Affect in the English Novel

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Whether the English novel descends from *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and nautical tales, or from *Pamela* (1740) and conduct books, it is clear that it has always depended on the representation and orchestration of emotion. Its characters, our surrogates, are endowed with emotions; and we, its readers, are drawn into their affective world. (Thus in a general sense the novel contributes to the development of interiority in the modern period that is also evident in, for example, the practice of diary-keeping.) Sutured together from nouns, adjectives, verbs, and the occasional illustration, fictional characters come to life for us, and we may weep at the death of Clarissa; cry or laugh at the death of Little Nell; suffer agonies of nonetheless pleasurable suspense at the fate of Marian Halcombe, or even Bridget Jones; or be titillated by the adventures of Fanny Hill or Anastasia Steele. Not all novels generate the more deeply-felt emotions: one of the most familiar of affects is the warm glow that readers derive from the company of such characters as Dickens' Pickwick or Alexander McCall Smith's Precious Ramotswe. Nor does all readerly affect depend on identification with characters, or the reality-effects of prose fiction: we may be irritated or delighted by the non-realist language-games of Laurence Sterne or Tom McCarthy; or amused by the narratorial observations of Jane Austen. Even boredom has its place in the emotional repertoire of fiction: as Leah Price (2000) has shown, skipping and skimming have been part of the reading experience of the novel since its beginning. There are, of course, others sorts of emotions attached to novel reading, such as the pleasure we may take in reading a particularly attractive volume, but such pleasures are outside the scope of my discussion here, and can better be discussed as a type of collector's delight.

The affective power of the novel was a commonplace in the eighteenth century, and familiar enough in the nineteenth, before it suffered something of an eclipse in the twentieth century. In the years of modernism, and modernist criticism, emotion became increasingly associated with genre fiction, and naïve responses to literature. In recent years, however, there has been something of a revival in the fortunes of affect, although as Emma Mason points out, the use of the academic term "affect" suggests that critics still worry about getting too close to emotion (Mason 2007). Some of the new interest in emotion and reading stems from work in the fields of biology and neuroscience that suggests that, pace René Descartes, the body and mind are not separate systems; that feeling and thinking are not discrete activities; that cognitive decision-making is shaped by emotion; and that emotions might be considered as a form of embodied cognition (Damasio 2005; Howard 1999). Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, for example, argues that "emotions and feelings may not be intruders in the bastion

of reason at all: they may be enmeshed in its networks for worse *and* for better (2005, xii) In literary and cultural studies, affect theory has been driven by the work of, among others, D.A. Miller, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, and Laurent Berlant, all of whom have focused attention on the cultural work that emotion performs. Miller (1988) was something of a pioneer in taking literally the somatic effects of the Victorian "sensation novel", though his Foucauldian readings suggest that our emotional responses are put to disciplinary use. Sedgwick and Frank's work on Silvan Tomkins marks an epoch in affect theory, not least because they use Tomkins' theories of affect (he names nine: shame, contempt, disgust, startle, fear, interest, anger, distress, joy) not only to reconceive reading and desire, but to point the limitations of contemporary literary theory, and reading practices that can see nothing but the oscillation between subversion and hegemony. The most complex of texts, and the most polychromatic readerly affects, can be reduced to "256,000 shades of gray" (1995, 517) beneath a skeptical Foucauldian gaze; affects are quickly reduced to Affect, and historicized away. Berlant, on the other hand, reminds us of the often conservative cultural work that affect performs, arguing that "affect-saturated institutions (like the nation and the family)" can be used to paper over what are really structural problems. (2007, 638). These are not the only theories of affect to surface in the last few decades. The rise of trauma theory, inspired by, inter alia, Freud's account on shock and the repetition compulsion, as well as by clinical work on survivor memory and post-traumatic stress disorders, has also foregrounded issues of affect. Specifically, such work investigates the way in which the most painful events lodge themselves in individual or cultural memory: the work of Cathy Caruth (1996) and others suggests that, escaping conscious registration, such traumas lodge in the mind, or text, but their traces can be recovered by the clinician or critic (For a thoughtful critique of trauma theory see Radstone [2007]). Working from a different perspective, one attuned to the everyday shocks of modernity rather than specific historical traumas, critics of melodrama have also suggested ways of reading for affect (Singer 2001; Daly 2009).

