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TRANSFORMATIONS AND MIGRATIONS OF SYMPATHY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND POETICS

Eighteenth-century sympathy emerges from a long history of conceptual transformations that eventually – between Shaftesbury, David Hume and Adam Smith – saw its ancient cosmological dimension eclipsed. As sympathy came to signify intersubjective fellow-feeling and understanding, guaranteeing man’s sociability and moral nature, it also migrated into poetic and aesthetic theory, in terms both of a new affective theory of reading and of aesthetic production. In particular, Kames promotes sympathy to the centre stage of his *Elements of Criticism* (1762). At the same time, sympathy’s ancient cosmological semantics re-surface in more popular writings like Pratt’s *Sympathy, a poem* (1781), serving to justify the social and economic order.

Introduction

While “sympathy” until the enlightenment signified a principle of cosmological affinities, its long tradition running from Plotinus and Cicero to Ralph Cudworth and the seventeenth-century Neo-Platonists, it evolved into a distinct concept of intersubjective fellow-feeling and understanding in the eighteenth century. Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith are considered its main modern proponents. At first sight, the two sympathies – pertaining to a cosmological order on the one hand, and to the domain of sociability on the other – seem so little related that, for instance, the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* offers two separate entries,¹ and in his foreword to John Jervis’ recent book on *Sympathetic Sentiments*, Davide Pagnia speaks of “the eighteenth-century discovery of ‘sympathy’ (and therefore spectatorship)”.² Until today, the emergence of sympathy in the eighteenth century has indeed been a frequently suggested critical tenet.³ Yet

¹ S.v. “Sympathie”, in: Joachim Ritter (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. X. Basel: Schwabe, 1998, col. 751–762.

² John Jervis, *Sympathetic Sentiments: Affect, Emotion and Spectacle in the Modern World*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. ix.

³ Jonathan Lamb, for instance, also does not begin his survey of sympathy prior to the seventeenth century; see *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century*,

while sympathy undoubtedly is a, if not *the*, key term in eighteenth-century moral philosophy, its discursive foregrounding by the enlightenment belongs to a long history of conceptual transformations,⁴ in which the third Earl of Shaftesbury played a pivotal role as “agent of transformation”,⁵ connecting the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After Shaftesbury, David Hume and Adam Smith personify the key stages of this process. Beyond the domain of moral philosophy, however, sympathy also comes to feature significantly in theories of genre and of aesthetic response. It is this transition point between moral philosophy and poetics/literary theory that this article seeks to explore against the backdrop of sympathy’s transformative stages in the eighteenth century. Taking Shaftesbury’s notions of “natural affection” and “daemon companion” as figurations of both the old and the new sympathies, this paper undertakes to trace the further trajectory of sympathy in the eighteenth century through some of its multi-faceted transformative steps and generic migrations as it evolves to become a key concept in literary poetics – both in terms of a new affective theory of reading and of Romantic aesthetic production. Lord Kames (Henry Home) plays a pivotal, yet hitherto under-researched part in this story. On the one hand, he marks the intersection between the ethics and aesthetics of sympathy, pointing towards Romanticism and beyond;⁶ on the other hand, his writings also illustrate a phenomenon indicative perhaps of the migrations of sympathy in the latter part of the eighteenth century: sympathy appears as a flexible figure that

London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009. In contrast, Eric Schliesser’s recent volume pursues configurations of sympathy since antiquity, suggesting “a host of family resemblances” (*Sympathy. A History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 6), yet without a specific focus on the conceptual interconnection between cosmological and intersubjective sympathy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

- ⁴ I would like to acknowledge my debt to my fellow-researchers Verena Lobsien, Thomas Micklich, Alexander Kludies, and Roman Barton; it is from the context of our research group of the SFB “Transformationen der Antike”/“Transformations of Antiquity” that this paper emanates.
- ⁵ Lutz Bergemann et al., “Transformation: Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels”, in: Hartmut Böhme et al. (eds.), *Transformation: Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels*, München: Wilhelm Fink, 2011, pp. 39–56, here p. 44.
- ⁶ Incidentally, Kames (as Henry Home) features significantly in late eighteenth and nineteenth-century German aesthetics. As Leroy R. Shaw has shown in his illuminating paper, Herder borrows from Kames, although with curiously little acknowledgement and full of ambivalence in his judgements (“Henry Home of Kames: Precursor of Herder”, in: *Germanic Review* 35 [1960], pp. 16–27; esp. p. 22). The line of influence can be traced further to Dilthey and Karl Bühler. Kames was translated into German immediately by J. N. Meinhard. For Kames’ German reception, also see Wilhelm Neumann, *Die Bedeutung Homes für die Ästhetik und sein Einfluss auf die deutschen Ästhetiker*, Diss. Halle, 1894.

encapsulates old and new meanings, and it expresses both the notorious optimism of sociability as well as a sense of its limitations. Furthermore, as a conceptual figuration pertaining to aesthetic reception and production alike, sympathy seems to anticipate key tenets of Wordsworth's notion of aesthetic production.

1. Shaftesbury and Beyond: Sympathy and the Dynamics of Sociability in Eighteenth-Century Moral Philosophy

Social consent, intersubjective harmony, and universal sympathies may be seen to interact and to 'culminate' in Shaftesbury's notions of *Sensus Communis* and man as lover of mankind. In his *Characteristics*, Shaftesbury crucially conceives of a "natural affection" (that he does not yet call sympathy), i.e., a human disposition towards benevolent sociability as opposed to self-interest that affords some gratification.

However, even for the "philosopher of politeness"⁷ man's social disposition towards co-operation of the species does not seem to come easily. The practice of sociability necessitates an effort, to say the least, and so does the stability of a self that is perpetually subjected to the pulls of sociability. The optimism inherent in the notions of natural affection and moral sense appears far less pronounced in Shaftesbury's private notebooks than in his published work. "Why seek familiarity with these? Can I make myself what they are? Can I reconcile my opinions to theirs?" he questions, "[w]hy mix and associate? Why affect forwardness in these concerns, assume and act as willing to be thought somebody, and of some moment?"⁸

Not only is sociability not taken for granted or entirely naturalized, but a possibility for affection as hypocrisy is implied by the ambiguous semantics of affect: "If not, why do I affect this intimacy?"⁹ In his stoic exercise of self-examination, Shaftesbury explicitly ponders on the dangers of sociability:

But what will be my carriage in company? How shall I appear in conversation? – Dangerous consequences! But of what kind? – lest I be called ill-bred; a good companion. [...] But if I suffer not myself to be at all transported, how shall I act with

⁷ Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 2.

⁸ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, Author of the "Characteristics"*. Ed. by Benjamin Rand, London/New York: Macmillan, 1900, pp. 140–141.

