *ur*-figure for the Romantic soul: a contemplative, solipsistic, Kantian—and distinctly male—subject who imagines, as much as he observes, the sublimely inscrutable landscape before him. He is solitary genius incarnate.

The *Wanderer*, in other words, exemplifies Romanticism's enduring myths of egotistical sublimity and of "autoproduction"[4]—what Susan Wolfson describes as its literature of "single perspectives, solitary converse, stark differentiation of self and world, [and] highly signaled subjective agency" and what Jack Stillinger first called attention to as the universalized "romantic notion of solitary authorship."[5] Yet, as we know, all good myths invite debunking. And while the ubiquity of Friedrich's *Wanderer* as a Romantic poster-child has unconsciously prolonged our "uncritical absorption" of the Romantics' own curated stylization of solitary genius,[6] scholars like Stillinger, Wolfson, and others have begun challenging this longstanding mythos by pointing to the coteries and communities that surrounded these authors.[7] Close friends, family members, fellow

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Press, 2004); and Sabine Rewald, *Caspar David Friedrich: Moonwatchers* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001).

[3] See, for instance, recent book covers for editions of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (Wordsworth Classics, 2004) and *Frankenstein* (Dover, 1994), as well as literary anthologies and criticism, including *Romanticism* (Cambridge Contexts in Literature series, 2004), *Romanticism* (Phaidon Press Arts and Ideas series, 2001), Alan Richardson's *The Neural Sublime: Cognitive Theories and Romantic Texts* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), and the first edition of Paul Johnson's *The Birth of the Modern: World Society, 1815-1830* (HarperCollins, 1991). *Wanderer* also appears as the primary image on Wikipedia's Romanticism page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanticism, accessed November 1, 2014.

[4] Koerner, *Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, 59.

[5] Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 1; Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 183.

[6] Jerome McGann famously warns against accepting Romanticism's self-constructed myths in *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 1.

[7] See for instance coterie studies such as Jeffrey Cox's *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Hunt, and Their Circle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and recent collaboration

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writers, not to mention editors, publishers, and booksellers: all of these men and women influenced the conception, composition, and execution of literary works. Rather than being a self-contained, solitary project, then, Romantic authorship was far more communal and collaborative—and domestic—than once assumed. Writing frequently involved the input of social and familial cohorts in the development of creative works, whether that was through the shared activities of reading and thinking, through a collective heritage of philosophical and literary tracts, or through the joint mechanical labor of producing manuscripts. One need only consider, for instance, the daily interactions between Wordsworth and his intimate network of companions, from his sister Dorothy and close friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge to his wife Mary Hutchinson and publisher Joseph Cottle, to recognize that literary works were rarely conceived or created in isolation.

Within this critical shift towards collaborations and coteries, Romanticism's writerly family circles have garnered increasing scholarly attention. As Michelle Levy observes in *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture*, the role of the family has been "little acknowledged and so little understood in most accounts of the field" up to this point, yet the phenomenon of "family authorship" was, she claims, intrinsic to Romantic print culture.[8] Tracing this sociable system across the period's most well-known families, from the Aikins and Coleridges to the Shelleys and Godwins, Levy argues that the domestic practices of dialogic exchange and mutual influence between family members preserved

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studies such as Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson's *Literary Couplings: Writing Couples, Collaborators, and the Construction of Authorship* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).
[8] Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

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the interactive features of collaborative manuscript culture well into the age of print media—and the age of original genius. In *Romantic Literary Families*, Scott Krawczyk concurs with Levy that collaboration stood as the rule rather than the exception. Examining family members' writings side by side, he suggests, leads to a more thorough understanding of how this "collaborative consciousness" characterized literary authorship of the period.[9] While Levy focuses on the material practices of manuscript production and Krawczyk on the social interactions behind authors' inter-related texts, both critics highlight the dominant role that the so-called "literary family" played as a constituent of the Romantic writing world.[10]

As rebuttals to the myth of solitary authorship, these studies importantly redefine the critical conversation by conceptualizing groups and cohorts to be authoring bodies—as Krawczyk refers to them, "nascent corporation[s]" (x). Distinguishing between particular *kinds* of familial connections, however, has remained of far less pressing concern. Levy's discussion, for instance, touches upon variously constituted kinship systems, from the sister-brother pair Anna Barbauld and John Aikin's collective educational writings to the multi-generational Wordsworth household (William, sister Dorothy, wife Mary, and daughter Dora) and their communal projects of travel writing. Similarly, Krawczyk highlights a range of family dynamics, including both the inter-generational influences within the Godwin-Wollstonecraft-Shelley clan as well as the

[9] Scott Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 19.
[10] Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families*, x. These studies follow the trend of several earlier monographs that consider the phenomenon within singular family units; see, for instance, Julie Carlson, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Richard Matlak, *The Poetry of Relationship: The Wordsworths and Coleridge, 1797-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); and Elizabeth Fay, *Becoming Wordsworthian: A Performative Aesthetics* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

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brother-sister correspondences of Barbauld and Aikin. In yet another exploration of Romanticism's ideological investment in the family, Jane Spencer equates numerous kinship metaphors as being potential structures underlying authorial relationships, from "generative literary fatherhood" to "mythical literary motherhood" to "competitive and co-operative literary brotherhood and sisterhood."[11] Family authorship can, it seems, be found almost anywhere, once one starts looking. For the most part, however, this scholarship tends to flatten differentiations within the spectrum of kinship while also retaining a predominantly biographical angle. They have sought to redefine our understanding of collective and collaborative writing *practices* rather than to reinvent our readings of Romantic writing itself.

This dissertation reconsiders familial paradigms to suggest that one specific mode of kinship—siblinghood—uniquely infiltrated Romanticism's literary consciousness. Instead of focusing upon real-life sororal and fraternal relations, as Levy, Krawczyk, and others have inventively done, I step aside from this authorial-oriented scholarship in order to examine how Romantic writers used siblinghood as a thematic and structural element in their literature. Sisters and brothers appear, after all, in a wide range of roles across Romantic texts. There are, for instance, far-flung and absent figures who consistently pull on characters' heartstrings, such as Fanny Price's naval brother William in Austen's *Mansfield Park* or the dead and ghostly half-sister Astarte in Byron's *Manfred*. There are intimate arrangements in which siblings reciprocally inform one another's pathways through life, such as the close bond between sisters Elizabeth and Jane Bennet in Austen's

[11] Spencer, *Literary Relations: Kinship and the Canon 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8-9.

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Pride and Prejudice, the indivisible childhood partnership of James and Leonard in Wordsworth's "The Brothers," or the long-held connection between Jane and De Monfort in Joanna Baillie's *De Monfort* (originally portrayed on stage by real-life siblings Sarah Siddons and John Kemble). There is dependent and paternalistic caretaking, such as that between Lorenzo and Flora Mancini in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's short story "The Brother and Sister: An Italian Story." And there are wider networks of relations surrounding or complementing such representative one-on-one pairings, including the seven varied siblings that constitute the groups depicted in Wordsworth's "We are Seven" or "The Seven Sisters"; the orphaned clan represented in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Narrative of George and Sarah Green*; and the myriad families of three, four, and five siblings and near-siblings contained within each of Austen's major novels.

Examining constructions of siblinghood in representative texts from across the genres—poetry, fiction, drama—as well as from across the generations and genders of Romantic writing—from Joanna Baillie and William Wordsworth in the 1790s to Percy Shelley, Jane Austen, and Mary Shelley in the 1810s—I argue that Romantic authors deployed instances of sibling kinship in order to articulate a specific vision of subjectivity that has been previously overlooked in criticism: a vision of networked rather than of individualized selfhood. Romantic writers portrayed this networked and sibling-based subjectivity as an integrated state of being—one that is bound to, constructed with, evolving alongside, and intimately tied up with the minds and bodies of others. The appearance of siblings throughout Romantic literature is thus far from incidental; rather, siblinghood embodies that mode of "collaborative consciousness" which Romantic writers

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used to conceive not only themselves but also their literary subjects.

This reorientation towards "sibling-ed" rather than solitary selfhood requires a shift in perception—perhaps even literally. Critics' selection of visual representation, for one, has been unnecessarily misleading. Having taken the iconography of Friedrich's solitary *Wanderer* for granted, literary scholars have missed the fact that such isolated figures were not the painter's primary subject. The *Wanderer* is an anomaly. Friedrich preferred, rather, "pensive *pairs* of figures,"[12] and it is those pairings for which he is most well known in the history of art—and which he even reproduced in multiple versions (figs. 2 and 3). With these couples, Friedrich brings together interconnected individuals who enjoy a split but shared perspective and a collective experience of the natural world. Stationed slightly off-center within a given composition, these pairs welcome a triangulated perception from the viewer outside the canvas as well. As Friedrich's artistic signature, these close companions observe the natural sublime from a position that is not quite the same but not quite different. Their simultaneous and overlapping contemplation

Figure 2. *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, c. 1819-20, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister, Dresden

Figure 3. *Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon*, c. 1824, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

[12] Rewald, *Moonwatchers*, 12, emphasis mine. In comparison to his few *Rückenfigur* images, Friedrich painted nearly two dozen works with this paired motif, particularly during the height of his popularity from 1817 to 1823 (Vaughan, *Friedrich*, 178).

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presents a visual correlative to the intersecting and interrelated nature of their subjective experiences. We, too, might perceive the Romantic world differently, if only we could train ourselves to see through multiple pairs of eyes.

Instead of memorializing Friedrich's *Wanderer* as *the* Romantic symbol, then, we could as easily elect an image like his *Sisters on the Harbor-View Terrace* (fig. 4), in which two nearly identical women appear, clad in the same clothing, adorned with similar hairstyles, their bodies drawn almost in duplicate. With rigid, upright stances, depicted from the rear and occupying the middle ground of the composition, these two figures resemble the dominating *Rückenfigur* of *The Wanderer*, but they also combine this independent, solitary positioning with the twinned and conjoined composition of the two figures in a *Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon*. Their stringent verticality distinguishes their bodies from one another, yet their gently extending arms reach across the space between them—and across the canvas's center—to produce intimate contact that mimics their parallel gazes. The urban scene reinforces the women's dualities: the doubled architectural elements of statues, spires, and masts echo their repetition with a difference.[13] United in

Figure 4. *Sisters on the Harbor-View Terrace (Harbor by Night)* ca. 1820, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

[13] Though the statues are difficult to see in this dark-toned painting, a monument to the right of the women features a cross with two figures who overlook the harbor. See Rewald (*Moonwatchers*, 38) for Friedrich's sketch study, which illustrates the statues much more clearly.

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their companionable *tête-à-tête*, made almost interchangeable through their near-identical appearances, the two sisters invoke an inter-related, collective experience that I suggest structures the Romantic imagination. Simultaneously independent yet identical, the women of *Sisters* are separate yet enmeshed. One cannot be understood without the other.

* * *

This vision of sibling subjectivity replaces Romanticism's egotistical sublime with selfhood in context: individuals intrinsically bound within a network of others whose perspectives are not quite the same but not quite distinct either. In theorizing this sibling framework, I draw on Stefani Engelstein's recent *PMLA* article "Sibling Logic; or, Antigone Again." Recognizing the intricate web of kin surrounding Antigone in Sophocles's Greek drama, Engelstein advances "sibling logic" to address the complex interplay of relationality embodied by lateral kinship networks. Within *Antigone*, she claims, we cannot find a distinct individual because characters cannot "pluck themselves out of each other's being."[14] The siblings are too enmeshed to be entirely differentiated. Antigone cannot be understood—nor can she understand herself—without the siblings to whom she is physically, affectively, and psychologically attached (including not only Ismene, Polyneices, and Eteocles, but also her father-brother Oedipus).

Focusing not on the sole character of Antigone, but rather on the system of siblings surrounding and encompassing her, Engelstein articulates the psychoanalytic and ideological valences of such sibling expansiveness:

> The sibling as a model, I argue, allows us to move beyond both self-other dualisms and the mother-child dyad as the only grounds for intersubjectivity, and recognizes the subject as instead embedded in a network of *partial others*, whose

[14] Stefani Engelstein, "Sibling Logic; or, Antigone Again," *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 39.

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> subjectivities are nonetheless partially, though differentially, shared… [This] logic of differential degrees of likeness provides the foundation for less confrontational formulations of belonging, identity, and agency. (40, original emphasis)

As Engelstein indicates here, the newly-imagined possibility of psychoanalytic sibling networks might serve to replace the dominant Freudian theories that have almost exclusively conceived of familial, cultural, and political paradigms in dichotomous, binary, and specifically vertical terms—in "self-other dualisms" and in the "mother-child dyad." Aiming to redress this tendency towards replacement and substitution in psychoanalytic models, those built upon vertical kinship hierarchies and conflicted relationships between parents and children, Engelstein suggests instead a lateral and horizontal platform of trans-subjective identities, whereby relations *within* a generation define subjecthood rather than those between generations. In this, she follows a thought experiment articulated previously by Judith Butler in her *Antigone's Claim*: "What would have happened if psychoanalysis had chosen Antigone rather than Oedipus?"[15]

What indeed? In contrast to Freud's Oedipal models, Antigone's sibling kinship offers a fluid system of multiple and partial connections, in which each child shares inherent similarities to her siblings, yet is simultaneously defined by her differences from them as well. Overturning Freud's inter-generational rivalries, Engelstein's sibling logic presents *intra*-generational "differentials," an array of shared likenesses and contrasts that constitute one's self-conception. Engelstein explains this multiplicity as follows:

> … the tie between siblings [is] always in excess of either the mother-child or the father-child relationship. The sibling relationship is multiply mediated through a set of nuanced differentials: resemblance between siblings, differential

[15] Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 57. Also cited in Engelstein, "Sibling Logic," 39.

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> resemblance to each shared parent (biological or otherwise), and not-quite-duplicated positionality. The relationship with the sibling in turn mediates and refracts relations both within and beyond the family from a perspective not quite same and not quite other. (41)

Sprouted from identical parentage, biological siblings in any given nuclear unit may occupy the "same" place within the family tree, yet this "not-quite-duplicated positionality" means that each sibling occupies that branch from an ever-so-slightly skewed position. Their unique positions, however, generate meaning only in relation to one another. As Engelstein suggests, sibling logic thus resists an ideology of individualism and autonomy—and, we might add, an ideology of Romantic egoism—because no sibling can exist in true independence or separation from her kin.

Following Butler and Engelstein, I wish to spark a similar thought experiment: what would have happened if Romantic criticism had chosen siblings instead of solitaries? Indeed, the omission of siblings and other intra-generational groups not only from the legacy of Romanticism but also from the cultural record as a whole has become strikingly apparent across fields ranging from psychology to biology to history. As sociologist Leonore Davidoff remarks, siblings have remained, mysteriously, an "absent presence" in both academic analysis and in professional applications, raising the question as to "why the networks formed by siblings and their place in the development of modern capitalist, class society have been neglected."[16] Even though our own cultural moment may be making full birth siblings harder to come by, what with the ubiquity of reconstituted step-families and reproductive technologies redefining kinship connections, siblings, biological

[16] Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1, 281.

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or otherwise, still maintain a material and psychic draw throughout our entire lives. They are, after all, "life's longest relationship."[17] Siblings have a unique status: they are there from our very beginning (or relatively close to it); they tend to outlast parents; their presence will cover more of our lifetime than friends, children, spouses, or any other relatives; we share a range of experiences with them over the course of life; they are assigned rather than earned; we can never choose them nor divorce them. Despite their exceptional importance in our lives, however, until quite recently siblings rarely featured as a source for theories of the inner life, since, as Prophecy Coles puts it, Freud's stress on parent-child relations within the family romance so thoroughly convinced us, more than a century ago, that "we do not need siblings."[18]

And yet early-nineteenth-century writers and thinkers were keenly aware of their need for siblings. In their daily realities, many Romantic brothers and sisters shared a domestic household throughout adulthood: Jane and Cassandra Austen resided together with their mother until Jane's death in 1817; from 1795 on, William and Dorothy Wordsworth sustained a lifelong domestic companionship even after William married and had children; Joanna Baillie occupied a common house in London with her sister Agnes for a half-century of their unmarried lives, while their brother Matthew resided just a few miles away; Charles and Mary Lamb shared a home when Mary was not confined in an insane asylum. Other sibling relations stimulated ongoing material and financial bonds,

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[17] Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, 2.

[18] Prophecy Coles, *The Importance of Sibling Relationships in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Karnac, 2003), 2. Other recent psychological work on the topic of siblings includes Coles, ed., *Sibling Relationships* (New York: Karnac, 2006); and Frank Sulloway, *Born to Rebel: Birth Order, Family Dynamics, and Creative Lives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996).

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such as Edward Austen's support of his sisters after their father's death. Even when separated by geography, siblings maintained psychological connections. John Keats, for one, wrote frequently to his brother and sister-in-law in America, and he imagined that their sympathetic attachments might be strong enough to generate a kind of transatlantic telepathy, if only they could engage in simultaneous reading practices—what one critic playfully refers to as "Shakespearean Skype."[19] This was an age, after all, when kinship nomenclature dissolved apparent distances between in-laws, when married partners would refer to their spouse's siblings as their own, using the terms "brother" and "sister" interchangeably to refer to those with whom they had no blood relation at all.[20]

Writers' own autobiographical relationships were not the only sibling bonds to feature in Romantic writing, yet scholarship has conventionally aligned them by collapsing Romantic siblinghood into the motif of Romantic incest. Thus far, the critical tradition has been dominated by psycho-biographical readings of what appear to be quasi-sexual intimacies between brothers and sisters in literary texts. According to this traditional line of thinking, the focus should be on heterosexual brother-sister relations in, predominantly, Romantic poetry. Within this framework, the love and intimacy between a brother and a sister verges on the illicit, thereby becoming a sign of the male author's repressed sexual desire for his own sibling. Moreover, this interpretation of sibling love as sibling incest reinforces an ideology of egotistical selfhood: according to Peter Thorslev, James Twitchell, and Alan Richardson, sibling longing symbolizes the male writer's quest

[19] Yohei Igarashi, "Keats's Ways: The Dark Passages of Mediation and Why He Gives Up *Hyperion*," *Studies in Romanticism* 53 (Summer 2014): 172.
[20] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 133.

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to incorporate the female as part of his own narcissistic and self-perpetuating "love affair with self."[21] Brother-sister near-incest is both exonerated and idealized by these poets because, in literary form, it can incarnate the self-obsession that defines the solipsistic Romantic project. Yet this tendency to equate sibling love with sibling desire—and thus to solidify Freudian readings of these tabooed longings—is unwarranted.

What such psychoanalytic readings have omitted are the myriad ways in which siblings function in Romantic literature beyond this reductive paradigm. For every Byronic Manfred yearning for his Astarte, there are numerous poems imagining the affective and psychological allure of sibling groups (not just heterosexual pairings). Such portrayals emerge, for instance, in a longing to reconstitute expansive networks that have been rent apart by the realities of work, war, and death, such as that in Felicia Hemans's "The Graves of a Household" or Wordsworth's "We are Seven." For every forbidden love affair between a Laon and Cythna, there are pre-sexual siblings listening attentively to family lore, as in Lambs's "Dream Children: A Revery." Furthermore, in Romantic culture at large, siblinghood functioned as a paradigm not just for intimacy, love, and affection, but also for political schemes on a broader scale. While Coleridge and Robert Southey hoped that marrying the Fricker sisters would secure a fraternal foundation for their utopian Pantisocracy, for instance, larger political movements in both America and Europe were launching their own metaphors of siblinghood as the new basis for

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[21] Thorslev, "Incest as Romantic Symbol," *Comparative Literature Studies* 2, no. 1 (1965): 56. See also Twitchell, *Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); and Richardson, "The Dangers of Sympathy: Sibling Incest in English Romantic Poetry," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 25, no. 4 (1985): 737-754, and "Rethinking Romantic Incest: Human Universals, Literary Representation, and the Biology of Mind," *New Literary History* 31, no. 3 (2000): 553-572.

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meritocratic societies. French revolutionaries, for one, leveraged the term "*fraternité*" in order to break with the ancient monarchical governments, in which patriarchal authority and the patriarchal family went hand in hand. They imagined themselves banding together as a collective of sons overturning the absolute rule of their despotic father.[22] As Mary Wollstonecraft saw it, part of the problem had been that rank and age interceded between family members because patriarchal systems had so favored hierarchies over equality. "Property," she exclaims in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, should be "more equally divided amongst all the children of a family," since no sibling—no eldest male, in other words—should be set apart from the others in any manner that would allow him to lord it over his kin.[23] Her proposed remedy in *Rights of Woman* is that "to improve both sexes they ought, not only in private families, but in public schools, to be educated together."[24] They should, in other words, be treated like siblings. Egalitarian ideals of brotherhood and sisterhood came to emblematize all that the period's radical fervor espoused.

* * *

By examining literary siblinghood in light of these historical and theoretical contexts, I aim to uncover the ways in which "sibling logic" was always already shaping Romantic literature. In doing so, I propose a departure from the hegemony of theories based in binaries, dichotomies, polarities, and rivalries—including sibling rivalry. Diverging from platforms that define individualism to be a solipsistic enterprise of

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[22] Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
[23] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23.
[24] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 260.

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differentiation and alterity, I seek, instead, the ways in which Romantic literature uses siblings to present individuality as an ideology of multiples, trans-subjective identities, and networked, collective encounters. In doing so, I offer sibling logic as one possible answer to the kind of ideological breaks that queer theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have previously called for. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick points to how "our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge" have been restricted to paradigms of contrast and opposition.[25] The possibility for thinking outside of these binary frameworks—of thinking, for instance, in multiples or in pluralities—remains epistemologically inaccessible. By reducing Western culture to discourses of self/other paradigms, Sedgwick laments, "every single theoretically and politically interesting project of postwar thought has finally had the effect of delegitimating our space for asking or thinking in detail about the multiple, unstable ways in which people may be like or different from each other" (23). This impulse towards dual categorizations—divisions like masculine/feminine, hetero/homo, normative/deviant—obscures other frameworks for personal and cultural identification. We are stuck in a world of twos. What would happen, then, if we could think in varied ranges of, say, sevens and nines and sixes—or infinities? What if we registered, as Sedgwick suggests, that an innumerable number of axiomatic relations both connect and distinguish us at any given moment, rather than continue to reify the reductive sex-gender system with its simplified binaries of me and not-me?

Without drawing explicit methodological connections to Sedgwick, Engelstein's

[25] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 1990; updated 2008), 3.

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"sibling logic" gestures towards such a possibility. With the omission of siblings from psychoanalytic theory, Engelstein reflects, "we have lost…a notion of shared subjectivity, interconnectedness, similarity in difference, and group belonging outside the stark terms of otherness versus introjection."[26] Theories of substitution and replacement, such as Freud's Oedipal complex, have obscured arenas for more complex arrangements of interpersonal identifications. But sibling logic could rectify this omission. Sibling logic frees us from the constraints of self/other differentiation, for siblings allow us to think in multiples—in threes and fours and fives; in combinations of age, gender, and personality; in simultaneous communion and competition; in the additions and subtractions and the constant evolutions of a horizontal network. By spreading the range of identification across spectrums and contingencies rather than reducing difference to mere alterity, sibling logic would, in Engelstein's words, "make possible a politics that discards dichotomies in favor of differentials, one that recognizes the subject within networks and vice versa" (50). Networks, by definition, resist simplistic reduction to you versus me, self versus other, father versus child. Networks, in essence, make possible both the one in the many and the many in the one—the sibling *in* and *as* the self.

I would like to suggest, then, that sibling logic not only opens horizons for psychoanalytic and queer theory, but that it may also address some of the key heuristic conundrums with which Romantic criticism has been grappling. Take, for instance, Anne Mellor's artificial but necessary binary between "masculine" and "feminine" romanticisms. Although Mellor herself acknowledged that establishing such a schema

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[26] Engelstein, "Sibling Logic," 50.

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would be "theoretically dubious," it was a necessary first step to recovering the plethora of women writers who had long been ignored by scholarship but who nevertheless had historically shaped Romantic reading and writing culture. They did so, however, as Mellor's binary proposes, according to a different ethos. Where men favored the "development of an autonomous self" via the imagination, women favored a vision of community based on "a cooperative rather than possessive interaction" with Nature. Masculine Romantics (i.e., the big six male poets) adhered to "oppositional polarity" as their founding truth, whereas feminine Romantics drew upon a model "based on sympathy and likeness."[27] And although Mellor flagged the limitations of these discursive and epistemological distinctions, the self/other, male/female divisions have been nonetheless instrumental in informing much subsequent work—even if that work aims to invert such gender-based binaries.

I propose that sibling logic offers a new solution entirely, mediating these two spaces of gendered romanticism by helping us to see that the divide was artificial all along. Siblinghood, along with sibling logic, dissolves binary thinking altogether. Moreover, it potentially combines the self-oriented subjectivity of so-called masculine romanticism with the other-oriented features of feminine writing. As a structural paradigm, literary siblinghood embodies both. Engelstein suggests such a blending when she remarks that the "trans-subjective world" of sibling logic supports "a paradoxical cleaving of union and difference" whereby affiliation and foreignness, mirroring and variation, exist simultaneously in the space between self and other (42). Self and other are

[27] Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2-3.

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one, but they are also plural. "Sibling love," she explains, "thus both evokes and revokes the narcissism onto which it is so frequently read" (42). Sibling logic sustains the viability of understanding the self as a simultaneous rendering of sameness out of otherness and otherness out of sameness, interchangeably, thereby undermining any methodological classifications that might distinguish one mode of opposition (masculine romanticism) from another of sympathy and likeness (feminine romanticism). From the perspective of this trans-subjective sibling logic, both male and female Romantic writers may have been conceptualizing the "Self" in similar terms to begin with.

Furthermore, what distinguishes sibling logic from other epistemological and psychoanalytic paradigms is not only these variable matrixes of self-other differentials that Engelstein illuminates, but rather (or, also), I suggest, the complex complementarities of both vertical *and* horizontal relations that constitute sibling networks. As an archetypal model, the sibling network contains an infinite permutation of possible arrangements and variations between siblings of different ages, age gaps, genders, personalities, and intimacies. As Engelstein explains, lateral differentials position each sibling in a slightly unique orientation not only to one another but also to the prior generation of parents to which the group belongs. I wish to point out, however, that sibling logic naturally contains *both* of the supposedly exclusive categories of inter-generational and intra-generational kinship. Sibling logic, in other words, does not *only* introduce lateral thinking. Rather, it embodies both horizontal and vertical orientations. Sibling networks orient themselves not only around egalitarian sameness, as equals and peers, but also around the rich diversity of vertical hierarchies that define the relations of siblings in

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various birth positions. Thus, on the one hand, sibling logic instantiates ways to think across a singular generation, shifting our attention to frameworks of interconnectedness between and among related kin as well as invoking dispersive spatial metaphors based upon such horizontal kinship—spreading, diffusing, and intersecting. But sibling logic also includes elements of inter-generational, hierarchical, and vertical paradigms: differences in birth order; older siblings who act as pseudo-parents for their youngest kin; emotional relationships that involve replacement and competition and rivalry; and, ultimately, temporal metaphors of growth and change over time. In such "constellations," as one psychologist names it,[28] sibling logic contains features of both vertical and horizontal arrangements.

With this ability to embrace models of both intra- and inter-generationality, as I will explore in this project, the logic and kinship of siblinghood intersects with some of the largest inquiries informing our current social and literary histories: namely, theories regarding certain transformations in paradigms of the family. Some time during the course of the eighteenth century, English culture evolved from its medieval patriarchal structures towards new, modern models of nuclear households and affectively-bonded conjugal families. This transition—along with its precise timing, nature, and effects—has been strenuously debated among historians. Stemming from Lawrence Stone's theory of companionate marriage and its concomitant affective individualism,[29] such debates have contested whether, in fact, there was any definitive break between old family forms and

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[28] Victor G. Cicirelli, *Siblings Relationships Across the Life Span* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1995), 18.
[29] Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

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new ones, and, if so, how and when that break may have taken place. Most recently, Ruth Perry adopts Stone's premises to suggest that this "seismic shift" indeed transformed British culture from the predominance of one primary kinship set to another: from "the axis of kinship based on consanguineal ties or blood lineage" to "an axis based on conjugal and affinal ties of the married couple"—from, in other words, the parental home to the spousal.[30] In her feminist response to Stone, Perry suggests that this transformation had adverse effects on women, leaving them struggling to find their place within changing systems, unsure of which power structures would provide them the financial, material, and emotional support they required. Perry describes the distinction this way:

> In a kinship system based on the conjugal bond, the obligations of spouses to each other are stressed above and against their ties of filiation. In a consanguineal kinship system, bonds of filiation and siblinghood are stressed above and against the conjugal tie. … From the evidence of these [eighteenth-century] novels I believe that this shift from a consanguineal to a conjugal system had very different consequences for women than for men… Suffice it to say here that it was a mixed blessing for women to exchange whatever power and status they had in their families of origin for the power and status of women in conjugal families. (2)

The eighteenth-century novel, she explains, dramatized these confusions over where women could place their allegiances, whether their home was to be with their fathers or with their husbands. Here, however, Perry groups "siblinghood" with filial bonds and the consanguineal, biological relations that constitute the parental family. Yet I would argue that, more often than not, siblings in Romantic literature serve as testing grounds for future marital relationships; they are as closely aligned with the emotions and psychology behind the choice of an affinal partner as they are aligned to the memories and

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[30] Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

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experiences associated with the childhood home and the obligations of the paternal, lineage clan. As such, siblinghood uniquely mediates between and inhabits both of these shifting paradigms, both the consanguineal *and* the conjugal, thereby generating a space where these two competing systems might coexist—and where their incompatibilities become, perhaps, even more thoroughly pronounced.

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My first chapter, "Queer(ing) Kinship on Stage: Sororal-Fraternal Reproduction in Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci* and Joanna Baillie's *De Monfort*," explores two Romantic-era verse-dramas that, despite being conceived as closet dramas throughout their early reception history, in fact depend actively on visual forms of communication and transmission—in other words, on both the performance and materiality of the stage. By using these physical registers, I argue, Shelley's and Baillie's dramas problematize their patriarchal society's accepted heteronormative systems, including not only biological, sexual reproduction but also the linguistic, political, and cultural forms of heredity that follow directly from these vertical structures. Placing these maneuvers in the context of cultural discourses that relied particularly on visual communication, such as physiognomy and phrenology, I suggest that these plays capitalize on the theatricality and materiality of observation in order to define new modes of transference between bodies. In both plays, the transmission of likeness and mirroring between siblings enables a non-biological mode of reproduction. Specifically, at the end of both works, a female protagonist/sister is given the final words; and, in both, she imagines a new framework for continuing the siblings' shared legacy well into the future. In the end, each sister

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creates a space for alternative queer kinship that sidesteps the mandates of sexual procreation in favor of other forms of bodily reproduction, overturning the procreative strictures of marriage and motherhood in favor of sibling—sideways—reproduction.

Chapter Two, "William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and the Spots of Sibling Time," takes up this motif of sibling transference in order to consider the inter-relational paradigm of Wordsworth's fictionalized sibling networks. A combination of vertical and horizontal relations shape each network's constituent parts. Placing Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and other contemporaneous poems in a historicized context of late-eighteenth-century kinship, I suggest that Wordsworth's poetry invests in a kind of inter-subjectivity that informs not only the relationship between and amongst sibling characters but also the consciousness of his poetic self-fashioning —a self that depends upon the trans-subjective consciousness constructed by the sibling network. I examine how sibling bonds in, for instance, "We are Seven" reveal essential affective and psychoanalytic connections that, regardless of whether siblings are living or dead, must be maintained in a constellated family unit. By way of other works such as "The Seven Sisters" and "To My Sister," I turn to "Tintern Abbey," where, I suggest, we find the fullest ramifications of Wordsworth's sibling logic as structuring a mode of multi-layered queer temporalities.

After challenging the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth's poetry, replacing it with this multidimensional subjectivity, I move to Jane Austen's novels, where, I suggest, the self-contained "I" of the *Bildungsroman* is likewise challenged by a sororal framework. Chapter Three, "Building the *Bildung* of Sisterhood in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*," considers the prospect of a female novel of development in which

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sisters undergo a shared, mutual *Bildung* evolution. Rethinking this genre's emphasis on individual subjectivity, I explore how the sororal relationships between Elinor and Marianne Dashwood and Jane and Elizabeth Bennet foster a complementary process of education. In performing her natural character traits, each sister models for the other a different epistemological approach to the world that the other will eventually adopt, in part, as her own behavior changes along with her shifting self-understanding. These dynamics lead the protagonists to find balance between oppositional epistemological forces—between the extremes of logic and emotion, secrecy and exposure, introversion and extroversion. The slow growth of siblinghood—and not the precipitous courtship of male suitors—is what shapes these classic texts of female maturation.

If Austen's novels exploit the sororal combination of similarities and differences in order to forge a middle-way among epistemological extremes, settling upon a hybridity and balance between polarities, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* explores the consequences of ignoring such sibling complementarity. Tracing the source of homosocial bonds to the brother-sister relationships that sit at the heart of each male narrator's story, I suggest that Shelley's novel critiques one of these narrators, Victor Frankenstein, for his narcissistic inability to recognize these inter-relational and dual-gendered dynamics. Ignoring the pseudo-sisters in his life—or attempting to convert them into wives—Victor misinterprets the nature of non-reproductive human interdependence, thinking instead that he can supersede biological bonds with manufactured ones. In contrast, Walton and even the creature identify the affective core of brother-sister relations: at the root of these connections, whether exemplified by Walton and his sister Margaret or by Agatha and

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Felix De Lacey, lies a mode of sympathetic reciprocity that sustains their emotional, material, and psychological needs. Because he cannot understand this dynamic, Victor makes the greatest mistake of all: he thinks the creature asks him for a spouse, when in reality he asks him for a sister. Though Shelley's novel demonstrates sibling reciprocity, Victor fails to embrace it—but the failure lies uniquely with him. Like Wordsworth, Austen, Baillie, and Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley recognizes the integrity of intimate and sympathetic sibling reciprocities, and the many possibilities that this brand of lateral kinship makes available.

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CHAPTER ONE

Queer(ing) Kinship on Stage: Sororal-Fraternal Reproduction in Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci* and Joanna Baillie's *De Monfort*

When Percy Bysshe Shelley sent his drama *The Cenci* back home from Italy, he suspected this new work might encounter some resistance. In a letter to Thomas Love Peacock, Shelley confessed that his "principal doubt" was "whether any such a thing as incest in this shape however treated [would] be admitted on the stage."[1] Featuring a scandalous father-daughter rape, *The Cenci* and its incestuous plotline were rejected by the literary reviewers. *The Monthly Magazine*, for one, recoiled with "sentiments of horror and disgust" from a play it deemed "overstepped the bounds of modesty and nature."[2] *The Literary Gazette* questioned whether to acknowledge this "noisome and noxious publication," while *The Edinburgh Monthly Review* praised Shelley's literary talent but condemned his immorality, declaring: "It is absolutely impossible that any man in his sober mind should believe that dwelling upon such scenes of unnatural crime and horror can be productive of any good to any one person in the world." Protesting to Peacock that he was merely recording "facts" that were "matter of history," Shelley was perhaps unprepared for these vehement objections. But once Covent Garden refused to perform the piece, it would remain obscured from public view for more than a century[3]—a closet drama too dangerous to be on stage, spurned by many as "not an acting drama at all."[4]

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[1] Shelley to Peacock, July [c. 20], 1819; *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. II: *Shelley in Italy*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 504.
[2] *Monthly Magazine*, April 1, 1820; in Newman Ivey White, *The Unextinguished Hearth: Shelley and His Contemporary Critics* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966). Subsequent reviews are also cited from this source.
[3] While the Shelley Society produced a one-off matinee in 1886, the play would not appear on a professional stage until 1922. On *The Cenci*'s production history see Kenneth N. Cameron and

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Over the subsequent two centuries, accusations of the play's moral reprehensibility—its "trash, filth, and poison"[5]—once leveled at Shelley's not-so "sober mind" have been progressively transferred to the character of Count Cenci, who enacts the rape, and, ultimately (and with a hint of victim-blaming), to his daughter Beatrice. As the unapologetic orchestrator of her father's murder, Beatrice has been censured by nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers alike for her ethically compromised stance. As one critic conclusively declares, "By taking what she thought to be the law of God into her own hands, she acted as a brave and desperate human being—but she was wrong."[6] Beatrice's repeated refusals to speak—to name Cenci's crime, to express responsibility for his murder, to convey any sense of guilt at all—has led her to be castigated as despicably immoral.