Nonetheless, at the time of writing, criticism remains uncomfortable with the emotional dimension of texts. A number of writers on this field suggest that what troubles us most about fictional emotion -- especially the tearful kind, as opposed to, say, the horrific or the erotic -- is that it threatens to destroy our comfortable critical distance. Our hostile critical vocabulary might suggest some of the reasons for this. "Cloying" literally means suffocating, and our critical hostility to emotional texts might be because they come too close to us, refusing the critical arms-length to which we are accustomed, rather as texts that disgust us do (Bown 19). It is as if literary form fails to do its work of framing, and we feel ourselves physically affected, moved to tears by scenes that we know are fictional, even when they draw directly on real history. Lauren Berlant notes that the word "mawkish", another familiar pejorative for the sentimental, comes from an Old Norse word for maggot, suggesting that there is something deathly about emotional texts. We may recall Aeneas's famous line about the moving effect of representation: "sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt', which can be translated very loosely as "there are tears in things, and the weight of life touches us". If fictional affect makes us uneasy, perhaps it is because it reminds us that life -- for other people as well as ourselves -- is often hard and

always brief. Whether or not this is the case, we still feel more suspicious of texts that try to make us cry than those that deploy humour, suspense, or terror, or even the erotic.

The Eighteenth Century

In the second half of the eighteenth century the novel's emotional dimension came to be understood in terms of two distinct sets of ideas. On the one hand, benevolist theories of sentiment suggested that good conduct derives from innate goodness; such feelings as compassion, are hard-wired, and are an imprint of the divine. Imaginative literature can help to develop this natural compassion for our fellow human beings, and thus has a valuable social role to play. On the other hand, theories of the sublime suggested a more physiological account of our emotional engagement with the world: our perception of the beautiful gives us a feeling of pleasure; our perception of that which is frightening or overwhelming produces a form of painful astonishment or fear, as Edmund Burke argues in his 1757 essay on the sublime:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling … Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer, are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasures which the most learned voluptuary could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination, and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body could enjoy … When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful (Burke 1992, 36-7).

Burke was taking up the idea of the sublime from Longinus and other classical sources, and applying to it the empirical imagination of the age of reason. The theories of benevolism for their part derived from, inter alia, the ideas of the Cambridge Platonists and Lord Shaftesbury (Taylor 1992). Benevolism accompanied the rise of a literature of sensibility, which encompassed the sentimental novels of Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith, Henry Mackenzie, and others. In such fiction fine feeling, notably compassion for the sufferings of others, marks the central characters. The reader is to be morally improved through the vicarious experience of such emotions. As the contemporary *Sentimental Magazine* put it, "writing that edifies should arouse the 'tear of compassion'"(Miller 2001, 29). Burke also believed in the power of sympathy, and indeed argues that it is the basis of our enjoyment of literature and art: "It is by this principle chiefly that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, transfuse their passions from one breast to another, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself (41). But we usually consider that the theories of Burke and others on the sublime resonate with a different strain in late eighteenth-century fiction: the Gothic novel. The protagonists of these novels are, like their sentimental peers, marked by their emotions more than by their intellects, but they are more likely to be suffering solitary terror than enjoying a community of benevolent feeling. In some novels of this stamp

the terror springs from things that remain undescribed, as with the experiences of Ann Radcliffe's Emily St Aubert in the rambling Italian castle of Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794): what is behind that black curtain that upsets her so? But elsewhere the physical and mental anguish of the characters depend less on the obscure and the veiled, and more on explictly realized horrors. In Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), for instance, an escaped prisoner of the Inquisition describes his reaction at seeing the Madrid crowd seize a man from the midst of a religious procession and murder him:

Amid yells like those of a thousand tigers, the victim was seized and dragged forth, grasping in both hands fragments of the robes of those he had clung to in vain, and holding them up in the impotence of despair … The cry was hushed for a moment, as they felt him in their talons, and gazed on him with thirsty eyes. Then it was renewed, and the work of blood began. They dashed him to the earth–tore him up again–flung him into the air–tossed him from hand to hand, as a bull gores the howling mastiff with horns right and left. Bloody, defaced, blackened with earth, and battered with stones, he struggled and roared among them, till a loud cry announced the hope of a termination to a scene alike horrible to humanity, and disgraceful to civilization … I saw, I felt, but I cannot describe, the last moments of this horrible scene. Dragged from the mud and stones, they dashed a mangled lump of flesh right against the door of the house where I was. With his tongue hanging from his lacerated mouth, like that of a baited bull; with, one eye torn from the socket, and dangling on his bloody cheek; with a fracture in every limb, and a wound for every pore, he still howled for 'life–life–life–mercy!' till a stone, aimed by some pitying hand, struck him down. He fell, trodden in one moment into sanguine and discoloured mud by a thousand feet … It is a fact, Sir, that while witnessing this horrible execution, I felt all the effects vulgarly ascribed to fascination. (Maturin 1820, vol. 3, 29-31)