⁹ Shaftesbury, *Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen*, p. 140.

forwardness and concern in the public or for a friend? – If it be a part not consistent with the preservation of a character, it is never to be undertaken.¹⁰

According to Shaftesbury, sociability, or politeness as its normative equivalent and practice, also jeopardizes the self to a certain degree. Transport is required to allow a fellow-feeling to occur, to feel concern for others, but at the same time it is this very transport that threatens to undermine the stability of self. “Universal good, or the interest of the world in general,” therefore can only be “a kind of remote philosophical object. That greater community falls not easily under the eye.”¹¹

Shaftesbury’s solution to this dilemma in his public, published writings, particularly in his “Soliloquy”, was to resort to a “certain duplicity of soul”, allowing us “to divide our-selves into *two parties*”. Self-recognition thus figures as a maxim of “‘Divide yourself!’ or ‘Be Two!’”¹² One of the two is pictured as “a venerable sage”, who “with an air of authority erect[s] himself our counsellor and governor”.¹³ Significantly, in the context of a self constantly attended by a “daemon companion”, self-exercise is conceived as a healing practice administered to “‘a patient in ourself [sic]’”, and the self features as one that contains its own company: “‘never less *alone* than when by *themselves*’”.¹⁴ In contrast, the company of others may cause deflection, threatening to put us “upon terms of greater distance and formality with ourselves and evade our proving method of soliloquy”.¹⁵ Hence Shaftesbury’s concern with genre: “Soliloquy” as the “instance of talking to or conversing with oneself”¹⁶ entails an essentially dialogical relation to oneself in the performance of self. Dialogism is at the heart of Shaftesbury’s self, which is one that must perpetually be in performative practice. The “Soliloquy” corresponds to dialogue as the private, internally dialogic self relates to its public dimension.

If the “Soliloquy” insists on the intrinsic duality or dialogicity of the self, Shaftesbury’s *Inquiry* propagates self-reflexion as necessary for goodness to

¹⁰ Shaftesbury, *Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen*, p. 112.

¹¹ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, “Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour”, in: Lawrence E. Klein (ed.), *Characters of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 29–69, here p. 52.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, “Soliloquy”, in: Klein (ed.), *Characters of Men*, pp. 70–162, here p. 77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Shaftesbury, “Soliloquy”, p. 79.

¹⁶ S.v. “soliloquy, *n.*”, in: *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://dictionary.oed.com/> (January 27, 2015).

become virtue. Whereas goodness as affection is a “natural temper” “suited to the public good or good of the species” and as such pertains to “all sensible creatures”, “virtue or merit” is a human capacity only, and is founded on “reflection”, rendering one’s actions and affections “objects”. Thus, “by means of this reflected sense, there arises another kind of affection towards those very affections themselves, which have been already felt and have now become the subject of a new liking or dislike.”¹⁷ This inner dialogue as pre-requisite of habituated virtue is one that requires constant exercise and self-regulation or self-control.

Resolve, therefore, never to forget thyself. How long is it that thou wilt continue thus to act two different parts and be two different persons? [...] Be one entire and the self-same and; wander not abroad so as to lose sight of the end; but keep that constantly in view [...] in company and alone; [...] Let neither ceremony, nor entertainment in discourse, nor pleasantry, nor mirth amongst friends, nor anything of this kind, be the occasion of quitting that remembrance, or of losing that fixed attention.... Begin, therefore, and, as a legislator to thyself, establish that economy or commonwealth within.¹⁸

With his duality of self and second-order “reflex affection”,¹⁹ Shaftesbury is indeed no far cry from sympathy as later conceptualized in terms of intersubjectivity by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*; this seems to be the case even more so as Shaftesbury proceeds to speak of the mind as “spectator or auditor of other minds”.²⁰ If the term “sympathy” in Shaftesbury does not yet designate a reflective intersubjective faculty as the basis of our virtue – it is still reserved for a cosmological principle – Shaftesbury still conceives of such a faculty, anticipating Adam Smith’s fully-fledged chief concept to a considerable extent.²¹ Furthermore, in his “Letter Concerning Enthusiasm” (1708), he also envisages sympathy as a quasi-semiotic principle of contagious communication resembling a “disease [...] no sooner seen than caught”,²² associated

¹⁷ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit”, in: Klein (ed.), *Characters of Men*, pp. 163–207, here p. 172.

¹⁸ Shaftesbury, *Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen*, p. 112.

¹⁹ Thus the marginal note in the 1711 edition. See, e.g., Ursula Renz, “Changing one’s own Feelings: Spinoza and Shaftesbury on Philosophy as Therapy”, in: Sabrina Ebbersmeyer (ed.), *Emotional Minds: The Passions and the Limits of Pure Inquiry in Early Modern Philosophy*, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 121–138, here pp. 130–131.

²⁰ Shaftesbury, “Inquiry”, p. 172.

²¹ This would seem to also include the principle of self-gratification. See Shaftesbury “Inquiry”, p. 189.

²² Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, “A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm”, in: Klein (ed.), *Characters of Men*, pp. 4–28, here p. 10.

with the mob or masses (“panics in mankind”) – a notion of sympathy that Hume will stress in his *Treatise of Human Nature*.²³ This disease is to be softened (or controlled), however, by the magistrate’s “kind sympathy, entering into the concern of the people”.²⁴ Hence, there are two kinds of sympathy in operation in Shaftesbury’s “Letter”: one of potentially dangerous spontaneous communication, and one of gentlemanly concern with and regulation of (religious) enthusiasm, safeguarding political stability. At this point, Shaftesbury comes close to the subsequent dividing lines between Hume and Smith. In terms of his preferred mode of critique, he favours “a sober kind of cheerfulness”²⁵ and benevolent “good humour”²⁶ related to comedy over harsh satire. Preferences of genre, politics, and ethics go hand in hand.

While, then, Shaftesbury’s philosophy is one that is heavily indebted to both ancient philosophy (combining Neo-Platonism and Stoicism), both constitutive elements of sympathy as a social principle as it will evolve in the course of the eighteenth century are already present – albeit without the word itself: first, sympathy, i.e., natural affection as a human faculty of sociability and benevolence, and second, the inner dialogic structure of self, or self-doubling. Shaftesbury thus sets the transformation of sympathy going towards an intersubjective and dialogic principle constituting the self. His fascinating anticipation of Adam Smith’s figure of the impartial spectator and inner dialogism is striking (as is indeed his anticipation of Hume’s notion of sympathy as an inadvertent, quasi-contagious communication of sentiments).

2. Adam Smith and the Theatricality of Sympathy

Defining sympathy as a “fellow-feeling with any passion whatever”,²⁷ Adam Smith rejects Hume’s notion of contagious communication²⁸ to implement

²³ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 592.

²⁴ Shaftesbury, “A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm”, pp. 10–11.

²⁵ Shaftesbury, “A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm”, p. 9.

²⁶ Shaftesbury, “A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm”, p. 13.

²⁷ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Ed. by David D. Raphael/Alec L. Macfie, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982, p. 10.