Recently, however, Beatrice's silences have been gradually recuperated in more sympathetic terms, understood to be a positive emblem for Shelley's political message. In such readings, her "wrongness" has been refashioned as critics begin imagining Beatrice to be the victim of religious, legal, and sexual forces.[7] Her suffering reflects Shelley's

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Horst Frenz, "The Stage History of Shelley's *The Cenci*," *PMLA* 60, no. 4 (December 1945): 1080-1105; as well as Bert O. States, Jr., "Addendum: The Stage History of Shelley's *The Cenci*," *PMLA* 72, no. 4 (September 1957): 633-644; and Truman Guy Steffan, "Seven Accounts of the Cenci and Shelley's Drama," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 9, no. 4 (Autumn 1969): 601-618.

[4] Earnest Sutherland Bates, *A Study of Shelley's Drama* The Cenci (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), 60, as cited in Cameron and Frenz, "The Stage History," 1080.

[5] *The London Magazine* 1 (May, 1820), 546-555, in White, *Unextinguished Hearth*, 190.

[6] Robert Whitman, "Beatrice's 'Pernicious Mistake' in *The Cenci*," *PMLA* 74, no. 3 (June 1959): 253.

[7] See for instance Colleen Fenno, "Remembering Beatrice Remembering: Sexual Crime and Silence in Shelley's *The Cenci*," *Essays in Romanticism* 22, no. 1 (2015): 35-51; Sean Dempsey, "*The Cenci*: Tragedy in a Secular Age," *ELH* 79, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 879-903; Monica Brzezinski Potkay, "Incest as Theology in Shelley's *The Cenci*," *The Wordsworth Circle* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 57-65; and Ginger Strand and Sarah Zimmerman, "Finding an Audience: Beatrice Cenci, Percy Shelley, and the Stage," *European Romantic Review* 6, no. 2 (1996): 246-268.

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atheistic disdain for his repressive patriarchal culture, validating her horrific actions by manifesting the stakes of such systemic institutional oppression. She has no option but to murder. As Sean Dempsey puts it, Shelley uses the dire situation of *The Cenci* to show his countrymen a mirror of their own ignorant "blockages":

> Her refusal to take responsibility for her actions and her stubborn unwillingness to break from a social framework that has proven itself false is presented as a challenge to the audience's own refusal to wake up from the subliminal 'impulse' that keeps them enslaved to the matrix of a discredited social framework.[8]

Ashamed of his society's shortcomings, Shelley dramatizes the drastic repercussions of silencing women and accepting the rule of a tyrant—a resonance perhaps not lost on his twenty-first-century readers.

While such scholarship has expanded the ethical import of Beatrice's silences, I argue that Beatrice does in fact "speak" in several ways that these readings have overlooked: namely, in the non-verbal registers of bodily performance, visible disabilities, and non-reproductive reproduction—what I term "fraternal reproduction." In a play centered on threats of father-daughter incest, Beatrice overcomes this familial trauma to engage with her brother in a way that restores order and sanity to their lives. She invokes her brother's likeness as a means by which her own legacy might be continued, using their sibling relationship to bring about material continuity without the need for sexual, biological reproduction. With this phenomenon of fraternal-sororal transmission, Beatrice hands her legacy to her brother, fostering a paradigm of reproductive kinship that relies not on procreation or on linear generational progression but, rather, on physical modes of reflection between brother and sister in the present moment. This transmission enables

[8] Dempsey, "*The Cenci*: Tragedy in a Secular Age," 882, 892.

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Beatrice to conclude her life, and Shelley's play, with a uniquely queer version of kinship: a non-normative, non-reproductive possibility for familial continuity and a propagation of the self.

This fraternal reproduction counteracts Beatrice's otherwise immoral deeds by offering a recuperative and reparative vision of hope. She overturns her father's malicious methods of destruction and ethically redeems herself for less admirable acts. In this way, Cenci's vicious rape—a "sad reality" perpetrated by one who "do[es] and think[s] evil"[9]—opens narrative space for alternative modes of kinship. Although the Count's incestuous violence is a destructive signifier in itself, the rape introduces *The Cenci*'s interest in confronting normative cultural systems of reproduction, heredity, and heterosexuality. In the wake of this tabooed encounter, both Count Cenci and Beatrice leverage its results to imagine new realities. Beatrice's recuperative vision clashes with her father's anti-normative stance: while his brand of anti-familial and anti-social queerness seeks to overturn the kind of progressive futurity that is inherently enfolded within patriarchal systems, Beatrice similarly resists patrilineal inheritance—but she does so by operating without a bodily invasion of the other. Thus where Cenci disrupts his own lineage by destroying his male line and pursuing an inverted impregnation of his daughter, Beatrice, far more productively, invests her future in her brother without altering his physical wholeness. Beatrice's reparative mode thus generates a new inheritance scheme out of lateral lines of transference—a queer futurity that embodies not destruction or perversion but creation: not in the child, but in the sibling.

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[9] Shelley, "Dedication" to Leigh Hunt for *The Cenci*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 140.

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I. No Future: Count Cenci and the Death Drive

By rejecting her father's verbal discourse in favor of material and fraternal-sororal forms of communication, Beatrice Cenci introduces a "reparative" queerness—to borrow that term from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick—that embraces the physical, the bodily, the performed, and the visible. In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick offers "reparative reading" as an alternative to the tendency of literary criticism to favor a "hermeneutics of suspicion" and paranoid analytical practices. This reparative mode, she suggests, advances instead an epistemology of positive, generous, and creative critical maneuvers, rejecting those motivated by negative deconstruction—and destruction.[10] In an almost parallel vein, Beatrice resists her father's antisocial negativity—a particular brand of queerness that we might align more closely with Lee Edelman's "sinthomosexuality," to which I will return shortly. Within a reparative move, Beatrice sidesteps the mechanisms of conventional reproduction—both linguistic and biological—in order to replace the patrilineal order of her father with something far more enduring. In doing so, Beatrice espouses an affective commitment to positive reconstruction previously unimaginable in her father's ethically binary—and biologically reproductive—world.

In order for Beatrice's material voices to, well, materialize, she must overturn the kind of anti-familial, anti-normative, and anti-social queerness that leads her father, Count Cenci, to desire the termination of his patrilineal family. As we learn from the play's opening act, Count Cenci yearns to eliminate his male progeny and his current

[10] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

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(second) wife. The play begins with a dinner party held to celebrate the recent deaths of his two eldest sons, which Cenci believes his own prayers have actualized. This happy coincidence is, for Cenci, "a most desired event," since these "disobedient and rebellious sons" will now need no more "food or raiment."[11] Ecstatic at no longer having to provide resources for these would-be inheritors, Cenci exclaims to his audience, "Rejoice with me, my heart is wondrous glad" (I.iii.50). While his guests—and perhaps even Shelley's reader—doubt that this glorifying of his sons' deaths could actually be the stimulus for the banquet, Cenci has already affirmed this truth, quite excitedly, prior to hosting the event. Before the dinner, he informs his servant Camillo that he had indeed prayed for God to enact this outcome, to "send some quick death upon them," these "cursed sons," and that, moreover, his remaining living kin, his wife Lucretia and son Bernardo, "could not be worse / If dead and damned" along with them (I.i.134, 130, 135-6). Cenci looks forward to ending his male line, even though his audience resists believing it.

Desiring the annihilation of his reproductive clan, Count Cenci engages—and complicates—what queer theorist Lee Edelman brands "sinthomosexuality." In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Edelman presents this radical queer position as a means by which to oppose normative paradigms of cultural progression via the homosexual resistance to biological reproduction as a given social good. As a structural position of anti-social negativity, the sinthomosexual employs a destructive death drive to resist heteronormativity's adherence to what Edelman terms "reproductive futurity" and its affiliation with politics *qua* politics: "this neologism," Edelman suggests, "would assert

[11] Shelley, *The Cenci*, I.iii.21, 43, 46, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002). Further references to this edition are provided parenthetically.

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itself instead *against* futurity, *against* its propagation, insofar as it would designate an impasse in the passage to the future and, by doing so, would pass beyond, pass *through*, the saving fantasy futurity denotes."[12] In other words, sinthomosexuality combats the assumption that a future must take place at all. Instead, such antisocial queerness "names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (3). Not fighting for the children means not assuming children must be birthed for social progress to be made.

For Edelman, this sinthomosexuality can be a positive and affirmative mode: it retains an essential radicalism embodied by "queer" in its purest form, sustaining a necessary ideological contradiction to the normative and forward-moving impetus of Western culture. By abandoning reproductive futurity, we might imagine a better world for the *now*, rather than just for the unknown and unnamed future inhabited by our as-yet-unconceived children. In light of today's current movements to normalize same-sex marriage and the like, Edelman embraces anti-normativity to retain homosexuality's originating resistance to the social impetus to reproduce—thus ensuring cultural legibility for those who have been written out of the heteronormative story. Sinthomosexuality resists creating a future for the figurative child upon which our hegemonic systems rest: the Child as emblem of a basic social value in progressive improvement for later days.

As Shelley's Cenci destroys his patrilineal and political futures, he is certainly not fighting for the children. But whereas Edelman celebrates the subversive nature of this antisocial radicalism, Shelley renders this queerness at a disturbing extreme, blending

[12] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 33.

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Cenci's otherwise potentially fruitful desire to oppose normative kinship systems—he does, after all, successfully disconnect political futurity from its dependence on biological reproduction—with a much more destructive personal *modus operandi*; his malicious and murderous nature do not make him a fair representative of radical queerness. Nevertheless, Edelman's theory of antisocial negativity may help us to register the impact of Cenci's position, since both the historical and fictional versions of this disruptive Count attempt to abort his male inheritors—and with them his political futures.

In Mary Shelley's translation of the Cenci legend, "Relation of the Death of the Family of the Cenci,"[13] the historical tale of Francesco Cenci fashions him as a sexual deviant. On the surface, he engaged in conventional heterosexual conjugality. He first married "an exceedingly rich lady who died after she had given birth to seven unfortunate children," and then wedded Lucretia, "a lady of a noble Roman family but [having] no children by her."[14] Following this information, Mary assigns the underlying cause of Cenci's "most wicked life" to his veiled homosexuality (174). "[S]odomy was the least and Atheism the greatest, of the vices of Francesco as is proved by the tenor of his life," Mary records, "For he was three times accused of Sodomy and paid the sum of 100,000 crowns to government in commutation of the punishment rightfully awarded to this crime" (175). Though the "Relation" does not document the specific punishments the Count endured, Mary does note that Cenci underwent at minimum a "third

[13] Mary's work (credited to her but not definitively proven to have been originally translated by her) could have been written in 1818 or 1819, either before, concurrently with, or after Shelley's writing of *The Cenci*. See *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. 2: 1817-1819, eds. Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews (Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2000), 865-867.

[14] Transcription of Mary Shelley's "Relation of the Death of the Family of the Cenci," Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 13, in *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, vol. X, ed. Betty T. Bennett (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 175.

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imprisonment…for his accustomed crime of Sodomy" during the time that his eldest sons were banished from his home (175).

Percy Shelley's play alludes to these sexual crimes from the moment Cenci first walks onstage—disturbingly, crimes that are tied up with murder and bribery. As Camillo initiates the play's dialogue, he informs Cenci that the "matter of the murder" will remain quiet as long as Cenci continues to pay off the Pope and his associates. This most recent occurrence, Camillo notes, merely extends a prior stream of "crimes like yours" (I.i.7) and "hideous…deeds" (13) for which Cenci has already purchased "impunity" (6), saving himself from both earthly punishment and everlasting damnation by "[e]nrich[ing] the Church" (8) with his "gold" (6). While Camillo, as a voice of moral rectitude, attempts to admonish Cenci for these horrendous acts, the Count commends himself for yet another victory, readily giving away a "third of [his] possessions" so that it can be "compounded," i.e., settled with the Pope's "nephew" (illegitimate child) so that Cenci is not legally prosecuted for said crimes. Like the historical Francesco Cenci, Percy Shelley's Count pays a large sum of money in order to avoid his due punishment—though, on the surface, the drama masks these alleged crimes as murder rather than sodomy.

As with these commuted crimes, the Count's despicable hatred of his sons also stems from the historical Francesco. In the "Relation," Mary records, "nothing would exceed his pleasure if all his children died and that when the grave should receive the last he would as a demonstration of joy make a bonfire of all that he possessed" (183). Along with the end of his family line, Francesco orchestrates the demise of his own rule, comingling his children's physical decease with the further destruction of his material

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commodities, those remnants of his political powers. With his children die his reign. Francesco had even prepared a small chapel on his property for this very purpose: "his intention in so doing was to bury there all his children whom he cruelly hated" (177). Thus in both Mary's translation and in Shelley's dramatic invention, Francesco Cenci appears not only to have despised his own progeny but also to have yearned for—and planned for—their deaths. This murderous impulse mingles, disturbingly, with his penchant for defying the normative cultural constructs that uphold his political reign.

Cenci's homicidal desires contradict heteronormative culture's dependence upon the figurative and literal Child. As Edelman posits, the symbolic Child represents the inevitable future towards which we constantly march, a fantasy that frames what is and is not legible in the realm of "political discourse as such." The fantasy of the child, in other words, "render[s] unthinkable…a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations" (2). Culture, kinship, politics—all of these rely upon the notion that we will propagate and prosper, that we will birth children and thus birth a future, and so the sinthomosexual exists outside this system entirely in order to contest it and make other possibilities legible. We need to be disabused of the myth of reproductive progression, Edelman urges; we need the sinthome as a symbolic alternate.

In Shelley's drama, Count Cenci revels in the antagonistic space of the sinthome, rejecting the futurity of a reproductive sexuality and embracing the Lacanian *jouissance* that Edelman suggests characterizes such a radical and deviant queerness. Cenci does not act according to heteronormative suppositions that "the body politic must survive" at all (3). Rather, he luxuriates in a joyful death drive that fosters the destruction of his own

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family unit and the political futures that they represent, as he declares proudly, contrasting himself to other men:

> All men delight in sensual luxury,
> All men enjoy revenge; and most exult
> Over the tortures they can never feel—
> Flattering their secret peace with others' pain.
> But I delight in nothing else. I love
> The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,
> When this shall be another's, and that mine.
> And I have no remorse and little fear,
> Which are, I think, the checks of other men. (I.i.77-85)

In true Iago-like fashion, the villainous Cenci relishes his monomaniacal commitment to pure evil, exulting in the pain and terror that he inflicts upon others. He delights in nothing else. Cenci's "embrace of queer negativity," to invoke Edelman's language once again, has "no justification if justification requires it to reinforce some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself" (6). Cenci's desires carry no justification other than pure delight, without any aim towards a positive social good: they are simply self-pleasing. "I please my senses as I list," he announces (I.i.69); "[a]ny design my captious fancy makes / The picture of its wish…Is as my natural food and rest debarred / Until it can be accomplished" (87-90). Cenci pursues the suffering of others for the simple reason that it brings him great joy. According to Edelman, "the sinthome, in its refusal of meaning, procures the determining relation to enjoyment by which the subject finds itself driven beyond the logic of fantasy or desire" (35). Cenci will never be satiated, for his appetites for destruction are unquenchable, beyond the logic or fantasy of even this most solipsistic of personal pleasures.

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This joyous resistance to the social good is what makes Cenci incomprehensible to his subjects and friends and illegible to his heteronormative audience. We witness this confusion when, for instance, the play's opening scene juxtaposes Cenci's revelatory glee against Camillo's cautionary disbelief. Camillo reinforces what should be Cenci's properly ordered relation to this family: "Your children should be sitting round you now… Where is your wife? Where is your gentle daughter?" (I.i.39-43). Camillo imagines Cenci as the paternal center of an idyllic family portrait. Moreover, Camillo cannot believe that Cenci does not find misery in his hunt for unadulterated evil: "I thank my God that I believe you not," he exhales to deaf ears (I.i.120). And yet, believe him he inevitably must, for Cenci will continue his crusade on behalf of death and destruction.

Cenci defies such incredulity when he perpetuates this morbid celebration, positioning himself as a proud father—but one whose pride stems from his sons' deaths:

> It is indeed a most desired event.
> If, when a parent from a parent's heart
> Lifts from this earth to the great father of all
> A prayer, both when he lays him down to sleep,
> And when he rises up from dreaming it;
> One supplication, one desire, one hope,
> That he would grant a wish for his two sons
> Even all that he demands in their regard—
> And suddenly beyond his dearest hope,
> It is accomplished, he should then rejoice,
> And call his friends and kinsmen to a feast,
> And task their love to grace his merriment,
> Then honour me thus far—for I am he. (I.iii.21-33)

To everyone's horror, Cenci parades his filicide in public. Quite ominously, he invokes a symbolic image of a father praying to the "great father" of heaven, morning and night, for the wellbeing of his children, and he converts it into a fervent and monomaniacal

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prayer—"[o]ne supplication, one desire, one hope"—for their deaths. With such sacrilege, Cenci calls upon his subjects to condone his actions by inviting them to "rejoice" and "feast" with "merriment." Cenci celebrates what horrifies others.

Cenci's death drive is thus indiscernible to his attendees. His dinner guests refuse to believe that the sons' deaths could truly be the reason for Cenci's exuberance. The First Guest reacts to Cenci's statements with jovial indifference: "In truth, my Lord, you seem too light of heart, / Too sprightly and companionable a man, / To act the deeds that rumor pins on you" (I.iii.14-16). Cenci's demeanor cannot be reconciled with the Guest's instinctive—heteronormative—worldview. Even once Cenci's motives become more clear, his guests still linger in denial: "No, stay!" the third guest implores, "I do believe it is some jest; though faith! / 'Tis mocking us somewhat too solemnly. / I think his son has married the Infanta, / Or found a mine of gold in El Dorado" (I.iii.70-74). Surely Cenci's laudatory claims cannot be genuine, his guests surmise. Such malicious negativity is, for them, inscrutable, and they assume that Cenci must be preparing them to celebrate a marriage or a discovery of riches—certainly not death. They seek a reason for merriment more suitable within their reproductive culture, for Cenci's aversion to kinship is rendered unthinkable. By killing off his children, or at least praying for their deaths, Cenci "names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (Edelman 9).

But while his filial death drive corrupts patrilineage, Count Cenci's most disturbing move of all is to manipulate heterosexual reproduction to his own deviant ends. After killing his sons, he envisions one generational product: Beatrice's child. Cenci

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imagines producing a future offspring in his daughter's womb by the means of incestuous rape. This rape represents for Cenci a further corruption of normative linear hierarchies. Cenci considers defiling his daughter by impregnating her as retribution for her resistance, aiming at destroying all forms of normative kinship by having Beatrice conceive a progeny that will bear the imprints of his perverse desires. Cenci's curse on Beatrice undermines conventional paradigms:

> [I]f she ever have a child; and thou,
> Quick Nature! I adjure thee by thy God,
> That thou be fruitful in her, and encrease
> And multiply, fulfilling his command,
> And my deep imprecation! May it be
> A hideous likeness of herself, that as
> From a distorting mirror, she may see
> Her image mixed with what she most abhors,
> Smiling upon her from her nursing breast. (IV.i.141-149)

Cenci's threat breeches the sexual impasse that *should* exist between himself and his daughter, and he uses this tabooed encounter to debase any prospective biological issue. Cenci would produce, both metaphorically and literally, a "mirror" that forever reminds Beatrice of her violator by resembling both of them in a tainted admixture of kinship connections: it would be both son and brother to its mother; both son and grandson to its father. This collapsing of kinship distinctions turns generations backwards and inwards upon themselves, obliterating the kind of reproductive futurity that, according to Edelman, underlies heteronormative politics. For Count Cenci, his vision of this future child culminates his mission: it disrupts normative lineage and blocks all generational progression. In Shelley's vision, however, this mission is problematically tied up with incest and violence.

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II. Touching Feeling: Beatrice's Sororal Transmission

While Cenci embodies a problematically destructive brand of radical anti-normative queerness, Shelley redeems the play's ethical center with Beatrice: Cenci's brand of queerness is not the one that succeeds. Indeed, the two characters' contrasting relationships to anti-normativity illuminate the sort of ideological conflicts for which queer theory itself has come under scrutiny in recent times.[15] Over the past few years, scholars have begun to re-examine queer theory's commitments to anti-normativity, questioning how this theoretical methodology might continue to function today in the crosshairs between "queer" as an anti-social radicalism and "queer" as a real-life human rights movement through which LGBTQ individuals have been able to adopt mainstream heteronormative practices such as marriage and child-bearing. For queer theorists like Edelman, the annihilation of futurity defines queerness as an essential opposition to these fundamental normative practices. But with non-heterosexual parenting and alternative familiy construction now becoming legal, binding the ideology of queerness to a rejection of social norms has become increasingly problematic. As meanings for the term "queer" proliferate today, so too does Shelley's *The Cenci* offer us competing examples of anti-heteronormativity.

Count Cenci's daughter Beatrice represents an anti-reproductive modality resembling that of her father, but her version of queer kinship proves to be reparative rather than destructively paranoid. While Count Cenci concocts a cursed progeny to be a

[15] See, for example, the recent issues of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26, no. 1 (2015) on "Queer Theory without Antinormativity," especially the introduction by Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson.

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mirror image of himself and Beatrice, in the crucial final moments of the play Beatrice and her brother Bernardo re-appropriate this blasphemous metaphor. Instead of giving literal birth to the mirror-image with which Cenci curses her, Beatrice gives figurative birth to a different kind of mirroring: her own image as reflected in her brother. In a gesture of fraternal-sororal reproduction, Beatrice reconceives her future without the literal body of a child—but also without the destructive death drive of her father. Rebuking the sinthomosexual antagonism of Cenci, while simultaneously abdicating the normative compulsion to reproduce an heir from her own material body, Beatrice generates a queer form of non-reproductive reproduction that takes place through this sibling exchange, a sororal transmission of her future to her brother. Beatrice's new orientation of kinship acts as a counterpoint to the kind of generational inbreeding imagined by her father, offering a reparative act to restore order after Cenci's anti-social reign.

Faced with her impending execution, Beatrice uses the penultimate speech of her life (and of the play) to turn over her legacy to her brother Bernardo—a speech that, importantly, emphasizes material mirroring and physical appearances as a means by which to preserve the individual through a sibling union. Her leave-taking follows:

> Farewell, my tender brother. Think
> Of our sad fate with gentleness, as now;
> And let mild, pitying thoughts lighten for thee
> Thy sorrow's load. Err not in harsh despair,
> But tears and patience. One thing more, my child,
> For thine own sake be constant to the love
> Thou bearest us; and to the faith that I,
> Though wrapt in a strange cloud of crime and shame,
> Lived ever holy and unstained. And though
> Ill tongues shall wound me, and our common name

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> Be as a mark stamped on thine innocent brow
> For men to point at as they pass, do thou
> Forbear, and never think a thought unkind
> Of those, who perhaps love thee in their graves.
> So mayest thou die as I do; fear and pain
> Being subdued. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell! (V.iv.141-156)

Beatrice bids her younger brother adieu by asking him to preserve memories of her "fate" with gentleness, mildness, pity, and patience—he should not, in other words, in future years when he no more can hear her voice, wallow in sorrow, but, instead, should assuage his grief by recalling how Beatrice, *now*, in this present moment, conveyed ease and calm as she courageously approached death. She solicits Bernardo to carry on her lineage by representing her family throughout the region. He will do so, she reflects, through his own physical portrayal of that family—by literally *re*-presenting it: he cannot help wearing the clan's physiognomy and carrying on the family name and history, after all, since it is inscribed upon his own face and body, as a "mark" stamped irrevocably on his "brow." Beatrice implores him to wear this image proudly, retaining his affective connections to what will soon be his deceased kin. She fashions Bernardo's body into a surrogate progeny that will enable her life to endure well after her death.

This transposition takes place in two stages. At first, Beatrice speaks to Bernardo as her sibling and equal; then, phrased almost as an afterthought, Beatrice appends, "One thing more, my child" (145). With this second rhetorical plea, Beatrice strategically alters her address from "my tender brother" to "my child," a pivotal segue in which Beatrice surreptitiously transfers Bernardo from one kinship structure to another, converting her fraternal and *intra*-generational siblinghood into one of *inter*-generational relations. Their fraternal-sororal dynamic takes on the hierarchical relation of mother and son. This

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rhetorical shift seems to position Beatrice in a new affective hierarchy with Bernardo. No longer seeing him as her brother, a lateral member of her kin and an equal, she adopts what might be considered condescending diction in order to reframe his position beneath her, as an inheritor of herself, as secondary on the generational chain of their hereditary familial system. Beatrice's impulse to mark their relationship in this new language, however, coincides with another shift, what amounts to a momentary move in temporalities. While her speech to Bernardo lingers in a future rooted in her instructive, imperative tense ("Think…And let…Err not…Forbear"), when she speaks to him as "my child" she imagines, for a brief moment, a future tense comingled with reflections on the present and past: "I, / Though wrapt in a strange cloud of crime and shame / Lived ever holy and unstained." With this vivid image of present-ness Beatrice attempts to memorialize herself, lending Bernardo a final portrait of her ("holy and unstained," with "fear and pain / Being subdued") that he can carry forward into his future memory, a future-anteriority that she herself will never experience—such a moment as the one we will see, in Chapter Two, being painted by William Wordsworth at the close of "Tintern Abbey," when the poet makes a gift of his present self for Dorothy's future memory and memorialization.

Like Wordsworth with his sister, Beatrice proposes that Bernardo, her likeness, carry forward her legacy, not only in his mind but also in the material world. She reinforces the pseudo-reproductive nature of this transposition when she comingles the rhetoric of reflection with that of pregnancy: speaking to Bernardo of the love he "bear[s] us" and compelling him to "forbear," Beatrice's echoing "bear" reminds us of Bernardo's

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dual tasks. Not only will he bear the burden of the Cenci name and body, but he will also give birth to it anew. Beatrice emphasizes the future, and its coinciding rhetoric of child-bearing, to re-articulate her own yearning for an enduring incarnation of herself. This image need not be reproduced physically out of her material body as a byproduct of heterosexual union—a biological child of her own—but rather as a material reproduction of sibling transference, a new kind of generativity altogether.

In his own final speeches, Bernardo highlights the reflexive quality of this sibling transference. He reworks the imagery of mirrors from Cenci's earlier curse into a reparative construction of sibling unification. In an expression of love for his sister, the younger brother laments that he cannot stand "[t]o see / That perfect mirror of pure innocence / Wherein I gazed, and grew happy and good, / Shivered to dust!" (V.iv.129-132). Beatrice has been the mirror through which Bernardo has come to recognize and define his own self and being, and Bernardo can barely move now for fright of his sister's impending absence. In effect, this metaphorical and literalized mirroring—the shared resemblance between them—is what will enable him to prolong her life in a way no one else can. Only a sibling can be "that perfect mirror."

Imagining this mirroring in even more concrete terms, Beatrice not only requests that Bernardo should recall his sister and stepmother with cognitive and emotional fondness—to "[t]hink" on his family and "be constant" to their love hereafter—but also reminds him that he embodies the visual signifier of their connection: Bernardo wears their "common name" "as a mark stamped on [his] innocent brow." So apparent is this visible demarcation, Beatrice surmises, that others will "point at [it] as they pass."

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Physically resembling Beatrice in this manner, Bernardo becomes the figurative and even literal child that she never had, generating a reproduced version of Beatrice through resemblance rather than through sexual reproduction. Beatrice delivers neither a reproduction of the body nor one of language: she does not ask Bernardo to *tell* the story of her family, after all, but to wear it. Instead, Beatrice's bodies of transmission spawn new modes of material signification altogether.

Bernardo's ability to engender Beatrice's image—and, as a result, her future—emerges specifically through this bodily physiognomy. Yet such externalized projections are subject exclusively to observation and interpretation by others. Thus Bernardo retains little agency over perceptions of his "brow" and, thereby, his and his sister's character. With this lack of authoritative control over the reception of Bernardo's image and her own, it may seem odd that Beatrice would turn to this material method in order to defend her honor. For Beatrice, however, performed, physical, and bodily narratives have already become her *lingua franca*. Early in the play, Beatrice must come to terms with the ineffectiveness of words and political discourse, the signifying systems of her father and the patriarchal reign that have failed her. Beatrice abdicates these discursive schemes in favor of her own performative means of communication. This agentic voice emerges not, as other critics have suggested, in Beatrice's silences and repressed verbal utterances, but rather, I suggest, in her bodily performance, which communicates specifically to an intimate and familial audience.

The material replaces the verbal when the language of the patriarchy proves insufficient to name Beatrice's experience. "Previous to the crime against her between

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Acts II and III, Beatrice is outspoken about her father's wrongs," Colleen Fenno notes, "but following the offence…she begins Act III unable to directly explain herself."[16] In fact, Beatrice's outspokenness is what drew her father's ire. During Act I, as Count Cenci's guests depart from the banquet, Beatrice beseeches them not to go, not to ignore the "tyranny, and impious hate" that has been unfolding before their very eyes (I.iii.100). Her speech implores them to empathize with her own fate, asking them to imagine themselves in her position, as if they were, indeed, communal members of the same race: "What, if we, / The desolate and the dead, were his own flesh, / His children and his wife, whom he is bound / To love and shelter?" (I.iii.103-106). Invoking this sympathetic resonance as Cenci's long-suffering kin, Beatrice uses her rhetorical flourishes to solicit their support. Yet this verbal effort fails and Cenci becomes enraged. He threatens his dinner attendees, using similar appeals to kinship status—"I hope my good friends here / Will think of their own daughters—or perhaps / Of their own throats—before they lend an ear / To this wild girl" (129-132)—and then turns to Beatrice with equal bile, threatening, "Retire to your chamber, insolent girl!" (145). In this first act of Shelley's play, Beatrice still believes in the power of rhetoric to bring about change; shortly thereafter, she will abandon this strategy for material means of expression, since Cenci's patriarchal language serves not her needs.

After the alleged rape between Acts II and III, Beatrice struggles to put words to deeds. Her increasing instability is conveyed through broken speech patterns, exclamations, confused questions, and hesitant pauses—linguistic slippages that reveal her

[16] Fenno, "Remembering Beatrice Remembering," 43.

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destabilized state. Words do not suffice, however, to express the horror that has been experienced, and she announces this insufficiency directly: "If I try to speak / I shall go mad" (84-85); "What are the words which you would have me speak? (107); "Of all words, / That minister to mortal intercourse, / Which wouldst thou hear? For there is none to tell / My misery" (111-114). Beatrice recognizes her own instability and attempts to cease this linguistic confusion: "I have talked some wild words, but will no more" (66). Despite knowing that her mother and Orsino desire to understand her predicament, she refuses to translate events into words: "Ask me not what it is, for there are deeds / Which have no form, sufferings which have no tongue" (141-142). Beatrice speaks again and again about her inability to speak, thus depriving her verbal communication of its communicative force. She depletes words of their capacity for reference, portraying, as Fenno suggests, the impossibility of "remembering and giving voice" to sexual violation.[17]

While Fenno and others point, justifiably, to how Beatrice's verbal incapacities, her "fragmented and metaphoric manner," reflect her increasing inability to "verbalize her experience" of trauma,[18] I suggest that Beatrice's disability in fact becomes the compensatory means by which she achieves affirmative communication. Although Beatrice becomes unintelligible, even silent, she achieves communication by privileging the material over the verbal. Letting go of linguistic signification, Beatrice refuses famously to repeat that "one word," "one little word" of Count Cenci's that threatens to destroy her (II.i.63), declaring that "the thing that I have suffered" (III.i.88) will remain "without a name" (116). As she does so, Beatrice consciously rejects the kind of discursive

[17] Fenno, "Remembering Beatrice Remembering," 45.
[18] Fenno, "Remembering Beatrice Remembering," 44.

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exploitation that, as Michel Foucault reminds us, would result from being compelled to speak of one's sexual deeds for a public, and judging, audience.[19] Opting out of such a repeated violation against her own fragile body, Beatrice embodies rather than verbalizes her meaning.

After the rape, situated within her domestic space and with her family as witness, Beatrice conveys her message through visible disabilities, translating her defiance into bodily performance. When she comes onstage, Shelley's stage directions instruct the actress to enter "staggering"; as the scene unfolds, she should at first "speak wildly," then "more wildly," then "franticly," then "doubtfully." Beatrice's stepmother Lucretia translates Beatrice's changed demeanor. She compares Beatrice's historical patterns with her present manifestation, determining that "Thou art unlike thyself; thine eyes shoot forth / A wandering and strange spirit" (III.i.81-82). Beatrice's physical appearance continues to fall apart: her hair comes undone; her eyes are full of blood; she sees the walls spinning and imagines a black mist dissolving her flesh. As Beatrice's visceral performance portrays her suffering, Lucretia registers the change, but this "strange spirit" appears legible only to the woman who knows Beatrice best, who can tell that she is now, indeed, quite "unlike" her prior self. As she begins to adopt bodily communication, this interpretive act requires an intimate relationship between the observer and the observed, an audience for her visible display.

Lucretia recognizes these alterations specifically through Beatrice's changing physiognomy: "My sweet child, / You have no wound; 'tis only a cold dew / That starts

[19] See Foucault, "The Incitement to Discourse," chapter 1 in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

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from your dear brow" (III.i.3-5). Emphasizing Beatrice's brow, Lucretia corrects her daughter's exaggerated complaint that her "brain is hurt" (1). Beatrice marks her damaged internal state as a pain in her mind, which her stepmother interprets in physical, outward manifestations. This metaphorical connection between brain and brow echoes what later, in the final sibling interaction of Shelley's play, will become an essential signifier of family character, as we have already seen—that mark which Bernardo wears upon his brow of the eternal family resemblance. As with Bernardo's infamous "mark," which will be recognized by the townspeople around him, Beatrice's brow and body communicate by finding a recipient who can register, observe, and interpret that material element as it reflects Beatrice's affected interiority. In this domestic environment, the girl's embodied performance signifies for those who know how to interpret it properly—a private, rather than public, audience.

III. The Materiality of Performance

As the receiver of Beatrice's material performance, Lucretia plays the role of interpretive viewer, acting in turn as surrogate for us, the play's audience members, who similarly observe the performance unfolding on stage. Far from being mental theater or closet drama, then, *The Cenci* relies upon elements of enacted performativity. The visual interchange between observer and observed—between Lucretia and Beatrice or between audience and actors—structures an important shift in signification out of which Beatrice's sororal-fraternal reproduction can emerge: material mirroring that replaces biological and linguistic modes of meaning.

In connecting meaning to materiality, Shelley draws upon a much larger cultural

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discourse that was rapidly becoming embedded in popular consciousness. During the early nineteenth century, the burgeoning and complementary studies of physiognomy, pathognomy, and phrenology theorized ways in which to read the human figure, turning the formerly impenetrable surface of the body into something more legible. An outside observer, scientists conjectured, could indeed read another person's physical appearance in order to discern that other's internal and mental constitution. Faces and bodies were thus becoming seen as devices of communication. German physiognomist Johann Caspar Lavater, for one, claimed this visually-oriented field to be "the proper study of man."[20] Since "[a]ll the knowledge we can obtain of man must be gained through the medium of our senses" (7), Lavater suggests, the empirical study of externalized countenance was the most adequate system for interpreting human character. Conflating internal and external worlds, Lavater argues that the "invisible contents" of a person's makeup can be detected through his "visible superficies" (11): "The eye, the look, the cheeks, the mouth, the forehead…whatever is understood by physiognomy, are the most expressive, the most convincing picture of interior sensation, desires, passions, will" (8-9). While the related pseudo-science of pathognomy traced ephemeral facial movements and expressions as signs of changing internal moods, phrenology focused on the unchanging bone structures of the skull. In *Elements of Phrenology* (1824), George Combe describes this methodical practice as an analysis of "the cranium" via "anatomical and metaphysical modes of

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[20] Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy; designed to promote the knowledge and the love of mankind. Written in the German language by John Caspar Lavater, and translated into English by Thomas Holcroft*, 3rd edition (London: B. Blake, 1840), 7.