It is a passage rich in grand-guignol detail, but it is also offers an account of the fascinating power of violence. Lest we think this grotesque violence is only the stuff of fiction, Maturin inserts a historical footnote that links the gruesome episode to the murder of Arthur Wolfe, Viscount Kilwarden, in Dublin's Thomas Street during Robert Emmett's rebellion of 1803. This should remind us that the popularity of Gothic was not due only to its resonance with the theories of Burke: its heyday coincided with, inter alia, the French Revolution and the 1798 rising in Ireland; and, as Karen Halttunen (1998) has suggested, its vogue coincides with the appearance of new attitudes to pain and the body.

Victorian Emotion

The literatures of sensibility and of terror declined in critical esteem in the nineteenth century, though the gothic lived on in popular fiction well into the century in such fare as James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood* (1845-7). More generally, aspects of the sentimental novel and the gothic survived in melodrama, which was not only the dominant theatrical form of the period, but also a powerful transgeneric mode that informed fiction too, as well as poetry and the visual arts. Peter Brooks (1995) suggests that the melodramatic imagination is structured by the figures of antithesis and hyperbole: good is not only opposed to evil, but the good characters are purely

good, and the bad are very wicked indeed. In this polarized world the sympathy of the reader is secured by the presentation of "virtue in distress". That is to say, we are moved to a deep emotional engagement, to the point of tears even, by the plight of the good, innocent, and powerless as they face poverty, hardship, and even physical or mental abuse at the hands of their persecutors. Children, orphans in particular, are thus the perfect centres for the plots of melodrama. The eponymous heroine of *Jane Eyre* (1847) is a complex version of this friendless orphan-figure; mistreated by her remaining family at Gateshead, she suffers privations and humiliations at Lowood and Thornfield before she finds a family, love and fortune. A more clear-cut instance is Dickens' Oliver Twist, who is starved and flogged in the workhouse, beaten by the Sowerberrys, and preyed upon in London, before the narrative rewards him with modest wealth and a new family. A similar scheme of good versus evil against a backdrop of urban menace informs one of the nineteenth century's most internationally successful novels, Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-3). In Sue's novel, the intrepid Duke of Gerolstein fights the career-criminal Schoolmaster and his associates, and saves the tender-hearted and much-abused La Goualeuse from life on the streets. He later finds out that she is his long-lost daughter, and takes her away to a life at court; but unable to shake off her past, she dies young. The novel inspired much of the urban crime fiction of the 1840s, with its Anglophone imitators including G.W.M. Reynolds' long-running serial, *The Mysteries of London* (1844-6), and his historical *Mysteries of the Court of London* (1848-56), as well as numerous other titles matched to the streets of New York, Philadelphia, and Melbourne.

But it is Dickens, lifelong lover of the drama, whose work is most suffused with melodrama, and Oliver is just one of many orphans and vulnerable children who walk and hobble the pages of his novels: Smike, Little Nell, and Jo are a few of the best known of these. Like the dramatists of the day, Dickens aimed to move the reader with various carefully-wrought "effects". As Bethan Carney (2012) has shown, contemporary and posthumous reactions to Dickens and his emotional effects were not always positive, with Trollope mocking him as "Mr Popular Sentiment" in 1855, and G.H. Lewes dismissing him in 1872 by claiming that "'the logic of feeling seems the only logic he can manage. Thought is strangely absent from his works" (Carney 2012 14). But the reading public did not, by and large, share this distaste, and Dickens' most emotional fare was generally his most successful.