²⁸ In fact, Hume does not just subscribe to a simple contagion in his model of sympathetic communication, as sympathetic fellow-feeling presupposes a semiosis of physiological signs that requires the detour of individual acquisition of such meanings. “When I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself. In like manner, when I perceive the *causes* of any emotion, my mind is convey’d to the effects, and is actua-

the imagination as sympathy's constitutive element. His notorious modification reads as follows:

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*. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy [...] By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments.²⁹

In Smith's version, the communication of sentiments functions through an act of the imagination rendering the self a "spectator" identifying with the agent concerned. Direct or immediate sympathetic communication is replaced by a detour of imaginative identificatory role taking that requires a degree of acquaintance with and understanding of the pragmatic context. Sympathy "does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it", Smith ponders to conclude that "compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment".³⁰

Smith insists there is no spontaneous, immediate sympathetic communication;³¹ rather, understanding the situation of another is a necessary component of our sympathetic fellow-feeling. In a second pivotal move of transfor-

ted with a like emotion." Sympathetic communication requires an inference from external physiological signs to the correspondent passions and causes. "No passion of another discovers itself immediately to the mind. We are only sensible of its causes or effects. From *these* we infer the passion: And consequently *these* give rise to our sympathy." (Hume, *Treatise*, p. 576). For an excellent discussion of this issue, see also Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Eighteenth-Century Hermeneutics. Philosophy of Interpretation in England from Locke to Burke*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1993, esp. pp. 103–34.

²⁹ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 9. My emphasis.

³⁰ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 12.

³¹ Only a few passions does Smith allow to be communicated immediately: "If the very appearances of grief and joy inspire us with some degree of the like emotions, it is because they suggest to us the general idea of some good or bad fortune that has befallen the person in whom we observe them [...]. Even our sympathy with the grief or joy of another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect" (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 11).

mation, he notoriously gives sympathy an inward bent to render it the foundation of our moral sense. This depends on a splitting of the self “into two persons”. Smith, too, conceives of a divided self:

The first [person] is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion. The first is the judge; the second the person judged of. But that the judge should, in every respect, be the same with the person judged of, is as impossible, as that the cause should, in every respect, be the same with the effect.³²

This is the core of Smith’s theatrical scenario of social gazing, turned moral by way of its self-reflective turn³³ – in David Marshall’s terms, “the *dédoulement* that structures any act of sympathy is internalized and doubled within the self.”³⁴ It is the presence of the other as internalized self-observer, called the impartial spectator, that guarantees our moral sense and, on a higher plane, self-command. As frequently commented upon, Smith conceives of the figure of impartial spectator in increasingly abstract terms, culminating in his sixth edition in “the man within”³⁵ judging on moral “praiseworthiness” rather than “praise”.³⁶ Yet in all its versions, Smith’s self-reflexive “ethical dialogism”³⁷ displays a surprisingly strong resemblance to Shaftesbury’s configuration.³⁸ Significantly, Smith acknowledges no such influence at this point, neither does he reference the ancient tradition of sympathy, outsourcing, as it were, his account of this tradition into a separate historical outline³⁹ and reserving as explicit systematic influence not Stoic or Neo-Platonic sympathy or natural affection, but Stoic self-command governed by the impartial spectator called “Superintendent of the universe”.⁴⁰

³² Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 113.

³³ On the interplay of social and moral gaze in Smith, see Vivienne Brown, *Adam Smith’s Discourse. Canonicity, Commerce and Conscience*, London/New York: Routledge, 1987; as well as her “Dialogism, the Gaze and the Emergence of Economic Discourse”, in: *New Literary History* 28 (1997), pp. 697–710.

³⁴ David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 175; similarly p. 190.

³⁵ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 131.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Brown, “Dialogism, the Gaze, and the Emergence of Economic Discourse”, p. 702.

³⁸ Marshall, too, remarks on Smith’s debt to Shaftesbury. *The Figure of Theater*, pp. 37 f.

³⁹ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ch. VII.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 292.

This is the point of discursive intersection between Smith's Stoicism and Bentham's "Panopticon".⁴¹

Whereas Smith's concept of sympathy and the impartial spectator may be regarded in terms of a cornerstone in the evolution of modern conscience⁴², his fading out of sympathy's ancient sources and meanings appear as a significant component of his strategy of transformation. Tracing the complex processes of transformation in Smith's theory would certainly demand a story in its own right, suffice it here to highlight the gist of it: Smith downplays Stoic, Neo-Platonic and Shaftesburian cosmology and natural affection for his version of sympathy, letting the ancient tradition emerge elsewhere in his notions of duty, prudence, and self-command, which are clearly indebted to Stoicism. It is his theatrical model of sympathy, however, that infuses the poetics of the latter part of the eighteenth century, whether in terms of influence or of a more diffuse conceptual migration, as a floating signifier (and signified), so to speak, in a variety of discourses.

3. Lord Kames and the Poetics of Sympathy

Lord Kames, or Henry Home, was an Edinburgh judge and a very learned man moving in those circles of the Scottish and Edinburgh Enlightenment that Smollett famously called a "hotbed of genius". In fact, Kames was a constitutive element of the inner circle; he was, among others, mentor of, or friends with, David Hume, Adam Smith, and Thomas Reid, and Smith is reported to have said "We must every one of us acknowledge Kames for our Master".⁴³ With regard to sympathy, Kames certainly plays a key role in its trajectory of transformations and migrations. Grounded in empiricist epistemology and psychology of association, Kames spells out his aesthetic theory in his work *Elements of Criticism* (1762), which was to found criticism in "human nature" as its "true source".⁴⁴ The empiricist legacy of his enterprise

⁴¹ Notoriously, Jeremy Bentham's eponymous *Panopticon* is governed by an omnipresent, centrally located "inspector". *Panopticon: or, the Inspection-House*, London: T. Payne, 1791, p. 25.

⁴² Thus Heinz D. Kittsteiner, *Die Entstehung des modernen Gewissens*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995; Knud Haakonsson, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁴³ The authenticity of this comment, cited from Tytler, is controversial. See, e.g., R. L. Meek, "Smith, Turgot, and the 'Four Stages' Theory", in: John Cunningham Wood (ed.), *Adam Smith: Critical Assessments*, vol. IV, London: Routledge, 1984, pp. 142–155, here p. 154 n. 31.

⁴⁴ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*. 2 vols., ed. by Peter Jones, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005, here vol. 1, p. 18. Kames had in mind a foundation of criti-

is clearly discernible when he argues in the founding chapters of his work that the “relations by which things are linked together, have a great influence in directing the train of thought”,⁴⁵ and nothing is “devoid of connection”.⁴⁶ We naturally take pleasure, Kames further stipulates, in perceiving “connection” and “order”,⁴⁷ the latter with clear socio-political overtones: “[B]y cherishing love of order”, said Kames in his dedication to George III, the “Fine Arts” indeed “enforce submission to government”.⁴⁸

It is Kames’s flexible and multifunctional handling of sympathy in the *Elements of Criticism* that to a considerable extent impresses his intellectual stamp upon contemporary moral and critical discourse. While sympathy features prominently in what amounts to a fully-fledged aesthetic or literary theory, and while contemporary moral philosophers and their popular offspring in various ways pronounce sympathy as the foundation of sociability and morality, Kames explicitly rejects any such “one-principle” theory. Again and again, he dismisses such a single, big principle governing human nature as pronounced by Hobbes, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith: “[T]he variety of nature is not so easily reached”⁴⁹ is his dry comment.