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research" to discern the "form of the brain" and its "manifestations of mental power."[21] In all of these interconnected studies, details of the human face and head were believed to register features of the personality inside: the ghost that could be read both in and through the shell. Quite literally, the visible "brow" was to be analyzed in order to understand the invisible "brain" underneath.

Together, these related pseudo-sciences of physiognomy, pathognomy, and phrenology turned facial appearances, expressions, and cranial measurements, respectively, into interpretive tools. Whether one was reading the work of these physiognomists directly or not, their ideas infiltrated the cultural zeitgeist. As John Graham observes, Lavater's essays were so frequently "reprinted, abridged, summarized, pirated, quoted, parodied, imitated, and reviewed"—with at least 55 editions appearing in more than seven languages between 1772 and 1810—that any educated person would have been, at the very least, familiar with his widely-circulating theories.[22] In the Godwin-Shelley family, this familiarity went beyond a mere acquaintance. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote a shortened translation of Lavater's *Essays* in 1788, and William Godwin would later claim, in his *Thoughts on Man* (1831), that "nothing can be more certain than that there is a science of physiognomy."[23] Godwin believed in the discipline so much that, upon the birth of Mary Godwin (later Shelley) in 1797, he employed a student of Lavater to "write up a lengthy report on the significance of the infant's features."[24]

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[21] Combe, *Elements of Phrenology*, in Laura Otis, ed., *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 377.
[22] John Graham, "Character Description and Meaning in the Romantic Novel," *Studies in Romanticism* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 210.
[23] Graham, "Lavater's *Physiognomy* in England," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, no. 4 (1961): 567.
[24] Graham, "Lavater's *Physiognomy*," 568.

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Physiognomy turned the human figure into a legible material object—thus Beatrice's faith in the visual realm and its capacity for communication finds its foundation in this broader discourse. In kind, physiognomy supported the notion that all of us are equally, and naturally, equipped to act as interpretive analyzers: "Man endowed with these faculties," Lavater writes, "is in himself the most worthy subject of observation, as he is likewise himself the most worthy observer" (7). Perhaps because of its apparent accessibility, physiognomy expanded beyond the natural sciences and into everyday life. As Sharrona Pearl notes, by 1820 the practice had become part of London's urban consciousness, allowing perambulating city-dwellers a sense that in this dense and crowded environment they could read the faces of strangers for evidence of the character inside.[25] As Londoners became physiognomically literate, self-presentation was increasingly associated with the material and the visual, rather than the linguistic and the verbal—both off and on the stage. Placing Lucretia in the position of recipient for Beatrice's visible performance, Shelley reminds his audience of their own interpretive responsibility, but also differentiates Lucretia's familial perceptions: knowing someone in the past represents a different kind of physiognomic interpretation than that applied to strangers.

Due to the rapidly growing public expectation of physiognomic accuracy on stage, the experience of the theater itself began to evolve in the early nineteenth century. In essence, actors had to "look" the part, either naturally or through artificial assistance such as makeup and costuming: "regardless of his or her skill in various cosmetic and

[25] See Sharrona Pearl, *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

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prosthetic techniques," Pearl explains, stage-acting manuals "warned actors against straying too far from their own physiognomic boundaries" (69). In addition, the audience's role in inspecting and translating these appearances shifted noticeably. While the newly realistic theater demanded that the actor carry a likeness, in addition to a talent, in order to play specific characters, it also required its audiences to become more active in shaping that connection. This shaping was done in silence, however. Whereas theater audiences had once raucously partaken in the onstage action of a dramatic performance, they were now learning to engage in silent observation, and interpretation, rather than participation. Their silence, however, was still active: they were simultaneously "thinking, making decisions, learning, and moving with and sometimes against the actors and what they were trying to communicate."[26] In some ways, the on-stage Romantic theater was, indeed, always a mental one.

Lucretia's reception of Beatrice's performance is, unlike an audience's perception of stage-actors, based upon her knowledge in the moment of performance combined with her knowledge of Beatrice in the past. In this interchange, Shelley registers the active contribution of the observer to understanding the performer—like the public audience that will read the mark on Bernardo's brow—but he also protects Beatrice by allowing her to perform for a much more intimate, familiar audience, and thereby demonstrates how physiognomic reading takes place differently in more private environments. Instead of exposing Beatrice to strangers, as in both the dinner scene of Act I and the courtroom sequence of Act V, Shelley here offers Beatrice a respite from the public eye during the

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[26] Pearl, *About Faces*, 58.

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climax of the play, immediately after her father has violated her body. She performs for a secure, intimate, and personal audience of one: her stepmother. In their shared, secure domestic setting, Beatrice can communicate the devastating effects of her father's acts by allowing herself to fall apart. Requiring maternal nurturing in this particular moment, Beatrice will turn afterwards to her brother and his fraternal comfort. In both instances, physiognomic interpretation is not imposed from an outside, alien observer; rather, a close kin member reads the other in close proximity. This exchange creates a more nuanced and intimate mode of communication between observer and observed, for the observer accesses not just the other's self-presentation in the moment, but also contributes his or her own knowledge from the past: they invoke a shared history of both observing and being observed by the other—thereby constituting a model of intimacy and reflection that might be embodied by long-term observant siblings.

In his "Preface" to the play, Shelley links this observer/observed relationship that constitutes the study of physiognomy with his understanding of sympathy. Reading the painting that inspired him to write this drama—Guido Reni's portrait of Beatrice, a portrait that has since been proven to be neither of the historical Beatrice Cenci nor done by Reni—Shelley parses the individual compartments of Beatrice's face in order to construct a character study of her in miniature:

> There is a fixed and pale composure upon the features: she seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness…. The moulding of her face is exquisitely delicate; the eyebrows are distinct and arched: the lips have that permanent meaning of imagination and sensibility which suffering has not repressed and which it seems as if death scarcely could extinguish. Her forehead is large and clear; her eyes which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beautifully tender and serene.

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This ekphrastic description elucidates the objective stylization of Beatrice's physical countenance, such as the paleness, delicateness, and archness of her distinct facial features. In addition, alongside these notes on shape and color, Shelley applies interpretive language to translate these elements into character descriptions: he claims that Beatrice is sad, stricken in spirit, full of imagination and sensibility, at once vivacious and serene.

Alongside this breakdown of Reni's portrait, Shelley illustrates the relationship between physical performance and the motivations of sympathy that tragedies of the stage were intended to elicit. According to Shelley, the theater maintains a unique cultural role: it acts as conduit for building sympathetic bonds between audience and actor, observer and observed. Shelley adjoins the physical "cloth[ing]" of physiognomic registers with the affective sympathy necessary for effective dramatic performance. Describing the story of the Cenci family and his reasons for selecting this legend, Shelley remarks:

> In fact it is a tragedy which has already received, from its capacity of awakening and sustaining the sympathy of men, approbation and success. Nothing remained as I imagined, but to clothe it to the apprehensions of my countrymen in such language and action as would bring it home to their hearts. The deepest and the sublimest tragic compositions, *King Lear* and the two plays in which the tale of Oedipus is told, were stories which already existed in tradition, as matters of popular belief and interest, before Shakespeare and Sophocles made them familiar to the sympathy of all succeeding generations of mankind. (142)

Visuality is, of course, intrinsic to the archetypal plays that Shelley draws upon—so much so that both *Lear* and *Oedipus* include explicit acts of blinding. Moreover, Shelley draws attention to the interplay between observer and observed in the production of what he terms "the sympathy of men." He further claims that this production of sympathy is, indeed, the greatest accomplishment possible for theatrical performances:

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> The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. (142)

Shelley's notion of sympathy—that central term of the Romantic period—cannot be created solely on the blank page; it requires performance on a material stage—or, at the very least, a domestic one.

IV. Baillie's "Sympathetick Curiosity" and *De Monfort*'s Sympathetic Siblings

Percy Shelley was, of course, not the only poet or dramatist of the day to connect physiognomy with sympathy, nor was he the only one to question these new material frameworks regarding the extrinsic legibility of the human body. Drawing together physical science with the current practices of theatrical stage productions, for instance, physiognomist George Combe uses an example of two celebrity actors, Sarah Siddons and John Kemble, to illustrate his ideas about how one might discern the mental characteristics of a person through the veil of the physical body's surface. He writes:

> On the stage, Mrs. Siddons senior and Mr. John Kemble were remarkable for the solemn deliberation of their manner, both in declamation and action, and yet they were splendidly gifted in power. They carried captive at once the sympathies and understanding of the audience, and made every man feel his faculties expanding, and his whole mind becoming greater under the influence of their energies.[27]

Importantly, these two actors—real-life sister and brother—were cast to perform the title roles in Joanna Baillie's 1798 play *De Monfort*. Perhaps not coincidentally, they were, according to Combe, powerful actors who could convey a particular "deliberation of…manner" with "declamation and action" on the stage—their material bodies, in other

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[27] Combe, *Elements*, in Otis, ed., *Literature and Science*, 378.

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words, could move in such a way that particular emotions would be communicated to the audience. Such an audience, Combe reflects, felt both "sympathies and understanding" as a result of this affective transference. This spark of sympathetic union impressed an observing audience so much so that each person took on the emotions and feelings of the actors himself; as Combe puts it, each audience member could "feel his faculties expanding, and his whole mind becoming greater." The audience, in other words, responded in kind, embodying the emotions of the characters in the drama through the communicative power of the actors' material bodies.

This association between observation and sympathy was indeed becoming increasingly prevalent in contemporary dramatic theory. As the era's most well-known playwright, Baillie articulated similar premises in her "Introductory Discourse," which served as prefatory material to her first volume of *Plays on the Passions* (1798). Like Shelley, Baillie contemplated this performative link between observer and observed as it related to the creation of sympathy. Rejecting the excesses of melodrama—those "outrageous" stage productions that Wordsworth famously dismissed as the "sickly and stupid German tragedies"[28]—Baillie abandoned surface sensationalism in favor of deeper character studies of individual affects. For Baillie, such affects were generated through material performances. The dramatic project relies on a one-way interchange between observer and observed. Terming this project "sympathetick [sic] curiosity," Baillie theorized that the stage creates a kind of empathetic bond between souls; she hoped to educate the mass public by encouraging the observer to identify with the other as if he were oneself,

[28] William Wordsworth, "Preface," *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), eds. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

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producing a more measured and tempered set of responses to both victims and perpetrators of heightened emotional events, even crimes. "In examining others," she proclaims, "we know ourselves": "The highest pleasures we receive from poetry, as well as from the real objects which surround us in the world, are derived from the sympathetick [sic] interest we all take in beings like ourselves."[29] Baillie emphasizes here not a reciprocal back-and-forth but a unidirectional interpretive relationship by which the observer sees, registers, and feels the emotions of the other, the performer—much like the role of the physiognomist observing her subject.

Due to its one-directional nature, however, Baillie questioned the interpretive accuracy of such formulas—perhaps as Shelley seems also to question what might make for the proper inter-relational audience for these observational interactions. As Frederick Burwick has noted, while Joanna Baillie was busy contemplating the link between actors' performances and audience members' reactions, her scientist brother Matthew—future physician to George III—was likewise exploring a similar phenomenon of what was then called "aberrational psychology."[30] Thus both siblings were mired in investigating the correlation between outward empirical symptoms and internal cognitive or emotional responses. Joanna may have been somewhat anxious about these parallels, however, as Nathan Elliot suggests: medical diagnoses based on exterior appearances were not always accurate, after all—a reality that the Baillie family knew well, after Matthew corrected a misdiagnosis that his uncle John Hunter had made of the newborn George Gordon,

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[29] Baillie, "Introductory Discourse" (1798), ed. Peter Duthie, *Plays on the Passions* (Ontario: Broadview, 2001), 12.
[30] Burwick, "Joanna Baillie, Matthew Baillie, and the Pathology of the Passions," in *Joanna Baillie, Romantic Dramatist: Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas C. Crochunis (New York: Routledge, 2004), 51.

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future Lord Byron, eleven years earlier.[31] While her drama partook in the larger scientific discourses of the time, Baillie possessed some strong "interpretive doubts" as to the certainty with which diagnoses based upon external examinations of the body could be made. Using the "small-scale aesthetic" of the performer's body—"gesture, tone of voice, and facial expression"—to foster the audience's "sympathetic identification,"[32] Baillie experimented with just how legitimately were correlations between interior and exterior.

Both Shelley's and Baillie's statements on dramatic theory rely upon a physiognomic understanding of external character legibility: the observer reads the other and produces an internalized sympathetic attachment by sensing in himself the feelings and emotions beneath the material performance or appearance. Yet both dramatists also troubled this one-way dynamic. Testing out this theory of material performance, Baillie incorporates allusions to physiognomy throughout her plays. Her 1798 tragedy *De Monfort*, for instance, reverberates with references to this study of surface features. In the drama's opening sequence, the title character complains of a servant's "ill-favour'd visage" (I.ii.69).[33] A few lines later, Freberg mocks De Monfort's false transparency by telling him that "something in thy face / Tells me another tale" (I.ii.82-83). Where De Monfort says one thing, Freberg thinks that he, as observer of De Monfort's external features, can interpret an entirely different meaning. De Monfort's legible facial expressions apparently give him away. Later, Lady Freberg asks a messenger about a

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[31] Nathan Elliot, "'Unball'd Sockets' and 'The Mockery of Speech': Diagnostic Anxiety and the Theater of Joanna Baillie," *European Romantic Review* 18, no. 1 (2007): 83-84.
[32] Melissa M. Whalen, "The Suffering Stage: Joanna Baillie, Spectacle, and Sympathetic Education," *European Romantic Review* 24, no. 6 (2013): 665.
[33] Baillie, *De Monfort* (1798), *Plays on the Passions*, ed. Peter Duthie (Ontario: Broadview, 2001). Further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically.

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stranger's physical appearance before determining whether to admit him, querying, "How looks his countenance?" (II.i.19). Interpreting characters by their physical traits allows others to judge what may be happening inside.

The tragedy of De Monfort is concerned, as Baillie explains in the "Introductory Discourse," with tracing the affect of hatred. Its plot focuses on the spiteful relationship between two male protagonists, De Monfort and his long-time nemesis Rezenvelt, and watches the slow turning of De Monfort into a murderous felon. The impetus for De Monfort's destructive rampage comes from a subplot in which Countess Freberg jealously spreads a rumor that De Monfort's sister, Jane, has become secretly affianced to Rezenvelt. Despite Jane's protestations of her love for and loyalty to her brother, De Monfort fights and later kills Rezenvelt. The play ends with Jane mourning the body of her dead brother who has, in turn, now died from his own self-berating guilt over the jealous murder.

In later editions of the play, after 1798, Baillie would retract her drama's closing scene, explaining that the play could probably conclude with De Monfort's self-inflicted death. Because the actions of retribution cease thereafter, Baillie thought, further performances should omit the final sequence: "Should this play ever again be acted, perhaps it would be better that the curtain should drop here; since here the story may be considered as complete, and what comes after, prolongs the piece too much when our interest for the fate of De Monfort is at an end."[34] What comes *after*, however, is pivotal, I argue, for it is in the aftermath of De Monfort's death that Baillie articulates the stakes of

[34] See Duthie's edition of *Plays on the Passions*, 378n2.

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De Monfort's destructive hatred according to her trademark "sympathetic curiosity." These stakes are manifested through the figure of Jane, his sister.

As in *The Cenci*, the concluding speech of *De Monfort* is reserved for the sororal protagonist. After De Monfort's death, Jane performs the role of her brother's sole mourner, echoing Beatrice Cenci's desire to honor and be buried with her brothers. Jane placates the officers who have arrived to condemn De Monfort, not knowing the man has already died, and in an attempt to preserve her brother's legacy she rewrites his lamentable actions as heroic. Yet her revision of De Monfort's demise is a contorted one, for she must abandon her community's morality. As Victoria Myers explains, the play's audience would certainly have registered De Monfort's actions to be both morally and legally reprehensible. Since he had an opportunity to calm down after his confrontation with Rezenvelt, Myers explains, legal experts like Blackstone would have designated De Monfort a murderer: the killing was rational, pre-meditated, and intentional—it was not sprung from a moment of insanity, passion, or self-defense.[35] Jane's attempt to reframe her brother's deeds as heroic, and then to consecrate him despite the murder, "resonates with the question whether murder-guilt could have been palliated despite the rigor of the law."[36] Most legal consensus, Myers claims, would say no.

This verbal reconstruction of De Monfort's life story, however, is not the only preservation for the future that Jane attempts to install. Perhaps even more importantly, she hopes to encapsulate his life and his memory into the worthiest of material tombs: her

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[35] Victoria Myers, "Joanna Baillie and the Emergence of Medico-Legal Discourse," *European Romantic Review* 18, no. 3 (2007): 345.
[36] Myers, "Joanna Baillie," 345.

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own body. Jane concludes Baillie's play with a request to the convent that she not only bury her brother here on their grounds but that she also commemorate his life with a material marker of his heroism:

> And now, I have a sad request to make,
> Nor will these holy sisters scorn my boon;
> I, within these sacred cloister walls
> May raise a humble, nameless tomb to him,
> Who, but for one dark passion, one dire deed,
> Had claim'd a record of as noble worth,
> As e'er enrich'd the sculptur'd pedestal. (V.iv.135-141)

Should the religious sisters condone her sisterly request, Jane will erect a monument to De Monfort that will solidify her version of his story: he is "sacred," "humble," worth of entering the material "record" of history. But where Jane asks to sponsor this physical monument, we also might hear echoes to another kind of entombment: Jane will sacrifice her own reproductive fecundity in favor of preserving her brother's legacy. The cadence of Baillie's verse isolates Jane's "I" such that we might hear how she, her "I" and her own identity, may now "raise" a nameless tomb to her brother by becoming cloistered within these walls herself. Though she does not invoke this fate explicitly, the doubled implication suggests that, much as the body of Beatrice's brother Bernardo would endure as a memorial to Beatrice after her death, so too would Jane's body become a living memorial that continues to honor her brother after he is gone. Jane makes a figurative second tomb of her own flesh: she will reproduce her dead brother, rather than reproduce heirs to the De Monfort name.

In this way, Jane De Monfort and Beatrice Cenci each bring their reproductive futurity to a close. With their queer, non-normative, and non-biological visions of

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reproduction, Jane and Beatrice preserve one sibling in the body of the other, imagining a sibling kinship that provides a lasting form of self- and other-preservation by regenerating both past and present well into an unknown future. One sibling becomes the figurative child that reproduces the other for future generations. Such queer kinship requires an act of material self-sacrifice, a female protest performed not in the voice but in the body. Yet these deaths also imagine new life. While Beatrice Cenci utters a desire regarding both of her brothers—to be buried with the one in his death, and to give birth to the "child" of the other—Jane De Monfort regenerates her brother beyond his death. Both actions require the sacrifice of female procreation, an abdication of sexual generation in favor of another kind of material reproduction in likeness and in kind, in reflection and in mirroring. Normative storylines for the female body are overturned for queer applications of familial preservation. This reparative shift accesses a new mode of kinship situated in lateral bonds, throwing off the linear expectations of reproductive kinship in order to introduce a queer sibling love that fosters a new vision of futurity through non-reproductive reproduction—a new vision that has its roots in quite an old story indeed.

V. Antigone's Sisters

In longing to be aligned with their brothers in both life and death, Beatrice Cenci and Jane De Monfort reincarnate that progenitor of all theatrical sisters: Sophocles's Antigone. When Beatrice first discovers that her brothers are dead, she expresses a subjunctive appeal to join them: "Oh God! That I were buried with my brothers!" (*Cenci* I.iii.153). Beatrice's plaintive outburst echoes that of Antigone, her dramatic and feminist forebear, who likewise yearns to enter into a shared fraternal-sororal tomb, declaring of

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her brother Polyneices, "I shall lie by his side, loving him as he loved me… For there I shall lie forever."[37] This impulse to maintain sibling intimacy even beyond the grave stems from the fact that each sister's identity is tied up with her brother's. As Stefani Engelstein argues of Sophocles's archetype, the plural subjectivity of siblings cannot be reduced to one character: "we must be careful," she warns, "not to erect an Antigone complex but to recognize instead an *Antigone* complex"[38]—in other words, we must focus not on the solitary title character as a distinct personage, but rather on the network that surrounds her and constitutes the drama in its entirety. Acknowledging the "web of relationships" surrounding Antigone likewise acknowledges "the impossibility of locating an *individual* in this text" (39). As familial titles that name Shelley's and Baillie's plays indicate, the plural subjectivities of these collective family units inform the sisters' desires to be united with their brothers—even if that necessitates their own deaths.

In Baillie's play, Jane De Monfort reflects upon the origins of this inter-subjective intimacy, fondly recollecting the intricate enmeshment of sibling relations. From a young age, Jane recalls, she and her brother had been bonded physically and psychologically:

> [He] Was the companion of my early days,
> My cradle's mate, mine infant play-fellow.
> Within our op'ning minds with riper years
> The love of praise and gen'rous virtue sprung:
> Thro' varied life our pride, our joys, were one;
> At the same tale we wept: he is my brother. (*DM* II.i.210-216)

Having been constant companions and playfellows throughout childhood, the siblings developed so closely as to become almost the same person, unifying their subjective

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[37] Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. David Grene, *Sophocles I*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 163-164.
[38] Stefani Engelstein, "Sibling Logic; or, Antigone Again," *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 39.

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perspectives, their "minds," as well as their affective experiences of praise, virtue, pride, and joy. They have never been entirely distinct from one another, as Jane's use of a communal "our" and "we" suggests. She discerns no separation here: they "were one."

For Jane, this series of collective life experiences, from sharing an education to weeping at the same nursery stories, defines their relationship: for these reasons, she affirms, "he is my brother." Without each other, Jane and De Monfort would no longer function—and the dread of losing this irreplaceable partner in his life is what has driven De Monfort to murder Rezenvelt in the first place. In her archetypal sibling role, Antigone explains the source of this fear of sibling loss, lamenting her own brother's irreplaceability:

> If my husband were dead, I might have had another,
> And child from another man, if I lost the first.
> But when father and mother both were hidden in death
> No brother's life would bloom for me again.[39]

While family members like spouses and children may be reproducible, siblings are kin that can never be replaced, since, once a parent is dead, no new sisters or brothers can be gained either through biological or legal processes of their own undertaking (even the acquisition of step-siblings or adoptive siblings depends upon the legal actions of parents rather than the siblings themselves). In other words: we have no agency in the procurement of siblings. Once her three brothers are dead—including Polyneices and Eteocles as well as her father-brother Oedipus—Antigone occupies an entirely distinct subject position from the one she has previously known: no longer one of five differentiated and multi-gendered siblings of her original network, she is now only one of

[39] Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 909-912.

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two sisters. Antigone would rather die with her brother than face this altered kinship status. Jane De Monfort similarly embraces her brother for their mutual irreplaceability, having been one another's sole support after their parents' deaths—the point after which they could have found no more siblings for themselves. Jane reflects on the source of their shared intimacy: "So sadly orphan'd, side by side we stood, / Like two young trees, whose boughs, in early strength, / Screen the weak saplings of the rising grove, / And brave the storm together" (II.ii.23-26). Because of their circumstances, Jane remarks, she has always been her brother's "intimate and adviser" (28) through myriad tempests. As such, they remain inextricable.

Wanting to maintain sibling relations after death, both Beatrice Cenci and Jane De Monfort have to reconstruct the systems of signification surrounding their own and their brothers' actions. They challenge the ethical status quo in order to preserve their affective and psychological sibling bonds, hoping perhaps to revert to a time before one of the siblings had been corrupted by murderous drives. Before ever writing *The Cenci*, Shelley recognized the kind of ethical fluidity that would be required for exonerating such figures as Beatrice and De Monfort. In fact, he associated his own beliefs in ethical relativism with Antigone, the progenitor of questionable sororal morality. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg in May 1811, he asks, rhetorically, "But is the *Antigone* immoral? Did she wrong when she acted in direct…violation of the laws of a prejudiced society?"[40] Implying that we should indeed absolve Antigone, Shelley establishes the kind of philosophical and moral flexibility that would later give him, and us, the freedom to side

[40] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), I. 80.

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with a woman like Beatrice, regardless of her alleged homicide. While Antigone opposes her society's demands, for Shelley these actions must be evaluated on their own terms. Observing *The Cenci*'s resemblance to Sophocles's drama, critic Stuart Sperry similarly offers Antigone's connection to Beatrice, asking,

> was Beatrice wrong in planning the murder of her father, Count Francesco Cenci, or was she rather justified in following, like Antigone, the dictates of her conscience and in adopting violent means to relieve both her family and herself from the toils of an insupportable tyranny?"[41]

Violence may be excusable, in other words, as long as it leads to freedom.

To access such freedom, however, both Beatrice and Jane—like Antigone—must rewrite the language of criminality. At the beginning of Shelley's play, Beatrice attempts to overturn the structures of patriarchal language by using her father's vicious words against him. When Cenci snarls at her, "Retire to your chamber, insolent girl!" (I.iii.145), Beatrice throws these words back in his face: "Retire thou impious man!" (146). This verbal echo inverts Cenci's language as Beatrice attempts to wrest power from him. But this exchange also initiates Beatrice's break with language, since, after these words fail to achieve any reasonable outcome, she begins to abandon linguistic communication in favor of other modes. Later, Beatrice will refuse to capitulate to the verbal demands of either her father or the legal system. She denies all accountability by verbally negating her crime: "'Tis most false / That I am guilty of foul parricide" (*Cenci* IV.iv.173-4). Beatrice rejects the term "parricide," which names the crime of which she has been accused, since she believes the term "father" has itself ceased to function after Cenci violates her. In the

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[41] Stuart Sperry, "The Ethical Politics of Shelley's *The Cenci*," *Studies in Romanticism* 25, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 413.

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courtroom, Beatrice will perpetuate this verbal defiance by avoiding making a direct admission or confession. "I shall deny no more," she says. But as the judge recognizes, this is not an affirmative acceptance of responsibility, either: "She is convicted, but has not confessed" (V.iii.103). Beatrice defies her prosecutors by refusing to inhabit their language.

Accessing power through her body rather than through words, Beatrice embodies Antigone's transgressive resistance: Antigone not only insists on burying her brother but also resists verbal acknowledgement of her crime. As Judith Butler has argued, Antigone challenges Creon's semiotic system by inverting his legal paradigms. Antigone rejects her denial, stating, "I will not deny my deed." With this rhetorical obfuscation, Butler suggests, Antigone articulates what amounts to an impossible utterance, thus lending her the power to overturn the political system from within. Butler explains:

> "Yes, I confess it," or ''I say I did it"—thus she answers a question that is posed to her from another authority, and thus she concedes the authority that this other has over her. "I will not deny my deed"—"I do not deny," I will not be forced into a denial, I will refuse to be forced into a denial by the other's language, and what I will deny is my deed—a deed that becomes possessive, a grammatical possession that makes sense only within the context of the scene in which a forced confession is refused by her. In other words, to claim "I will not deny my deed" is to refuse to perform a denial, but it is not precisely to claim the act. To say, "Yes, I did it," is to claim the act, but it is also to commit another deed in the very claiming, the act of publishing one's deed, a new criminal venture that redoubles and takes the place of the old. [42]

Like Antigone, Beatrice refuses to perform a denial while simultaneously not claiming her act. Neither woman confirms the physical actions they have performed; they refuse the signifiers being imposed upon these material deeds from outside themselves. Because the

[42] Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 8.

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burial takes place off stage, without witnesses, Antigone cannot be connected directly to this crime without "linguistic assertion" (7); similarly, the off-stage murder of Count Cenci cannot be pinned upon Beatrice without such linguistic attachment—an admission she defiantly refuses to give to her accusers.

Like Beatrice, Jane De Monfort rewrites the systems of signification surrounding the crime of murder, appending her own layer of ethical relativism onto her brother's deeds. Shortly before the play concludes, officers arrive to arrest and punish De Monfort for Rezenvelt's murder, but the man is already dead. Mourning over his deceased body, Jane performs the role of her brother's eulogist by rewriting the history of what has just occurred. In an attempt to reconstruct her brother's reputation for the future, Jane reinscribes his lamentable acts into an honorable legacy, stating:

> Tell them by whose authority you come
> He died that death which best becomes a man
> Who is with keenest sense of conscious ill
> And deep remorse assail'd, a wounded spirit.
> A death that kills the noble and the brave,
> And only them. He had no other wound. (V.iv.113-118)

Authoring—and authorizing—De Monfort's obituary with this speech, Jane designates the cause of her brother's demise as his "deep remorse…[and] a wounded spirit," thus ensuring that he be characterized as a victim of his own guilt and psychological injury. Turning her brother into someone whose deeds should elicit pathos rather than contempt, Jane elegiacally writes De Monfort into the heroic tradition: he died the kind of death that only takes down those whose courage and conscientious morality define him: "the noble and the brave"—"And only them," she adds, for good measure. Jane shapes De Monfort's story into legend: she instructs the officers to return to their commanding

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rulers with this information and to perpetuate this reconstructed narrative of her brother's downfall. Jane creates a new legal narrative in order to defy the symbolic order, lending her brother a story that washes him of any guilt for murder and which preserves his legacy by demanding affective sympathy from its hearers.

In their final partings from their dear siblings, neither Jane nor Beatrice relies upon language to perform their ultimate reproductive and reparative moves. As discussed above, Beatrice installs her legacy in Bernardo's brow, identifying his physiognomic likeness as the key to the material memorialization of her own history. Desiring to share bodily space with her brothers, Beatrice wants to be buried with her already-dead brothers, recreating Antigone's ceremonial but rebellious act of laying Polyneices in the ground. While preparing for her own death, she solidifies this sororal-fraternal union by choosing to bury herself figuratively in her younger brother. Abdicating the normative roles of marriage and motherhood, Beatrice surrenders her own female body to death, but she preserves her lineage not in a material byproduct of her own sexual organs—that damned progeny that Cenci wishes to bury within her womb—but rather in a material transmission and extension of herself in the material body of her sibling. In Baillie's play, Jane De Monfort is the sibling who survives, thereby shifting the impetus for memorialization from Bernardo's preservation of Beatrice to an inverted sororal preservation of her brother. Yet, nevertheless, Jane enacts a similar replacement of a sexual generativity with a sororal-fraternal one. She, too, will preserve her brother's legacy by abdicating the normative structures of kinship—marriage, childbearing—for a much more solitary and transient role.

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Jane and Beatrice both live outside the terms of normative female sexuality. As Sarah De Sanctis has suggested of their progenitor Antigone, these women transgress the domain of kinship because each "consciously chooses her brother above her husband, refusing in this way heterosexual marriage and generational continuity as such."[43] Antigone rejects motherhood. "Such a gesture is suicidal," De Sanctis suggests.[44] By straying from the virgin-to-bride-to-mother narrative, Antigone invites a kind of premature death: "Antigone will find her marriage chamber in her tomb."[45] Jane De Monfort and Beatrice Cenci similarly abandon normative sexuality by refusing to choose the reproductive route. Their death drives push them towards siblings rather than spouses; they resist being subsumed into the maternal paradigm of bodily generation. Instead of moving onto—and producing—the next repetitive generation, they step, reparatively, sideways.

[43] Sarah De Sanctis, "From Psychoanalysis to Politics: Antigone as Revolutionary in Judith Butler and Žižek," *Opticon1826* 14 (2012): 30.
[44] De Sanctis, "From Psychoanalysis," 31.
[45] Françoise Meltzer, "Theories of Desire: Antigone Again," *Critical Inquiry* 37 (Winter 2011): 183.

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CHAPTER TWO

William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and the Spots of Sibling Time

When William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge conceived their "experiments" of the *Lyrical Ballads*, they envisioned a group of texts in which each poem would be distinct but relational.[1] Writing to their publisher Joseph Cottle in May 1798, Coleridge described this collective as an integrated set, a constellation of disparate but similar pieces that should be understood in the form of a web or network—or family:

> We deem that the volumes offered to you are to a certain degree *one work*, in *kind tho' not in degree*, as an Ode is one work—& that our different poems are as stanzas, good relatively rather than absolutely:—Mark you, I say in kind tho' not in degree.[2]

No work stands alone, he explains: the poems function relatively, not absolutely; individual pieces are not in fact individual, but must be read within the context of all others. In the following years, Wordsworth and Coleridge would each continue to turn repeatedly to this ideal mixture of unity with divergence, of likeness with contrast. In the 1800 "Preface," for instance, Wordsworth assigns aesthetic pleasure to the "perception of similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude."[3] "Imagination," for the Coleridge of the *Biographia Literaria*, involves a "reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" that blends "sameness, with difference."[4] For both poets, perceiving the whole requires simultaneously perceiving the inter-relation of its disparate but similar parts.

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[1] Wordsworth, "Advertisement" (1798), *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 7. Further citations will refer to this edition.
[2] Coleridge to Cottle, 28 May 1798, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, vol. 1: 1785-1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 412, emphases original.
[3] Wordsworth, "Preface" (1800), in *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. Brett and Jones, 250.
[4] Coleridge, Chapter 14, *Biographia Literaria*, eds. J. Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

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In this way, the *Lyrical Ballads* materializes a kind of spatialized sibling logic. Constructed of layered and graduated distinctions between works—works that differ, in Coleridge's words, only by degree rather than kind—the *Ballads* resembles the sort of constellation of identities, ages, genders, and power dynamics that make up any sibling network. The two volumes of the *Ballads*, born just two years apart from one another, mimic the kinship of brothers and sisters: as a diverse but inextricable unit of various pieces, they entertain the "coexistence of degrees of sameness and difference" amongst their parts that Stefani Engelstein links within sibling logic;[5] they embrace those "quintessential attributes of both sameness and difference" that historian Leonore Davidoff identifies as inherent to the experience of lived siblinghood.[6] Wordsworth's poetic vision thus depends upon the kind of networked relationality that is found amongst siblings. This sibling vision not only sustains Wordsworth's experimental project on a structural level, but also, and more importantly, evokes a brand of collective consciousness that sustains Wordsworth's poetic self-fashioning—defying what critics following Keats have always assumed to be the poet's "egotistical sublime."

In Chapter One, I explored the ways that Shelley's and Baillie's dramas offer the non-reproductive potential of sibling kinship as a replacement for heteronormative structures of lineage and generational progression. These plays invest, in other words, in horizontal systems of queer sibling transmission and futurity that might repair the damage done by hierarchical and patriarchal sociality. In this chapter, I uncover the networked

[5] Engelstein, "Sibling Logic; or, Antigone Again," *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 48.
[6] Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 35.

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paradigm of sibling logic that underwrites and enables Shelley's and Baillie's queer vision. By examining the sibling logic imbedded within and between Wordsworth's lyrical ballads, I argue that the poet constructs his inventive poetic self upon the foundations of sibling inter-subjectivity—those foundations of psychoanalytic interdependence upon which Shelley's and Baillie's queer sibling futurity also stands.

Indeed, Wordsworth's poetic commitment to sibling kinship extends far beyond his personal relations. Few scholars have noted this fact, however, since critical investment has primarily been given over to biographical nods to William's allegedly incestuous cohabitation with Dorothy—or to defensively redeeming the siblings from this specter of taboo.[7] Yet during the final years of the 1790s, Wordsworth incorporated sibling kinship into a range of works, including autobiographical pieces like "Tintern Abbey," "To My Sister," and "Nutting," as well as impersonalized narratives like "The Brothers" and "We are Seven," not to mention those written contemporaneously with the *Lyrical Ballads* such as "The Seven Sisters" and "When to the attractions of this busy world." And while Wordsworth and Coleridge may have conceived the *Ballads* using a logic of relationality, readers have, for the most part, orphaned its members, analyzing them separately from the kinship fabric that knits them together. Thus the siblings of, say,

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[7] Ever since F. W. Bateson accused William of harboring repressed desires for his sister, many biographers have responded to the Wordsworths' intimacy with suspicion; see Bateson, *Wordsworth: A Re-Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), 151; Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 203; and Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York: Norton, 1998), 399. Biographer Mary Moorman promptly rebutted Bateson's "morbid implications" in her *William Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1770-1803* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 282. Others such as Elizabeth Fay and Lucy Newlyn have attempted to reframe the siblings' complementarity altogether; Fay, *Becoming Wordsworthian: A Performative Aesthetics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), and Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth: 'All in Each Other'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

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"We are Seven" have seemed unrelated to the more well-known sibling invocations of "Tintern Abbey." Reading Wordsworths' sibling-oriented poems together, however, we uncover an imbedded sibling logic in which the poet's self-construction depends as much upon his "solitary musing" as it does upon an inter-relational and trans-subjective framework of self-construction. In other words, the "other" is always already part of the Wordsworthian self: she is always there, with him, now, upon the banks.