One of Dickens' greatest achievements in this line is his creation in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) of a seasonal modern legend. The story is remarkable for its shaping of a particular image of Christmas as a time for kindness, family and feasting, some of which he borrows from the American writer Washington Irving's account of the festivities at Bracebridge Hall in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-20). But its most emotionally powerful passages describe Scrooge's encounters with himself as a lonely boy, left behind at school while others go home for the holidays, an image inspired, perhaps, by Dickens' own loneliness when the rest of his family was consigned to the Marshalsea debtors' prison:

"The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still." Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed … They

went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be … Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the panelling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with a softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears. (Dickens 2003, 58)

Scrooge weeps at his own past and for some 170 years we have wept with him. Dickens' conception of Christmas as a sort of emotional time-machine has had a deep impact on subsequent popular culture: not only has it inspired numerous adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* itself, but it also echoes through artefacts as different as James Joyce's "The Dead" (1914) and Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).

It is worth remembering, though, that Dickens does not always aim at the tear-ducts, and that his first great success was the episodic *Pickwick Papers* (1836-7), a novel that aims more at creating a certain pleasant warmth in the reader than any very vivid emotion. Stirring tales are inset within the narrative, but they do not long detain us from the genially comic world of the Pickwickians and Sam Weller. Good humour is, perhaps, one of the more under-theorized aspects of affect, but it is a significant ingredient of the novel tradition. In shaping his particular variety of light comedy, Dickens clearly draws on the picaresque work of his eighteenth-century predecessors, and he in turn is a model for later writers in the genial tradition. Among the more successful narratives to follow in this line of gentle homosocial comedy are Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (1889) and P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster novels and stories (1915-74). More arguably, perhaps, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851) can be seen as a female alternative to this form of narrative.

In the nineteenth century the Brontës carried forward aspects of the Gothic novel, as Dickens, Gaskell and others did aspects of the sentimental, but the books most famous in their day for emotional impact were the "sensation novels" of the 1860s. As their name suggests, the sensation novels of such writers as Wilkie Collins, M.E. Braddon and Mrs Henry Wood, aimed to produce a direct response in the reader. The label comes to fiction from the "sensation drama" of the same era, in which the audience's attention was held in a vice-like grip by elaborate and spectacular scenes, often last-minute rescues. Some sensation novels feature suspenseful set-pieces of this kind, but they are also characterized by strong mystery plots, and they look forward to the twentieth-century detective novel as much as to the thriller. Critics at the time described such fiction as "preaching to the nerves", suggesting that the reader is imagined as an embodied subject (Mansel 1863). To this extent we can see that the response to sensation fiction – perhaps even the conjuring up of such a subgenre from novels that are often quite different – indicates that critics were troubled by issues of class and taste – the embodied, easily moved, "culinary" reader was a figure who seemed too much part of the mob, in a decade in which expansion of

the franchise was once again a pressing issue. If we historicize the affective component of these novels – the extent to which they operate on the body of the reader -- we can see that their attention-engineering techniques are consonant with a more general interest in attention and distraction in these years, and they are thus very much the fruit of an industrial culture. But as Beth Palmer (2008) has argued, in the case of Mrs Henry Wood the emotional punch of her fiction also owes something to the affective dimension of evangelicalism.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the emotional potential of the novel was put to a new use: creating sympathy with our fellow creatures rather than our fellow human beings. Humanitarian attitudes to animals had gained considerable ground by then, not least through the efforts of the Society for Prevention of Cruely to Animals, founded in 1824; Darwin's work had also played a role in fostering a recognition of our kinship with animals. An index as well as a source of new attitudes Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty: His Grooms and Companions: The Autobiography of a Horse* (1877), presented as 'Translated from the Original Equine", was a huge bestseller. But the growing prestige of science in the wake of Darwin's work also led to widespread use of animals in experiments, and in response a new subgenre of anti-vivisection fiction appeared. Probably the best-known of this subgenre now is Wilkie Collins *Heart and Science* (1882-3), which features Dr Nathan Benjulia, a prominent vivisectionist who ultimately realises the error of his ways and releases his lab animals before killing himself. It would be some time before novelistic arguments against cruelty were accompanied by ecological fears for the disappearance of species, though one might argue that H.G. Wells' thrilling science-fiction novel, *The War of the Worlds* (1897) is, inter alia, a refracted vision of the destruction of other species by humans.