Kames thus refuses to allocate a systematic foundational position to sympathy, explicitly “finding it necessary to canvass and impugn the system of

cism in human nature that was to train “readers in the act of criticism itself – in production of critical arguments – and not simply in receptive competence”, thus the assessment of Kames’ contribution to and role in the tradition of Scottish rhetoric in Beth Innocenti Manolescu, “Traditions of Rhetoric, Criticism, and Argument in Kames’s *Elements of Criticism*”, in: *Rhetoric Review* 22 (2003), pp. 225–242, here p. 231.

⁴⁵ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 22. When it comes to the notions of moral sense and personal identity, Kames’ views accord with the Scottish common sense school. He sides with Thomas Reid, ascertaining against Locke and Hume “a sense of my own identity” that “constitutes me as a moral agent” as well as an innate sense of the species. Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005, pp. 128 f. Kames actually quotes from his correspondence with Reid at this point. For an extended discussion of Kames on personal identity, see Albert Tsugawa, “David Hume and Lord Kames on Personal Identity”, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (1961), pp. 398–403.

⁴⁷ See Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 27.

⁴⁸ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 3. With a view of social and historical progress in mind, Kames characteristically links taste and politeness (of course a common nexus in eighteenth-century writings on taste going back to Addison and Shaftesbury) with social discipline: “[M]en, originally savage and brutal, acquire not rationality nor delicacy of taste till they be long disciplined in society” (*Elements of Criticism*, vol. II, p. 725). As Manolescu (“Traditions of Rhetoric”, p. 237) has astutely remarked, Kames’ degree of “insistence on regularity and order must include a fear of disorder”.

⁴⁹ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 33.

sympathy, which he judged to be by far too narrow a basis on which to build all the moral feelings and social duties of man” as his first biographer Alexander Fraser Tytler explains. Accordingly, Kames sent “to Dr. Smith a transcript of observations on his theory, which he had prepared to insert in a third edition of the *Essays on Morality*.” As Tytler elaborates in a long footnote, the “objections here alluded to are sufficient to overturn the theory of sympathy, being the sole foundation of morality.” He cites three objections to Smith’s example of the man on the rack:

first, That if the torments of a man on the rack be not obvious to our senses from his screams and contortions, we should learn nothing from any fiction of our own imagination that we were in the sufferer’s place; that, on the contrary, instead of placing ourselves in his situation, we derive satisfaction in every such case, from the consciousness that we are exempted from those sufferings, for which, notwithstanding, we feel the strongest pity; and that this play of the imagination, therefore, instead of being the origin and cause of our feelings, tends in truth to moderate and diminish it. *Secondly*, If this theory were true, it would follow, that those in whom the power of fancy was the strongest, would be the most subject to the impressions of sympathy, and feel the most sensibly the force of the moral duties founded on that supposed basis; and *vice versâ*; a fact contradicted by daily experience. *Lastly*, It is observed, that this theory, though pretending to give an account of the origin of our moral sentiments, in so far as they respect *others*, fails altogether in accounting for such sentiments as regard *ourselves*: ‘My distress’ (says Lord Kames), ‘upon losing an only son, or my gratitude for a kindly office, are sentiments that neither need to be explained, by imagining myself to be another person, nor do they admit of such explanation.’ – *Essay on Principles of Morality*, edit. 3. p. 109. *et seq.* –⁵⁰

What at first sight might appear as eclecticism and a failure of methodology on Kames’ part compared to the intellectual heavyweights of the Scottish

⁵⁰ In order to come to his subject’s assistance, Tytler cites Hume’s essay “The Sceptic”: “‘There is one mistake to which they (philosophers) seem liable almost without exception; they confine too much their principles, and make no account of that vast variety which Nature has so much affected in all her operations. When a philosopher has once laid hold of a favourite principle, which perhaps accounts for many natural effects, he extends the same principle over the whole creation, and reduces to it every phenomenon, though by the most violent and absurd reasoning. Our own mind being narrow and contracted, we cannot extend our conception to the variety and extent of Nature, but imagine that she is as much bounded in her operations, as we are in our speculation.’—”. If Hume represents a strong authority in favour of a multi-principle approach such as Kames’, Tytler proceeds to pass severe judgement on Hume, who “fell under this very censure which he has here justly pronounced on the theories of others. His own theory of Utility has been extended beyond its due bounds, with as little propriety, and with the same partial fondness for a favourite principle, as the Sympathy of Adam Smith.” Alexander Fraser Tytler, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Honourable Henry Home of Kames*, vol. I (1807). Routledge: London, 1993, pp. 191 f.

enlightenment might better be understood as a conscious rejection of key elements of Smith's thought: Kames refutes both sympathy's foundational role and Smith's specific example, stressing the effect of aesthetic distance with regard to the spectacle of the rack (an argument that places Kames closer to Burke's notion of the sublime than to Smith).

What, then, are the different roles and meanings allocated to sympathy by Kames? I suggest three remarkably productive conceptual strands to be identified in Kames' *Elements*.

(1) Unlike his philosophical predecessors, Kames at times uses sympathy and pity as synonyms (compassion may be added), yet occasionally he places the latter as a result of the former. In other words, pity presupposes sympathy.⁵¹ At the same time, judging the intention of others requires reflection⁵² that would seem to overrule any immediate sympathy. Such slight obscurities or ambivalences notwithstanding, Kames definitely employs a spectatorial and theatrical semantics of sympathy that seems reminiscent of Adam Smith. Yet the gist of his argument is different. This comes into play in particular in his notion of the "Sympathetic Emotion of Virtue", which is crucial in terms of the intersection of moral and aesthetic theory. In order to make his point, Kames envisages "some grand and heroic action, highly agreeable to the spectator", singling out courage, grandeur, and heroism as examples:

beside veneration for the author, the spectator feels in himself an unusual dignity of character, which disposeth him to great and noble actions: and herein chiefly consists the extreme delight every one hath in the histories of conquerors and heroes. This singular feeling, which may be termed the sympathetic emotion of virtue, resembles, in one respect, the well-known appetites that lead to the propagation and preservation of the species. The appetites of hunger, thirst, and animal love, arise in the mind before they are directed to any object; and in no case whatever is the mind more solicitous for a proper object, than when under the influence of any of these appetites. [...] When we contemplate a virtuous action, which fails not to prompt our love for the author, our propensity at the same time to such actions is so much enlivened, as to become for a time an actual emotion.⁵³

Witnessing a courageous action, sympathy raises in the spectator the same feeling as that experienced by the agent involved, "*an emotion of courage*"⁵⁴ in Kames' example. More precisely, it seems that our fellow-feeling is directed to both the object of an action (as in the case of gratitude) and to the agent (as in the case of courage). In any case, Kames' argues that the specta-

⁵¹ See Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, pp. 33 f.

⁵² See Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, pp. 34 f.

⁵³ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, pp. 50 f.

⁵⁴ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 49.

tor or reader feels his own “self-value temporarily enhanced”⁵⁵ by such sympathetic emotion and “feels himself raised as it were to a higher rank.”⁵⁶ The imitation of the virtues of another leads to a feeling of moral elevation.