I. In Defense of Siblinghood; or, Why "We" is "Seven"

Wordsworth's poetic sibling logic has long been overlooked because readers, much like the adult inquisitor of "We are Seven," have been busy asking other questions. When the adult narrator of "We are Seven" meets a young eight-year-old girl near a country churchyard, he inquires how many siblings she has. She responds that they number "seven," but that two of these have died. The adult then protests the inaccuracy of her math: her calculation should instead, he insists, total "five." Pestering her with his repeated challenges—"How may this be?"; "I pray you tell… / how this may be," and so on[8]—the speaker pits his numerical logic against hers, trying to convince this young child that her dead siblings no longer count. With these objections, the speaker introduces a fundamental epistemology that the poem's readers have since followed. He insists upon a system of mathematically- and biologically-derived binaries—of seven versus five, yes versus no, living versus dead, child versus adult.

Following this dualistic and arithmetical thinking, critics interpreting the poem—

[8] Wordsworth, "We are Seven," in *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), lines 14, 27-8. Further line numbers from this edition will be cited parenthetically.

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even those who support the little girl—have settled into similarly divisive camps, each with its own dichotomous reading stemming from this epistemological split. For some, the girl's arithmetic appears to be right—the correct answer is "seven."[9] From her perspective, the two dead siblings remain spiritually alive through a kind of childhood innocence and spiritual naiveté that Wordsworth famously celebrates elsewhere. For others, however, the adult's answer makes far greater sense;[10] the siblings are, after all, dead. Readers of "We are Seven" have thus pursued a binary approach dictated by the numerical and hierarchical regime indoctrinated by the poem's interlocutor. They continue to assume that the deceased children must, in one way or another, be accounted for—and, literally, *counted*—differently from the living. Adding to critical arguments defending one speaker's form of numerical reasoning over the other's, some scholars place the poem directly into the context of historicized acts of counting, situating "We are Seven" in the era of demography and census-taking. But these readings, too, draw binary and mathematical distinctions, such as that "between poetic counting and political counting"[11] or between an "opposition of two kinds of representational logic."[12] Most

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[9] For arguments that support the girl's perspective, see Galia Benziman, "Two Patterns of Child Neglect: Blake and Wordsworth," *Partial Answers* 5, no. 2 (2007): 167-197; James McGavran, Jr., "Catechist and Visionary: Watts and Wordsworth in 'We are Seven' and the 'Anecdote for Fathers,'" in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth Century England*, ed. James McGavran, Jr. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991); Alan Richardson, "The Politics of Childhood: Wordsworth, Blake, and Catechistic Method," *ELH* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 853-868; and Ronald McReynolds, "Primitivism in Wordsworth's 'We are Seven,'" *Publications of the Missouri Philological Association* 7 (1982): 34-37.
[10] See Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's* Lyrical Ballads *(1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Alan Grob, *The Philosophic Mind: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry and Thought* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1973); and Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).
[11] Aaron Fogel, "Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' and Crabbe's *The Parish Register*: Poetry and Anti-Census," *Studies in Romanticism* 48 (2009): 26.

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readers thus concur: something has to be subtracted.

By adopting the speaker's ideologically dualistic and numerically reductive inclinations, however, critics have tended to ignore other ontological possibilities presented by the poem. If we pay attention to the alternate voice, that of the young girl rather than of the speaker, we might be inspired to ask other kinds of questions altogether: Why, for instance, does she need all of her siblings to *count* in the first place? After all, the girl struggles not with whether her siblings are truly alive or truly dead—she does in fact acknowledge that they *are* deceased—but adamantly maintains that there be "seven" in total. Where the speaker fixates on excluding two from this count, we might focus instead upon the number of seven as a whole and consider what, for this young country maid, seems to be precisely at stake.

Despite being manipulated into using the enumerative logic imposed upon her by the speaker, the "little maid" tries her best to say what she means using his discourse of numbering. While the speaker concentrates on a singular narrative—your brother and sister have died, so now we subtract and get five—the young girl describes her reality in a series of multiplying but equivalent explanations. Each time her interlocutor signals his failure to understand her by reiterating his sole query of "how many," she tries to reach him with a new version of her story. At first, she explicitly echoes the speaker's question with her reply, "How many? seven in all" (15), to demonstrate that she comprehends his meaning. When that response fails to satisfy, she describes the siblings' geographic positions, with their implied occupational roles: two can be found "at Conway" (19), likely

[12] Hollis Robbins, "'We are Seven' and the First British Census," *English Language Notes* 48, no. 2 (2010): 207.

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in apprenticeship or domestic service; two are "gone to sea" (20), in naval or merchant engagements. Next, she cites topographical information, locating the dead siblings "in the church-yard … Beneath the church-yard tree" (31-32). Then, she appends sensory details by plotting their precise cartographic points: their "green" graves "may be seen" a mere "twelve steps" from the cottage door (37, 39). This last moment reinforces her rhetorical strategy: not only does she invoke the freshness of the siblings' still-"green" graves to prove their ongoing relevance, but she also invites the speaker to measure these quantifiable steps himself.[13] She provides, in other words, the precise kind of empirical evidence—the exact counting—that her questioner demands.

These dialogic responses never appease the adult speaker, however, so the girl submits lengthier narrative scenarios. Midway through their exchange, she switches to descriptive and chronological reports, first providing anecdotes of the siblings' daily interactions (lines 41-44), then constructing a linear history that accounts for how, when, and in what order John and Jane each died (49-60). This storytelling mode fails as well, of course, and by the end of the poem the two figures must agree to disagree. Despite the adult speaker's stubborn refusal to acknowledge her perspective, however, the girl *has* offered an array of verbal defenses, each with its own brand of evidence: from geographical mappings (at Conway, at sea) to observable data (green graves only steps away from where they now stand) to temporalized stories (when and why the siblings died). Since the man listens only for the single number that he has predetermined as valid,

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[13] We might also smirk at the girl's tinge of irony: by not specifying whether these twelve steps demarcate the length of an adult's stride or her own, she may in fact be sending him on a wild goose chase—punishing him for overstepping his bounds by making him, quite literally, over-step.

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the girl's differentiated answers never register. But regardless of his protestations, her stories provide material and concrete evidence, rather than transcendent or spiritual justifications. Thus while the speaker seeks a reductive binary of subtraction, the girl multiplies the possibilities instead.

This multi-faceted discourse in fact echoes the multi-faceted nature of the girl's family. Her diversified recording illustrates her multidimensional sense of kinship: all of her siblings add up to define her selfhood as accretive and communal rather than detached or independent. She incorporates herself into this expansive sibling family of seven when, for example, she binds herself to the diverse sets of groups and pairs that make up her collective "two" and "us" in line after line: "And two of us… / And two are… / Two of us… / My sister and my brother" (20-22). Synecdochally, she fashions herself as one part of a whole that she herself reciprocally represents. These possessives convey her feeling of ownership and belonging with her other sibling constituents, while her echoic assonance of "and two" across these lines reinforces the interchangeable nature of the groups. Each sister or brother is bound to the others of differing ages, genders, and personalities, and any number or grouping of them might be mixed and matched at any given time or place—at Conway, at sea, in the grave.

Synecdoche serves, in fact, as the literary *modus operandi* of Stefani Engelstein's "sibling logic." Describing siblinghood as a psychoanalytic network in which the subject is "multiply mediated" via relations to her siblings, Engelstein positions the inter-subjective sibling as a synecdochal part of a whole, a "subject embedded in a network of *partial*

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others."[14] The lateral nature of such sibling kinship, she explains, "resists the metaphoric economy of castration [i.e. of Freudian psychoanalysis], instead following the model of synecdoche, a part-whole relationship that does not entirely relinquish the object it moves away from" (41). The young girl of "We are Seven" asserts this kind of synecdochal unification. Each member of her sibling network exists within the larger set, and the reiterated groups ("us") and pairs ("two") reciprocally constitute her singular identity ("me," "I"). This logic permits the girl to expand her thinking beyond the dualities of dead and living.

As Engelstein proposes, such sibling logic overcomes the reductive thinking of Hegelian dialectics or Freudian oedipal dyads, replacing these binary paradigms with a "complex modeled on the web of relationships," a model of "transsubjectivity" and a "tenor of relatedness" that reveals the inherent "impossibility of locating an individual" as an entirely distinct entity (39). Binary logic, in contrast—the kind represented not only by the adult speaker in "We are Seven" but also by most twentieth-century poststructuralists and by readers of Wordsworth's poem—"forecloses potentials for theorizing differential relationships and collective identities not only in the imaginary but also in the symbolic order." Engelstein continues:

> The sibling as a model…allows us to move beyond both self-other dualisms and the mother-child dyad as the only grounds for intersubjectivity, and recognizes the subject as instead embedded in a network of *partial others*, whose subjectivities are nonetheless partially, though differentially, shared. (40, emphasis original)

Thus even in death the young girl of "We are Seven" must not elide her siblings. Her network continues intact, for her own subjective existence depends upon theirs. The girl

[14] Engelstein, "Sibling Logic," 40.

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must preserve her original system: each sibling remains, regardless of whether they are now *only* remains.

Affirming the interdependence of this transsubjective network, Wordsworth's young maid roots herself within her group of siblings through shared material and affective interactions. All day long, each and every day, her activities are oriented towards a brother and a sister, as she describes:

> 'My stockings there I often knit,
> 'My 'kerchief there I hem;
> 'And there upon the ground I sit—
> 'I sit and sing to them.
>
> 'And often after sunset, Sir,
> 'When it is light and fair,
> 'I take my little porringer,
> 'And eat my supper there.' (41-48)

Reiterating "there" four times in these eight brief lines, the girl aligns herself to this communal physical presence: it is only *there* with her kin that her "I" can act and can be—can knit, hem, sit, sing, and eat. Her siblings function as her recipients and her objects; she never performs alone. Even those items that she seems to possess independently (*my* stockings, *my* porringer) correlate to the domestic routines associated with this family unit: her stockings, kerchief, porringer, and supper that she, respectively, knits, hems, eats from, and eats with these two siblings. With present-tense verbs, the girl reinforces the perpetual nature of these interactions, painting a tableau of their ongoing engagements. Conducting her daily rituals around her siblings—and *not*, we should note, inside the cottage with her mother—the girl links her corporeal as well as her emotional essence to her sibling constellation. Despite their absence—for, whether alive or dead, *all* of the

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siblings are currently absent from the family home—the girl registers each brother and sister as a felt psychological and affective presence, regardless of whether they are distinctly *not*-present in the here and now.

II. Kinship Beyond Death

In maintaining the vivacity of this network, the young girl is, in historical terms at least, far from unique. At the end of the eighteenth century, any changes to the numbers or order of siblings in a family would have drastically impacted the structure of the sibling network. Sibling deaths were, of course, a common occurrence in an era of high mortality rates, when anywhere from one quarter to one third of siblings could be lost in early childhood.[15] Sibling order and placement—variable, rather than stable, throughout the lifecycle of a family—would reorient each sibling's material and economic realities, not to mention their emotional and psychological relationships. This was not merely an issue for aristocratic primogeniture, which for obvious reasons favored eldest sons to the detriment of younger siblings. Children in middle- and lower-class families would have been equally at the mercy of their uncontrollable circumstances of birth order.

For folks in all ranks of society, trends in life trajectories typically accorded with one's rank in the sibling hierarchy. "Certain differences in residence and marriage patterns and in occupational histories were associated with specific ranks of birth," historian Richard Wall explains, because "the dynamics of the family's own life cycle imposed its own constraints on the life chances of children born at different points in the

[15] Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: Further Explored* (London: Methuen, 1983), 112, as cited in Amy Harris, *Siblinghood and Social Relations in Georgian England: Share and Share Alike* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), 33.

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course of its development."[16] Middle-born children, for instance, were statistically less likely to remain in their neighborhoods of origin, whereas eldest children and youngest daughters tended to settle in the same parishes as their parents. The age when a child moved out of the parental residence also correlated to his or her place in the sibling order. Most would leave their childhood home temporarily and sporadically throughout their teen years and twenties in order to hold apprenticeships or service positions elsewhere. Rarely departing to establish their own independent households until their late twenties or thirties, only about one third of men and one quarter of young women would leave their parental abodes alone. Instead, most exited along with a small family group. Those who departed the parental home with their older siblings were typically younger than average. And until that final move, young adults would still consider their parents' house to be "home."[17] Furthermore, as Naomi Tadmor points out, the term "family" itself was extremely malleable: it could refer interchangeably to a household's immediate constituents, whether consanguineal or not (including servants and visitors), or to one's entire extended network of kin scattered across the globe.[18]

Historians assume that since siblings often suffered from an unequal distribution of wealth, goods, and status, these material realities must have produced bitter rivalries.[19]

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[16] Wall, "Marriage, Residence, and Occupational Choices of Senior and Junior Siblings in the English Past," *The History of the Family* 1, no. 3 (1996): 260.
[17] See Colin G. Pooley and Jean Turnbull, "Leaving Home: The Experience of Migration from the Parental Home in Britain since c. 1770," *Journal of Family History* 22, no. 4 (1997): 390-424; and Richard Wall, "The Age at Leaving Home," *Journal of Family History* 3, no. 2 (1978): 181-202.
[18] Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[19] Linda A. Pollock, "Parent-Child Relations," in *The History of the European Family: Volume One, Family Life in Early Modern Times, 1500-1789*, eds. David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

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Yet psychic dynamics often varied. Despite conflicts, siblings of the eighteenth century remained quite close, finding emotional and psychological solace in one another while also depending upon each other for financial and social resources. Therefore siblings remained quite sensitive to variations in the family tree, since losses or gains in sibling numbers affected all of its branches. As scholars like Linda Pollock have noted, families functioned as cohesive systems wherein individual members could experience a wide range of relationships and interactions that varied over time, being at intervals "both a constraint and a resource; a psychological sanctuary and a cause of deep emotional pain."[20] Moreover, sibling birth order and its resultant hierarchies and privileges could change at any time, thus shifting the tensions and affiliations within a given network. Prior to marriage, for example, "the combined impact of birth order and gender dynamics" structured a continually shifting set of "power machinations between siblings" and influenced the internal dynamics of the family at large.[21] These power dynamics altered often, since birth order could be converted throughout childhood and adulthood as "the vicissitudes of health, injury, and medicine meant death was a constant possibility."[22] The sibling hierarchy could be reordered at any time. Even though inheritance rules suggest that eldest sons would be the unquestioned recipient of a family's lineage and property, this "ever-shifting birth-order variation" meant that children might not know until well into adulthood, or even middle age, who would inevitably inherit the

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[20] Pollock, "Rethinking Patriarchy and the Family in Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 1 (January 1998): 4; siblings were consistently "aware of the interwoven nature of their lives and that their standing in the family could be raised or lowered by the behavior of a sibling" (15-16).
[21] Amy Harris, "That Fierce Edge: Sibling Conflict and Politics in Georgian England," *Journal of Family History* 37, no. 2 (2012): 156-157.
[22] Harris, "That Fierce Edge," 162.

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family's lot of goods.[23] Even youngest daughters could become family heirs if the right circumstances (and deaths) created enough fluctuations. The sibling order into which one was born was not necessarily the order with which one died.

In Wordsworth's "We are Seven," any changes in the cardinal number of the girl's siblings—from "seven" to "five," for instance—would revise her ordinal position within the familial system, just as it would have for any child of her era, affecting both her financial status and her future adult responsibilities as well as her juvenile emotions. Before John and Jane died, this girl may have been younger than, older than, or in between her brother and sister in age, but she was certainly one of the three youngest children, since these remained at home while the others had already departed for military or domestic service. In all likelihood, one of these three children would have been in charge of caring for the other two, since poor laboring workers not only had difficulty supporting the resources of their ever-increasing broods (hence why children were often sent out to service), but children were also frequently required to mind their younger kin. Working-class women with large families, in particular, such as the cottagers of Wordsworth's poem, had neither "time [n]or energy for mothering or playing with their children."[24] If the girl's two dead siblings are now to be removed from the overall "count," as the poem's adult speaker implies that they should be, then the girl herself would be re-cast in a new role: no longer caretaker nor companion of John and Jane, she

[23] Harris, "That Fierce Edge," 163. Harris's data demonstrates that in one particular family "whatever birth order had been established, mortality had reshaped it and the sibling politics it affected multiple times" and within just a few months "the birth-order hierarchy had been completely reshuffled."
[24] Mary Abbott, *Family Ties: English Families, 1540-1920* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 140.

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becomes the baby of the family—and, with her other four siblings clearly absent, essentially the only child of the household.

Displaced into this subordinate position of lone youngest, the girl of this newly reordered family of "five" would possess the fewest privileges and endure the most burdens. If, before her two nearest siblings had died, the girl had been fifth of the seven, a middle child more likely to depart from the neighborhood of origin, she now becomes trapped in her infantile status with its far more limited options, such as the daunting material and psychological obligation of caring for her aging mother in their shared cottage, a responsibility that would likely delay her own marriage and independence until well after her mother's death.[25] At the same time, having fewer siblings within her age bracket, with older siblings earning money for the household, the girl could also, after her two nearest siblings died, have had more familial resources allocated to her.[26] But the loss of John and Jane could, equally likely, have significantly *reduced* the household income, since young children often garnered food from local sources or gained small monetary contributions through regional work that could add to the domestic coffers.[27] Without these economic additions, this young girl and her mother might be more destitute now than before. Be that as it may, the girl's willful obliviousness to these material alterations marks her greater preoccupation with the affective, emotional, and psychological

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[25] See Wall, "Marriage, Residence," 259; and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 346.
[26] See, for example, a study of latter nineteenth-century siblinghood and the influence on familial resources in northern European countries by Bianca Suanet and Hilde Bras, "Sibling Position and Marriage Timing in the Netherlands, 1840-1922: A Comparison Across Social Class, Local Contexts, and Time," *Journal of Family History* 39, no. 2 (2014): 126-139.
[27] Abbott, *Family Ties*, 31.

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ramifications of these sibling deaths, rather than their financial, social, or physical consequences. But in either case, the threatening power of the speaker's imposing "five" looms large.

So when this girl adamantly insists that "we are seven" rather than "five," she argues about far more than how to account for the dead. Rejecting her interlocutor's arithmetical, binary logic does not mean she is naïve enough to believe that her siblings are magically somehow still alive, but that she recognizes how this new numbering would fundamentally modify her inclusive family paradigm and dismiss its members' intrinsic interdependence. Accepting the speaker's "five" would diminish her future prospects and rewrite her past history; "five" would indicate that she had never partaken in a small triad of kin who were raised together; "five" would mean that she no longer has any siblings in proximate age or location. "Five" signifies, most of all, that she is for all practical purposes an only child. "Seven," in contrast, acknowledges the original hierarchy among her siblings, maintaining the various relationships shared within that network. "Seven" ensures that her own position remains the same, that she continues to live within the familial organization into which she was born: that she still occupies her given "spot." And "seven" allows for epistemological expansion and new ontological relations—affective, numerical, or otherwise.

Ultimately, the girl's logic of "seven"—a logic of multiplicity rather than of binaries—wins out over that of her stubborn interlocutor. But in contrast to what critics have previously argued, I would like to suggest that her victory is *not* to be attributed to a more rational method of counting nor to a more skillful handling of objective ordinals.

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Nor does it derive from a child-like and transcendent spirituality, as we have seen. The girl succeeds in sustaining her sibling family, with all its positions intact, regardless of living status, because she understands the flexibility that sibling logic affords her—a fluid multiplicity that Wordsworth reinforces by welcoming it into his own rhythmic poetics. In each line where the little maid reiterates her claim that "we are seven," the poem's mechanical meter expands to accommodate her fluid thinking. Wordsworth's alternating 4/3 ballad line-pairs swell to furnish room for the odd number of syllables and irregular rhythms that the two syllables of "sev-en" demand. For instance, in her reply "'How many? seven in all,' she said" (15), the "seven" disrupts the middle of this four-beat line with an anapestic substitution. When one speaks the line without eliding "sev-en" into a single syllable—when, in other words, one lets each syllable *count*—the line conjures an awkward, almost stuttering break in the otherwise even tetrameter rhythm. The meter upsets its expected eight-syllable measure to shift into an irregular count of nine syllables. Moreover, her verbal reply itself ("How many? seven in all") totals seven. With each of her other lines of argumentative proposition—"She answered, 'Seven are we'" (18); "'Seven boys and girls are we'" (30); "'O Master! We are seven'" (64); and "And said, 'Nay, we are seven!'" (69)—this word "sev-en" refuses to fit the strict metrical count, extending each trimeter pace into seven syllables. With each utterance of the child's reiterated "seven," Wordsworth constructs the line as a literal count of that number. Flexing the binary march of the iambic ballad, the meter fluctuates to embrace the semantic weight of each iteration. Thus the poem embodies the same exact count from which the little girl refuses to subtract.

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In the end, the girl's "we are seven" performs what it promises. While the interlocutor demands a sum that would adhere to dualistic logic—yes or no, seven or five, stressed or unstressed, counted or uncounted—the girl's utterances unleash a pluralized ontology. The speaker discards her statement as failed discourse, but we need not repeat his error. Glossing the young girl's utterances as "performative" rather than "constative,"[28] we can appraise her speech acts not as naïve attempts to bring the dead to life in literal (or even transcendental) terms, but instead as discursive invocations of the siblings in the present through consciously self-constructed—and self-construct*ing*—narratives. Without this linguistic embodiment, without the narrative variations that she offers, the siblings would no longer exist. Yet the girl *knows* this fact. Her defiant speech acts allow the siblings to endure at the level of poetic imagination. In her words, in her memories, and in her performative acts of counting, the girl's sibling kinship continues to signify: it is in those words that her "we" can be—indeed, "are"—"seven."

III. The Set is Broken

Despite the girl's masterful poetic performance, however, the specter of sibling death lingers. Though I have argued that the girl sustains her alternative ontology at the levels of narrative, affect, and meter, Wordsworth's own fears of sibling loss, and its resulting isolation, still threaten to destabilize this integrated system. Like several of Wordsworth's other poems, "We are Seven" gestures towards the instability threatened by the removal of any siblings—a separation that the speaker's "five" would make permanent. In a moment when the girl clings most adamantly to her kin, the poem

[28] I borrow this distinction from J. L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 27.

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entertains the possibilities of division:

> 'Two of us in the church-yard lie,
> 'My sister and my brother,
> 'And in the church-yard cottage, I
> 'Dwell near them with my mother.' (19-24)

In these seemingly innocuous lines, wherein the girl connects herself to both her siblings and her mother's cottage, the girl confirms her temporary divorce from them as well: the siblings are in pairs, she the odd one out; she remains at home, they live away together. But the gravest danger lies at the end of this stanza's penultimate line, where the girl's "I" dangles precariously apart from everything she knows. With an insidious comma, Wordsworth amputates this "I" from the girl's immediate surroundings: she is orthographically severed from the protective shelter of her "cottage"; she hangs tentatively apart from the enjambed "Dwell" that would return her to her "mother." Disrupting her proximity to these representations of home, the line plays with her estrangements, wrenching her subtly but dramatically from her comforting domestic contexts. Furthermore, this "I" rhymes disturbingly with the position of her dead siblings who "lie" in their graves nearby: the girl is pushed eerily close to the "church-yard" herself. Divided from her siblings and from her mother in this tenuous moment, the girl teeters upon a precipice where her "I" is—if for only an instant—starkly alone. This is the fate, one embodied in the speaker's "five," that the girl so urgently resists.

By momentarily suspending the girl from her affective attachments, the poet alludes to a distress around sibling loss that resonated throughout the Wordsworths' lives. Familial disruption had become an almost ubiquitous experience in William's youth, such that these well-known facts require only brief rehearsing. In their childhood, Dorothy was

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removed from the paternal home following their mother's death in 1778, when she was only six years old. She remained separated from her four brothers, even after their father's death five years later, in 1783, which orphaned the sibling clan. Not reunited fully until their early twenties, William and Dorothy chose to reside together over the subsequent half century throughout their entire adult—and, in William's case, married—lives. Sharing both domestic duties and financial and intellectual vocations, Dorothy and William hoped to recreate and preserve in adulthood what had been robbed of them in youth. The Wordsworth siblings were, in 1793, eagerly awaiting—and lamenting the constant delay of—what, as Dorothy put it to her childhood friend Jane Pollard, would be the "Day of my Felicity, the Day in which I am once more to find a Home under the same Roof with my Brother… and there is much Ground to fear that my Scheme may prove a Shadow, a mere Vision of Happiness."[29] Simply imagining this reunion seems to forebode its impossibility. In childhood they had "in the same moment lost a father, a mother, a home," Dorothy records, afflictions that "have all contributed to unite us closer by the Bonds of affection notwithstanding we have been compelled to spend our youth far asunder."[30]

Both before and after the *Lyrical Ballads* were published, the threat of loss seeped deeply into the Wordsworth household. In 1805, this threat became reality when William and Dorothy's younger brother John died unexpectedly at sea. In his mournful response to this traumatic event, Wordsworth announced that their sibling unit had now been

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[29] D. W. to Jane Pollard, 16 June 1793, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd ed., vol. 1: *The Early Years 1787-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 93.
[30] D. W. to Jane Pollard, 16 February 1793, *Letters*, 88.

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irreparably destroyed: "God keep the rest of us together!" he wrote to his eldest brother Richard, "the set is now broken."[31] A few years later, Wordsworth would again witness precisely the kind of devastation incurred by sibling separations, this time in his adopted Lake District community.

In March 1808, an impoverished local Grasmere couple died accidentally after falling off a snowy cliff, effectively orphaning their eight children. William coaxed Dorothy to record the events in what would become her unpublished manuscript, *The Narrative of George and Sarah Green*. There Dorothy documents the community's efforts to provide money, housing, nourishment, and, eventually, foster families for these destitute children. Though every effort was made to keep them within the community, the parents' deaths resulted in the sibling network's being broken, dismantled, and rearranged—turning what was once a whole of "eight" into solitary ones and twos.[32] While celebrating the community's recuperative acts of kindness, Dorothy also reveals the resulting emotional distress, as when two brothers find themselves facing separation:

> The younger sibling sate upon her lap [i.e., Miss Knott, the lady who had fetched them on the day of their parents' deaths] while we remained in the house, and his Brother leaned against me: they continued silent; but I felt some minutes before our departure, by the workings of his breast, that the elder Boy was struggling with grief at the thought of parting with his old Friend. I looked at him and perceived that his eyes were full of tears: the younger Child, with less foresight, continued calm till the last moment, when both burst into an agony of grief.[33]

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[31] Written on 11 February 1805, after receiving news from Richard of John's death; *Letters*, 540.
[32] The two eldest Green girls remained where they had been (one in domestic service, the other living with the Wordsworths), and a younger boy was adopted by a half-brother. Of the five remaining children who were placed under parish care, two boys were taken in by a farmer and his wife, one adopted by a friend of George Green, and two sisters housed by a local couple.
[33] Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Narrative of George and Sarah Green*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (London: Folcroft Press, Inc., 1936. Reprint 1969), 67-8.

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The depth of their "agony" at parting testifies to the strength of the boys' sibling bonds. Removed from their original family, the Green children encounter significantly reduced sibling arrangements. While Dorothy's *Narrative* applauds the community's charitable efforts, she cannot escape the disturbance of such devastating sibling subtractions.

Throughout his poetry of the 1790s, Wordsworth tries to defend against the reality of such traumas as the result of sibling loss, separation, and death. Whether or not beset by William's and Dorothy's own anxieties of familial fragmentation, the speakers of Wordsworth's poems consider sibling relations to be intrinsic to self-consciousness, and are determined to maintain sibling connections in the face of loss, both tangibly and metaphysically. Where in "We are Seven" the little girl perceives her house and the sibling graves as synecdochal representations of her entire family unit, in Wordsworth's other sibling-oriented poems the speakers confront relationships to place and home through sibling kinship, further preserving these relations beyond death.

In the summer of 1800, Wordsworth ruminated on sibling attachments in another fictionalized tale of seven siblings, a short fable with a lengthy title: "The Solitude of Binnorie, or the Seven Daughters of Lord Archibald Campbell." Composed in August and published in *The Morning Post* on October 14, 1800,[34] this work was later retitled "The

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[34] Carol Landon dates the poem's composition to some time between February 26, when the *Morning Post* printed Mary Robinson's *Haunted Beach*, from which the "Seven Sisters" draws its meter, according to Coleridge's editorial note, and August 17, when Dorothy mentions it in her journal ("Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the *Morning Post*: An Early Version of 'The Seven Sisters,'" *The Review of English Studies* 11, no. 44 [1960]: 393-394). I would suggest the poem was written towards the latter date. Coleridge notes in his editorial letter to the *Post* that Robinson's "Haunted Beach" had been "since…re-published in the second volume of Mr. Southey's Annual Anthology" ("Wordsworth and Coleridge," 393). Only two weeks prior to William's recitation of "7 sisters on a stone," Dorothy records that Coleridge had arrived "very hot" on the afternoon of July 31 with this "2nd volume of the Anthology" in hand (Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and*

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Seven Sisters" for the 1807 *Poems*.[35] Like "We are Seven," it portrays a sibling group as a collective unit with interdependent identities, sustaining totality over individuation. The ethos of communal existence is so strong, in fact, that the seven sisters of this poem elect to engage in an act of group suicide rather than risk losing even one of their members. Death only draws them closer.

When the poem begins, the sisters are indistinguishable, pictured as "[s]even lilies in one garland wrought" (5), preserved together in their idyllic scene of pastoral purity: "The Seven, in rural fashion, / Beneath a tree were sitting, free / From all unquiet passion" (24-26).[36] This solitude is interrupted only by the arrival of foreign male "warriors" (18), who approach the virginal maidens "[w]ith menace proud, and insult loud" (36). The sisters escape this threat, first through temporary and chaotic separation ("Away they fly to left, to right" [29]; "Some close behind, some side by side" [45]), but then they choose to plunge to their mutual destruction: "in together did they leap" into the nearest lake (52), exclaiming as they go, "nay, let us die, / And let us die together!"

Alfoxden Journals, ed. Pamela Woof [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008],15). Thus "Seven Sisters" coincides with the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, despite not being published in that volume.

[35] Though mostly overlooked today, this poem enjoyed popularity throughout the nineteenth century. Based on a German fable, "Die sïeben Hügel" ("The Seven Hills") (1793), it was included in more than a dozen anthology collections and grammar books for children, including the following: Giraldus, *Nightingale Valley. A Collection, including a great number of the choicest lyrics and short poems in the English Language* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1860); Anon., *Playtime with the Poets: A Selection of the Best English Poetry for the Use of Children. By a Lady* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1863); Coventry Patmore, ed., *The Children's Garland, From the Best Poets* (Cambridge: Severs and Francis, 1863); Larkin Dunton, ed., *The Land of Song. Book III. For Upper Grammar Grades* (New York and Boston: Silver, Burdett & Company, 1899). Moreover, "The Seven Sisters" appears alongside "We are Seven" in a mid-century German-English reader, *The English Reader, or, A Selection of Pieces in Prose and Poetry, from the Most Eminent Modern Writers…by Dr. H. M. Melford* (Brunswick: Frederick Vieweg and Son, 1844).

[36] See reprint of the 1800 version in Landon, "Wordsworth and Coleridge," 401-402; she also provides a useful comparison between this version and its 1807 rendition; 398 ff.

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(47-48). These sisters choose a collective death "together" rather than face parting—either by kidnapping, sexual violation, or enforced marriage, all of which seem likely outcomes of this abrupt male invasion. In both "The Seven Sisters" and "We are Seven," seven siblings preserve their singularity in both life and death. For these young women, there can be no existence, either figurative or literal, outside conjoined sorority.

In a more well-known poem from the *Ballads* collection, "The Brothers," Wordsworth will narrate yet another version of sibling death, one that seems perhaps more destructive than are the deaths we find in "We are Seven," but which, like that poem, similarly offers a restorative vision of sibling preservation. In the opening of "The Brothers," the protagonist Leonard Ewbank has returned home to Ennerdale after twenty years at sea, having originally left to earn an income to support himself and his brother. Now Leonard comes back to his native village in the hopes of reuniting with this "only brother" whom "he so dearly lov'd."[37] He discovers, however, that James has since died. Upon this brother's death, Leonard confronts revisions of his family story and of his own identity. He is not merely an only child now, but he is also the only Ewbank left.

James's absence shifts Leonard's capacity to identify the sights of his hometown. Leonard's original understanding of these native hills had been formed through a combined subjective experience with his brother, and he becomes unable to identify not only the anonymous graves in his family plot, but also the entire surroundings, including the natural landscape that was once so familiar to him. The scenery, formerly taken in with James by his side, now becomes illegible:

[37] Wordsworth, "The Brothers," *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), lines 70, 77. Line references cited parenthetically hereafter.

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> …as he gaz'd, there grew
> Such a confusion in his memory,
> That he began to doubt, and he had hopes
> That he had seen this heap of turf before,
> That it was not another grave, but one
> He had forgotten….
> …He lifted up his eyes,
> And looking round he thought that he perceiv'd
> Strange alteration wrought on every side
> Among the woods and fields, and that the rocks,
> And the eternal hills, themselves were chang'd. (83-97)

The longer Leonard lingers to "gaze" at these graves, the more perplexed he becomes. This confusion then spreads to his perceptions more broadly. When he draws his gaze outward and upward to the natural landscape, he wonders whether the material objects of the "woods," "fields," "rocks," and "hills" have also changed. But no, he discovers; it is his own perception that has changed, not the physical objects themselves. His subjectivity, embodied in the things that he "thought" and "perceiv'd" with James, is what causes this "[s]trange alteration."

In other words, Leonard's senses are transfigured because his original impressions of the natural environment had once been formed in co-consciousness with his brother. As the narrating Priest recounts, the brothers had been like two "brother fountains" (143) that "bubbled side by side" (141) as constant "[c]ompanions for each other" (142). These brothers "had much love to spare, / And it all went into each other's hearts" (251-52). Rambling across the local landscape together, they had shaped their knowledge of the world through one another's eyes: "Leonard and James! I warrant, every corner," the Priest exclaims, "Among these rocks and every hollow place / Where foot could come, to one or both of them / Was known as well as to the flowers that grow there" (278-81).

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These are the same rocks and flowers that now seem so alien to Leonard. Trekking everywhere together, Leonard and James had, at times, even shared the same body: "Would Leonard then…go staggering through the fords / Bearing his brother on his back" (261-63). Each brother's encounters with the world had been filtered through the other's, sometimes as literally as walking upon the same two feet. Now that his partner is missing, Leonard cannot access this inter-subjectivity. He can no longer process what he sees because his perceptions were never meant to be experienced in solitude.

Each Ewbank brother suffers from the other's absence. While Leonard had been away at sea, the Priest explains, James too had deteriorated for lack of fraternal kinship: "when his Brother / Was gone to sea and he was left alone / The little colour that he had was soon / Stolen from his cheek, he droop'd, and pin'd and pin'd" (347-350). In Leonard's absence, James's yearning disorients him into a weakened state that eventually kills him: he walks off a cliff in delusory pursuit of Leonard. Neither brother can comprehend the space of home without the other. In the end, Leonard chooses to depart rather than stay in this defamiliarized homeland. Finding he cannot linger in a location that will only remind him of his brother's death, Leonard leaves behind "[t]his vale, where he had been so happy, seem'd / A place in which he could not bear to live" (439-440). He returns, instead, to sea, the one place where James can continue to endure in his imagination. Like the young maid in "We are Seven," Leonard chooses to preserve his sibling narrative of "we are two" in the only place he can.