Wells' work at times also touches on another anxiogenic aspect of post-Darwinian science, or pseudoscience: discourses of degeneration. It is impossible in short space to do justice to the many facets that degeneration theories exhibited in the late nineteenth century. But one strand at least is pervasive in the novels of the period, the perception that modern city life was producing a degenerate working-class population, and thus threatening the health of the nation. The anxieties surrounding this underclass appear, for example, in Wells' representation of the Morlocks in *The Time Machine* (1895). Some of the novel's most vivid passages describe the horror that the Time Traveller experiences when he is in danger of being engulfed by the sloth-like Morlocks:

In a moment I was clutched by several hands, and there was no mistaking that they were trying to haul me back … You can scarce imagine how nauseatingly inhuman they looked – those pale, chinless faces, and great, lidless, pinkish-grey eyes! as they stared in their blindness and bewilderment. (Wells 1995, 50)

Where Wells projects this fear and loathing into the future, the slum novels of the 1890s suggested that the barbarians were already at the gate. Middle-class hostility to the urban poor was scarcely new, of course, but in the 1890s an earlier discourse of urban criminality mixes with proto-eugenicist ideas. Arthur Morrison, himself from a relatively poor background, puts these ideas in the

mouth of the unnamed surgeon in *A Child of the Jago* (1896), a tale of East-End slum-life:

Is there a child in this place that wouldn't be better dead – still better unborn? … Here lies the Jago, a nest of rats, breeding, breeding as only rats can; and we say it is well. On high moral grounds we uphold the right of rats to multiply their thousands. Sometimes we catch a rat. And we keep it a while, nourish it carefully, and put it back into the nest to propagate its kind … It's a mighty relief to speak truth with a man who knows – a man not rotted through with sentiment (Morrison 1996, 140)

Thus while the slum novel may have in part been motivated by a desire to shine a light on the deprivations of the urban poor, in places the will to symbolic distance is all too evident, and the dominant affects are fear and disgust rather than sympathy. As John Carey (1992) has traced, even after the star of degeneration theory waned somewhat, a similar revulsion is the face of "the masses" is evident in early twentieth-century literature.

Degeneration theory also runs through a number of the novels that, despite their differences, are sometimes seen to comprise something of a late-Victorian Gothic or Romantic revival, e.g., Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886); Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890); and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). If these novels revived some of the terror-aesthetic of the Romantic fiction of the start of the century (Stoker's vampire, for example, dusts off Polidori's creation of 1819), others of the period went back to Defoe for inspiration for their thrilling novels of exotic adventure: Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883); and H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and *She* (1887) all belong to this camp. In the first two, in place of courtship narratives, readers are offered treasure hunts and sword-play; male-bonding replaces heterosexual romance. *She* is something else again, since at its heart there is a transhistorical love affair, though the narrative emphasis is decidedly more on adventure than intimacy. Perhaps the most significant thing about the revival of Gothic and adventure fiction at this time is that it represents a turning away from the domestic novel that had held sway for much of the century. Degeneration, again, provides a context for this turn: more suspenseful and visceral fare was to be offered to the reader as a replacement for the supposedly effete materials of the late Victorian domestic novel, or French Naturalism. Where the Gothic revival features a number of degenerate monsters (Count Dracula, Mr Hyde, more arguably Dorian), the adventure novels promise to regenerate the British reader by offering healthy, outdoors, bloodthirsty fare savouring more of epic than introspection.

In this period what would later be termed genre fiction begins to assume more definite shape: the science fiction novel in Wells; the horror novel in Stoker, the crime novel in Arthur Conan Doyle, though the marketing of science fiction, horror, and crime, among others, as separate and distinct literary goods comes a little later. An early attempt to effect such marketing is the "shilling shocker", which became a recognized form targeted at a particular kind of readerly response. Mixing mystery and sensation, such novels as Hugh Conway's *Called Back* (1883) and Fergus Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) recalled the sensation novels of the 1860s, but were usually shorter, and sometimes

mixed in more gothic material (arguably, Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* belongs in this group too). But as with the American dime novel, it was not only crime and horror that sold books. Raphael Tuck and company planned to "dissociate a shilling from a shocker, and to supply rather a series of 'Shilling Soothers'" (Morton 2005, 118). The result was their Breezy Library series of light fiction. Authors included the prolific Grant Allen, who contributed *An Army Doctor's Romance* (1894), and Israel Zangwill, whose *Merely Mary Ann* (1893) was the first in the series. Here we see not only recognizable ancestors of later romance fiction, but more importantly, perhaps, of the packaging of that fiction as a more or less homogeneous product: by buying a Breezy Library book you were making sure that nothing too disturbing would intrude upon the imaginary world you were entering. Readers of such fiction were looking for sensation as much as the readers of shilling shockers, but it was a different kind of sensation, a pleasant flutter of interest rather than anything more stirring.