The crucial point, however, seems to be that such a sympathetic emotion is without a direct object. Whilst the emotion is, as it were, a replica of the emotion felt by the agent involved, it lacks the object to which the original feeling is attached – Kames speaks of “gratitude without an object”.⁵⁷ Capable of reproduction freed of its original pragmatic context, the emotion inspired is one that is felt without its original ‘objective correlative’, to use T.S. Eliot’s formula in an anachronous fashion. This specific mechanism of the sympathetic emotion of virtue ultimately “attracts individuals from their private system to perform acts of generosity and benevolence.”⁵⁸ Moreover, its effect is the acquisition of a habitual moral disposition:

the sympathetic emotion under consideration bestows upon good example the utmost influence, by prompting us to imitate what we admire. This singular emotion will readily find an object to exert itself upon: and at any rate, it never exists without producing some effect; because virtuous emotions of that sort, are in some degree an exercise of virtue; they are a mental exercise at least, if they appear not externally. And every exercise of virtue, internal and external, leads to habit; for a disposition or propensity of the mind, like a limb of the body, becomes stronger by exercise. Proper means, at the same time, being ever at hand to raise this sympathetic emotion, its frequent reiteration may, in a good measure, supply the want of a more complete exercise. Thus, by proper discipline, every person may acquire a settled habit of virtue.⁵⁹

This passage is remarkable indeed: our spectatorial emotional sympathy is one that, conceived of sequentially (“frequent reiteration”), engages us in a repeated striving for moral action – along with appropriate objects. It is the core element of a quasi-moral teaching scenario that heavily relies on continuous exercise prompted by example, with its Stoic reminiscences, as encountered in the writings of Shaftesbury and Adam Smith, quite visible.

(2) Implicit in this sympathetic scenario is, of course, Kames’ conception of a sympathetic impact of reading (or watching a play).

How, then, does literary reception precisely operate? Whether prose or verse, fiction or non-fiction, Kames commences by proposing (both in his *Elements* and in his *Essays*) a triple concept of “presence” that serves to ex-

⁵⁵ Andrés Horn, “Kames and the Anthropological Approach to Criticism”, in: *Philological Quarterly* 44 (1965), pp. 211–233, here p. 225.

⁵⁶ See Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 177.

⁵⁷ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 49.

⁵⁸ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 74.

⁵⁹ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 59.

plain the psychological effect of reading. Starting with observations on the operations of memory, he posits between the poles of “real presence” at the one end and self-conscious recollection – “reflective remembrance” – on the other his third and pivotal term: “ideal presence”, which occurs when

I am imperceptibly converted into a spectator, and perceive every particular passing in my presence, as when I was in reality a spectator. [...] conceiving myself to be in the place where I was an eye-witness, every circumstance appears to me as at first [...] a thing recalled to the mind with the accuracy I have been describing, is perceived as in our view, and consequently as existing at present.⁶⁰

Again, the figure of spectator (in the mode of the conditional) plays a part in this scenario of sympathy spelt out as ideal presence. What is more, such an “as-if” presence may be triggered not only by involuntary memory but by way of verbal representation substituting real presence:

ideal presence supplies the want of real presence; and in idea we perceive persons acting and suffering, precisely as in an original survey: if our sympathy be engaged by the latter, it must also in some degree be engaged by the former [...] The power of language to raise emotions, depends entirely on the raising of such lively and distinct images as are here described: the reader’s passions are never sensibly moved, till he be thrown into a kind of reverie; in which state, forgetting that he is reading, he conceives every incident as passing in his presence, precisely as if he were an eye-witness.⁶¹

In the mode of ideal presence, ideas of reflection assume the character of being sensible, as it were. This is the point at which Kames emphatically brings into the play the power of texts and narration, whether fiction or non-fiction, to propel the audience or reader into an imaginary scenario. In contrast, a “general or reflective remembrance cannot warm us into any emotion”,⁶² for only as long as reflection, i.e., any consciousness of recollection, is switched off is such a condition of a “waking dream” possible: “it vanisheth the moment we reflect upon our present situation: real presence, on the contrary, vouched by eye-sight, commands our belief, not only during the direct perception, but in reflecting afterward on the object. [...] this perception.”⁶³ Ideal presence is anathema to reflection (and vice versa); it is an “act of intuition, into which reflection enters not, more than into an act of sight.”⁶⁴ Kames can construct this argument especially because his episte-

⁶⁰ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, pp. 66 f.

⁶¹ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 69.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 68.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

mology presupposes the special quality of sight and hearing as “insensible of organic impression”.⁶⁵

Hardly surprising, it is this mode of ideal presence that Kames adopts to theorize the act of reading and literary reception. Provided there is a sufficient amount of detail (and vividness), the reader or audience is transported into the fictive scene; this experience happens in the (non-reflective) mode of ideal presence, evoking correspondent emotions in the audience/reader and allowing them to re-experience what is represented. The reader turns sympathetic spectator in Kames’ model of aesthetic response:

But let it be spread out in a lively and beautiful description, I am insensibly transformed into a spectator: I perceive these two heroes in act to engage: I perceive them brandishing their swords, and cheering their troops; and in that manner I attend them through the battle, every incident of which appears to be passing in my sight.⁶⁶

Reading, then, creates an ‘as if’ presence that allows us to emotionally partake of vicarious experience – to live the experience of historical or fictive others.⁶⁷

This issue of ideal presence bears some poetological and generic repercussions. If Kames applies the aesthetic effect of ideal presence to a variety of textual modes and authors, he does, however, articulate a hierarchy of genres in terms of their affective reading potential. “Of all the means for making an impression of ideal presence”, “theatrical representation” is claimed to be “the most powerful”.⁶⁸ The difference in “the effect it occasions” is accounted for by the greater impact of sight: “for what we see makes a deeper impression than what we learn from others”. Drama is the most powerful genre when it comes to evoking ideal presence; “it makes a deeper impression than narration: in the former, persons express their own sentiments; in the latter, sentiments are related at second hand”.⁶⁹ No won-

⁶⁵ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 69.

⁶⁷ Such a notion of presence is not an isolated phenomenon but a prominent strand in eighteenth-century thought. It is related to the Greek concept of *enargeia*. See Charles H. Hinnant, “*Steel for the Mind*”: *Samuel Johnson and Critical Discourse*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994, p. 78.

⁶⁸ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 71.

⁶⁹ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. II, p. 650. Dramatic expression is also best suited to the natural legibility of physiological expressions as signs of emotions: “So intimately connected are the soul and body, that every agitation in the former, produceth a visible effect upon the latter. There is, at the same time, a wonderful uniformity in that operation; each class of emotions and passions being invariably attended with an external appearance peculiar to itself. These external appearances or signs, may not

der, then, that a substantial number of his illustrations are taken from Shakespeare; his citations seem to be largely limited to the articulate, explicit expression of emotions. Kames' preference is for the classical canon (his only substantial inclusion of eighteenth-century literature being *Ossian*); he opts for a generic prioritization which does not yet account for the opportunities of narrative prose that was to infuse the nineteenth-century poetics of the novel,⁷⁰ whereas his contemporary, Samuel Johnson, propagates the sympathetic potential of the 'new' novel⁷¹ and biography⁷² and thus points beyond the classical generic canon.