This paradigm of brotherhood shaping the physical and affective experiences of Nature emerges yet again in "When to the attractions of this busy world," a slightly more

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transparently autobiographical poem that Wordsworth composed during the same summer weeks of 1800 when he was also writing "The Brothers" and "The Seven Sisters."[38] In yet another rendition of sensory experiences of space being transfigured through the presence of a brother, Wordsworth invokes here the role of his own brother, John, who had been staying with him and Dorothy in Grasmere since January of that year. The poem opens with the speaker meditating alone in a wooded retreat. He depicts a particular spot, nicknamed the "Fir-grove," a "cloistral place" where he would frequently retire by himself during the snowed-in winters, seeking quiet "refuge" from the "busy world." Though he spends much time here, recollecting that "[f]ull many an hour / Here did I lose," the speaker is disgruntled by the limited room he finds amidst the dense foliage: "vainly did I seek, beneath their stems / A length of open space, where to and fro / My feet might move without concern or care" (36-38). Unable to mark out adequate pacing ground, he abandons this spot in search of a more welcoming (and penetrable) respite.

Come springtime, however, the poet-speaker stumbles again upon this grove, only to discover that a fresh avenue has been cut through it: "there I found / A hoary pathway traced between the trees…that I stood / Much wondering how I could have sought in vain / for what was now so obvious" (47-52). Surprised by joy at the pathway's sudden appearance, it occurs to Wordsworth that his own sea-faring brother was responsible for having worn this easy route during the weeks and months after the poet had himself

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[38] Dorothy was copying "The Brothers" by the first of August (*Journals*, 15). Pamela Woof concludes that her reference on August 29th to the "Inscription—that about the path" was "[p]robably 'When to the attractions of the busy world'"; see editorial note, *Journals*, 180.

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abandoned it. The "[p]leasant conviction flashed upon my mind, / That … / [John] had surveyed it with a finer eye, / A heart more wakeful; and had worn the track / by pacing here" (58-62). Much like the "flash" that defines his trek across the Alps in Book VI of *The Prelude*, this sudden recognition comes upon the poet with unexpected immediacy to reveal a necessary truth: his brother's encounter with the place transforms his own.

The speaker's relationship to this location takes on new resonance. From being a spot he had "ceased…to frequent" (41), it becomes, after his brother's revision, one in which he chooses daily to "sit at evening" (90). From despising the grove for its physical inconveniences and his personal inability to probe its secrets, the speaker now finds that the space holds particular appeal: "now / I love the fir-grove with a perfect love" (86-87). His brother's presence has converted the speaker's orientation. Even though the speaker thought he intimately "knew" Nature before, the poem displaces such assurances. It is only after his brother's occupation of the hidden, cloistered woods that the poet can encounter his fullest understanding. Once thinking that he would best experience Nature while solitary, alone, and retreating from the external world, Wordsworth finds himself, at the end of the poem, even imitating his absent brother's actions, walking both his own path and his brother's in a sort of doubled communion: "Alone I tread this path;—for aught I know, / Timing my steps to thine" (105-6). His own subjectivity relies upon relations with his kin—his walk "Alone" is not, in fact, individual, but synchronous with another's.

Though John is not yet dead like the siblings in "We are Seven" and "The Brothers," his absence from the immediate scene resonates across both space and time.

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While the speaker misses his brother, he treads the same footpaths, marking steps as does the girl of "We are Seven," who marches back and forth between her cottage and the siblings' graves. This metaphoric overlapping of steps also recalls the parallel path cut by Leonard Ewbank as he carries James upon his back. Wordsworth further capitalizes upon this communal production of space in the closing subsection of the second volume of the *Ballads*, the "Poems on the Naming of Places." Here, Wordsworth explicitly ties his ability to narrate the story of a place to his experience of companionship. In the prefatory advertisement to this group of poems, Wordsworth explains that there are often "many places [that] will be found unnamed or of unknown names, where little Incidents will have occurred, or feelings experienced," and it is to these spots that he wishes to assign a personalized record. But he cannot do so alone. "Names have been given to Places by the Author and some of his Friends," he remarks, for this process of naming must be a collective activity.[39] Unnamed spaces might appear as blank tablets awaiting his inscription, but they cannot be identified alone.

IV. "Tintern Abbey" and the Spots of Sibling Time

John Wordsworth was, of course, not the only sibling to engage Wordsworth's imagination and to influence his sense of both space and time, and no work perhaps captures the intricacies of siblinghood more quintessentially than "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey." But even though, as Coleridge conveyed to Cottle, the *Ballads* were conceived as a project of connections in kind, the magnum opus of "Tintern

[39] *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. Brett and Jones, 217. The same advertisement appears in the 1815 volume. See Wordsworth, *Poems, by William Wordsworth: including Lyrical Ballads, and the Miscellaneous Pieces of the Author. With Additional Poems, a New Preface, and a Supplementary Essay. In Two Volumes*. Vol. II (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815).

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Abbey"—and its closing address to Dorothy—has often been isolated. In particular, the final fifty lines are frequently plumbed for evidence of William and Dorothy's real-life relationship and interpreted, alternately, as justification for the poet's genuine homage to her,[40] as an attempt to honor Dorothy while suppressing her individual growth,[41] or as a sign of the poet's narcissistic absorption of the feminine other.[42] Most recently, scholars like Heidi Thomson have sought middle ground, in which Dorothy and William constitute a mutually constructive, collaborative relationship. As Thomson notes, in "Tintern Abbey" we find a "continuous necessity for a web of interlocution between Wordsworth and his sister" that sustains his poetic vision.[43] But what Thomson and others have not recognized is that this web of interlocution can be found across the multitude of Wordsworth's sibling poems—and in the inter-relationships between them.

In fact, "We are Seven" and "Tintern Abbey" were intrinsically linked. When his travels up the Wye Valley took Wordsworth to Tintern Abbey in the summers of 1793 and 1798, ultimately inspiring his famous "Lines," he also visited the grounds of Goodrich Castle, a medieval fortification located 30 miles north of Tintern between the towns of Monmouth and Ross-on-Wye. There, in 1793, Wordsworth had met the young country girl who would become the subject of "We are Seven" five years later.

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[40] Alan Grob, "William and Dorothy: A Case Study in the Hermeneutics of Disparagement," *ELH* 65, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 187-221; James Soderholm, "Dorothy Wordsworth's Return to Tintern Abbey," *New Literary History* 26, no. 2 (1995): 309-22.
[41] John Barrell, "The Uses of Dorothy: 'The Language of Sense' in 'Tintern Abbey,'" in *Poetry, Language, and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).
[42] Marlon Ross, "Naturalizing Gender: Woman's Place in Wordsworth's Ideological Landscape," *ELH* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 391-410; Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
[43] Heidi Thomson, "'We are Two': The Address to Dorothy in 'Tintern Abbey,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 40 (Winter 2001): 533.

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Wordsworth's 1798 visit to Goodrich is often glossed over, however, perhaps because the poet mistakenly told Isabella Fenwick he would not revisit Goodrich until fifty years later, in 1841.[44] His *Memoirs*, in contrast, offers a different account:

> We left Alfoxden on Monday morning, the 26th of June, stayed with Coleridge till the Monday following, then set forth on foot towards Bristol. We were at Cottle's for a week, and thence we went toward the banks of the Wye. We crossed the Severn Ferry, and walked ten miles further to Tintern Abbey, a very beautiful ruin on the Wye. The next morning we walked along the river through Monmouth to Goderich [*sic*] Castle, there slept, and returned the next day to Tintern, thence to Chepstow, and from Chepstow back again in a boat to Tintern, where we slept, and thence back in a small vessel to Bristol.[45]

Having first accessed the Abbey via the river route, Wordsworth, with his sister Dorothy in tow, trekked from Tintern to Goodrich the following day. The siblings stayed the night near Goodrich before returning by road to Tintern the next morning. In 1798, their treks to Tintern bookended a daylong sojourn to their northernmost destination of Goodrich, and while their interest there might have been literary in nature—contemporary guidebooks pointed to Goodrich as the "birth-place and residence of the ancestors of [Jonathan] Swift"[46]—their motivations were, one might presume, far more likely personal. Wordsworth would have been eager to show his sister the place where he had met the young girl of his recently completed poem, "We are Seven," which was then at the printer's along with the rest of the *Ballads*, and which Dorothy had transcribed. So while William began contemplating his lines to Tintern, the siblings were located, quite

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[44] *Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical press, 1993), 4.
[45] Quoted by Christopher Wordsworth in *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, ed. Henry Reed, 2 vols. (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851, reprint 1966), 118-119.
[46] Charles Heath, *The Excursion down the Wye from Ross to Monmouth: including historical and descriptive accounts of Wilton and Goodrich Castles…* (Monmouth: Charles Heath, 1796). Heath notes that this fact was likely known to his readership; for those less acquainted with the Dean's history, he provides narratives, as his title page promises, of the "celebrated family of the Swifts."

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literally, just a few miles above the Abbey at Goodrich. Whenever Wordsworth began to actually compose the lines, either while walking from Tintern to Goodrich, or on their way back to Bristol a few days later,[47] he certainly would have had the earlier poem fresh in mind. If, as Coleridge put it, the *Ballads* collection should be considered "*one work*, in *kind tho' not in degree*"—a group of related, sibling verses—then these two poems, "Tintern Abbey" and "We are Seven," can be understood as particularly close kin.

As in "We are Seven," "Tintern Abbey" explores the temporal and spatial structures of siblinghood, but "Tintern Abbey" explicitly layers the internalized temporalities that create the poet's self-consciousness: the past, present, and future moments that are materially represented by the interplay between siblings. In particular, this poem combines the two modes of relationality that are enabled by sibling kinship: namely, the intra-generational framework of lateral, egalitarian, and equal positions with the inter-generational hierarchies implied by birth order and other vertical dimensions between particular brothers and sisters. In this way, the ending section of "Tintern Abbey" combines the spatial motif of a spreading network of horizontally-organized kin connections—a geographical displacement like that we see in "We are Seven"—with the temporal motif of differentiated "degrees," to use Coleridge's word descriptive of the *Ballads* as a whole. Wordsworth's poem thus unfolds some of the structural ramifications of sibling logic as implied by, but not yet fully worked out in, Engelstein's nascent theory.

[47] Although Wordsworth claims he wrote nothing down until they returned to Bristol, Mary Moorman assumes he began composing on their first day at the Abbey, July 10, as opposed to after their return on July 12; *William Wordsworth*, 402. In either scenario, whether while composing aloud on the way to Goodrich or while writing the poem at Bristol, Wordsworth would have freshly recalled "We are Seven" while creating "Tintern Abbey."

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To generate such a complex layering of inter- and intra-generational paradigms, Wordsworth positions Dorothy in three cotemporaneous positions: as present sibling, as past child, and as future progeny. When the poet-speaker first turns to her, Dorothy appears as his "Sister" and "Friend," his un-chosen childhood equal and his selected lifelong companion. Then, her introduction as intra-generational kin, as sibling and partner, takes puzzling rhetorical turns: Wordsworth injects this fraternal-sororal union into the discourse of parent and child—a rhetorical move akin to Beatrice Cenci's sororal transmission to her brother Bernardo, who functions as both her tender brother and her imagined child. Characterized with "wild eyes" (120), Dorothy as a poetic "Sister" personifies the kind of "wild" primitive that Wordsworth reflects of his own "boyish days" (74). She resembles that child from a past time, the poet's earlier self, for he can "read" (118) and "behold" (121) in her current bodily presence an image of that "former heart" (117) and an incarnation of "what [he] was once" (121). Where Wordsworth proclaims earlier in the poem that he cannot "paint" his boyhood, by now, at the end of the poem, he finds himself able to do just that, for Dorothy provides the canvas upon which he can render this vision. The Sister-Friend figure represents an earlier stage of life, a prior generation, that produces the speaker in the here and now. She is, in many ways, the child who fathers the man.

Dorothy is not only a child of the past, however, but a child of the future as well. Wordsworth fashions her into a progeny-like preserver of his legacy, invoking the same kind of rhetoric Coleridge adopts in his "Frost at Midnight," where he bestows wishes for a fruitful future to his beloved biological child Hartley. Laying benedictions upon his

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sibling descendant in a similar manner, William blesses Dorothy here with a generous future in which she might be in touch with Nature: "Therefore *let* the moon / Shine on thee… / *let* the misty mountain winds be free… / When these wild ecstasies *shall be* matured / Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind / *Shall be* a mansion for all lovely forms…" (134-141, emphases mine). With these willful invocations, William urges Dorothy to allow Nature to cradle her when he no longer can. She will be his child: *he* now fathers *her*.

While siblinghood takes on the nurturing of parenthood in this moment, Wordsworth's metaphorical re-positioning of Dorothy retains one important difference: there is no hierarchical investment in biological descent. And while this inter-generational rhetoric has been frequently noted, the interdependence between temporalities has been less so. The temporality of siblinghood is, indeed, much different from the linear progression associated with normative biological reproduction of successive generations. In sibling time, the present depends, reciprocally and perhaps even paradoxically, upon a temporal interchange between past, present, and future. In this closing sequence, for instance, the future anterior mode converts the siblings' experience of the "now" into a backwards-looking projection from a future time that will be deferred by the present—but a present only accessible through an accumulated set of past memories and experiences.

With phrases like "nor…wilt thou then forget," uttered twice at the poem's close (150, 156), Wordsworth constructs the present as being available to them only in retrospect, as a past that Dorothy must later, at some unknown future time, recall as the moment when they both "stood" and "came" and "were" here, on the Wye, together

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(152, 153, 159). Inscribing the present as a reversed projection from the future, Wordsworth rounds off "Tintern Abbey" by creating a present that is always destined never to arrive. Dorothy informs William's perceptions in the present through their shared affective bonds, which have been shaped over their shared pasts and their imagined conjoined future. But this is a future that has not yet transpired for the speaker himself—and, from the stance of the present, perhaps never will. The brother-sister union becomes a dream deferred. Thus the poem's temporal construction becomes cyclically interdependent: the current time depends upon memories of the past, deferrals of the present, and anticipations of the future—all of which are conjured and embodied in the figure of his sister.

"Tintern Abbey" thus illustrates the multi-dimensional temporal workings of sibling logic. These temporalities are adumbrated, but not yet developed, in the birth-order dynamics that inform the little maid's anxieties in "We are Seven." The speaker of "Tintern Abbey" embraces sibling logic by imagining his own past and future selves through the woman who stands with him, here and now, upon the banks of the Wye. Later, in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth would conceptualize this sibling-like inter-subjectivity as a meeting of "two consciousnesses," a multilayered awareness that describes the growth of his own mind as the juxtaposition of intervals and differences between past, present, and future selves. As much as Wordsworth used this phrase to define his internal self-reflections, the layered consciousness he describes aptly suits the relationship materialized between the poeticized Dorothy and his poetic speaker-self. These two consciousnesses of brother and sister hinge, after all, upon a simultaneous awareness of both "myself / And

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of some other being," a being that is his past and prior, more youthful and naïve self—an other that is externalized in the image of his past, and present, sibling.[48] As a poetic figure, Dorothy functions as the "other" with and against whom Wordsworth constructs his evolving self, one that manifests in a varied layering of times and places.

Bound through memories and conversations and personal intimacies, William's and Dorothy's sibling dynamic expands both forwards and backwards, embodying regressions and progressions of time—a state of being simultaneously here and not-here, both now and not-now. Thus the Sister and Friend of "Tintern Abbey" becomes far more than a companion: she is the screen onto which these projections are cast, through which Wordsworth frames his multi-layered self-construction, which is formulated, essentially, as and through a recognition of divisions and cohesions amongst past, present, and future selves. Only a sibling can play this uniquely reflexive role, for only a sibling can be the visual mirror into which one gazes to view both oneself and another, both one's past and one's present, the other's past and present, and a combination of imagined futures. Dorothy is Wordsworth's essential mirror—his vital *spot of time*.

That famous phrase of Wordsworth's has, as Alan Richardson suggests, often been distorted, but my suggestion here that Dorothy acts as William's "spot of time" can aid us in recapturing that phrase's complicated multidimensionality. As Richardson puts it, critics have typically misconstrued the phrase as if it indicated a "spot *in* time," privileging the spatial resonances over temporal ones: it is a moment, an image, a memory frozen in the past. But this misreading, Richardson argues, erases tensions

[48] Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), II. 32-33, in *William Wordsworth: The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

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Wordsworth intended to retain by collapsing the two registers into one. "[M]uch Wordsworth criticism," Richardson goes on, "presents the 'spot' as a pictorial scene or a single moment, even as a frozen tableau"; as such, it has been "detemporalized." The phrase has drifted from its original meaning as a "conflation of time with space," with which Wordsworth provoked a fluid "binding together of a place with temporal movement [that] suggests not a pictorial but a dramatic scene," fostering not a frozen image but, rather, "a dialogic relation between poet and nature."[49] These spots, Richardson rightly implies, should be comprehended not as two-dimensional scenes but as moving and multiplying instances of time that reverberate between experience and memory: not spots *in* time, but spots *of* time. They signify not Wordsworth's isolation from the physical world around him,[50] but rather his engagement with it, rooted in collective evolution within and through these varying temporal and spatial fluctuations.

Through his sister, Wordsworth works out this particular paradox: Dorothy embodies both a spatialization of time (a spot *in* time, a "pictorial scene" or "frozen tableau") as well as a temporalization of space (a spot *of* time, a "dynamic relation"). While Dorothy continues to age and to grow, she embodies a series of past, present, and future "spots" in which the two siblings shift and change in their own selves and in their fluid relationship to one another. In "Tintern Abbey," Dorothy's immediate presence in the here and now combines with William's imaginings of their future separation; this

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[49] Alan Richardson, "Wordsworth at the Crossroads: 'Spots of Time' in the 'Two-Part Prelude,'" *The Wordsworth Circle* 19, no. 1 (1988): 15.

[50] Jonathan Bishop links the spots of time with the motif of "the emergence of a solitary figure from the crowd" ("Wordsworth and the 'Spots of Time,'" *ELH* 26, no. 1 (1959): 47), while Richardson remarks on their association with "the child developing a sense of autonomy" ("Wordsworth at the Crossroads," 15).

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combination contains the movements, evolutions, and regressions of temporal and spatial experience—a multidimensionality enabled by sibling kinship and through which Wordsworth traces the growth of his own mind.

V. Redefining Time:
"To My Sister" and the Queering of Sibling Logic

Dorothy thus represents the fluctuations inherent in sibling time: the similarities and differences between the two siblings define any—and *every*—given moment. This spectrum encapsulates Wordsworth's sibling logic, a logic without which his poetic "self" would not be possible. While "Tintern Abbey" draws out this multilayered generational thinking, Dorothy's embodiment of sibling temporality is already present in an earlier poem as well: the third piece in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, "Lines written at a small distance from my House, and sent by my little Boy to the Person to whom they are addressed"—later renamed, more simply, "To My Sister." In this poem, Wordsworth urges his sister to abandon her domestic tasks and to join him in the wild: "your morning task resign / Come forth and feel the sun."[51] He coaxes Dorothy out of doors—not for her own good, necessarily, but for his reliance upon her presence, both imagined and real. Beckoning Dorothy with increasing urgency—"Make haste" (11); "Put on with speed your woodland dress" (14); "Then come, my sister! come, I pray" (37)—the poet recognizes that only his sister's future emergence into the woods will allow him to fully embrace his own "idleness" and immersion in nature (40). In other words, Dorothy's future arrival is

[51] Wordsworth, "Lines written at a small distance from my House, and sent by my little Boy to the Person to whom they are addressed," *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), lines 11-12, 15. Line references from this edition will be cited parenthetically hereafter.

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required for his spiritual encounter; he needs their shared subjective experience: "*Our* living calendar," "*Our* minds," "*Our* temper," and "*our* souls."[52] And yet the poem itself can only be conceived in her absence. It is distinctly because she is not there, neither bodily nor temporally present, that the speaker can fantasize their future reunion; and he can do so only because he knows her so intimately as his sibling.

In "To My Sister," Dorothy's temporal and spatial absences, in addition to her presence across their shared pasts and futures, instruct the poet's present self-conception. Using their sibling sense of temporality, Wordsworth reinvents a subjective framework for Time itself. Disgruntled with objective quantifications of the passing minutes, days, months, and calendar years that have been inflicted upon them, Wordsworth conceptualizes a new set of measurements that he and his sister might foster together. Replacing arbitrary designations like the "March" of the Gregorian calendar, he hopes to institute a pacing that honors, instead, their personalized perceptions of seasonal and daily rhythms. On this "first mild day," for instance, Wordsworth determines that "[w]e from to-day, my friend, will date / The opening of the year" (19-20).[53] Together, Wordsworth imagines, he and his sister will form a new calendar entirely, one that springs from their own impressions of the changing weather.

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[52] See lines 18, 27, 32, 35; emphases mine. The active verbs of the poem are likewise framed as mutual endeavors: "*We*'ll give" (16), "*We* for the year to come may take" (31), "*We*'ll frame" (35).
[53] While Lucy Newlyn glosses this line as referring to the first day of the calendar month of March, i.e., "1 March 1798," this is indeed an important misreading (*William and Dorothy Wordsworth: "All in Each Other"* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 61). Wordsworth does not want to date the year from the beginning of *any* calendar-derived month; rather, he marks this as the first "mild" day of the spring season. One might recall, for instance, the English proverb that March "comes in like a lion, goes out like a lamb": and so the first "*mild*" day of the month would likely have been towards the middle or end. Since the poem emphasizes how arbitrary is the relationship between the dating of the year and the natural seasons, no "first" of any constructed month would serve Wordsworth's purposes.

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They will reinvent other measures of the day as well, converting the arbitrary ticks of seconds, minutes, and hours into a temporal system that can account for their affective interactions. The typical markers of the day—the "morning meal" (10) or the "minute" (2)—are traded for an individualized temporality based on the siblings' shared "Love" (21), the affective power of moments shared between them: their own "hour of feeling" instead of the hour constituted by an arbitrary and neutral 60 minutes (24). Minutes and hours can be as fleeting or as eternal as the siblings' subjective experience thus demands: "One moment now may give us more / Than fifty years of reason" (25-26). Since Time can expand or contract based upon its emotional content, the only clock they now need is each other.

This idyllic scene, however, will remain forever a dream deferred. Wordsworth speaks of this moment in the delayed future tense, a projection that is always yet to come: "We…*will* date," "Our minds *shall* drink" (27), "Some silent laws our hearts *may* make, / Which they *shall* long obey" (29-30), "We*'ll* frame the measure of our souls, They *shall* be turned to love" (45-46). Thus it is through Dorothy that Wordsworth can imagine the paradox that defines his spots of time. She embodies a spatialization of time: her physical body represents the cumulative moments that the siblings have shared and will continue to share over time. But she also embodies at the same instant a temporalization of space, a spot of time, as the dynamic relation between poet and other. Temporal variations within sibling hierarchies, which "Tintern Abbey" and "We are Seven" render visible, define siblinghood as a concatenation of temporal moments experienced and spread over time, moments both shared and not shared, both real and imagined, both present and

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not. These variances mark the multiplicity of sibling kinship. Wordsworth's conflation of Sister-Friend metaphors with those of ancestry and progeny is meant to illustrate, rather than to pervert, the nature of sibling kinship.

I would like to propose, in closing, that this temporalized logic of sibling kinship embraces a kind of queer temporality. Dorothy's status as a spot of time offers an alternative to clock time, one that embodies a non-normative, non-progressive, and non-linear experience. Recent queer theorists have, in similar terms, rejected the "reproductive futurism" employed by heteronormative, reproductive hegemonies.[54] This queer "turn toward temporality," conducted by critics such as Lee Edelman and Elizabeth Freeman, examines the array of modes in which our conscious experience of time need not reify the forward momentum of generational reproduction. Queer temporality, instead, expands into "backward emotional affects, [and] lateral queer childhoods"; it inhabits a "time that is attentive to the recursive eddies and back-to-the-future loops" that are undetectable in a linear sense of progression from past to future; and it thrives by "feeling backward" into negative affects like "nostalgia," "despair," "escapism," "withdrawal," and "loneliness."[55] Queer time, in other words, skews the experience of temporal progression to be something other than linear, progressive, and forward-marching.

In such a framework, the past is never complete; it remains contingent and

[54] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[55] Valerie Traub, "The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies," *PMLA* 128, no. 1 (January 2013): 22; Annamarie Jagose, "Feminism's Queer Theory," *Feminism and Psychology* 19, no. 2 (2009), 158, as quoted by Traub, 22; Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

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relative, dependent on the present and even the future; it is never entirely passed, never a self-contained entity. In queer theorists' terms, non-normative and non-reproductive relations embrace such regression into the past and its denials of futurity. This feeling backwards mashes together the past and present in an ever-reciprocal back-and-forth loop, an experience identified with queer sexualities; but for Wordsworth, feeling backwards is simply in the nature of siblinghood. In Elizabeth Freeman's terms, queer subjectivity instantiates "particularly inventive and time-traveling forms of grief and compensation that neither the normalizing work of the ego nor the statist logic of sequential generations can contain."[56] For Wordsworth, this is merely sibling logic.

Wordsworth's time-traveling grief performs multiple roles, perhaps extending even queer temporality itself: not only does this feeling backwards project the poetic speaker into a past that continues to evolve with the present, but this affective relation also projects the speaker into a future that itself continues to be contingent on the present that it creates. Wordsworth's impetus moves through time both backwards and forwards, both inter- and intra-generationally, both linearly and queerly. For Wordsworth's poetics, sibling logic embraces both the generative futurity of the child—his sister, in a potentially non-reproductive formulation—as well as the backward-looking affect of nostalgic modernity. This uniquely fluid temporality resists normative progression, illustrating instead the "persistence of the past in the present," making "entities past and present touch," and recognizing, inherently, that "the past is never fully over and never fully

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[56] Freeman, "Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography," *Social Text* 84-85, 23, nos. 3-4 (2005): 58.

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known."[57] Wordsworth's sibling poems conjure not a poet-speaker enveloped in sublime isolation, but rather a sibling-ed self, a pairing of inextricable inter-subjective psyches that have been and will always be interdependent, even beyond death. For Wordsworth, neither past, present, nor future can ever be fully known in a given moment. But they *can* be imagined, through the eyes, heart, and mind of the sibling. This Wordsworthian "self" turns out to be something far more deeply interfused indeed.

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[57] Love, *Feeling Backward*, 19; Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Post-modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 12; Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, "Queering History," *PMLA* 120, no. 5 (2005): 1610.

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CHAPTER THREE

Building the *Bildung* of Sisterhood in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*

One of the truths most universally acknowledged about Jane Austen's novels is that siblings are "literally everywhere."[1] From the central clans of the Dashwood or Bennet girls to notable off-stage siblings like the admirable Georgiana Darcy or the even less prominent unnamed brood of Lady Middleton, sisters and brothers—at minimum, 173 of them in total[2]—appear throughout Austen's oeuvre. Sibling rivalries thus undergird many of the novels' familial relationships: Edward and Robert Ferrars compete for maternal approval; Lydia and Kitty Bennet scramble for parentally-condoned socializing privileges; Elizabeth, Mary, and Anne Elliot vie for paternal affection. Whether they live in subtle competition or even in amicable companionship with one another, siblings in any of the "3 or 4 Families in a Country village"[3] that constitute Austen's novels tend to vary noticeably in both temperament and personality.[4]

Importantly, such differentiations set apart the protagonist: her characterological "roundness" distinguishes her from "flat" characters from whom, many argue, she must be "extricated" and "quarantine[d]" in order for her story of maturation to unfold.[5] In this secondary status, siblings establish a surrounding field of oppositional forces: relegated to

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[1] William Galperin, "*Lady Susan*, Individualism, and (Dys)functional Family," *Persuasions* 31 (2009): 47.
[2] Recent count provided by the Jane Austen Society of North America on their website for the 2009 general meeting in Philadelphia, "Jane Austen's Brothers and Sisters in the City of Brotherly Love," accessed December 1, 2014, www.jasna.org/agms/philadelphia/bas_stats.html.
[3] Jane Austen to Anna Austen, 9-18 September 1814, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[4] For a discussion of sibling competition and birth-order differentiation according to Darwinian evolutionary principles, see Peter W. Graham, "Born to Diverge: An Evolutionary Perspective on Sibling Personality Development in Austen's Novels," *Persuasions On-Line* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2004).
[5] Galperin, "*Lady Susan*," 47.

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the periphery, they clear space for the primary narrative consciousness by being "continually contrasted, juxtaposed, and related" to her.[6] Sibling differences and differentiation, if not outright rivalry, thus inform each heroine's *Bildung* progression.

For most readers, Jane Bennet serves as one case in point. In comparison with her younger sister Elizabeth, *Pride and Prejudice*'s more decisive and outspoken heroine, Jane exhibits a far more timid, unsure, quiet, and hesitant persona. When, for instance, Elizabeth reports to her sister the two conflicting versions that she has received of Wickham and Darcy's backstory, Jane offers her standard tentativeness:

> 'They have both…been deceived, I dare say, in some way or other, of which we can form no idea. Interested people have perhaps misrepresented each to the other. It is, in short, impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side.'[7]

With characteristic candor, Jane displays her willingness to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, which requires her, paradoxically, to evaluate nothing at all. Her language vibrates with notes of indeterminacy: "I dare say," "we can form no idea," "perhaps," "It is…impossible." In refusing to take sides, Jane seems incapable of holding any opinion.

Critics tend to write Jane off as being merely a receptive confidante for Elizabeth, but one whose role in the novel remains otherwise negligible. She is, as Felicia Bonaparte describes her, "the sweetest of sisters, [but], from a practical point of view, epistemologically the worst," for "she will make no decision at all"; and though her hesitancy may make "her a very pleasant young woman" to be around, it also means that

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[6] Alex Woloch, *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 45.
[7] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Donald Gray, 3rd edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 58.

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she is "not a very useful guide through the complexities of life."[8] Jane's usefulness rests, if anything, in her use*less*ness. Along with her three other sisters, each one functionally feeble in her own way, Jane embodies one more means of approaching the world that Elizabeth must learn to avoid. Even those who do see Jane as an informative entity limit her status to that of a temperamental contrast: her value lies, essentially, in "her counterexample, which includes an extraordinary degree of selflessness and restraint."[9]

In defining Jane by these traits of sweetness and pacification, however, critics have undervalued the epistemological rigor that informs her innocuous demeanor—the kind of rigor I argue underwrites many of the female *Bildungsroman* storylines that constitute Austen's novelistic corpus. It is not simply that Jane acts differently from Elizabeth, but that she thinks differently, too. Her way of thinking, moreover, is one that Elizabeth could adopt, in a way that she could never adopt Jane's gentle persona. Jane's epistemology may be transferable, whereas her personality is far less contagious. Specifically, Jane embraces a skeptical caution that separates frameworks of "feeling" (emotion, affect, intuition, prejudice) from those of "knowing" (truth, fact, objectivity, certainty). Unlike Elizabeth, who leaps so easily from impressions to facts, Jane registers the impossibility of conflating the two. In the encounter noted above, as well as elsewhere in the novel, Jane adheres to her innate understanding that information gathered via hearsay, initial impressions, and biased storytellers cannot be converted into objective truths—no matter how much her younger sister may wish they could be.

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[8] Felicia Bonaparte, "Conjecturing Possibilities: Reading and Misreading Texts in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*," *Studies in the Novel* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 144.
[9] Galperin, "*Lady Susan*," 57.

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This chapter explores Austen's first two published novels, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, to suggest that sisters—and not suitors—lay the foundation for *Bildung* evolution. Each sister's self-consciousness shapes, and is shaped by, her sororal dynamics, as each appropriates and internalizes features from the other's behavior until their two formerly distinct epistemological approaches intermingle, creating new frameworks that permit both sisters to see—and to act within—the world afresh. Where in *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Bennet models an alternative skepticism for Elizabeth, in *Sense and Sensibility* Elinor and Marianne Dashwood partake in complementary modes, educating one another until they can learn to tailor their external performances of behavior in order to mediate between immoderate self-exposure and restrained silence.

I propose these sororal exchanges as an element uniquely suited to, and made available by, the female version of the *Bildungsroman*. The intimate, interpersonal, and mutual evolution of women within these familial networks reveals a distinct feature not only of siblinghood but also of the process of self-development: the complicated nature of seeing oneself in a new way, and performing accordingly. By shifting their mental representations of both themselves *and* their sisters, Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor Dashwood complete a demanding project of transforming psychological constructions of both self and other. In doing so, they willingly embrace an expansion of the "self," accepting their inter-subjective nature as something penetrable and malleable, rather than upholding the ego as contained, bounded, and protected. In Austen's novels, men may be the motivators, but sisters become the models and agents of change. In short, Jane Bennet proves to be a very useful guide indeed.

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I. Exchanging Sororal Sensibilities

Over the course of *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood learn two distinct but interrelated lessons: first, how to blend the extremes of "sense" with "sensibility"; but second, and perhaps more importantly, how to mediate between the dynamics of internal affect and its external performance—a lesson they each imbibe by watching the sister whose approach to life had seemed, initially, to be entirely different from her own. With its polarizing title terms, Austen's novel seems to install a binary division between the two girls, with each sister representing one of these two categories. Yet for the most part, the narrative itself signals that these terms are much less distinguishable. However, it will take the characters quite some time to learn this truism and, afterward, to seek an ontological middle ground between the terms. In the meantime, each sister observes the other's oppositional behaviors: Elinor demonstrates an affective restraint that will, eventually, temper her younger sister's wildness; Marianne performs an unabashed self-exposure that will train Elinor how to display emotions. This mutual *Bildung* proves that "affiliation does not necessarily need to be found or forged" in these novels; "it needs to be understood, valued, and maintained."[10] Sisterhood is the key to personal development, for each sister will assimilate elements of the other into herself.

While "sense" and "sensibility" initially appear to represent "mutually exclusive categories,"[11] Elinor and Marianne are not in fact introduced as exclusive contrasts but, rather, each inhabits both categories to varying degrees. When the narrator first describes

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[10] James Thompson, "Sororadelphia, or 'even the conjugal tie is beneath the fraternal,'" *Persuasions On-Line* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2008): n. pg.
[11] Ruth apRoberts, "*Sense and Sensibility*, or Growing Up Dichotomous," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 30, no. 3 (December 1975): 354.

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them, Elinor is portrayed foremost through her rational qualities: her "strength of understanding," "coolness of judgment," and "knowledge." Yet she is also painted as an emotional being with an "excellent heart" whose "feelings were strong."[12] Marianne, the hyperbolic romantic, may be "eager in every thing," and her sorrows and joys show "no moderation," but she too is cast with elements of reason, fashioned as both "sensible and clever" (8). Together, the two sisters personify the full continuum that spans the philosophical spectrum between reason and sentiment.

Despite the omniscient narrator's implication that both Marianne and Elinor share overlapping skills and traits in this arena, however, the young women see themselves as diametric opposites. Accordingly, each becomes exasperated by the other's behaviors. Elinor's outward impenetrability, for instance, alienates Marianne, who proclaims in anger, "'We have neither of us any thing to tell; you, because you communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing'" (120). Not only does Elinor refuse to speak aloud of her internal state, but she also in no way alludes to that state through her outward expression—she communicates nothing. Marianne rejects this approach because, as far as she is concerned, her older sister cruelly chooses not to offer anything to her, either verbally or visually. Marianne takes offense at this seeming indifference because her own belief system leads her toward a more transparent elision of boundaries between internal and external. She prefers there be no filter between thought and deed.

In kind, Elinor finds Marianne's oppositional traits to be perplexing: she criticizes Marianne's default identity, labeling her naively unaware and immature because she

[12] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 8. Page number references for this edition will hereafter be cited parenthetically within the text.

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wishes that her younger sister would moderate her outlandish public behavior. When Marianne reacts wildly to Willoughby's sudden appearance in London, for example, Elinor refuses to "'go to him this moment,'" as Marianne begs her to do, and expresses instead her belief in patience: "'How can that be done? No, my dearest Marianne, you must wait. This is not a place for explanations. Wait only till to-morrow'" (126). Led by her own "steady conviction" (142), Elinor cannot comprehend why Marianne must be so demonstrative and urgent, and she explains in her best schoolmarm imperative that Marianne must certainly "wait" before taking any action. Throughout the novel, the sisters' perceived philosophical disparities shape a majority of their interactions, from the different ways they evaluate Colonel Brandon—Elinor believing him to be "well-bred, well-informed, of gentle address" and Marianne finding him to have "neither genius, nor taste, nor spirit" (40)—to the ways that they assess Marianne and Willoughby's courtship, with Elinor wishing "that it were less openly shewn" while Marianne "abhorred all concealment" (41).