Grant Allen's best-remembered novel, *The Woman Who Did* (1895), published in a very different series, John Lane and Elkin Mathews' *Keynotes*, shocked more than it soothed, notwithstanding its relatively conservative ending. But it should remind us that in these years the emotional range of the English novel was greatly expanded by the advent of "New Woman" fiction. Work by Mona Caird, George Egerton, Sarah Grand and others placed gender, sex, and sexuality center stage. George Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894), more Zola-inspired Naturalism than New-Woman novel, also played a part in changing the way in which love and sex were represented in fiction, as did Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1892). Both eschew the usual handling of the Victorian "fallen woman" theme, but only Moore can imagine something resembling a happy ending for his resilient heroine. In general terms the novels of this period paved the way for the more explicit treatment of sexual issues in the modernist novel, as Ann Ardis has argued. Sex often remained a highly-charged subject in later fiction, but its treatment was no longer always governed by the absolute moral values of melodrama. Female characters are at times allowed to follow sexual impulses; sex outside of marriage is not always a death-sentence for them. Such a shift was not a purely literary one, naturally, but one overdetermined by feminist politics and later by changing contraceptive practices. Initially, the representation of sexual affect outside of the inherited moral frameworks, usually meant clashes with obscenity legislation.

In this period we see the novel wrestling with new ways of describing sexual and other non-rational forces that act upon the subject, a pre-Freudian vocabulary of attraction, personal influence, and emotional sway. Such terms as "sex appeal", for example, begin to be used. On the one hand this manifests itself in the light work of Richard Marsh and Elinor Glyn. In Richard Marsh's *The Magnetic Girl* (1903), an unpopular young woman suddenly finds that every man she meets immediately falls in love with her. Elinor Glyn, who had read some Freud, or at least knew of his work, developed a similar idea of "It", a form of sexual magnetism, possibly borrowing the term from Rudyard Kipling's "Mrs Bathurst" (1904). She would go on to collaborate with Hollywood in creating the idea of the "It Girl" of the 1920s, a figure who married sexual magnetism to the dynamism of the flapper. The other allotrope of this new power is a form of personal magnetism with which some individuals are endowed that is not

necessarily sexual, something resembling the charisma that Max Weber describes around the same time, though also recalling the influence of the mesmerist. This version of magnetism features more in the late Victorian gothic novel: Ayesha possesses such a power in H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887); Lord Henry Wotton has a little of it in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890); as do Svengali in George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's gory invasion story of 1897, and the shape-shifting Beetle in Richard Marsh's chilling novel of the same name, also 1897; John Buchan imagines the political force of such a charismatic figure in *Greenmantle* (1916). Some of these novels show a strange prescience about what would become the politics of charisma, and the emotional manipulation of crowds for nationalist ends. But before it reached its apogee the cult of personality would be mercilessly mocked in P.G. Wodehouse's novels, in which the ludicrous Spode is a version of the British fascist, Sir Oswald Mosley, among others.

The Twentieth Century and After

The modernist novel has come to be associated with pleasures more cerebral than emotional, and the criticism that accompanies its rise to prestige is sometimes seen as responsible for the devaluation of emotion in twentieth-century literature. There is clearly some truth in the latter idea; for example, the strictures of W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in 1949 on the "affective fallacy" – cast a long shadow over critical attitudes.

"The Affective Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its results … It begins by trying to the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism" (Wimsatt 1982, 21)

…

"[Objective Criticism] will not talk of tears, prickles or other physiological symptoms, of feeling angry, joyful, hot, cold, or intense, or of vaguer states of emotional disturbance, but of shades of distinction and relation between objects of emotion." (Wimsatt 1982, 34)

But the New Critics were only voicing views that had already gained credence in other fields. Ten years earlier, the art critic Clement Greenberg had launched an attack on "kitsch", which he described as "vicarious experience and fake sensations … the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times" (Greenberg 1988, 14). One can trace this suspicion of emotion further back in art criticism, to the work of Roger Fry, say. Among literary movements we can see similar ideas in nascent form in the theories of the Imagists, with their call for images that are hard and clear -- though in fact there is plenty of emotion on display in *Des Imagistes: An Anthology* (1914). James Joyce, whose work appeared in the imagist anthology, likewise claimed to have written *Dubliners* (1914) in a style of scrupulous meanness.