However, although Kames suggests a certain hierarchy of genres in terms of their sympathetic effects, he makes no fundamental distinction between reading fictional and non-fictional texts; his criterion seems to be a broad sense of eventfulness; to some extent, even of "narrativity"⁷³ in literature, or rather: he focuses on dramatic and epic representations of human actions and emotions, irrespective of their fictionality.⁷⁴ Human agents in interaction and experiencing emotions seem to be the prerequisite for the evocation of an ideal presence that aims at doubling or re-living *experience* in the reader's or audience's mind.

The generic qualifications notwithstanding, Kames conceives of the nature of reading in a way that anticipates to a significant degree modern read-

improperly be considered as a natural language, expressing to all beholders emotions and passions as they arise in the heart. [...] the character of a man can be read in his face; and beauty, which makes so deep an impression, is known to result, not so much from regular features and a fine complexion, as from good nature, good sense, sprightliness, sweetness, or other mental quality, expressed upon the countenance. [...] the external sign is indeed visible; but to understand its meaning we must be able to connect it with the passion that causes it, an operation far beyond the reach of eyesight. Where then is the instructor to be found that can unveil this secret connection? [...] had we no other means but experience for understanding the external signs of passion, we could not expect any degree of skill in the bulk of individuals: yet matters are so much better ordered, that the external expressions of passion form a language understood by all, by the young as well as the old, by the ignorant as well as the learned." (*Elements of Criticism*, vol. II, pp. 296 f.).

⁷⁰ See Rae Greiner's study *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

⁷¹ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* no. 4, 31 March 1750.

⁷² Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* no. 60, 13 October 1750.

⁷³ For a broad, intermedial definition of narrativity, see H. Porter Abbott "Narrativity", in: Peter Hühn et al. (eds.), *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, <http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Narrativity/> (26 January 2015).

⁷⁴ Accordingly, poetry appears of little interest; the possibility of sympathy with a poetic consciousness through reading poetry obviously does not enter into his model on any significant scale.

er response criticism and cognitive affect studies in literary theory. His basic argument stresses the moral effect of ideal presence generated by fictional texts. “[F]iction commands our passions”, Kames pronounces; “by means of language”, it

has the command of our sympathy for the good of others. By the same means, our sympathy may also be raised for our own good. [...] examples both of virtue and of vice raise virtuous emotions; which becoming stronger by exercise, tend to make us virtuous by habit as well as by principle.⁷⁵

The real-world affinity of “fiction” makes it a suitable instrument for moral education by means of repeated experiences of ideal presence. Translated into the words of modern cognitive reader response theory, “[t]he reader becomes an unobserved observer in scenes of the lives of characters in the story world.”⁷⁶ Generating ideal presence by means of fiction functions as a kind of “simulation” (rather than “mimesis”)⁷⁷ of actions and emotions that draws the reader or beholder into the scene as an observer. To spin out the analogy to modern theory even further, Kames’ affective reading theory is one that foregrounds emotional empathy through role taking (which requires fictional or non-fictional texts to foreground human agents in interaction), ascribing a secondary role at best to cognitive empathy.⁷⁸

Of course, Kames’ theory of reading is deeply embedded in eighteenth-century thought, above all in the discourse of moral philosophy (and law), with which he was very familiar. While he employs sympathy with little terminological rigidity, the proximity to Hume and Smith is clearly there,

⁷⁵ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 77.

⁷⁶ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 445.

⁷⁷ Regarding the effect of literature, Oatley proposes the concept of “simulation”, which he sees as a rethinking of Aristotelian “mimesis”. Keith Oatley, “Meetings of Minds: Dialogue, Sympathy, and Identification in Reading Fiction”, in: *Poetics* 26 (1999), pp. 439–454, here p. 441.

⁷⁸ Oatley, for instance, argues – with reference to Bakhtin’s dialogic model of the novel – that unlike expository or scientific texts, art strives for something that he calls “Meetings of Minds” (p. 440). While the “oneway meeting” between fictional character and reader/beholder varies according to specific genres and narrative techniques, ranging from identification to some aesthetic distance, the underlying principle remains the same: the “affiliative joining of reader and author, or reader and characters” (p. 452). Significantly, Oatley and others, following Scheler, suggest distinguishing between sympathy vs. empathy, or between a “cognitive, perspective-taking side and an emotional reactivity side”, the distinction between cognitive and affective empathy being supported by recent evolutionary theory and neurological science. Eva Maria Koopman and Frank Hakemulder, “Effects of Literature on Empathy and Self-Reflection: A Theoretical-Empirical Framework”, in: *Journal of Literary Theory* 9 (2015), pp. 79–111, here pp. 83 f.

especially so with regard to the *moral* function of sympathy. For Kames, too, sympathetic reading by way of experiencing ideal presence serves to promote moral progress through what was variously conceived of as imitation or emulation. To point to the analogy to cognitive studies once more, Kames insists on the effect of affective reading on ‘pro-social behaviour’. Reading, thus goes the implication of Kames’ argument, broadens our social and moral scope by affording us – through ideal presence – a more diverse encounter with others than the ‘real’ social world would hold out for the common reader.

This is the point where Kames conflates moral and aesthetic theory, providing the ubiquitous ideas of emulation or instruction by way of literature with a sentimental, or sympathetic, foundation: emulation operates through the sympathetic emotion of virtue enhanced by experiences of ideal presence. However, unlike the contemporary moral philosophers, and unlike his fellow moral and literary critic, Samuel Johnson, Kames does not differentiate between different degrees of intensity in such scenarios. Proximity, a yardstick of sympathy for Hume and Smith,⁷⁹ does not enter into Kames’ observations, and probability does not explicitly serve as a criterion, as it does in Johnson’s propagation of biography and the new novel. How sympathetic readings should translate into good lives is a question, though, that Johnson, as opposed to Kames, does not pursue in any detail. In Johnson, the instructive benefit of reading is somehow taken for granted while Kames spells out a theoretical model inspired by the “sympathetic emotion of virtue”.

Johnson and Kames also differ on the role of historical writing in such instructive reading processes. According to Kames, historical writing also necessarily resorts to the notion of ideal presence and its operation qua sympathy – “even genuine history has no command over our passions but by ideal presence only; and consequently [...] in this respect it stands upon the same footing with fable.”⁸⁰ With this observation, Kames argues much in line with eighteenth-century historiography, which debated over the significance of the reader’s involvement.⁸¹ Johnson, in contrast, held reservations

⁷⁹ See Fonna Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

⁸⁰ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 71.