In order for Marianne and Elinor to adopt features of the other's personality, they must come to recognize that this apparent divergence is more about surface than reality. Their epistemological difference lies not so much in a stark binary between sense and sensibility, but rather in a differing set of opinions about externalized behavior. Their chosen performances, and not their innate characteristics, are what separate them. Elinor and Marianne both naturally embrace a mixture of reason and feeling, but they differ in their external representations of their internal reactions. For Marianne, anything less than an expressive outburst seems confounding. When Elinor refuses to demonstrate

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melancholic destitution over Edward's absence from Barton Cottage, for instance, the younger sister remarks, perplexed: "'How strange this is! … Even now her self-command is invariable. When is she dejected or melancholy? When does she try to avoid society, or appear restless and dissatisfied in it?'" (31). Elinor's stony silence and "self-command" resist the kind of outward manifestations that Marianne herself would happily wear—dejection, melancholy, restless dissatisfaction—and which she believes are necessary in order to offer visible signifiers that others might read. As the narrator reflects, Marianne "expect[s] from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own, and she judged of their motives by the immediate effect of their actions on herself" (143). Marianne is concerned less with Elinor's emotions than with her communicative display of them—or, more accurately, her refusal to display.

Elinor's stoic façade seems to be a personal affront to Marianne's desire for sororal intimacy. Marianne cannot imagine how emotions could be so self-contained, how she herself, for instance, could ever "'appear happy when [she is] so miserable'" (134). In contrast, Elinor contains her interior state, whether it is depressed or joyful. Not only does she resist displaying emotion in disappointing situations, such as Edward's lack of visitation, but she also responds equally obtusely after Marianne's happy recovery from illness. "[I]t led to no outward demonstrations of joy, no words, no smiles," the narrator tells us. "All within Elinor's breast was satisfaction, silent and strong" (223). Choosing stoicism over expressiveness, Elinor differentiates herself from her sister. But both perform at the extremes.

The course of their complementary *Bildung* maturation will lead them to seek a

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middle ground. If their perceptions of one another are to change, however, some significant cognitive and emotional obstacles must be overcome in order to replace prior assumptions with new frameworks for understanding the other's identity. One's perceptions of one's siblings, after all, carry psychological baggage: from a young age, one develops and then solidifies an intuitive understanding of one's siblings (and one's self in reciprocal relation to them). These understandings are cultivated over the course of a shared evolutionary history—a history unlike that which we share with friends, spouses, teachers, employers, or even parents. While both men and women of the *Bildung* tradition may venture into the world in order to seek mentors and mates, the particularly fluid mixture of "similarity and difference, commonality and complementarity"[13] that defines female friendships becomes much more complicated when we turn to the family. Since one carries an ingrained cognitive image of the sibling "other," changing that perception is as difficult as changing the perception of self, if not more so.

These psychological investments in another's identity stabilize from a young age and remain consistent throughout one's lifetime. One psychological researcher explains the scenario in this manner:

> Imagine if you can, both your spouse and yourself as being 95 years old and married for 70 long years. After such a long time period, each knows fairly well what to expect of the other, what the other is going to say and do. Similarly, after many years of interacting and communicating, the siblings' characteristics solidify, and may evoke stereotypic responses from one another during interactions; thus interaction has little likelihood of altering characteristics.[14]

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[13] In "The (US)es of (I)dentity: A Response to Abel on '(E)Merging Identities'" (*Signs* 6, no. 3 [Spring 1981]: 436-442), Judith Kegan Gardiner discusses the blend of identification and differentiation that characterizes female friendships. With siblings, there is no element of choice; we are stuck with differentiating from and comparing ourselves to them from birth.

[14] Victor G. Cicirelli, *Sibling Relationships Across the Life Span* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1995), 20.

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Siblings become ingrained in their ways—not only in the ways they act with one another, but also in the ways they expect one another to act. Surmounting these expectations and approaching a sibling with a fresh mindset is an almost impossible feat. One's ongoing concept of her siblings results from seeing them respond to a variety of situations, and sisters and brothers develop their personality characteristics relationally, in direct response to one another.[15] Changing one's view of a sibling also therefore requires changing one's view of oneself.

Austen's narrator hints that Marianne and Elinor are the ones responsible for creating this mistaken view of their polarities, having reified their own perceptions of one another again and again. For example, when Marianne reveals her conviction that she and Willoughby do not need to be secretive about their affections, the narrator describes Marianne's thoughts as blending the rhetoric of both reason and sentiment: "to aim at the restraint of sentiments which were not in themselves illaudable, appeared to her not merely an unnecessary effort, but a disgraceful subjection of reason to common-place and mistaken notions" (41). Linking, rather than separating, affect and logic, Marianne equates the "restraint of sentiments" with the "subjection of reason"—and equates them both as "disgraceful" acts. To deny one's emotions is the same as denying one's logic. In moments like these, we witness the gap between Marianne's self-conception and her reality: she understands both logic and emotionality, but rejects one for the other while thinking that she is defending both. Elinor cannot see that combination in her sister, but we can.

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[15] Cicirelli, *Sibling Relationships*, 5.

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Only after Marianne's illness will both women finally come to realize the value of their counterpart's viewpoints. As a result, they each begin to embody traits that had been exhibited by the other and that, previously, they had each disdained. By the end of the novel, each sister tailors her individual behavior to reflect a middle ground between her prior self and the other extreme, one she has learned from the model of her sister. They each settle somewhere between impassioned sentiment and dispassionate logic.

After Edward arrives at Barton and reveals that his brother, and not he, has married Lucy Steele, Elinor finally exhibits an observable external response. While the catalyst for her reaction lies in Edward's revelation, the manner in which Elinor shifts her behavior resembles the emotional disclosure of her sister. Overwhelmed with feelings, Elinor now permits herself to respond physically to this new information:

> Elinor could sit it no longer. She almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease. Edward, who had till then looked any where, rather than at her, saw her hurry away and perhaps saw—or even heard, her emotion… (254)

The narrator seems to smirk at the irony of this situation: Elinor does not run, per se, but "almost" escapes quite as quickly; she does not cry in the same room, but still sobs loudly enough for Edward to hear her next door. Thus Elinor begins to express the gravity of her interior sentiments, while struggling to restrain them with her typical apathetic guise. Elinor attempts to remain impenetrable by hiding herself, yet her visible and audible actions betray her feelings nevertheless. After Edward returns to propose, Elinor more completely releases herself from her former self-monitoring, now permitting herself to become outwardly "everything by turns but tranquil" (256). Her feelings of being "oppressed, [and] overcome" are so intense, in fact, that "it require[s] several hours to

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give sedateness to her spirits, or any degree of tranquility to her heart" (257). This brand of expressive intensity has, of course, been modeled for her, all along, by Marianne.

Accepting this new state, in which reason and emotion can function together in informing her external behavior, Elinor must abdicate her strict faith in cool, rational judgment. Reflecting on her post-proposal high, the narrator informs us of this transition: "To her own heart it was a delightful affair, to her imagination it was even a ridiculous one, but to her reason, her judgment, it was completely a puzzle" (257). Logic fails her; only Elizabeth's inquisitive curiosity and her sentimental heart can make "sense" of recent events, only her exploratory imagination and her delight of heart can help her process what is happening. But these are Marianne's quintessential values. Elinor picks them up when her own epistemological allegiances prove to be inadequate.

In turn, Marianne qualifies her own prior "opinions" and "favourite maxims" in order to accept her second attachment to Colonel Brandon—a development that requires her to adopt some of Elinor's performed traits, including the more reasoned, tempered state that had so frustrated her previously. But she does not swing to the other extreme completely; rather, Marianne finds a contented sweet spot between the recklessness of a life of romance spent in "irresistible passion" and a sexless life of spinsterhood spent "in retirement and study" (268). As the narrator informs us, Marianne's unique fate will see her settle between the two possible oppositions:

> Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with expecting,—instead of remaining even for ever with her mother, and finding her only pleasures in retirement and study, as afterwards in her more calm and sober judgment she had determined on,—she found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village. (268)

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"Instead of" choosing an either/or course of action in which she pitches a tent at one end or the other of this spectrum, Marianne accedes to the roles of kinship: duty, obligation, propriety, and an awareness of social standards and expectations. These are paradigms that her sister Elinor has already prepared her to understand by modeling those standards herself. In the end, both sisters land at an epistemological midpoint: committed neither to the world of sense nor to the realm of sensibility exclusively, they demonstrate what was, for Austen, an "ideal state of affairs": "when reason and feeling possess equal strength."[16] To arrive at this happy equilibrium, the two adopt the performed traits of the other: Marianne tames her over-reactivity with Elinor's calming brand of acceptance, while Elinor takes a cue from Marianne's repertoire of sentimental display.

II. Sisterly Self-Knowledge in *Pride and Prejudice*

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the majority of Elinor and Marianne's interactions take place in the public areas of the home, such as parlors, which is an appropriate setting given their novel's concern with the public performance of emotion. In contrast, Elizabeth and Jane Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* often enjoy the more private conversational space of their shared bedroom. As John Mullan observes, the two eldest Bennet girls seek one another's listening ear a total of twelve times in the novel, compared with only five one-on-one conversations held between the Dashwood sisters. These frequent "sisterly chats"[17] transpire after each major plot point, punctuating the narrative with conferences between Jane and Elizabeth as if they formed a joint consciousness

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[16] J. A. Kearney, "Jane Austen and the Reason-Feeling Debate," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 75 (May 1990): 110.
[17] John Mullan, "Sisterly Chat," *Persuasions* 31 (2009): 66.

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through which to filter the novel's events: after she is introduced to Wickham, "Elizabeth relate[s] to Jane the next day" the events at her aunt's home;[18] when Jane receives news of Bingley's departure, she "very soon communicated the chief of all this" to Elizabeth (89); after Elizabeth endures Darcy's first proposal, her "impatience to acquaint Jane with what had happened could no longer be overcome" (146); following Darcy's second proposal, "[a]t night she opened her heart to Jane" (243). The physical re-location from the parlor to the bedroom emblematizes the slight shift in focus between the novels from, on the one hand, external performance and public appearances in *Sense and Sensibility* to, on the other, internal self-perception in *Pride and Prejudice*. As with the Dashwood girls' mutual evolution, Elizabeth learns to change her opinions in relation not only to herself but also to her sister as well—and, as this novel demonstrates, the one cannot be possible without the other.

As the pinnacle of her *Bildung* learning process, and as the climax of the novel, Elizabeth arrives at a shocking realization: everything she has known before is wrong. After pondering Darcy's confessional letter, Elizabeth registers her own prior ineptitude, marking this internal transition with a sudden exclamation, "'Till this moment, I never knew myself'" (137). In a chapter that unfolds chiefly via free indirect discourse, this direct speech interrupts not only the cadence of the narrative but also Elizabeth's own thoughts. Here, and now, she makes a rapid conversion, not just to a new understanding of the world but also, and more substantially, to a new understanding of herself. Now aware of her own formerly prejudiced assumptions, Elizabeth can, through this acquired self-

[18] *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Donald Gray, 3rd edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 58. Page numbers from this edition will be cited parenthetically hereafter.

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knowledge, begin to evaluate other people based on new criteria: she commits to no longer being "blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (137).

As many readers recognize, Elizabeth's relinquishing of her previously prejudiced nature forms the foundation of her self-transformation. In order to arrive at that point, however, she must come to know herself differently, through a course of self-actualization. In what Lorna Ellis deems Elizabeth's moment of "dramatic and decisive self-revelation," our protagonist comes to "learn the…lessons of the *Bildungsroman* heroine" by "learn[ing] to regulate her wit, her sarcasm, and her appearance."[19] In another reading, Elizabeth is said to accumulate this necessary self-awareness through "systematic self-examination" that takes place "in solitude," guiding her to correct her prior self-deceptions.[20] In a further assessment by Felicia Bonaparte, Elizabeth's self-directed learning is fashioned as the key to unlocking this narrative: "Elizabeth only, of the sisters, will learn, as she learns to read [Darcy's] letter, the skill required to read the world. Her arriving at this skill is the *bildung* of the novel."[21] In all cases, Elizabeth *learns* something new.

But whence does this learning originate—a learning that is so crucial to Elizabeth's *Bildung* achievement? Despite critics' insistence on the fact that Elizabeth learns a vitally new way of approaching the world, there has not yet been an adequate explanation as to the precise source of this learning. While the motivational catalysts for her transition may be quite clear—Darcy's letter; her own past mistakes—the manner in

[19] Lorna Ellis, *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British Bildungsroman, 1750-1850* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999), 132, 134.
[20] Peter L. De Rose, "Marriage and Self-Knowledge in *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*," *Renascence* 30, no. 4 (Summer 1978): 210.
[21] Bonaparte, "Conjecturing Possibilities," 145.

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which Elizabeth changes appears to manifest as if from within a psychological and ideological vacuum. In other words, we know *what* she learns, and *when* and even *why*, but the *how* has remained distinctly unaccounted for. I wish to propose that the model upon which this self-transformation occurs is not Elizabeth's own solitary, introspective self: it is Jane. Jane Bennet models an epistemological worldview that informs how Elizabeth's *Bildung* takes shape. Whereas Elizabeth erroneously collapses her impressions into verifiable facts, Jane remains cautious of funneling feelings directly into knowledge, in a manner that Elizabeth must come to discover—the crux of her *Bildung* transformation.

Thus Elizabeth is not the only person that Elizabeth begins to re-think and re-read during her pivotal moment of self-awareness. Until now, she may have never known herself, but she also never knew her sister. Following Elizabeth's initial outburst, "'I never knew myself,'" she continues to frame her self-analysis around a new appreciation of her older sibling. In this sequence, she swerves from herself to Jane and back again, seamlessly, within just a few animated clauses:

> 'How despicably have I acted!' she cried.—'I, who have prided myself on my discernment!—I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust…' (137)

Finally claiming responsibility for her own subjective perceptions, Elizabeth reinforces her new position of self-critical awareness in a series of rapidly accumulating personal pronouns: "I" (thrice), "myself" (twice), "*my* discernment," "*my* abilities," "*my* sister," "*my* vanity." But while she turns inward, she also looks outward. In the single moment where Elizabeth does not explicitly reiterate her self-reflexive "I" pronoun, her reflective impetus projects out towards Jane: "who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister."

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Jane's presence becomes folded into the most climactic of Elizabeth's personal realizations. Elizabeth's "I" is not the only one under consideration here.

While Elizabeth verbally criticizes her own character ("How despicably have I acted"), she turns promptly to Jane's personality ("generous candour") as well as to her own prior misperception of that personality ("with disdain"). Jane is incorporated into the midst of this intensely self-directed introspection, and this speech centers Elizabeth's despicable pride and vain distrust—her worst default traits—around Jane's best quality—that feature of "candour" which Elizabeth formerly ignored by dismissing what appeared to be Jane's tempered and indifferent persona. Realizing that she has always cast aside her sister's approach to the world, Elizabeth sees now not only that this dismissal has prevented her from seeing her sister clearly, but also that it has stopped her from learning anything from her sister's underlying motivation. Despite her own conscious rejection of Jane, however, Elizabeth has in fact been learning from her the entire time. As if to reinforce this inclusion of Jane into her new persona, the narrator informs us that, directly after her verbal outburst, Elizabeth travels mentally "[f]rom herself to Jane."

As a dividing point in the novel, this scene of self-realization separates Elizabeth's previous behaviors from her new, more balanced perspective. The way in which this balance manifests sprouts from Jane's epistemological instincts, ones that she has been exhibiting for her sister throughout their shared childhood. As Elizabeth's thought process and verbal communication shift, they begin to reflect the kind of thinking and speaking that Jane has been modeling. This influence is in the nature of sibling relations: the long-term effects of any one-on-one sibling interaction can most often be "found

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when one sibling learns certain characteristics, expectancies, or skills from another sibling that in turn influences future learning or behavior."[22] While Elizabeth may not be actively aware or conscious of this influence at the time, Jane's consistent behavior infiltrates her young mind until the moment that the effects become clear later on.

Elizabeth learns from her older sister an important epistemological distinction between feeling and knowing. While one cannot accept perceptions as if they were facts, this is a tendency towards which Elizabeth leans all too readily. She has always been willing to trust her immediate sensory impressions, but Jane cautiously resists drawing such speedy conclusions. Thus Jane's skeptical doubt provides a roadmap for Elizabeth's *Bildung* development. Prior to her scene of self- and sisterly-transformation, Elizabeth mistakenly exchanges one epistemology for the other, never pausing to consider that they are separate registers. Blending subjective and objective information, she draws judgments out of impressions. This tendency begins early on, when Darcy's "forbidding, disagreeable countenance" (8) causes Elizabeth to assume anything he says or does in the future confirms this earliest verdict. When he begins showing her more attention, for instance, she dismisses it, remaining committed to her pre-conceived notions: "to her he was only the man who made himself agreeable no where" (16). Later, she informs him directly of this adherence to her own preordained assumptions:

> 'From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immoveable a dislike…' (148)

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[22] Cicirelli, *Sibling Relationships*, 6.

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From their first meeting, what Elizabeth witnesses of Darcy's behavior only reinforces her initial opinions. For Elizabeth, Darcy's character is decided in the first night of his appearance. Wickham, too, will fall subject to a similar assessment. In their initial meeting, Wickham's appearance casts him with a favorable "person, countenance, air, and walk" (52). As such, Elizabeth assumes him to be rational, logical, and honest—a conclusion she reaches based solely upon subjective sensory input: she "honoured him for such feelings, and thought him handsomer than ever as he expressed them" (55). Her thinking is guided by her physical impressions of his external appearance: "there was truth in his looks" (59).

But whereas Elizabeth readily jumps from appearances to facts, remaining blind to her willful prejudices, Jane embodies another approach altogether: she refuses to elide feelings into certainties. The sisters' clash of perspectives becomes apparent during the girls' first shared dialogue. Elizabeth teases her sister for being "a great deal too apt…to like people in general" (10). Since Jane "never see[s] a fault in any body," Elizabeth censures her for what she believes to be Jane's optimistic naiveté: "'All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life'" (10). Elizabeth dismisses Jane's "candour"—her capacity to see the goodness of other people—because, for her, this represents weakness.[23] Yet this interchange reveals Elizabeth's own flawed hastiness in drawing facts from impressions. Elizabeth declares universal truths about Jane's behavior: she hyperbolically laments that Jane "in *general*" "*never*" sees fault

[23] As John Mullan notes, conversations between Elizabeth and Jane "commonly stage the clash between Elizabeth's candor (in our sense of unsentimental truth telling) and Jane's 'candour' (in Austen's sense of thinking the best of people)"; "Sisterly Chat," *Persuasions* 31 (2009): 66.

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and values "*all*" the world as good, having "*never*" spoken ill of anyone. Elizabeth links an expression of the moment to enduring and irrefutable truths. Such extreme rhetoric speaks more to Elizabeth's shortcomings than to Jane's. Jane even rebuffs Elizabeth's judgment, retorting, "'I would wish not to be hasty in censuring any one; but I always speak what I think.'" Seeing Elizabeth's hastiness in leaping from impression to judgment, Jane reaffirms that she does in fact "always" speak her mind, defying Elizabeth's assumption that she has no evaluative opinions at all. In her stubbornness, of course, Elizabeth ignores Jane's opinions: "Elizabeth listened in silence, but was not convinced" (10).

Jane consistently embodies an alternative that eventually Elizabeth will respect. Jane delineates distinctions between perception and truth by occupying the realm of *potential* knowledge. When Elizabeth reports Wickham's story to Jane, for instance, she weights belief, understanding, and expressions against fact. As noted in the opening to this chapter, Jane acknowledges the potential for misrepresentation, and when Elizabeth challenges her as speaking only positively of everyone, Jane declares her position as one that is reasoned from multiple perspectives:

> 'Laugh as much as you chuse [sic], but you will not laugh me out of my opinion. My dearest Lizzy, do not consider in what a disgraceful light it places Mr. Darcy, to be treating his father's favourite in such a manner,—one, whom his father had promised to provide for.—It is impossible. No man of common humanity, no man who had any value for his character, could be capable of it. Can his most intimate friends be so excessively deceived in him? oh! no.' (58)

In response, Elizabeth reinforces her proclivity for believing her own impressions, expressing that she could "more easily believe" that Bingley had been erroneous than that Wickham had been untruthful. Here, Elizabeth dismisses the term "believe" as folly,

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affirming instead her one-sided commitment to Wickham's story as verifiable: "a history" of "names, facts, every thing." But where Elizabeth feels secure in her own evaluation, Jane inhabits the middle ground between certainty and uncertainty, allowing for indeterminacies and inconclusiveness: "I dare say," "in some way or other," "perhaps." Jane's hesitation is not a refusal to judge; rather, her hesitation marks her recognition that the sisters cannot deduce truth from their own personal feelings. Therefore, she tells Elizabeth, "*we* can form no idea" and it is "impossible for *us* to conjecture." No verifiable ideas or conjectures—no valid knowledge, in short—can be drawn from impressions. The ending of this exchange epitomizes this perspective clash most vividly. Jane reiterates her cognitive vacillation, concluding the conversation with a distinctly non-conclusive comment: "'It is difficult—it is distressing—One does not know what to think.'" But Elizabeth feels otherwise: "'I beg your pardon,'" she retorts, "'one knows exactly what to think'" (59).

Thinking that she knows just what to think is Elizabeth Bennet's foremost liability, of course. Elizabeth's evolution across the novel will hinge upon her increasingly Jane-directed recognition that there are, indeed, two separate modes of perceiving the world: trusting one's momentary emotional responses versus trusting one's reason. When Elizabeth thus undertakes her "second perusal" of Darcy's letter, after she has registered and taken in a new view of both herself and her sister, everything appears to her to be "[w]idely different" (137). Recalling Wickham's behavior by bringing it now "fresh [to] her memory," she places it under new scrutiny, suddenly sensing the delusion and the uncertainties—the "gross duplicity," the "wishes"—that had previously shaped her

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interpretations: "what she meant to be impartiality" was in fact guided by a self-fulfilling prophecy (136).

Now, in her reappraisal of these memories, Elizabeth adopts Jane's language of skepticism. Finding it to be "impossible" to ignore the "duplicity" of Wickham's words, she replaces her former certainties with indeterminacy. There had never been real knowledge derived from their conversation, Elizabeth realizes, and she observes that "nothing had been known" and that "she could remember no more" (136). Moreover, she observes the important transition that has taken place, for she is only "*now*" being "struck with the impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped her before" (136). Before, of course, Elizabeth remained under the delusion of her own epistemological assumption that one's affective reactions provide as much information as factual truths derived from logic and reasoning. Now, having discovered the flaws in such biased perceptions, Elizabeth's foundations begin to crumble.

In this letter-reading episode, feelings cease leading to facts. Elizabeth becomes overwhelmed by emotions that do not seem to offer her any understanding of the situation she faces. Following the moment when Darcy announces how ardently he admires and loves her (125), Elizabeth spins into a state of emotional "tumult" (128): her "astonishment was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent" (125). The next morning, she "could not yet recover from the surprise" and finds it "impossible to think of any thing else" (128). Darcy's proposal and subsequent letter leave her with "a contrariety of emotion" (134): she is, in turn, excited, frustrated, anxious, "perturbed" (135), and disappointed, and moves through various affective states of

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"anger" (125, 126), "amazement," "shame," "eagerness," "impatience" (134), "astonishment," "apprehension," "horror," (135), and agitation. She becomes, at various times, "angry," "roused to resentment," "shocked," and "exasperated." By emphasizing the wide range of emotional spaces that Elizabeth inhabits during this self-reflexive scene, Austen's narrator communicates that the mode of "feelings" no longer serves as the route to knowledge—a route that Elizabeth had previously followed with confidence and even gusto. Like Elinor Dashwood, Elizabeth must abandon her faith in her particular brand of logic.

Amidst this great "contrariety" of feelings, both Elizabeth and the narrator begin to solidify a boundary between knowledge and emotions, ideas and affects. Where Elizabeth had previously collapsed these together, the narrative now separates them. When Elizabeth contemplates the letter, her thoughts are described as being between the objective and the subjective, in an inconclusive mediation, with verbs like "understand," "believed," "persuaded," "resolved," "expressed," and abstract nouns like "explanation," "account," and "belief" (134). Elizabeth sits amidst the language of belief on the one hand (emotion, heart, instinct) and knowledge on the other (truth, assurance, decisiveness). Like Jane in her skeptical caution, Elizabeth measures the indeterminate space between sensory perceptions and reasoned explanations, for she does not link one to the other, but rather lingers in the kind of skepticism that Jane inhabits. It is impossible, she now sees, to know anything from her emotional reactions. Thus Elizabeth registers neither complete doubt nor complete certainty. Her epistemology recalibrates to the *search* for *potential* knowledge—something she never would have paused to consider in the past without

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witnessing it in Jane.

Importantly, while Darcy's letter provides a stimulus for these contemplations, *his* rhetoric continues to exemplify the kind of one-sidedness that Elizabeth's once had. Where Elizabeth's default would be to collapse the distinction between emotions and facts, Darcy relies affirmatively upon his own biased judgments as the source of truth. Despite the fact that he is trying to remedy his prior misconceptions, he still adheres to one end of the epistemological spectrum. He concludes his letter, for instance, with the language of truth and certainty: "to know," "revealed," "truth of every thing," "testimony" (134). For now, at least, Darcy remains committed to the notion that reason and feeling are *not* separate concepts, for his own power of perception, he believes, can lead him to "impartial conviction" which he assumes to be "as truly as I wished it in reason" (130). Blending his own impressions with reason, Darcy closes his epistolary confession by explaining his perspective as sticking close to logic, with no consideration of the biases of his own subjectivity. He applies such language of reasoned logic and objective knowledge as "[d]etection," "know," "truth," "assertions" (134). To Darcy, his own understanding equals truth. The irony, of course, is that his perceptions are just as biased as Elizabeth's. Thus she cannot be learning much from him at all.

III. Change over Time; or, The *Bildung* of Slow Growth

The female *Bildungshelden* in these novels change in ways profoundly influenced by what they witness in their siblings, a process that is complicated by the feat of coming to see differently those intimate family members who had once been so familiar to them. Yet despite the predominant role of sibling kinship as I have been tracing it here, scholars'

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encounters with both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* have, for the most part, remained situated within the context of the novels' heterosexual marriage plots. Whether readers want to interpret these teleological narratives in line with Austen's commitment to social conservatism or as a trope that grates against her rebellious feminist tracts,[24] readers cannot avoid the fact that wedded bliss ties up each novel in a pretty conjugal bow. As such, these idealized marital conclusions have far overshadowed examinations of other familial dynamics. Male figures like Darcy, Willoughby, and Edward have functioned as far more vital signifiers of Austen's allegiances than, say, a Jane Bennet, Anne Elliot, or Margaret Dashwood. As I have been suggesting, however, each of Austen's protagonists are situated within kinship networks that inform her worldview—and whose evolution alongside hers contributes vitally to her own.

The tendency to overlook siblings in favor of suitors becomes a particular liability when scholars locate these novels within the *Bildungsroman* genre. Often, the successful development of the female protagonist becomes marked only by her preparation for, and acceptance of, the social rite of passage invested in matrimony. Franco Moretti, for one, assures us that Elizabeth Bennet's *Bildung* successfully culminates once she accedes to her position as a married woman.[25] Joseph Allen Boone similarly aligns Elizabeth's courtship storyline to her *Bildung* achievements, noting that "[a]s the subject of a female

[24] The debate over political implications for Austen's marriage plot can be found among critics such as, on the one hand, conservative readings from Marilyn Butler (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975] and William H. Magee ("Instrument of Growth: The Courtship and Marriage Plot in Jane Austen's Novels," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 17, no. 2 [1987]: 198-208); and, on the other hand, readings of Austen's progressivism beginning with Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979]) onward.
[25] Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987).

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bildungsroman, therefore, Elizabeth remains inscribed within the one arena, the one destiny, permitted by the mechanics of love-plotting."[26] Such a prescription, however, presupposes that the *Bildung* quest either squelches the heroine's individualism or deprives her of a fulfilled *Bildung* journey. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis puts it, "the energies of the *Bildung* were incompatible with the closure in successful courtship or marriage" novels, and therefore the "plot of self-realization was…subordinate to, or covered within, the magnetic power of that ending."[27] All theorists of the female *Bildungsroman* must grapple with the ways the marriage plot has been folded into this critical inheritance.

In reframing the *Bildungsroman* to contain women's narratives, several scholars have tried to identify what women's novels of development have in common with—and what distinguishes them from—the classical, male, and German-derived tradition. Typically, these readings move away from a focus on the individual hero in order to open space for a heroine situated within communal and social contexts. This "dialectical relation to historical events, social structures, and other people"[28] centers, however, around an individual's internalized "process of learning to understand and work within the limits of society."[29] Even for those who suggest the female *Bildungsheld* embraces a fragmented rather than holistic (i.e., male) sense of personhood,[30] the individual "I" continues to divert us from the kind of interpersonal interactions that constitute such an

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[26] Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 93.
[27] DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 6.
[28] Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 10.
[29] Ellis, *Appearing to Diminish*, 18.
[30] See for instance Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, eds., *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983).

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identity in the first place. Readings of Elizabeth have followed suit: the "I" of her self-analysis has diverted our attention away from the "we" upon whom she actually focuses.

Thus the *Bildungsroman*'s integral notion of individualism and personal evolution, set against the expectations and lessons of the social world, have shifted attention away from familial inter-subjectivity in favor of the "hero's self-realization," which requires "a delimitation, indeed, a constriction, of the self"[31] so that the *Bildung* takes his "place in the order of things."[32] The course of progression towards an enclosed ego applies differently, of course, to women, whose situations were necessarily much more private and domesticated: women did not have the same educational opportunities as men;[33] they could not form sexual liaisons outside the institution of marriage;[34] and they could not embrace the opportunities of working culture and the upward social mobility offered by the "myth of bourgeois opportunity" so integral to the male tradition.[35] Rather than seeking individualization through work, apprenticeship, and urban living, women evolved within the home. This was a process, most readers have concurred, that culminates with the wedding bells.

Yet as I have been outlining here, heroines of Austen's novels, such as Elizabeth Bennet, endure internal battles that require them to struggle not only with their own subjectivity but with that of their sisters as well. Elizabeth recognizes her enmeshed

[31] Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 29.
[32] Gregory Castle, *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), 8.
[33] Abel et al., *The Voyage In*, 15.
[34] Elaine Hoffman Baruch, "The Feminine *Bildungsroman*: Education through Marriage," *The Massachusetts Review* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 335-357.
[35] Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women*, 6.

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dynamic with her sisters, suddenly coming to see her similarities and differences from them, which requires a unique opening up of her own ego boundaries: it takes quite a cognitive accomplishment to change one's perspective not only of oneself but also of one's intimate kin, for whom one has already hardened a cognitive and psychological image. By shifting our focus from the marriage vows to the paradigms of sisterhood, I suggest, the project of the *Bildungsroman* appears differently: the sororal *Bildungsroman* shapes multiple characters at once, requiring a mental flexibility that a conventionally determined (male) ego does not traditionally conceive.

For women like Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, as well as Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, the *Bildung* evolution is both more dynamically interpersonal and inter-subjective than the heterosexual romance plots—and the measure of marriageability—have led critics to imagine. What I wish to suggest is that the female *Bildungsroman* of Austen's novels does not cultivate women who are socially indoctrinated and prepared for marriage but, rather, women who are, like their male counterparts, cultivated to be both epistemologically and ethically evolved—yet in such a way that they can never return to their prior self-conceptualizations as entirely self-contained. Their interdependent sororal exchanges, in other words, ensure that each woman's *Bildung* process is both ego-forming and communally-bound, both boundaried and permeable. Thus Austen's novels integrate elements of both the traditional male *Bildungsroman* form and the more fragmented, indeterminate, and inconclusive features of what feminist scholars have recently theorized as being unique to the canon of "female *Bildungsromane*."

With their mediation between epistemological extremes—between reason and

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feeling, between sense and sensibility—Austen's novels offer a paradigm of "sibling logic" that combines elements across supposedly gendered divides. The "self" that we find in Austen's sororal *Bildungsromane* challenge heuristic binaries to advance two features of female self-development: first, that change is acquired slowly, over time, through gradual progression; and second, that change brings us towards epistemological equilibrium, balancing extremes into moderation.

Situating Austen within eighteenth-century philosophy, J. A. Kearney has suggested that Austen dramatizes this search for moderation between antithetical extremes. Her novels arrive at a compromise between the polarities of reason and feeling—a dichotomy drawn frequently in political and philosophical discourse. Adhering neither to John Locke's faith in logic nor to Adam Smith's faith in sentiment, Austen instead combines both frameworks, since "each needs the support of the other, each is equally fallible when trying to act independently."[36] Neither reason nor feeling can function well in isolation. Rather, these terms must come together into a more integrated and cohesive ontology, as Kearney explains: "Both are needed for an adequate understanding of the truth about human affairs and experience. Many of the difficulties experienced by Jane Austen's characters result, in fact, from attempts by reason or feeling to act independently of one another, or for one power to try to usurp the other's domain" (111-12). Reason and feeling must be intrinsically intertwined, just like siblings.

Austen's sisterhoods materialize this segue from a phenomenology of extremes to one of moderation. Since nothing can be known without the combined input of both

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[36] Kearney, "Jane Austen and the Reason-Feeling Debate," 111.

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affective and logical filters, Jane and Elizabeth Bennet together demonstrate a balanced approach that considers all aspects of cognitive and psychological processing. Likewise, since neither complete self-exposure nor complete self-containment allow one to communicate in social situations, Elinor and Marianne together forge an approach wherein both factors can be at play, in which one's successful engagement with the world requires a moderated performance of both affect and sense.

By blending and blurring epistemological polarities through the slow procedural experience of learning new behavior and perspectives from one's kin, Austen's novels explore the role of slow growth over time. As an allegory for political change, this growth perhaps sheds light on one of Austen's underlying ideologies: that historical change should not be radical nor revolutionary, but gradual and incremental. Women like Elinor and Elizabeth do not transform themselves suddenly as the result of proposals of marriage; they do not embrace revolutionary and cataclysmic change, in other words. Rather, while they may be instigated towards change by their male suitors, the manner in which this change takes shape happens as the result of a lifetime of learning. The carefully orchestrated influence of women upon one another offers a paradigm of political evolution framed by gradual awareness, the kind that comes with mutual respect and appreciation for the differences and similarities shared between parties. For Austen, change should be progressive—not in the sense of being ideologically liberal, necessarily, but in the sense of evolving over time in incremental stages towards a moderated perspective. Austen's distinctive sibling logic thus provides a model of effective transition without radical disruption: the *Bildung* of slow growth over time.

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As Ruth Perry has noted, eighteenth-century narratives have typically been interpreted along conjugal, rather than consanguineal, lines: "Social historians and literary critics often pass over sibling relationships as irrelevant to the 'real story'—which they assume to be the development of the conjugal family and an emphasis on romantic love between husbands and wives."[37] *Pride and Prejudice* has been subject to the same fate. Yet Perry claims, overall, that women's roles as daughters and sisters were diminishing at the end of the eighteenth century as their place as mothers and wives increased in both financial and material importance—and that the fiction of the period represented this cultural shift by morally testing out "good brothers" to care for their sisters. As she discusses elsewhere,[38] Perry suggests that fictional sibling pairs offer only a fantasy of what people could no longer access in their everyday lives: the material and emotional support of birth families, including siblings. Yet I believe Austen's novels contest Perry's claims, since her marital endings confirm the opposite remained true. Throughout Austen's novels, female characters evolve in tandem with their siblings, and these mutual relationships mold women into their proper state as inter-subjective entities—no longer grasping their own immature egoistic notions of self-reliance, they become open to the influence of others. And while the wedding bells do ring, so do their sisters' doorbells.

When *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* come to a close, both novels affirm the importance of maintaining sibling relationships as cotemporaneous bonds paralleling

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[37] Ruth Perry, "Brother Love in Eighteenth-Century Literature," *Persuasions On-Line* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2009): n. pg.
[38] See Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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matrimonial ones. The two novels conclude, after all, not with the culmination of women's young adult lives as the acquisition of a husband and property. They end with the culmination of women's young adult lives in the settling of their family members close by, in the rectifying and then embracing of nearly-fractured relationships with their sisters, and in establishing these familial connections by affirming close geographical proximity to follow the proximity gained even closer to home: that assimilation of the other's personality into one's own.