But did the modernist novelists actually suppress affect in their fiction? At the level of diegesis the emotional lives of characters are often vividly presented, as one might expect when fiction turns to focus on mental events rather than external action. If we take the work of D.H. Lawrence, for example,

we see a detailed attention to the embodied consciousness of his characters, and an attempt to find a new vocabulary to chart the shifting nature of emotional relationships, with their attractions and repulsions, aggressive and erotic drives. *Women in Love* (1920), for instance, is almost completely devoted to this project, deploying the language of electricity and radioactivity, among others, to describe the highly-charged encounters among Birkin, Crich, the Brangwen sisters and other characters. It may be objected that Lawrence is scarcely typical of international modernism, but in the work of Joyce and Woolf we also see the emotional lives of characters placed center stage. Where Lawrence tends to focus on the lives of his characters in the present, in Joyce and Woolf inner lives tend to be as much about the past as the present. In *Ulysses* (1922) Stephen's thoughts about his dead mother, and Bloom's memories of his dead father, Rudolf, and dead son, Rudy, are recurring themes. Whether or not we as readers are meant to be emotionally engaged by these thoughts is less easy to establish, perhaps. But the symbolic replacement of Bloom's dead son with Stephen Dedalus is surely intended to move us at some level, as is the novel's life-embracing ending. Likewise, the novel's structuring classical parallels may suggest a gap between modern city life and the world of epic, but they do not always work to diminish the characters in the present: in his way, Bloom is a heroic figure as well as a semi-comic one, heroic in his ordinary human decency.

Woolf's take on a day in the modern city, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), also charts the fluctuating affective lives of her characters; as in Joyce, it is the events of the past that are most charged with emotion for the characters. In the figure of Septimus Smith we see a man who has been irrevocably scarred by World War 1, not just by the "shell shock" of industrialized warfare, but by the loss of his close friend, Evans. Clarissa for her part is also haunted by the past; for her, being kissed by her friend, Sally Seton was a moment of pure bliss that nothing else has ever matched. (It is possible that Septimus's friendship with Evans was also erotically charged.) As with Joyce, it is perhaps more difficult to establish whether these scenes of affect are meant to also be "effects". But I would suggest that they are, and that the welling up of such moments are the modernist equivalents of the restoration of lost characters, and the reconciliation of opposed ones, that produce the emotional crescendos of the nineteenth-century novel. There is even a more direct echo of such a Victorian moment in the appearance at the climactic party of Clarissa's (Victorian) aunt, whom the reader, might reasonably expect to be long dead: "For Miss Helena Parry was not dead: Miss Parry was alive. She was past eighty. She ascended staircases slowly with a stick" (Woolf 2000, 151).

Even if the modernist novel is not quite as hostile to affect as is sometimes assumed, it might be assumed that the emotional text could not survive the arrival of the playful postmodernism of the post-war period, if that postmodernism can be defined in terms of an aesthetic of reference and pastiche, and a distrust of metanarratives. Where all is pastiche and knowing irony, the emotions of characters can hardly be taken at face value; and high levels of readerly self-consciousness tend to be incompatible with affective involvement. But playful postmodernism is less a feature of English fiction in this period than it is in the U.S., say, where the work of such writers as Robert Coover, John Hawkes, and Richard Brautigan defined a particular kind of break with the