⁸¹ Thus Adam Ferguson in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) also contended that transporting the reader “into the very place and time” was the business of history, too: “As actors or spectators, we are perpetually made to feel the difference of human conduct,” he argued; “[o]ur sensibility on this subject gives their charm, in retirement, to the relations of history, and to the fictions of poetry; sends forth the tear of compassion, gives to the blood its briskest movement, and to the eye its liveliest glances of displeasure or joy.” Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil So-*

as to history's sympathetic potential, as it seemed too far removed from the reader's experience.⁸²

Johnson uses sympathy to establish a different priority although he does not explicitly refer to the term or to that of "ideal presence". As to the latter, he displays a considerable degree of scepticism concerning the power of theatre to evoke such an effect as labelled "ideal presence" by Kames. "The spectator", according to Johnson, "knows with certainty that he has not changed his place; and he knows that place cannot change itself"; above all, the spectator knows, "from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players".⁸³

In any case, whilst his contemporary Johnson thus refuted a poetics of uncontested literary presence in this comment, the notion of identificatory reading by way of sympathy is one that, although without recourse to the term itself,⁸⁴ allowed him to notoriously promote biography to a supreme status in the hierarchy of genres. "Those parallel circumstances, and kindred images, to which we readily conform our minds" he finds, above all, in "the lives of particular persons" and therefore considers "no species of writing [...] more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition."⁸⁵

Johnson's notion of biography's didactic utility is based on a model of sympathetic reading that comes very close to, or rather anticipates, Kames'

ciety. Ed. by Fania Oz-Salzberger, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 36. For historiography and sympathy, see Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain 1740–1820*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁸² Johnson, *Rambler* no. 60.

⁸³ Samuel Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare", in: *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. VII. Ed. by Arthur Sherbo, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968, pp. 59–113, here p. 76. Kames, in contrast, while declaring the unities of time and place, too, as of little importance and a historical phenomenon, explicitly insisted on the unity of plot as it produced the "mutual connection" required of all elements in terms of "their common relation to the grand event or catastrophe." Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. II, p. 673.

⁸⁴ Johnson speaks of "an act of the imagination, that realizes the event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves." Johnson, *Rambler* no. 60.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* For the role of sympathy in Johnson's poetics of biography, see Helga Schwalm, *Das eigene und das fremde Leben*, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2007, pp. 153–162 and 331–345.

theory. Unlike ‘big history’, biography cajoles the reader into a sort of short-lived sympathetic identification resembling ideal presence (‘while the deception lasts’). Its affinity with the reader’s world generates a kind of kindred spirit that enables the reader to gain instruction from the reading process. Just how this instruction was to operate Johnson does not elaborate on, but Kames, as we have seen, has an answer ready, explaining the habituation of virtue through identificatory reading. Moreover, he expands on the role of reflection in this process, transcending a mere emotional identification. In his elaboration on “Epic and Dramatic Composition” in the latter part of *Elements*, Kames distinguishes between “pathetic composition, whether epic or dramatic and “moral composition”. The former “tends to a habit of virtue, by exciting us to do what is right, and restraining us from what is wrong”, with two “extremely salutary” effects springing from its “frequent pictures of human woes”: “they improve our sympathy, and fortify us to bear our own misfortunes”.⁸⁶ Virtue as a habitual disposition, however, evolves through sympathetic emotional exercise preferably aided by reflection, a ‘reflex affective’ dimension of reading that only “moral compositions” as opposed to simply pathetic ones afford.⁸⁷ Tragedy serves as his best case in point. While “pity” in Kames’ transformative adoption of the Aristotelian formula is “the ruling passion of a pathetic tragedy”, and this so “to a height scarce exceeded by any thing felt in real life”, “moral tragedy” takes us onto a higher plane of moral reflection by bringing “fear or terror” into play. It is the very fear of the tragic hero’s potential flaws (“some wrong bias”), which cause the hero’s “misfortune”, that make us dread our “falling into the same misfortune”.⁸⁸ The Aristotelian poetics of tragedy is transformed into a theory of sympathetic reading attended by moral reflection, putting the spectators, by frequent reiteration of such experience, “upon their guard against the disorders of passion”.⁸⁹

(3) A third facet of the Kamesian transformative appropriation of sympathy reveals a striking (Pre-)Romantic dimension of Kames’ theory of literature and reading. On the one hand, Kames’ notion of reading makes a significant step towards a notion of identificatory sympathy. William Godwin was to pursue the issue further, significantly shifting the object of sympathetic transport from the represented scenes to the author himself: “When I read Thomson, I become Thomson; when I read Milton, I become Milton. I

⁸⁶ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. II, p. 651.

⁸⁷ “[B]y being moral it ceaseth not to be pathetic: it enjoys beside an excellence peculiar to itself; for it not only improves the heart [...] but instructs the head by the moral it contains”. Ibid.

⁸⁸ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. II, p. 653.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

find myself a sort of intellectual chameleon, assuming the colour of the substances on which I rest".⁹⁰ In Godwin's version, sympathetic transport of ideal presence allows the reader to melt into the authorial imagination. Godwin seems to come close to a sense of psychological *Einfühlungshermeneutik* at this point.

On the other hand, Kames contributes another significant new angle, remarking on the role of sympathy in the aesthetics of production: quite late into his first volume of *The Elements of Criticism*, in his chapter "On Sentiments", it is the writer turned spectator that enters the scene of poetic sympathy. In order to reach a "delicacy of execution" for a "long theatrical representation", he elaborates, "it is necessary that a writer assume the precise character and passion of the personage represented; which requires an uncommon genius".⁹¹ Not only is the writer endowed with "uncommon genius" – not an unusual ascription as such – but the writer's special faculty consists of his faculty of sympathetic projection, rendering him a spectator lost in reverie to the scene of his own imagination. The writer performs the act of the imagination to feel another – entering the business of the actor, as it were.

To awake passion by an internal effort merely, without any external cause, requires great sensibility: and yet that operation is necessary, no less to the writer than to the actor; because none but those who actually feel a passion, can represent it to the life. The writer's part is the more complicated: he must add composition to passion; and must, in the quickest succession, adopt every different character. But a very humble flight of imagination, may serve to convert a writer into a spectator; so as to figure, in some obscure manner, an action as passing in his sight and hearing. [...] This descriptive manner of representing passion, is a very cold entertainment: our sympathy is not raised by description; we must first be lulled into a dream of reality, and every thing must appear as passing in our sight.⁹²

Almost inadvertently, Kames' critical theory has shifted from a psychological aesthetics of response to one of aesthetic production/composition by way of a sympathetic imagination, conjuring up a kind of external correlative, the object of composition, to the internal emotion that is to be expressed. This is Hume's semiotic model of sympathy turned upside down. Kames stages the poet as both spectator and actor in a scene of his own imaginary making. Almost like Coleridge's Shakespeare does, or later Keats' poet endowed

⁹⁰ William Godwin, *The Enquirer* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1797); quoted in Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, p. 106. I am following Salber Phillips's excellent discussion of this point particularly with regard to Godwin (*Society and Sentiment*, pp. 105–110).

⁹¹ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 312.

⁹² Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, pp. 313 f.

with “negative capability”, Kames’ version of literary composition requires self-annihilation: “the writer, who, annihilating himself, can thus become another person”.⁹³ The pivotal turn towards a sympathetic aesthetic creativity is visible.⁹⁴ Furthermore, there is a striking resemblance to Wordsworth’s notion of the poet, who, bringing “his feelings near to those of the persons he describes, nay for short spaces of time perhaps”, lets “himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs”.⁹⁵ In this context, Wordsworth’s notorious chemical reaction that allows the poet to experience in tranquillity “an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation”⁹⁶ might be read in terms of ideal presence. I have found no evidence of Wordsworth reading Kames (whereas he did read Shaftesbury)⁹⁷, but I suggest a significant discursive affinity that, with the benefit of hindsight at least, marks Kames’ position as a pivotal point of intersection between eighteenth-century and (Wordsworthian) Romantic poetics, hinging upon a turn towards the poet as spectatorial agent of his sympathetic creative imagination.