As *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* end, Austen's narrator sums up the unified kinship networks that will enfold the newly married couples into an intimate social fabric—the text's ultimate goal of "uniting them" within the lateral family system (*PP* 254). As part of their marital settling, "Jane and Elizabeth, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other" (*PP* 252); and "[b]etween Barton and Delaford"—between the new Mr. and Mrs. Brandon and Mr. and Mrs. Ferrars—"there was that constant communication which strong family affection would naturally dictate;—and among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne…they could live without disagreement between themselves" (*SS* 269). But along with these closing gestures, as we have seen, the sisters affirm their transformation from singular and bounded egoistic selves into open and malleable members of a complex inter-related system. Siblinghood has shaped them into the women who enter these new conjugal partnerships, and these marriages, in turn, take place only by enabling an ongoing connection to their originating sisterhood. Both novels require not just a double marriage but also a double livelihood—happily ever after.

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IV. Conclusion:
The Swing toward Sisterhood in Austen Adaptations

> *Jane*: You two have always been so alike.
> *Lizzie*: What world are you living in?
> *Jane*: One where I have two wonderful, stubborn sisters who spend more time talking to thousands of people they've never met than to each other.
> Episode 86, "Sisterly Support," *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*

For the most part, the Austen we are inhering today, both in literary criticism and in popular culture, is an Austen of the marriage plot. The most well-known recent filmic adaptations confirm this legacy. Take, for instance, Joe Wright's Hollywood production of *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), in which a steamy Matthew Macfadyen as Darcy clashes heatedly with the nubile Keira Knightley: in one particularly memorable scene, the two holler at one another while underneath a thunderous rainstorm, their erotic tensions building throughout the rain-soaked spat—punctuated, literally, by strikes of lightning. Playing up the overt sexuality, the film's ending further fetishizes the romantic teleology by revealing Elizabeth and Darcy in an intimate, half-dressed, apparently post-coital embrace, adorned with a backdrop of Pemberley's candlelit decadence—an ending that was added specifically for American audiences. Even the more ascetic and historically accurate BBC miniseries (1996) still heightens the romantic impulse by luxuriating in physical displays of the central couple's sexual friction. Actor Colin Firth was, after all, catapulted into stardom once his Darcy emerged from a lake in soaked undergarments. This version ends, likewise, with the visual consummation of heterosexual love and marriage: as the wedding carriage pulls away from the church, the film's final frame freezes on Darcy and Elizabeth's first private kiss as man and wife.

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While the majority of modern adaptations and spin-offs indulge the marriage plot of Austen's classic, however, one recent version has placed the Bennet sisterhood front and center. Hank Green and Bernie Su's YouTube sensation *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* aired from April 2012 to March 2013 as a 100-episode video diary log, or "vlog," made up of 3-minute clips recorded by a modern Lizzie Bennet, "a 24-year-old grad student, with a mountain of student loans, living at home, and preparing for a career."[39] A quintessential millennial, Lizzie (played by Ashley Clements) presents a first-person narration of her daily life. She is often accompanied on-screen by her two sisters Jane (played by Laura Spencer) and Lydia (Mary Kate Wiles). Like Austen's novel, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (*LBD*) highlights the turbulent nature of twenty-something relationships: the ups and downs of Jane and Bing Lee's on-again/off-again courtship; Lydia and George's intense but fractious fling; Darcy and Lizzie's fomenting but repressed desires. But while *LBD* incorporates these romantic storylines, the true emotional crux of the series falls on the love affair between sisters, rather than lovers.

With poignant self-awareness, the three Bennet girls occupy almost comically stereotyped sibling roles. Lydia is the bubbly, overly exuberant, and scandalous youngest, about whom Lizzie jests that she is "very proud she's now too old to be on any reality shows about having babies in high school." In stark contrast, Jane plays the excessively sweet oldest child, whom Lizzie labels as "practically perfect in every way." With self-deprecating humor, Lizzie casts herself in yet another typified sibling position: "That's right, I'm the dreaded middle child! Doomed to a life of drug addiction, irresolute

[39] *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, "Episode 1: My Name is Lizzie Bennet," YouTube video, 3:19, Posted by Pemberley Digital, April 9, 2012, https://youtu.be/KisuGP2lcPs.

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drinking, and out of wedlock pregnancy!" (Episode 2: "My Sisters: Problematic to Practically Perfect"). (Austen's Mary Bennet appears a few times in the series as the girls' depressive Goth cousin, and Kitty Bennet is, well, a kitten.) As the series unfolds, the plotlines revolve around the three redheaded sisters' individual experiences as well as their shared encounters, from the everyday foibles of sisterly squabbles over who annoys whom more at a party to a heart-wrenching drama in which the older sisters must comfort Lydia through a very public online sex-tape scandal. The show acknowledges the originating sororal differences that manifest in Austen's novel, but raises them to newly visible heights with self-conscious and hyperbolic delight.

With the ability to represent Lizzie's internal thoughts through her first-hand verbal narration—something that other film and television renditions have previously omitted in favor of traditional objective perspectives—*LBD* builds to a climax that revolves around Lizzie's pivotal realization: she has made many errors in interpreting not only herself but also her sisters. Rather than focusing on the girls' suitors and their shifting romantic dynamics, the series lands its emotional impact on the intricate dynamics of sisterly inter-subjectivity. As I have been arguing is true for Austen's original text, this Lizzie Bennet will not only rethink her "first impressions" of her new acquaintances such as Darcy and Bing Lee, but, more importantly—and with much more cognitive and affective difficulty—she will reframe her opinions of both herself and her sisters.

Revising many of her own long-standing assumptions about the girls' childhood personas, and the adult persons sprouted from those origins, Lizzie reconsiders her most intimate companions and what she had thought to be her most familiar relationships:

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> 'I went back and watched all of Lydia's videos. I don't know that girl. It's like my sister is a person I've never met. And then I thought about it. And how could I not have seen her when she was standing right in front of me?' (Episode 87: "An Understanding")

Crying at the sheer shock of this realization, Lizzie comes to terms with the fact that she has imposed her own ingrained mental version of her younger sister upon the now-adult Lydia, and, as a result, slowly begins to see that she has not only misunderstood her sister but that she has also misunderstood her own position in relationship to her:

> 'I thought I knew how to be a big sister. I mean, I know how to do all the dumb stuff, like take her out to a bar for her birthday and fight over who does the dishes and give her a hard time about… everything. There's a lot more to it than that, isn't there? [Lydia enters] Lydia, I want you to know, how sorry I am about the things I said to you, on and off the Internet. I don't think I really … I didn't really know you, I guess.' (Episode 88: "Okay")

The resolution of Lydia and Lizzie's fight—which had sent Lydia "offstage" for a number of episodes to record her own personal vlog as retribution—precedes any resolution to the romantic storylines. Lizzie's siblinghood thus takes center stage, as her self-understanding circulates around changing perceptions of her siblings. As in Austen: until this moment, Lizzie did not know herself; but she also did not know her sisters. With its focus on the complementary features of sisterly affection and sororal turmoil, *LBD* presents a Lizzie—like Austen's original Elizabeth—who must uncover the ways in which she is both more similar to and more different from her sisters than she had ever previously imagined. Only through this acknowledgement of their evolving relationships can Lizzie begin to transform. Green and Su's YouTube adaptation thus makes visible something that has resisted being universally acknowledged throughout the long history of Austen criticism: Elizabeth Bennet's story was never really about Mr. Darcy in the first place.

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CHAPTER FOUR

"I am Alone, and Miserable": The Failures of Fraternity in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

> The sounding cataract
> Haunted him like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to him
> An appetite; a feeling, and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, or any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.[1]

Early in the third volume of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Victor Frankenstein quotes the above passage from Wordsworth's "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey." In citing this lyrical ballad, Victor amends Wordsworth's original, changing the poet's self-reflexive, first-person "me" into a third-person "him." In doing so, Victor defers the intimate experience with nature onto someone else entirely—"[t]he sounding cataract / Haunted *him* like a passion"; "colours and their forms, were then to *him* / An appetite." Ruminating on pleasures that are distinctly not his own, Victor proclaims enviously that his friend Henry Clerval (the designated *him*) is still able to relish the beauties of nature in a way that Victor's "me" no longer can. Unlike Victor, Clerval retains the tools necessary for fostering communion with nature: a "wild and enthusiastic imagination," "ardent affections," and, most importantly, "human sympathies" (166).

Using this allusion to "Tintern Abbey" to register his own sense of alienation, Victor invokes here the two readings of Romantic subjectivity that I have been

[1] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, 3rd edition, eds. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2012), 166-67. Further page references to this edition will be cited parenthetically within the text.

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contrasting. On the one hand, Victor's quotation exemplifies the kind of isolated interiority that has conventionally been associated with the Romantic ideology—an independence of mind that Shelley depicts through both Victor Frankenstein and Captain Robert Walton, who each finds himself attracted to those "poets whose effusions entranced [his] soul" (52). While the text gestures elsewhere to similarly solipsistic Romantic figures like Samuel Taylor Coleridge as well as Mary's husband Percy Shelley, Walton nostalgically describes such poets' creative solitude as one that led to his own intellectual and psychological narcissism: "for one year [I] lived in a Paradise of my own creation," he recounts (52). However, Victor's self-imposed distancing from the "him" who experiences this sublime state disconnects him from the alternate register of "human sympathies" that Wordsworth's poem equally invokes—a register of interconnection which, as I have been arguing, supplants Romantic solipsism with a more relational dynamic. This multiple, collective, and sibling-based inter-subjectivity is what unites Clerval with other people. So while Victor may no longer be able to access this interconnected kinship for himself, Shelley affirms the need for such sympathetic attachments—a need communicated explicitly through Victor's failure to recognize it.

Where Wordsworth acknowledges the sibling "other" whose presence sustains his self-comprehension, Victor Frankenstein misses these potential connections—particularly those with women—by pursuing his own monomaniacal self-containment. In this chapter, I culminate my discussion of Romanticism's sororal and fraternal "sibling logic" by suggesting that Victor excludes women from the world of Shelley's novel, and that, by positioning him in this way, Shelley critiques her protagonist for his masculinized

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solipsism—a state that has led him to ignore the lived experiences of relational sibling exchanges that Shelley's other two male narrators, Robert Walton and the creature, both recognize and respect.

Sisters, whether biological, adoptive, or figurative, are indeed ever-present in the novel: Elizabeth, Justine, Margaret, Agatha, Safie—these women model bonds of sympathetic kinship. But Victor erases these sororal figures from his ontological horizons. In previous chapters, I have been exploring the ways in which horizons of fraternal and sororal kinship have indeed expanded rather than contracted our sense of inter-subjectivity: surpassing the traditionally hierarchical paradigms of reproductive relations, these works by Percy Shelley, Baillie, Wordsworth, and Austen open radical possibilities for queer sibling kinship, for non-reproductive propagation, for temporalities rooted in multiplicity, and for subjectivities situated in networks. Illuminating these applications of lateral sibling logic even further, Shelley's novel demonstrates what happens when possibilities for plurality, expansion, and proliferation are foreclosed. Instead of honoring his surrogate sisters, Victor collapses them. Shunted from the affective and discursive spaces they might otherwise occupy, women are reduced to tales themselves, to circulating objects of exchange that can be traded between men in their efforts to forge homosocial bonds. In the world of *Frankenstein*, men construct a narrative "traffic in women," to cite Gayle Rubin's phrase, converting women's histories into transferable stories. But by overlooking the sororal sympathies available to him through lived brother-sister relations, Victor abandons the exact human interdependence he seeks. In his hunt for brotherhood, in other words, Victor Frankenstein ignores the sisterhoods already

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surrounding him.

I. Sympathetic Reciprocity: Agatha and Felix De Lacey

While domestic ideology itself has become a center point for one strand of scholarship on Shelley's novel, siblings have factored far less into critical discussions of the text—perhaps exemplifying the influence that Victor's dominating consciousness has had upon his audience, both inside and outside of the novel proper. From Anne Mellor's *Romanticism and Feminism* onward, gender-based criticism of *Frankenstein* has understood the De Laceys to serve as *the* representatives for Shelley's bourgeois domestic fantasies. As such, the De Laceys appear to be an ideal that can never be achieved, and one that differs significantly from the Frankensteins' model of patriarchal relations. The tripartite household of Agatha, Felix, and De Lacey père, as Mellor explains, represents a utopian view of cooperation amongst daughter, son, and father that "constitutes Mary Shelley's ideal, an ideal derived from her mother's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*."[2] "In the impoverished De Lacey household," Mellor continues, "all work is shared equally in an atmosphere of rational companionship, mutual concern, and love." But, as Mellor astutely observes, this "egalitarian and interdependent" (229) family rooted in "justice, gender equality, and mutual affection" simply cannot succeed within the world of Shelley's novel—or in Shelley's England.[3] This vision of an "alternative nuclear family" is, Mellor claims, altogether "lost in the novel."[4] It is lost because Shelley's idyllic arrangement requires a maternal figure to make it whole: the De Lacey home "lacks the

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[2] Anne K. Mellor, "Possessing Nature: The Female in *Frankenstein*," in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 222.
[3] Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Methuen, 1988), 118.
[4] Mellor, "Possessing Nature," 223.

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mother who might have been able to welcome the pleading, pitiable creature" into the fold.[5] Without this mother-figure to ground its sympathetic center, the De Laceys' "egalitarian, benevolent, and mutually loving" kinship remains only a hypothetical (im)possibility,[6] a castle in the air conjured by the daughter of progressive philosophers, but a castle not constructible in her actual universe.

By looking to the absent mother as the lack whose presence would otherwise redeem this family, however, Mellor and other critics have merely repeated Victor's own interpretive errors.[7] Relying as they do on a paradigm of psychosexual desire for the symbolic but absent mother, these oedipal-inflected readings reify the patriarchal placement of women into roles of reproductive helpmates: as wives and mothers, rather than sisters. This is Victor's miscalculation as well. Instead of searching for what Mellor calls a missing maternal ethics of care I propose that what Shelley's novel seeks most is a sororal ethics. Brother-sister paradigms enable a unique reciprocity that the unidirectional frameworks of mother-and-child exclude. The problem is that Victor can think of women only in the limited terms of patriarchal relations—in terms of verticality, inheritance, lineage, and reproduction. He sees wives where he should, in fact, see sisters.

At the heart of Shelley's novel, the interdependent sister-and-brother pair of Agatha and Felix De Lacey exemplifies the reciprocal nature of these "human sympathies" from which Victor feels dissociated. The De Lacey siblings perform a dance

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[5] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, 118.

[6] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, 126.

[7] See for instance Adam Komisaruk, "'So Guided by a Silken Cord': *Frankenstein*'s Family Values," *Studies in Romanticism* 38, no. 2 (1999): 409-441, and Marc A. Rubenstein, "'My Accursed Origin': The Search for the Mother in *Frankenstein*," *Studies in Romanticism* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1976): 165-194.

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of true reciprocity: they exchange their domestic roles throughout the day, with one sibling picking up where the other leaves off. The creature explains this elegant interchange of labor tasks:

> [She] walked along, seemingly incommoded by the burden, [when] a young man met her, whose countenance expressed a deeper despondence. Uttering a few sounds with an air of melancholy, he took the pail from her head, and bore it to the cottage himself. She followed, and they disappeared. Presently I saw the young man again, with some tools in his hand, cross the field behind the cottage; and the girl was also busied, sometimes in the house, and sometimes in the yard. (125)

Agatha and Felix partake equally in the chores around the house, dividing what must be done between the two of them: the brother labors outdoors while the sister busies herself with things closer to their abode, either inside the cottage or in the nearby yard. Importantly, neither sibling *needs* to request the help of the other; nor do they seem incapable of accomplishing any of the tasks on their own. Rather, each sibling could carry out his or her activities independently. Agatha might be temporarily "incommoded" by her burden, but she does not require physical assistance from Felix to carry on that job. She does not ask directly for her brother's assistance either, but instead voluntarily endures the intense bodily exertion demanded by these tasks inside and outside the home. Felix, in turn, conducts his work independently as well, moving easily between the cottage and the woods. The key is that while each of them *can* work alone, they do *not*. At moments when they come together, their innate compulsion is to provide mutual support: Felix lifts Agatha's burden; they retire into the house together. Their instinct is to work collectively and reciprocally, rather than separately; yet they are capable of doing either.

Defying the rubric of a strictly gendered division of labors, Agatha and Felix move between indoor and outdoor spaces, switching between yard-work and household chores

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with little complaint. Importantly, this ethical sharing of physical work translates additionally into their shared affect. Material burdens are not the only ones the siblings swap. Felix's state of "deeper despondence" and "air of melancholy," for instance, are readily apparent to the creature who observes the siblings because Felix's affective state can be compared to Agatha's: where they are both relatively depressed, Felix is more so. In this scaled comparison, the two close family members perform some degree of a similar emotion; and it is only through such juxtaposition with Agatha's state that the observer can discern Felix's emotions to be, at this time, "deeper" than hers.

Moreover, Agatha and Felix's complementary sibling dynamic—their shared work as well as their shared suffering—is neither uni-directional nor one-sided. It features a key element of sympathy that distinguishes sibling relations from other kinds of inter-generational kinship structures: reciprocity. In texts examined thus far, including Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" as well as Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, siblinghood contains a degree of implied hierarchical power dynamics between older and younger siblings. Yet, like *Frankenstein*, these texts also demonstrate how siblinghood balances such birth-order structures with the inherent egalitarianism invoked by sibling status. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley capitalizes upon the equivalency of sibling kinship in order to test out its ontological possibilities as a model for equal sympathetic reciprocity.

So even though some hours or days might see Felix bearing the material weight of a milk pail along with the psychological burden of his family's financial and psychological strains, at other times Agatha will comparably uphold her end of their shared sibling load.

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Before long, Agatha releases her brother from his own strenuous cargo:

> Soon after this the young man returned, bearing on his shoulders a load of wood. The girl met him at the door, helped to relieve him of his burden, and, taking some of the fuel into the cottage, placed it on the fire; then she and the youth went apart into a nook of the cottage, and he shewed her a large loaf and a piece of cheese. She seemed pleased; and went into the garden for some roots and plants, which she placed in water, and then upon the fire. She afterwards continued her work, whilst the young man went into the garden, and appeared busily employed in digging and pulling up roots. After he had been employed thus about an hour, the young woman joined him, and they entered the cottage together. (126)

This scene extends the siblings' familiar and effortless *pas de deux*: at first, Agatha meets the returning Felix at the threshold of the cottage, takes the logs, and moves them to the fire; then the siblings confer together over their newly acquired victuals, sharing in their joint pleasure over the gathered goods; third, Agatha retrieves vegetables from the garden, and, when she returns inside the house, Felix goes outside to take over the gardening tasks; lastly, Agatha comes out to meet him, and they go inside as a unit once again. Their choreographed dance is well rehearsed, representing a series of movements that the two have practiced repeatedly over time. The siblings know instinctively when to perform independently, when to come together, when to separate, and when to switch roles. Their dance—their sympathetic reciprocity—passes these domestic tasks back and forth between them, until finally they both retire to enjoy the products of their individual and communal undertakings.

As we have already seen in Chapter One, the late-eighteenth-century concept of sympathy infiltrated both the philosophy and fiction of the period. Incorporated by Joanna Baillie in her "Introductory Discourse" as what she terms "sympathetick curiosity," this concept represented one avenue by which individuals could be conjoined

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in ethical bonds that would bridge the space and distance between separate hearts. "The highest pleasures we receive from poetry," Baillie explains, "[…] are derived from the sympathetick interest we all take in beings like ourselves."[8] Through the careful observation of others, Baillie suggests, particularly those on the stage, we can contemplate the ways in which we might respond in parallel situations. It is through this process of identification with the emotions, reactions, and behaviors of other people that we become more just, compassionate, and merciful ourselves. In his popular treatise on the subject, Adam Smith similarly defines sympathy in the mode of observation combined with imagined feelings: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation."[9] Moreover, Smith suggests, our approval of others' sentiments derives from our own accordance with their responses: if we react the same way that they do, we confirm that their response is just. Sympathy registers as synthesis.

Frankenstein's creature models this route to sympathy when he describes his own experience of mirroring the De Laceys' affective states. Learning what human sympathy looks like from the outside, the creature finds himself responding in kind as a reflection of the De Lacey siblings' emotions: "when they were unhappy, I felt depressed;" he recalls, "when they rejoiced, I sympathized in their joys" (129). Here, as Smith and Baillie propose, sympathy takes the form of internalized identification: the creature projects his

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[8] Joanna Baillie, "Introductory Discourse" (1798), in *Plays on the Passions*, ed. Peter Duthie (Ontario: Broadview, 2001), 23.
[9] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 13.

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own emotions to overlap with the De Laceys', imagining himself in their shoes, and sensing that he, too, might feel the same way if placed in their situation. But the creature's response—feeling precisely what these other humans feel—points to the principally unidirectional nature of Baillie's and Smith's theories. While this scenario allows the creature to learn about the experience of emotions, as he feels his own cognitive and physiological reactions aligning precisely with what the De Laceys deem unhappiness and joy, this affective experience is one-sided: the creature observes and then feels the De Laceys' emotions, but they have no awareness of his presence. They do not feel what he feels in return. Like an audience watching actors upon the stage, the creature can sympathize with their performance, but they cannot even see him.

For theorists like Baillie and Smith, this is precisely what sympathy looks like: an individual visualizes himself in the place of another in order that he might determine whether he would respond similarly to a stimulus and, in turn, permits himself to feel empathy for that other soul who is currently experiencing that emotion. This mode of sympathy is, in fact, spectatorial—though, of course, as Smith expands, we do enjoy when the direction reverses and our friend sympathizes with our own current state. But sympathy happens in the mind of only the one observer. What the creature—and, I would suggest, Mary Shelley as well—seeks to institute is something that goes beyond this one-directional sympathetic identification. What the De Laceys model, and what the creature subsequently values after learning from this model, is a sympathetic exchange conducted through the kind of reciprocated actions, behaviors, and feelings that play out in the *relationship* between Agatha and Felix: the ongoing, reciprocal sympathy that

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connects two souls continually over time. In other words: the reciprocity of siblinghood.

II. Domestic Doubling: The Waltons and the Frankensteins

In *Frankenstein*, Agatha and Felix are not the only siblings to model sympathetic reciprocity. Indeed, the younger Waltons and young Frankensteins embody a similar paradigm. The problem for Victor is that he will later try to replace this sororal-fraternal intimacy with surrogate fraternity, whereas Walton recognizes that he owes his notion of brotherhood to an earlier sisterly companionship. Walton builds his search for male friendship upon that earlier foundation. In both men's original childhood homes, sympathetic reciprocity served as the basis for brother-sister relations, particularly as it was developed within a complementary course of early educational development. Despite these parallel origins, these two men will later diverge in their sororal allegiances.

In the outermost frame of the narrative, Captain Robert Walton famously writes to his sister, Mrs. Margaret (Walton) Saville, of his nostalgic ties to their once-intimate childhood relationship, an experience that they shared together in the communal Walton household. Despite his current distance from her, Walton invokes the affective intimacies that continue to bind them, regardless of how far they may now be geographically dispersed. Childhood experiences, and the later recollection of these experiences as memories in adulthood, forge an inseparable attachment between the brother and sister. The sympathetic reciprocity cultivated in childhood seems capable of connecting siblings regardless of how far apart they might now be.

In his letters, Walton draws upon this earlier intimacy in order to construct an imaginative bond between the siblings in the present. He reflects that his sister "may

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remember, that a history of all the voyages made for purposes of discovery composed the whole of our good uncle Thomas's library" (52). Walton finds solace not only in the fact that his sister will remember the contents of their uncle's library but also that she will recall the time they spent exploring the stacks together. Margaret knows the physical books as well as the history of voyages that both of the siblings perused inside them. In addition to recalling her uncle's bibliophilic repository, Margaret should also, Walton assumes, retain a memory of his interests and affinities, the psychological passions he associates metonymically with these books: he had once wanted to become a sea voyager, then a poet, and again an explorer. Walton surmises that Margaret should easily remember these aspirational vacillations: "You are well acquainted with my failure [i.e., at becoming a poet], and how heavily I bore the disappointment" (52). It is as a result of their intimacies during these primary stages of life that Walton believes the two siblings could now, as adults, access the emotional synthesis they enjoyed in childhood. He speaks to her, after all, in the present: "you *are* well acquainted," he remarks, rather than "you *were*."

Even at great distance, these shared childhood encounters help Walton to imagine and reconstruct Margaret's sympathetic availability, not only in their collective past, but also in their separated present. Yet this "present" moment in which he imagines Margaret reading his letter is a present that will only be realized in his future, once she has received his letters in England after he sends them from the arctic. "Do you understand this feeling?" he asks her hopefully (and rhetorically, since she cannot answer his inquiry). Walton asks whether the Margaret of the present/future will comprehend the feeling of

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his own present that he is attempting to evoke for her in words. The basis for this sympathetic understanding would be, for Walton, their shared childhood emotions: if Margaret knew him then, she should also know him now.

Upon such reasoning, Walton continues to plead for his sister's affective identifications: "And now, dear Margaret, do I not deserve to accomplish some great purpose" (53); "Ah, dear sister, how can I answer this question" (53); "You may deem me romantic, my dear sister" (54). Calling attention to the immediacy of his unanswerable requests in the "now," Walton uses the fluidity of their early sibling relationship to cycle through a conceptual layering of temporalities—a present self that conceives the past and future of a sibling's reception. Walton hopes his sister will identify with his present in her future, just like she did in their joint past. Thus Walton conceives a similar temporality as that which Wordsworth assigns to siblinghood: a mixed temporality in which past, present, and future meld together into an interdependent system—a system embodied in the figure of the sibling herself.

Accepting this nonlinear temporality, Walton also imagines himself capable of characterizing his sister's reactions in that as-yet unknown future: they would likely echo his own present emotions, since he believes he knows her past self well enough to project her character and her demeanor into that future reception. "Margaret, if you had seen the man who thus capitulated for his safety," he ponders, "your surprise would have been boundless" (59). Through his intimate knowledge of her former reactions to similar events, based upon their shared childhood, Walton presumes to know Margaret's reactions before they have even happened: she would have been utterly surprised if she

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had been with him during the experience, and in reading about the situation later she will be surprised in the future. Imaginatively projecting her responses, Walton writes of those hypothetical reactions by moving from the conditional past of "if you had seen" to the future and future-conditional tense of "Will you" and "if you do": "Will you laugh at the enthusiasm I express concerning the divine wanderer? If you do, you must have certainly lost that simplicity which was once your characteristic charm" (62). Although it seems tangible to him, Walton's connection to his sister lies solely in his imagination, and yet that imagination comes alive for him through memories of who his sister once was. Walton draws upon their past in order to project his sister's acceptance of him into the future: in this way, he can still feel her sympathies resonating in his own here and now, despite her actual distance.

Like Robert and his sister Margaret, Victor too once enjoyed the intimacies of a shared sibling childhood where bonds were forged both in the nursery and the library. The collective "we" that joins him with Elizabeth Lavenza shapes Victor's early life: from a young age, he explains, Elizabeth Lavenza was "my playfellow, and, as we grew older, my friend" (66). Victor and his close associate enjoyed both recreational and educational pursuits together: "Our studies were never forced," he reflects, although "we always had an end placed in view, which excited us to ardour in the prosecution of them" (67). Never cajoled into following a specific curriculum, the pseudo-siblings were left to their own devices in the Frankenstein home, with little parental oversight. Instead, Elizabeth and Victor encouraged one another, forging ahead in their cotemporaneous development by pursuing subjects at their own instigation, including both "Latin and English, [so] that we

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might read the writings in those languages" (67).

Undertaking this communal project, the young Elizabeth and Victor sought knowledge for its own sake: "we loved application, and our amusements would have been the labours of other children," Victor recalls (67). And while their rubric may have been lax, it followed a pursuit of passions: "Perhaps," he suggests, "we did not read so many books, or learn languages so quickly, as those who are disciplined according to the ordinary methods," but, in the end, "what we learned was impressed the more deeply on our memories" (67). The pleasures that Elizabeth and Victor feel derive from their shared encounters with these texts. For Victor and Elizabeth, as for Walton and Margaret and for Felix and Agatha, reciprocal education, shared domestic tasks, and communal recreation substantiate the ongoing emotional, intellectual, and physical bonds of their sibling units. It is this source of intimacy that sustains them even when separated.

As does the young Margaret and Robert Walton's exploration of the treasures of their uncle's library, Victor and Elizabeth's mutual educational pursuits represent an ideal Wollstonecraftian scenario. As Shelley's mother famously laments in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), women's subordination to men had become culturally instituted through the suppression of women's intellectual and rational education, their minds sacrificed for superficial training in domestic finery. "The minds of women are enfeebled by false refinement," Wollstonecraft writes; "they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty," and, moreover, "the instruction which women have hitherto received has only tended…to render them insignificant

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objects of desire."[10] For Wollstonecraft, the solution to this sociocultural imbalance lay in mutual education that would strengthen women's minds and bodies. Her "main argument," she writes, "is built on this simple principle, that if [woman] be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all" (304). To accomplish this "revolution in female manners" (321) and seek rationality for all creatures, both male and female, Wollstonecraft demands the introduction of equal education for young boys and young girls together, rooted not just in public institutions but in the private home as well.

In the home, Wollstonecraft believes, children might be educated in tandem, with the development of natural domestic affections balancing that of rational philosophy, before they are sent to school—where, Wollstonecraft argues, the sexes should still comingle rather than be educated separately:

> My observations on national education are obviously hints; but I principally wish to enforce the necessity of educating the sexes together to perfect both, and of making children sleep at home that they may learn to love home; yet to make private support, instead of smothering, public affections, they should be sent to school to mix with a number of equals, for only by the jostlings of equality can we form a just opinion of ourselves. (270)

Once sent to school, young women and young men should be educated in similar subjects, so that their minds might be equally developed, neither one taking precedence over the other:

> In public schools women, to guard against the errors of ignorance, should be taught the elements of anatomy and medicine, not only to enable them to take proper care of their own health, but to make them rational nurses of their infants, parents, and husbands… It is likewise proper, only in a domestic view, to make

[10] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 307, 309, 311.

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> women acquainted with the anatomy of the mind, by allowing the sexes to associate together in every pursuit… (274)

Thus with their communal childhood curricula, the brother-sister pairs of Robert and Margaret Walton and Victor Frankenstein and Elizabeth Lavenza exemplify Wollstonecraft's vision of equal education in which boys and girls are trained together at home and school. Their collective learning is balanced so much so that Victor and Elizabeth even study Latin together, a subject typically denied to young girls, even when their brothers might have been tutored in the subject—an inequality that any reader of George Elliot's *Mill on the Floss* will vividly recall.

III. Desperately Seeking Siblings

Altogether, the shared domestic activities of both leisure and education constitute the unique source of reciprocal sibling sympathies. As Alan Richardson has pointed out, late-nineteenth-century anthropologists theorized that sibling closeness arose from their shared physical environments in childhood.[11] In his *History of Marriage* (1891), for instance, biological anthropologist Edward Westermarck suggests that a tabooed aversion toward sexual incest in siblings develops out of the close proximity of their communal childhood home—and not, as Sigmund Freud would have it, as something that arises from natural biological drives that are innately rooted within a sexualized family system. As Westermarck demonstrates proximity serves as the primary preventative to future sexual congress between children. Regardless of their biological status, Westermarck finds, children who raised in the same home do not desire one another. In his survey, children

[11] Richardson, "Rethinking Romantic Incest: Human Universals, Literary Representation, and the Biology of Mind," *New Literary History* 32, no. 3 (2000): 553-572.

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reared from infancy together but contracted for future marriage have a much higher rate of divorce and infertility than those in cultures where endogamic marriages such as this are discouraged. Even children *not* related by blood or familial ties develop a natural aversion toward future sexual relations with pseudo-, foster-, or surrogate siblings since "early and regular domestic exposure triggers some sort of negative sexual imprinting in young children."[12] This co-socialization is why quasi-siblings raised together, even cousins or adopted kin, can feel as intimately united as siblings birthed by the same two parents.

Turning from anthropology to literature, Richardson finds a parallel phenomenon occurring in Romantic texts: "Indeed, so strong is the power of shared childhood experiences that adopted siblings, or foster siblings, or even neighbors who grew up together tend to have the same valence in Romantic narratives as do siblings by blood."[13] In Shelley's novel, both the creature and Walton honor the power of these reciprocal learning dynamics: they feel the strength of reciprocal childhood bonds forged out of shared experience. For Walton, these experiences are with his biological sister; for the creature, they are witnessed in the De Lacey siblings. As a result, each narrator later hopes to find male-male bonds that resemble the originating female-male relationships that first cultivated their understanding of sympathetic reciprocity. In contrast, however, Victor Frankenstein does not respect the brother-sister foundations of sympathy in quite the same way. Having grown up alongside Elizabeth Lavenza, his cousin and adoptive sibling, Victor oversteps the taboo Westermarck suggests *should* separate them from engaging in conjugal relations. Victor tries to turn Elizabeth from sister to wife, which is

[12] Richardson, "Rethinking Romantic Incest," 560.
[13] Richardson, "Rethinking Romantic Incest," 554.

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an error that Walton and the creature do not make.

Captain Walton's frame narrative, for instance, reveals not only his bond with his sister Margaret but also the ways in which he grounds his current search for a new companion upon their primary sororal-fraternal dynamic. In the deserted arctic wasteland, Walton seeks a replacement for the female sibling he left behind in England, a replication of the model of intimacy he cultivated with her. Explaining his dissatisfied longing to that same sister, Walton writes in his letters of his unfulfilled hopes for an acquaintance—or better yet, a friend—who could engage with him in this sacred bond of communion. In Walton's imagining, this man would partake equally in his woes and successes, but he lacks such a figure: "I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy," he laments; "I have no friend, Margaret" (54). To date, Walton has found no one that meets him on the same affective, psychological, or intellectual platforms.

What Walton truly yearns for is a male partner whose similarity to himself might go beyond the platonic roles of friendship: "I desire the company of a man," he writes to Margaret, "who could sympathize with me; whose eyes would reply to mine" (54). Using language that resonates as more erotic than collegial here, Walton hopes to "satisfy" his "want" and "desire" of that one "man" whose "eyes" would reflect the mirror to his own soul. He longs for someone to understand his motives without judgment or critique: "I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind" (55).

Walton seeks a brother. And, in fact, he uses that word only after the man who could potentially fulfill this role appears. When Victor, a stranger, emerges from the icy

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wastelands of the arctic, Walton believes he has now found his match. Having hungered for something more intimate and familiar—and familial—than those relations offered by his fellow shipmates, Walton defines for Margaret this longed-for relationship as one of siblinghood: "For my own part, *I begin to love him as a brother*. … I said in one of my letters, my dear Margaret, that I should find no friend on the wide ocean; yet I have found a man who, before his spirit had been broken by misery, *I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother of my heart*" (60-61, emphases added). Twice referring to Victor as his "brother" and associating that term with the romantic and intimate "love" of his own "heart," Walton links brotherhood not only to heightened emotional intensity but also to the models of sympathetic reciprocity that his own sister had developed with him: someone who elicits "sympathy and compassion" (60), who inspires his own "affection" (61), and who returns his own "admiration" and "pity" (61). Walton idealizes his budding attraction to Victor so much, indeed, that he projects onto Victor a sympathetic attachment that the man himself may not be capable of reciprocating. Walton tells Margaret that Victor "interests himself deeply in the employment of others" and "instinctively takes in the welfare of those who surround him" (61). While Victor may have fundamentally altered his personality by the time he reaches the arctic wastelands, it seems far more likely that Walton fantasizes Victor's emotional availability —like any good lovelorn suitor would do.

In his infatuation with Victor, Walton accentuates this brotherly adulation with the trappings of a romantic obsession: "even now in wreck [he is] so attractive and amiable" (60); "He is so gentle, yet so wise; his mind is so cultivated; and when he speaks,

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although his words are culled with the choicest art, yet they flow with rapidity and unparalleled eloquence" (61). Walton's obsequious language belies the accuracy of his report: he watches Victor always through his own rose-colored glasses tinted with aspirational love. Yet while the language of brotherhood is clouded with the delicacies of affection, for Mary Shelley and her husband Percy such intensity of identification would have been paramount to sympathy, an intimacy that resembles the idealistic "antitype" Percy Shelley conceptualizes in his essay "On Love" and in poems like "Epipsychidion."