traditional reading experience through, inter alia, the abandonment or radical reworking of ideas of plot and narration, and the embrace of discontinuity, conflicting narratives, and found text. Insofar as this kind of fiction generates an affective response it is likely to be amusement, and a delight in playfulness, or just as likely, perhaps, readerly frustration and irritation. There were English examples of this kind of postmodernism in, for example, some of the work of J.G. Ballard, whose *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969) makes use of similar devices. But as Aleid Fokkema has suggested, the postmodernists of the 1970s and 1980s – Angela Carter and the Scottish writer Alasdair Gray, for example – blended experimental narrative strategies with more familiar materials in ways that ensured that readers were not cast adrift. Gray's *Lanark* was published in 1981, though he wrote an early section in 1954 while he was still in Art School: it contains a familiar enough Bildungsroman narrative about a young art student, but it also features a parallel – or at least discontinuous -- plot in which the central character's increasingly disturbed emotional life is replayed in a dystopian fantasy city, Unthank. The novel's metafictional flourishes prevent any simple identification with the central character of the realist narrative, Duncan Thaw, or his other self, Lanark, but the effect is far from being an emotionally distancing one. In this respect it recalls the Irish writer Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), a metafictional novel that also parallels undergraduate life and fantasy sequences on a grander scale, the latter deriving from medieval Irish literature, cowboy stories, and other sources.

A similar tendency to blend the experimental with familiar narrative forms, and to marry the fictional to the historical characterizes some of the most successful novels of the last 20 years or so. Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985), for instance, is a novel about growing up gay in a religious household, but the narrative is studded with a series of fairytales that contain parallels to the life of the young Jeanette. The result is a novel in which we are emotionally engaged by the travails of the narrator's younger self, but always aware of the constructedness of the text. The novels of the Anglo-Indian writer Salman Rushdie have likewise displayed an interest in self-conscious fabulation while also anchoring readers with historical reference. *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983), for example, both contain elements of magical realism, and highlight the links between history and storytelling, but also evoke the actual (and violent) political history of India and Pakistan. Famously, Rushdie's aesthetic-distancing techniques did not prevent him being sued for libel by the very real Indira Gandhi in 1984 for suggesting that Sanjay Gandhi had accused her of hastening her husband's death through neglect: the author was forced to remove the passage in question.

The powerfully affective dimension of off-campus history remained a significant component of 1990s English fiction, though it was sometimes a more distant history than Rushdie's. The futility and horror of the First World War provided the material for both Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* (1993) and Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy* (1991-1995). In the latter, Barker evokes the physical and psychic damage wrought by industrial warfare, but also uses present-day conceptions of gender and sexuality to explore the inner lives of her characters. Some of her central characters are based on historical individuals – e.g., W.H.R. Rivers and Siegfried Sassoon -- and some are not, presenting the reader with a complex reality effect. This also influence our readerly investment

in particular figures: our hetero-diegetic knowledge tells us that Sassoon will survive the war, but we have no such certainty in the case of the fictional Billy Prior.

The impact of industrial warfare on the soft fabric of humanity also provides much of the emotional force for one of the most dazzling novels of recent years, Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), which was both a critical and commercial success. The main narrative presents a poignant account of star-crossed young love against the backdrop of the Second World War. But the novel pulls the emotional rug from under the reader in its last section, when we realize that the happy ending for the story's lovers, Robbie and Cecilia, has been invented by Cecilia's younger sister, Briony, whose spiteful intervention at a crucial moment had led to the lovers' separation in the first place. The atonement of the title has been her subsequent life as a nurse and writer, but also her attempt in fictional form to provide a happy ending to lives she had destroyed. What appears at first to be a moving account of the survival of love in the face of insuperable odds metamorphoses into a metafictional meditation on our need for happy endings.

If the carefully orchestrated emotional effects of Dickens are rarely found now in literary fiction, the novel clearly has not lost its ambition to move us. The work of Rushdie, McEwan, Barker, Winterson, as well as that of Monica Ali, Julian Barnes, William Boyd, A.S. Byatt, Sebastian Faulks, Michael Frayn, Alan Hollinghurst, Hilary Mantel, Zadie Smith, and Monica Ali, Sarah Waters and many others suggest that the character-based, plot-driven novel is very much the dominant, and even the more knowing and experimental novels of recent years offer a vacillation between estrangement effects and emotional engagement. Outside of that world there is, of course, a vast hinterland of genre fiction in which high emotional impact is pretty much de rigueur for success. To this extent the novels of action and suspense – thrillers and police procedurals, for example – are the heirs to Victorian melodrama, as well as the Gothic novel. The phenomenal success of E.L. James's bondage-themed erotic novels suggests that the Gothic lives on in other ways too. Nor has the Breezy Library disappeared: it is the ancestor of contemporary, light-hearted "chicklit", for example. But as to the more tearful pleasures of the past, these now tend to be found in memoirs rather than novels, in the heaving shelves of "misery lit". We seem to be happier now when we can cry over true stories.