4. Popular Migrations and Diffusions

My trajectory of sympathy in the eighteenth century began with observations of Shaftesbury’s position, sketching him both as a philosopher of natural affection and sympathetic self-doubling, connected to a regime of self. The argument was that Shaftesbury displayed a noticeable wariness of sociability, running counter to the optimism of politeness. Modelled on Smith and Hume, Kames’ *Elements* display a strong but varied, if not diverse presence of sympathy, making “a capital figure”⁹⁸ for the purposes of and production of fiction as well as for the constitution of society. Reading, in short, contributes to our “daily exercise” of “our sympathetic emotions”⁹⁹ along with “instruct[ing] the head by the moral it contains”.¹⁰⁰ Despite the insistence on

⁹³ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 312.

⁹⁴ I share this view with Roman Barton.

⁹⁵ William Wordsworth, “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)”, in: *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*. Ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 595–615, here p. 604.

⁹⁶ Wordsworth, “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*”, p. 611.

⁹⁷ Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth’s Reading: 1800–1815*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 62. Also see Rowan Boyson, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment Idea of Pleasure*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, esp. p. 25.

⁹⁸ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 308.

⁹⁹ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 654.

¹⁰⁰ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, p. 651.

reflection, the sympathetic emotion of virtue lays the ground for our sociability: “[M]utual support, the shining attribute of society, is of too great moment to be left dependent upon cool reason; it is ordered more wisely, and with greater conformity to the analogy of nature, that it should be enforced even instinctively by the passion of sympathy”.¹⁰¹

In his more popular writings, Lord Kames, the judge, shows no such strong trust in sympathy as an emotion. In his *Introduction to the Art of Thinking*¹⁰², running through several editions and originally composed for the benefit of his family, he makes no reference to sympathy in the context of moral sense although admitting “men are more likely to be praised into virtue, than to be railed out of vice”.¹⁰³ Rather than refer to a sympathy-based moral sense, Kames more heavily relies on our sense of norms and, above all, on moderation, “order”, and the self-serving utility of morality. Benevolence is a disposition that happily serves the individual’s self-interest: “The good-natured man is the truly selfish. Benevolence procures a stock of friends and wellwishers, of greater value than a stock of money. These will be of constant use and satisfaction”.¹⁰⁴ Virtue is also explained by way of a kind of memory that serves a useful purpose: “The past, no longer in the power of fortune, is to the virtuous only, a constant source of enjoyment. What satisfaction, in looking back with approbation! What uneasiness, in looking back with shame and remorse! This, above every consideration, establishes the preference of virtue”.¹⁰⁵

Kames’ popular account, then, opts to rely little on principles that do not serve our somewhat selfish purposes and cannot be safely fitted into social order. The wariness of the sceptic judge (with his knowledge of human fallibility) overrules the critic and moral philosopher. As in Shaftesbury, sympathy seems a fairly exclusive principle to rely on. But none of that takes a systematic place in Kames’ writings; the question of how individual moral growth achieved by (frequent) reading relates to Kames’ advocacy of government, authority, and rules remains uncertain. Yet there is again perceptible an undercurrent of wariness of the moral powers of sympathy, a wariness that will culminate in its Romantic association with the mob and the crowd.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, the semantic instabilities and flexibilities in terms of sym-

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Introduction to the Art of Thinking* (1775). Ed. by John Valdimir Price, London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1993.

¹⁰³ Kames, *Introduction*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁴ Kames, *Introduction*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Kames, *Introduction*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁶ See Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

pathy's conceptual locations and functions contradict any linear story of transformation running towards modernity. Old and new meanings of sympathy seem to continue to coexist, particularly in popular writings – as the older cosmological principle, sympathy still features occasionally as a principle of universal cohesion, also translated into the terms of commerce, as was the case in Pratt's very popular *Poem on Sympathy*. Pratt links sympathy “with our SENSES, with our natural INFIRMITIES, and with the proper use of MONEY”¹⁰⁷ in order to unfold a semantics of sympathy that pertains both to cosmological and intersubjective dimensions:

Instinct, or Sympathy, or what you will,
 The social principle is active still;
 Of every element it glows the soul,
 Touches, pervades, and animates the whole;
 Floats in the gale, surrounds earth's wide domain,
 Ascends with fire, and dives into the main;
 Whilst dull, or bright, the affections know to play,
 As full, or feebly, darts this social ray;
 Dimly it gleams on insect, fish, and fowl,
 But spreads broad sunshine o'er man's favour'd soul....
 Gain, pleasure, passion, property, induce
 Each single man to study general use.
 Thus nature and necessity agree
 The social chain to stretch from land to sea.¹⁰⁸

Old and new modes of sympathy appear together in this popular poem, celebrating natural harmony and social cohesion as well as justifying the socio-economic order (thereby possibly rescuing commerce from the charge of being responsible for the “present Effeminacy”¹⁰⁹).

Outlook: Sympathy and Romanticism

Interweaving social/intersubjective and cosmological dimensions of sympathy will also be the business of the Romantics. Again, Wordsworth is my case in point. For while Wordsworth, as I have attempted to show, appropri-

¹⁰⁷ Samuel Jackson Pratt, *Sympathy, a poem. The fourth edition. Corrected and much enlarged*, London: Thomas Cadell, 1781, p. v.

¹⁰⁸ Pratt, *Sympathy*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁹ On the discursive interconnection of taste, commerce, and stability, see Manolescu, “Traditions of Rhetoric”, pp. 237–239, who cites from John Brown's *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757), which ran through many editions, on the issue of effeminacy and commerce.

ates an eighteenth-century notion of theatrical sympathy related to ideal presence for his notion of aesthetic production, he also incorporates into his poetological self-reflection notions that pertain to earlier transformative stages of sympathy. Speaking of “A plastic power/Abode with me; a forming hand”¹¹⁰ in Book II of his *Prelude*, he alludes to Cudworth’s “Plastic nature”, defined as the one “vital unitive principle in the universe”, an organic and dynamic structure that makes nature resemble art,¹¹¹ as it is a kind of unconscious structural practice: “they do not know, but only do”.¹¹² At this point, then, Cudworth’s imagery of an inward principle of organic vitality and dynamics contiguous with and related to art reappears, after its initial post-Shaftesburian oblivion, in Wordsworth’s nature poetics. Romanticist aesthetics may perhaps be seen to re-balance the intricate seventeenth and eighteenth-century vacillations of sympathy between cosmological and intersubjective principles, critiquing the latter or turning it into a purely poetic negative capability and yet resorting to sympathy’s earlier notion as a unifying principle in nature to be translated into the poet’s secret signature.

¹¹⁰ William Wordsworth, “The Prelude”, in: *Major Works*, pp. 375–590, here p. 401.

¹¹¹ Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1845), Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995, pp. 235 f.

¹¹² Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, p. 242.