Written during the summer in which *Frankenstein* was published, Percy's "On Love" proposes a model of psychological and spiritual mirroring embodied in one's relation to another person who resembles one's own self. What we yearn for most, Percy suggests, is the discovery of our self in another, someone whose "eyes…reply to" our own. The yearning rests so deep, he claims, that there is inherently "something within us which from the instant that we live and move thirsts after its likeness."[14] Hoping to surmount our sense of personal alienation, Percy explains, we seek this "antitype" who would be a mind, heart, and soul that beats alongside our own. What we thirst for is a

> meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of our own, an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities, which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret, with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own. (504)

We long for someone whose intellectual understanding meets ours, whose imagination enters the same fanciful spaces, and whose feelings can vibrate with that of our spirit.

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[14] Shelley, "On Love," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 504.

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Almost as an exemplar of this search for an "antitype," the notion of "sibling logic" implicitly aspires towards a similar dynamic of reciprocated self-other relations. As Stefani Engelstein notes, "[s]ibling love…both evokes and revokes the narcissism onto which it is so frequently read."[15] While self-love might require the dissolution of the other, sibling love maintains the other's separation while aligning self and other based on their innate likeness: "far from re-presenting an integral self with which to identify, the sibling hinders the illusions of both autonomy and integrity," Engelstein writes, since sibling logic favors a joining of multiple souls rather than a subsuming of one within the other.[16] Unlike a narcissistic obsession, sibling logic does not allow us to feel entirely autonomous in the first place.

Like Walton in his hunt for an antitype, for that "brother of my heart," Frankenstein's creature, too, seeks a sibling whose eyes will reply to his own. He yearns for one whose love will enable true reciprocity. Unlike Walton, the creature seeks this match in female form, though his model for such a relationship is parallel. Much as Walton bases his understanding of a brother-like antitype upon the model of his earlier brother-sister relationship with Margaret, the creature bases his search for a sibling-like relationship upon the reciprocity he has witnessed in the dynamic between Agatha and Felix. The De Lacey siblings become the creature's primary reference point for human interactions, and his conception of sympathetic attachment derives from their practice of physical and emotional reciprocity. When first learning about the concept of feelings, for instance, the creature develops his mode of psychological reciprocity with the two of

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[15] Stefani Engelstein, "Sibling Logic; or, Antigone Again," *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 42.
[16] Engelstein, "Sibling Logic," 42.

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them, as a third party. As observed earlier, the creature understands his own psychological responses as a direct reflection of the De Laceys' emotions: "when they were unhappy, I felt depressed; when they rejoiced, I sympathized in their joys" (129). The creature mirrors their emotions, using parallel syntax to reinforce the imitative nature of this inter-subjective experience.[17] In his own way, the creature feels he might be helping to carry the siblings' burdens as well.

Thus, at the climax of the novel, when the creature asks Victor to manufacture a female companion for him, he draws upon this example of Felix and Agatha's intimate reciprocity: he asks for a sister. Victor, however, cannot comprehend the creature's request for the human sympathies of siblinghood, and he assumes instead that the creature's demand must be reproductive in nature. Critics of the novel have made similar assumptions, insisting on the apparent truism that the creature seeks an Eve to his Adam, a sexual partner with whom to propagate a post-human world. What the creature hopes to find, however, is a female "other" just like himself. He wants one with whom he might share his physical and psychological burdens, much as Felix does with his sister Agatha and the young Robert Walton with his sibling Margaret.

Sounding uncannily like Walton writing to his sister, the creature laments his isolation, lacking a friend whose eyes might reply to his: "I am alone, and miserable;" the creature bemoans, because "man will not associate with me" (155). The lack of shared

[17] Interestingly, there is a slight misalignment of emotions in the De Laceys' otherwise equal sharing and in the creature's reflection. They apparently model misery externally with more aptitude than they do elation, for when the siblings "rejoiced" the creature feels only sympathy for their excitement, whereas when they perform unhappiness, he feels himself lowered into the pit of depression right along with them. At either extreme, however, the creature finds pleasure in his ability to produce in himself the same sentiments that he witnesses these others exhibit.

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sympathies has twisted him into a miserable soul, he believes: "My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor," he explains, "and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal" (158). To end his loneliness, the creature yearns not for a sexual partner but a sympathetic one: he wants an equal with whom he can live in direct "communion," a "sensitive being" that will share in his "affections" (158). With this fellow creature, he assures Victor, he will "become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which [he is] now excluded" (158). The creature echoes Walton's hope for a man who will show him both sympathy and compassion. Having come to understand human kinship from observing the De Laceys, the creature registers his own destitution in comparison; he knows he is removed from a society that rejects him based upon his shocking exterior appearance. But recognizing how important that reciprocity of shared affect can be, the creature requests that Victor build him a sister who is made of the exact same stuff as he, for "one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me" (155). If the female were to be as deformed and horrible as himself, "of the same species" and having "the same defects" (155), then she would treat him just like a sibling. And they would, after all, both be Victor's offspring.

Agatha and Felix's elegant dance of affective and physical reciprocity inspires the creature's imagining of a future time in which he and a female partner might forge a similar relation based upon mutual aid, collective labor, and emotional empathy. Like Agatha and Felix's collective domestic work, the creature believes his companion will be "of the same nature" as himself with the same cognitive assumptions about their needs for shelter and sustenance: she "will be content with the same fare" as he, and together they

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"shall make [their] bed of dried leaves" (157). Like the De Lacey siblings toiling inside and outside of their home, the creature and his partner will forage in the woods and cultivate their garden together: in the "vast wilds," he dreams, they will not kill other creatures, they will not "destroy the lamb and the kid, to glut [their] appetite," but rather they will seek innocuous nourishment in "acorns and berries" (157). With one another's support, these sibling-creatures will be gatherers rather than hunters; they have no need for violence when they can support one another in cultivating a homestead by favoring agriculture over animalistic predation. The creature hopes that they will create a "peaceful and human" home, uniting into a familial "we" and "us" that will release him from his current misery of isolation (157). Guided by the De Lacey siblings as the "only school in which [he] had studied human nature" (143), the creature yearns for a shared domestic economy and emotional reciprocity that will draw him back into the fold of humanity. He yearns for an Agatha to his Felix, not an Eve to his Adam.

IV. Victor's Kinship Miscalculations

When his wretch makes the "demand" upon Victor that he construct a "creature of another sex" (157), Victor fundamentally misconstrues the request. Drawing upon his own experience of women and of kinship relations, Victor assumes that what the creature desires most urgently is a spouse—likely because he, too, yearns to turn his platonic quasi-sister, Elizabeth Lavenza, into a sexualized wife. Victor's heteronormative assumptions about women's primary role as reproductive kin lead him to be wary of the generative ramifications that would be incurred by introducing this female creature: he wonders, "Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?"

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(174). Believing that "one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children" (174), Victor supposes that the creature adheres to the same strictures of reproductive futurity as does his own linear thinking: i.e., the concatenation of a symbolic Child along with a literalized offspring that would shape the determinacy of the future itself. In other words, Victor thinks (in line with the likes of queer theorist Lee Edelman, as discussed in Chapter One) that we can have no conception of the future without a conception (both figurative and literal) of children—at least, not in heteronormative paradigms.[18] Yet by associating the creature's request with a hungering for this ability to orchestrate his own future reproduction in the form of children—and fearing those children's impact on "everlasting generations"—Victor indeed projects his own desires: he is the one, after all, who attempts to manufacture his own offspring. This self-propagation is Victor's hungering, not the creature's. He believes the creature wants to populate the world with its own monstrous kind, and thus he fears what he deduces to be the only logical outcome of this situation: a monstrous reproduction of the wretch's progeny. The creature, however, is asking for something entirely different.

As we have seen, the "daemon" requests a fellow-creature not for the purposes of reproduction but for those of sympathetic reciprocity. From equal hideousness will emerge the female's identification, and, in his final command to Victor, the creature gestures towards this goal: "Let me see that I excite the sympathy of some existing thing; do not deny me my request!" (157). Mutual sympathies serve as the basis for the creature's conception of the female. Conveying this intention to Victor, the creature

[18] For a discussion of reproductive futurity, see chapter one of this dissertation, as well as Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

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draws explicitly upon that language of "human sympathies"—language that Walton, too, had used to describe his hunt for brotherhood: the creature yearns for the "interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being" (156). The creature thirsts for a family structure in which a back-and-forth "interchange" of "sympathies" between the two can serve as the foundation for affective intimacies and physical wellbeing—the minimum means of support he desires for both mind and soul. Following his meticulous observation of the De Lacey siblings, the creature craves not sexual union nor reproductive offspring but, rather, the interchange of mutual support between siblings. He desires that particular mode of sympathetic reciprocity that seems to be imbedded innately between brothers and sisters who share, in part, both blood and body.

Victor, however, misinterprets the creature, assuming that what he craves is a spouse. For Victor, women's roles are always reproductive; they must be situated within the vertical modes of reiterative kinship that preserves the patriarchal line. His story begins, after all, with an affirmation of genealogical structures, and his own position within them: "I am by birth a Genevese; and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics; and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation" (60). Just as Sir Elliot in Austen's *Persuasion* inscribes new members of his family into the local *Baronetage*, so too does Victor begin composing his oral autobiography by ensuring that everyone (including Walton as well as the novel's reader) knows precisely where he might fall within the hierarchies of heritage clans.

Unable to see male-female relations in contexts *other* than these linear reproductive

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families, Victor assumes the creature's conceptualizations of kinship to be the same as his own. Ironically, Victor overlooks even the biblical parallels of the creature's actual request: Adam and Eve, before becoming sexual partners and future parents, were once siblings. Clouded by his own God-complex, Victor translates the creature's demand—as have the novel's subsequent commentators—into the plea for a reproductive partner, for a "female companion, an Eve to comfort and embrace," as Mellor puts it.[19] But it is Victor, not the creature, who compulsively turns sisters into wives.

Victor indeed intends to convert Elizabeth Lavenza from his paternal cousin and non-biological pseudo-sister (what Shelley will call his "more than sister" in the 1831 version) into his conjugal mate. Raised in childhood together, Elizabeth and Victor develop the connections of early youth that, according to anthropologists like Westermarck, should deter the siblings, whether they are blood-related or not, from desiring copulation. Within the novel itself, Shelley signals the problematic nature of this conversion of Elizabeth from cousin and pseudo-sister to wife. In several letters sent to Victor from home, other family members—including Elizabeth herself—question whether Victor might now be reconsidering his intended marriage. Using these characters' voices, Shelley flags Elizabeth's transformation from the consanguineal to the conjugal as, at the very least, something potentially unwise.

Richardson notes this shift as well, suggesting that "Mary Shelley comes close to suggesting [Westermarck's] hypothesis herself as Alphonse Frankenstein, Victor's long-

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[19] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, 119.

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suffering father, seeks to account for his seeming coolness to Elizabeth."[20] In a letter to his son, Alphonse alludes to the possibility that Victor may have changed his mind about marrying Elizabeth, thereby calling attention to a new rationale that Victor might be using in order to move away from the pseudo-siblings' prearranged status. It is not just that Victor may have found a new lover in Europe, Alphonse considers, but also that such an exogamic, extra-familial attraction to a stranger might, in fact, be the more acceptable option. "I confess, my son," writes Alphonse,

> that I have always looked forward to your marriage with your cousin as the tie of our domestic comfort, and the stay of my declining years. You were attached to each other from your earliest infancy; you studied together, and appeared, in disposition and tastes, entirely suited to one another. But so blind is the experience of man, that what I conceived to be the best assistants to my plan, may have entirely destroyed it. *You, perhaps, regard her as your sister, without any wish that she might become your wife*. Nay, you may have met with another whom you may love; and, considering yourself bound in honour to your cousin, this struggle may occasion the poignant misery which you appear to feel. (162)

In showing his concern that Victor may choose not to marry Elizabeth after all, he gives Victor a moment to consider the ramifications of translating Elizabeth from cousin-sister to wife. In fact, Alphonse registers his own prior misconception: now, he sees that siblings and future spouses should not mix. As Westermarck's theory predicts, Victor should be romantically averse to Elizabeth as a sexual partner, for they should be predisposed in adulthood against marriage, since their intimate shared childhood environment should lead them to find one another unsuitable as sexual partners. Victor's father appears to be concerned that his son might in fact consciously now choose to cross lines that should not even be approached.

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[20] Richardson, "Rethinking Romantic Incest," 561.

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Importantly, Alphonse's statement differentiates between Elizabeth's dual kinship positions as cousin and sister. At first, he acknowledges his original desire that the two children would unite in marriage as cousins ("I have always looked forward to your marriage with your *cousin*"), and, toward the end of this passage, reiterates how their bond as cousins would have brought him great joy ("considering yourself bound in honour to your *cousin*"). While a marriage of cousins would satisfy Alphonse's utmost hopes for "domestic comfort," however, a marriage of siblings gives Alphonse pause. Reflecting the reasoning of a Westermarckian thinker, Alphonse raises the alternate possibility that Elizabeth might be too close for comfort, since she and Victor had spent so much of their young lives together before Victor departed from his parental home: "You, perhaps, regard her as your *sister*," Alphonse prompts Victor, "without any wish that she might become your wife." Alphonse wants Victor to marry his "cousin," but is not sure that marrying his "sister" would be a good idea.

While Alphonse does not explicitly warn Victor against marrying Elizabeth, neither is it simply the momentary lamentation of a grieving father. Moreover, Alphonse's cautionary observation is repeated by Elizabeth herself, who raises similar anxieties about her shifting place in the family home. Writing to Victor after his sojourn on the continent, Elizabeth echoes Alphonse, wondering, as does her prospective father-in-law, whether Victor has found a woman better suited for his marital bed:

> You well know, Victor, that our union had been the favourite plan of your parents ever since our infancy. We were told this when young, and taught to look forward to it as an event that would certainly take place. We were affectionate playfellows during childhood, and, I believe, dear and valued friends to one another as we grew older. *But as brother and sister often entertain a lively affection towards each other, without desiring a more intimate union, may not such also be our case*? Tell me, dearest

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> Victor. Answer me, I conjure you, by our mutual happiness, with simple truth—Do you not love another? (191, emphasis added)

While Elizabeth is concerned, of course, that Victor may no longer love her, her interrogatives suggest she retains doubts of her own: should he not, by now, love someone else? Shouldn't their sibling love prevent their sexual love? Indeed, taken in isolation, Elizabeth's remark registers as almost bizarre—could there be, in contrast to her statement, "some" siblings who *do* in fact desire a "more intimate union"? Would not such a union amount to incest? Elizabeth asks Victor to examine his preordained commitment to her as spouse, wondering, "may not such...be our case?...Do you not love another?" She seems almost to instigate him: *shouldn't* you love another? Perhaps their unique sibling-like intimacy, she considers, threatens to blur differentiations of kinship that should be more clearly maintained.

Insisting that he write a new script for Elizabeth regardless, transposing her from consanguineal to conjugal status, Victor further diminishes the significance of Elizabeth's original role as a lateral equal by replacing her with Henry Clerval—who, in turn, replaces Victor's actual, biological siblings as well, the two younger brothers who function only marginally in Victor's life. In essence, Victor transfers Elizabeth out of her sororal role entirely. Instead of building his desire for male-male relations with Clerval upon the originating brother-sister reciprocity he enjoys with Elizabeth—as Walton might do, for example—he writes her out of that script almost as soon as she enters it. He moves into an obsessive search for Clerval-as-brother at the same time that he shifts Elizabeth as past sister into a projected future wife. Victor supersedes his sororal bond by retroactively reframing the collective "we" that he had used to describe his early life with Elizabeth—

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in a mutuality that, we will recall, resembles the reciprocal sibling kinship of Agatha and Felix De Lacey. But Victor's was never a doubled but always a tripled relationship. After describing at length the "we" and "us" of his shared adventures with Elizabeth, Victor revises the "description of our domestic circle" to "include Henry Clerval," who was, he inserts in retrospect, "constantly with us" (67). Furthermore, Victor ignores biological siblinghood altogether. He treats his younger brothers like children, since they were "considerably younger than" him, and finds that his schoolmate Clerval "compensated for the deficiency" of these juvenile siblings (67). Displacing his biological kin with his chosen pseudo-siblings, Victor adopts a Westermarckian model of childhood intimacy, locating "siblings" in his surrogate family, Elizabeth and Clerval, rather than in those who share the same biological parentage—all the while corrupting that surrogacy with an attempt at forging legal and reproductive obligations.

Finally, while Victor desperately pursues Henry's friendship across land and sea, he rejects other offerings of surrogate brotherhood placed in front of him. Walton indeed makes repeated overtures towards developing a close companionship with his newfound "brother of my heart," telling Victor directly of "the desire [he] had always felt of finding a friend who might sympathize with [him]" (61). Confessing his deepest yearnings to Victor, Walton explains his search for an elder-brother figure: "'I wish therefore that my companion should be wiser and more experienced than myself, to confirm and support me; nor have I believed it impossible to find a true friend'" (61). In return, Victor rebuffs Walton, shuffling aside Walton's pleas for union entirely:

> 'I agree with you,' replied the stranger, 'in believing that friendship is not only a desirable, but a possible acquisition. I once had a friend, the most noble of human

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> creatures, and am entitled, therefore, to judge respecting friendship. You have hope, and the world before you, and have no cause for despair. But I—I have lost every thing, and cannot begin life anew.' (61)

Victor ascetically and even antisocially rejects Walton's overtures by reducing Walton's efforts to dry philosophical principles. While Victor may be willing to "judge respecting friendship," he will not enter into that vulnerable state. Ignoring the pleas of Walton's heart, Victor speaks mechanically in intellectual terms of "believing" in the "possible acquisition" of a "noble" "creature" and "friend." Because Victor has already removed himself from "every thing," he does not accept the hand of fraternity being extended his way.

V. Fraternity's Failures

The consanguineal intimacy that Walton desires in this "brother of his heart" cannot be located in Victor, in the end, for the two men seem to speak different languages. Oblivious to the brotherly friendship that Walton offers him, unable to solicit the fraternal intimacies he seeks from Clerval, and rejecting his biological brethren in the young William and Edward, Victor abandons the biological and surrogate brotherhood presented to him. Each attempt at manufactured kinship fails because Victor ignores the sympathetic reciprocities introduced to him by that original sororal figure, Elizabeth. By transforming this lateral, quasi-sibling relation into an affinal one, Victor problematically blends multiple kinship frameworks into one.[21] In parallel with his own recurring

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[21] In "The Monster in the Family: A Reconsideration of *Frankenstein*'s Domestic Relationships" (*Women's Writing* 6, no. 3 [1999]), Debra E. Best makes a similar argument, positing that "Shelley thus examines the potentially destructive aspects of the multiple relations in early nineteenth-century English families," and that "[r]ather than creating a complex network of bonds to pull the family together, Victor's domestic relationships create confusion concerning one's proper role in the family" (370). I concur, but would add that it is *Victor*'s unique mis-designation of familial roles

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nightmare, which replaces the image of his own dead mother with that of Elizabeth, Victor consciously substitutes his sister for his parent. In other words, he never allows Elizabeth to occupy her primary sibling role, but instead conflates her with the positions of wife and mother.

Moreover, by selecting this pseudo-sibling as his marriage partner, Victor collapses the heteronormative paradigm he seeks to maintain: by marrying his quasi-sister, he generates no new kinship ties that would ensure the continuity of his own lineage. Kinship depends, after all, upon external exchange. As Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests, kinship relies upon the movement of a daughter or sister from one clan to another, in an act that forges connections between two previously unrelated cohorts. This exchange thereby strengthens patriarchal bonds between the male giver (father or brother) and the male recipient (husband). In selecting Elizabeth, Victor creates no new exogamous ties outside of the Frankenstein tribe. In acting as Elizabeth's giver as well as her recipient, he gifts her only to himself.

Elizabeth's value for Victor does not even function in the realm of lived kinship. Where she *does* partake in a particular cultural transaction between men is as a story herself, a tale that can be "given" from one man to another, through an exchange process that erases her lived reality. Victor converts Elizabeth's story—along with those of Justine, Agatha, and Safie—into narratives that he can "sell" to his eager recipient, Walton, as he attempts to solicit one-sided sympathy from that audience. He selfishly hopes to find in Walton the help he needs to hunt down the creature on the ice. Victor's motivation

and his inability to accept a more diversified model of kinship—and not necessarily the multiple functions of the family more generally speaking—that fails here.

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becomes clear when, for instance, he concludes his own retelling of Elizabeth's version of Justine's story by fashioning himself to be the pitiable victim: "But I—I was a wretch," Victor announces as the close of Volume II, "and none ever conceived of the misery that I then endured" (110). When, later, he tells Walton about Elizabeth's death, he similarly dramatizes his own suffering, hoping to garner further sympathetic allegiances: "Great God! why did I not then expire! Why am I here to relate the destruction of the best hope, and the purest creature of the earth" (198). Presenting these women's stories as verbal currency, as a means by which to shape his own victimhood, Victor hopes to elicit Walton's sympathy as remuneration for this narrative offering. He attempts to gain Walton's identification—the same thing that the creature, indeed, has asked him to provide in the form of a sibling.

But Victor neglects the lived presence of his various "sisters"—and women in general—in favor of turning them into, on the one hand, reproductive bodies, and, on the other hand, discursive histories that he can retell to other male listeners. In this concentric multi-layering of narratives, Victor tells his own tale, but inside that tale lie stories of Elizabeth and, further inside hers, Justine Moritz; while he re-narrates the creature's elegant autobiography, inside of *that* story lie those of Agatha De Lacey and, in the innermost core of the entire novel, Felix's prospective wife Safie. Women's stories are exchanged while the women themselves are erased. At the outskirts, Margaret Saville's ghostly presence sits as recipient of all—a sister to hold the stories of so many others.

Conclusion: Sibling Stories

In its entirety, *Frankenstein*'s multiple, embedded frame narratives work to distance

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oral narratives from their originating speaker. As Beth Newman helpfully notes, this story-within-a-story structure tears stories from their characters, such that "a story can be cut off from its origin in a particular speaker," and, moreover, from the life which that story depicts.[22] And, since the "production and transmission of narrative" acts as "compensation" for a sympathetic exchange that fails elsewhere, this novel depends upon such discursive relationships as generated between auditor and audience.[23] A story, once separated from its ontological roots, "achieve[s] autonomy"; as Newman explains, "it now functions as a text."[24] For Shelley, it is women's stories in particular that suffer this fate: stories of women's lives are separated from the minds, bodies, and voices from which they come. It is women who are traded as narrative commodities, converted into the currency that men exchange in their economy of sympathy. It is women's stories that can cross the boundaries between alienated men. But in Victor's world, these discursive transactions work only in one direction.

Victor interpolates women into a kind of "traffic" in which their value replicates the complaint Gayle Rubin famously makes of kinship and culture: "A woman is a woman," Rubin remarks, "She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, a human dictaphone in certain relations."[25] In *Frankenstein*, a woman is a woman, but she becomes a wife and mother through Victor's miscalculated appropriation of his surrogate siblinghood. She also becomes a story, and, as such, she

[22] Beth Newman, "Narratives of Seduction and the Seductions of Narrative: The Frame Structure of *Frankenstein*," *ELH* 53, no. 1 (1986): 142.
[23] Britton, "Novelistic Sympathy in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Studies in Romanticism* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 3.
[24] Newman, "Narratives of Seduction," 147.
[25] Gayle Rubin, "Traffic in Women," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 158.

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serves the purpose of aligning a male storyteller with his male audience—resembling, perhaps, a similar erotic triangulation that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes in *Between Men*, in which homosocial male bonds are solidified through this trafficking, via the "use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property."[26]

Trading Elizabeth's story—and "trafficking" her into his own marriage prospect—fails to work for Victor, however, since Shelley wants to critique his narcissistic rejection of the lived kinship that surrounds him. Victor's monomaniacal obsession with manufactured rather than biological relations places him in the role of God and Creator, a transgression against "human sympathies" for which Shelley will not stand. By choosing his own artificial constructions of kinship, rejecting the sororal frameworks modeled by Elizabeth and other pseudo-sisters in his life, Victor relies upon patriarchal models of reproduction and replication, for he comprehends the family as turning upon genealogy and generation. In his search for a sympathetic listener, Victor seeks a paradigm of sympathy that parallels his paradigm of kinship: uni-directional, linear, reiterative, and passed from one man to another. But in the figures of Walton and the creature, and in the story of Agatha and Felix De Lacey, Shelley offers us an alternative: a model of sympathetic reciprocity imbedded in the complementary dynamics of siblinghood—an interchange of physical and emotional support that even Baillie's and Smith's notions of sympathy do not fully embrace.

Thus at the center of *Frankenstein*'s concentric narratives lies the story of a woman.

[26] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 26.

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The innermost tale, "the smallest doll in the set,"[27] as it were, is *not* an oral history recited by a man, but a written document penned by a woman: the letters written by Safie. As a tangible symbol of the women's narratives that have been circulating inside this text, the packet of Safie's letters passes from one male speaker's hands to another's. Through this process, the letters move from the innermost heart of the narrative's many layers to the outermost frames of the book, traveling "from the geographical, psychological, and narrative center of Mary Shelley's novel out to its margins."[28] The letters acquire meaning through these interactive exchanges between men: the creature records them, hands the material objects to Victor as evidence of the veracity of his own tale; Victor delivers them to Walton; Walton sends them to his sister back in England, along with the package of his own journals. Transacted as payment by men who are hoping to gain sympathy back in exchange, Safie's letters accumulate signification as they migrate from one writing desk to another, gaining sense only from the stories told *about* the story written inside.

Why, then, does the creature ultimately choose to first record and then retain the transcription of Safie's letters as material evidence of his own experiences in the woods? Indeed, as I have been arguing, the model of kinship that the creature hopes to recreate for himself is that of Agatha and Felix, the brother and sister whose sympathetic reciprocities so inspire his infatuation with humanity in its most pristine condition. For what reason does he then choose Safie's letters, the representation of an affinal

[27] Criscillia Benford, "'Listen to my tale': Multilevel Structure, Narrative Sense Making, and the Inassimilable in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Narrative* 18 no. 3 (2010): 324.
[28] Joyce Zonana, "'They Will Prove the Truth of My Tale': Safie's Letters as the Feminist Core of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 21, no. 2 (1991): 170.

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relationship between future husband and wife, as the visible proof of his true history?

In the end, the creature's exchange of Safie's letters perhaps serves as an ultimate confirmation of Victor's corruptive influence over the world of this novel. Attempting to write himself into a paradigm that Victor—and other humans like him—would understand, the creature allows his own self-identity to disintegrate, and attempts instead to interpolate himself into a culture and a language that has always already rejected him. Retaining the letters as a translated artifact, the creature tries to inscribe himself into kinship using Victor's frameworks. Having been rejected from the world that he understands, that of the physical and the observed and the sympathetic—that world of Agatha and Felix's reciprocal sibling exchanges, in other words—the creature struggles to render himself legible in a world familiar to Victor, a world of heteronormative genealogies. He does not recognize, of course, that this is a world even Victor fails to embrace.

But where the creature understands himself best is in the world of the De Laceys, and it is this model of kinship that the creature represents. As a blank slate, uncorrupted and un-socialized by the human realm, this manufactured "being" chooses to shape his identity through sibling kinship, even though he feels obligated to sacrifice this story in favor of Safie's, whose letters might purchase him entry into a world fallen into language, culture, marriage, and reproduction. Where he truly feels at home is in relation to siblings. Despite the fact that Victor can never hear his request—despite the fact that Victor will respond *only* to the records of marriage rather than to the stories of siblings—it is indeed this brother-sister ethic of care that the creature most desires. It is this ethic of

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sympathetic sibling reciprocity that the novel, freed from Victor's influence, most desires. And it is, in the end, this fraternal and sororal inter-subjectivity that Romanticism itself most desires.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

TALIA MICHELE VESTRI
Visiting Assistant Professor
College of the Holy Cross

One College Street | tmvcroan@bu.edu
Worcester, Massachusetts 01610 | 617.877.1301

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

College of the Holy Cross
Visiting Assistant Professor in 19th-Century British Poetry — 2017-

EDUCATION

Boston University
Ph.D. in English Literature — Jan. 2018
Graduate Certificate in Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies — Jan. 2018
M.A. in English and American Literature — May 2010

Vassar College
A.B. in English with honors, Phi Beta Kappa, Departmental Distinction — May 2005

University of Oxford
Visiting Student Certificate in British Literature, St. Peter's College — 2003–2004

PUBLICATIONS

"Wordsworth's Sibling Logic: 'We are Seven' and 'Tintern Abbey.'" Accepted at *European Romantic Review*.

"Queer(ing) Kinship: Fraternal Reproduction and Sororal Transmission in Shelley's *The Cenci*." Accepted for *Material Transgressions: Beyond Romantic Bodies, Genders, Things*, eds. Suzanne L. Barnett, Ashley Cross, and Kate Singer. Volume under review at Liverpool University Press.

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ONLINE PUBLICATIONS (SELECTED)

"Dear Friend, Dearest Sister," *The Keats Letters Project*, Sept. 10, 2017 http://keatslettersproject.com/correspondence/dear-friend-dearest-sister/

"*Pride and Prejudice* and Politics," *NASSR Graduate Student Caucus Blog*, Dec. 18, 2016 http://www.nassrgrads.com/pride-and-prejudice-and-politics/

"How Far Feminism?" *NASSR Graduate Student Caucus Blog*, Dec. 1, 2015 http://www.nassrgrads.com/how-far-feminism/

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"Reading Romanticism Today: Artistry of the Sublime," *NASSR Graduate Student Caucus Blog*, Nov. 11, 2015
http://www.nassrgrads.com/reading-romanticism-today-artistry-of-the-sublime/
"Reading Romanticism Today (A Pedagogical Experiment)," *NASSR Graduate Student Caucus Blog*, Sept. 20, 2015
http://www.nassrgrads.com/reading-romanticism-today-a-pedagogical-experiment/
"Will the Real Mr. Darcy Please Stand Up?" *NASSR Graduate Student Caucus Blog*, May 11, 2015
http://www.nassrgrads.com/will-the-real-mr-darcy-please-stand-up/
"The Modernization of Elizabeth Bennet," *NASSR Graduate Student Caucus Blog*, March 5, 2015
http://www.nassrgrads.com/the-modernization-of-elizabeth-bennet/
"More Frankenstein(s): Cumberbatch, Miller, and the National Theatre," *NASSR Graduate Student Caucus Blog*, Nov. 19, 2014
http://www.nassrgrads.com/more-frankensteins-cumberbatch-miller-and-the-national-theatre/
"Romantics Today: Where Art Thou, Queer Theory?" *NASSR Graduate Student Caucus Blog*, Oct. 23, 2014
http://www.nassrgrads.com/romantics-today-where-art-thou-queer-theory/

HONORS & AWARDS

Outstanding Teaching Fellow in English (2016-17), Boston University	May 2017
Senior Teaching Fellowship, BU Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies	Fall 2016
Summer Fellowship, English Department, Boston University	Summer 2016
Graduate Student Travel Bursary, NASSR Conference, Berkeley	August 2016
Graduate Student Travel Award, MLA Convention, Austin	January 2016
Graduate Student Travel Bursary, NASSR Conference, Winnipeg	August 2015
Clarimond Mansfield Award, BU Center for the Humanities	May 2015
Alice Brennan Humanities Award, BU Center for the Humanities	May 2015
Presentation Travel Award, BU Graduate Student Organization	May 2015
Graduate Writing Fellowship, BU Arts & Sciences Writing Program	AY 2014–2015
Research Fellowship, BU Graduate School of Arts & Sciences	Summer 2014
David Bonnell Green Prize, Boston University	May 2010
Teaching Fellowships (various), BU English Department	AY 2009–2017
Departmental Fellowship for M.A. studies, Boston University	AY 2008–2009
Fellowship for M.A. studies, Vassar College	AY 2008–2009

CONFERENCE PANELS & PAPERS

Special Session Co-Organizer and Co-Presider, — January 2018
"Is Kinship Always Already Queer?: Counternormative Communities in the Nineteenth Century"
MLA Convention, New York, New York

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"Sister Lives: Austen's Sororal *Bildungsromane* & the Imagining of History" August 2017
North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, Ottawa, Canada
"Queer(ing) Kinship: Fraternal Reproduction and Sororal Transmission in *The Cenci*" June 2017
British Women Writers Conference, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
"Perverting Sex: Incestuous Inheritance and Fraternal Reproduction in Shelley's *The Cenci*" October 2016
International Conference on Romanticism, Colorado Springs, Colorado
Session Organizer, "Romanticism and Gender: The Discontented Divide" August 2016
Paper, "Dear, Dear Sisters and Dear, Dear Friends: Rethinking the Relation of Romantic Siblings"
North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, Berkeley, California
Special Session Organizer, "Romantic Genealogies of Kinship" January 2016
Paper, "Spots of Sibling Time: Relational Networks in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*"
MLA Convention, Austin, Texas
"Romantic *Antigone*; or, The Political Rights of Kinship" August 2015
North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, Winnipeg, Canada
"Building the *Bildung* of Sisterhood in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*" June 2015
British Women Writers Conference: Relations, New York, New York
"Spots of Sibling Time: The Networked Logic of Kinship and Selfhood in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*" Sept. 2014
International Conference on Romanticism, Minneapolis, Minnesota
"The Traffic in Tales: Narratives of Women, Women as Narratives in Keats and Chaucer" August 2013
North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, Boston, Massachusetts

Teaching Experience

Department of English, College of the Holy Cross
Critical Reading and Writing: Multigenre Fall 2017
The Romantic Revolution Fall 2017
Summer Challenge Program for High School Students, Boston University
Persuasive Writing July 2017
Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies Program, Boston University
Critical Issues in Women's Studies: "Why Marry?: The History, Fantasy, and Reality of Married Sexuality" Fall 2016
Department of English, Boston University
Reading Shakespeare 2: "Shakespeare on Love, Hate & Everything" Spring 2017
Introduction to Fiction: "Women's Voices" Spring 2016
Freshman Seminar: "Reading Romanticism Today" Fall 2015
Freshman Seminar: "What Would Jane Do?: Austen & her Audiences" Fall 2013
Literary Types: Poetry Spring 2012
Literary Types: Fiction: "Family Fictions" Fall 2011
Literature and the Art of Film, TA for Professor Lee Monk S 2011, F 2009

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College of Arts & Sciences Writing Program, Boston University
- Writing & Research Seminar: "Me, Myself & I: Poets on Selfhood" Spring 2015
- Writing Seminar: "Me, Myself & I: Poets on Selfhood" Fall 2014
- Writing & Research Seminar: "All in the Family: Stories of American Life" S 2013
- Writing Seminar: "All in the Family: Stories of American Life" Fall 2012

Writing Fellow Tutor, Educational Resource Center, Boston University 2012–2014

SERVICE

Conference Core Organizer, "The Personal Is Still Political: Challenging Marginalization through Theory, Analysis & Praxis" (March 31-April 1, 2017), Consortium for Graduate Studies in Women, Gender, Culture, and Sexuality at MIT AY 2016–2017
Graduate Assistant, Boston Area Romanticist Colloquium (BARC) AY 2015–2017
Blog Writer & Board Member, NASSR Graduate Student Caucus AY 2014–2017
Member & Presenter, BU Grad Student Writing Workshop AY 2012–2017
Critical Pedagogies Group, BU Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies AY 2014–2016
Research & Editorial Assistant, Professor Joseph Bizup, Boston University AY 2015–2016
Senior Editorial Assistant, *Studies in Romanticism* AY 2015–2016
Editorial Assistant, *Studies in Romanticism* AY 2012–2015
Participant & Presenter, BU Humanities Dissertation Seminar Spring 2015, 2016
Conference Assistant, NASSR, Boston August 2013
Conference Chair, "Clash Zones: Identities in (R)Evolution" Consortium for Graduate Studies in Women, Gender, Culture, and Sexuality at MIT AY 2012–2013
Department Representative, Undergrad Open House Series April 2012

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Boston Area Romanticist Colloquium
British Women Writers Association
International Conference on Romanticism Modern Language Association
Modern Language Association
North American Society for the Study of Romanticism
NASSR Graduate Student Caucus

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