

Novel Reading and Self-Improvement in Scotland, c.1800–37

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the relationship between novel reading and self-improvement in Scotland during the early nineteenth century, focusing on the novels of Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier, and Elizabeth Hamilton. It contends that, through their self-conscious engagement with discourses on mental and moral improvement, these female novelists contributed something different to the novel from their male contemporaries – including John Galt, James Hogg, and, most famously, Walter Scott – thereby expanding the proliferation of alternative Scottish fiction that Scott's *Waverley Novels* enabled. It complements the often male-centric studies of the novel in Romantic-period Scotland to date by elucidating Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's hitherto underappreciated development of the novel, identifying them as strategic, impactful participants in its generic evolution, whose legacies extend into Victoria's reign.

I argue that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton redeploy longstanding antinovel stereotypes within their novels in satirical, sophisticated, and implicit ways, in order to promote a model of active reading, centring on distance, self-reflection, and critical readerly engagement. This enables their works to provide antidotes to the ostensibly corrosive effects of novel reading. I argue further that these novelists engage in complicated, performative, often subversive ways with familiar stereotypes pertaining to national identity and mental cultivation. In doing so, they encourage careful reading and present self-improvement as an iterative process comprising education and application.

The first four chapters analyse this process and the distinction between what I term true and false improvement within the novels, alongside their treatment of common prejudices. The final chapter analyses historical readers' responses to demonstrate the ways in which these novels were recognised as tools for self-improvement. Ultimately, this thesis argues that paying closer attention to the works of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, and especially the model of reading they promote, provides us with a new understanding of a pivotal phase in the novel's development.

Declaration

I, Cleo Stephanie Caldbeck O'Callaghan Yeoman, confirm that this research received ethical approval from the University of Stirling's General University Ethics Panel on 1 November 2021. No generative artificial intelligence software has been used in the preparation of this thesis, including the generation of data or writing the final text, and I consent to the use of plagiarism detection software. This work is original and my own. I explicitly acknowledge and reference all my sources throughout the thesis in footnotes and in my Bibliography.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CSC O'Callaghan Yeoman', written in a cursive style.

Date: 26 June 2025

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Bibliographic Note

Novel Editions

This thesis consults the Edinburgh Editions of the works of Walter Scott and John Galt, and the Stirling/South Carolina Edition of the works of James Hogg. There is not yet a standardised series of critical editions of the female-authored novels under study. I have therefore had to use a combination of first editions and the most recent (often only) critical editions of individual novels. Unless otherwise stated, I consult the following editions of the novels of Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier, and Elizabeth Hamilton, which are presented below in order of first publication. For reasons of scope, I do not consider Hamilton's first novel, *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796), in this thesis, though many of its themes and ideas persist in her later two novels, which I analyse in depth.

Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800). Edited by Claire Grogan. Broadview, 2000.

Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808). Edited by Pam Perkins. ASLS, 2010.

Mary Brunton, *Self-Control* (1811). Edited by Anthony Mandal. Routledge, 2016.

Mary Brunton, *Discipline* (1814). Edited by Olivia Murphy. Routledge, 2018.

Susan Ferrier, *Marriage* (1818). Edited by Dorothy McMillan. ASLS, 2020.

Mary Brunton, *Emmeline with Some Other Pieces*. Edinburgh: Manners and Miller, Constable, 1819.

Susan Ferrier, *The Inheritance* (1824). With an Introduction by Ronnie Young. Kennedy & Boyd, 2009.

Susan Ferrier, *Destiny; or, the Chief's Daughter*. 3 vols. Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1831.

Abbreviations

I abbreviate longer novel titles throughout the thesis, so *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* is referred to as *Memoirs*, and *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* simply as *Cottagers*. I also avoid including novels' subtitles after their first mention, referring, for example, to *Destiny; or, the Chief's Daughter* simply as *Destiny*, and *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* as *Waverley*.

Periodicals

To ensure ease of access via online repositories, I have deviated slightly from the eighteenth edition of the Chicago Manual of Style by citing the month of publication for periodical reviews (discussed primarily in Chapter Five) alongside the requisite year of publication.

Introduction

There are a kind of books, which tho' published under the title of Novels, are designed as an antidote to the bad effects of them.¹

I'm certain – indeed, I think there's no doubt of it – that reading does young people much harm. It puts things into their heads that never would have been there, but for books. I declare, I think reading's a very dangerous thing.²

Just as surely as the people who make them, texts are a part of all they have met, a complex product of a cultural moment in which a past is receding and a future developing.³

This thesis begins from the premise that, over the course of the long eighteenth century, the novel was repeatedly depicted and perceived as a source of moral, emotional, intellectual, and even sexual corruption. It argues that Scottish novelists of the early nineteenth century, and three Scottish female novelists in particular, wrote back against this longstanding discourse, presenting the novel as a source of self-improvement in theory and in practice. In what follows, I demonstrate how Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier, and Elizabeth Hamilton engage performatively in complicated ways in their novels with a variety of common stereotypes in order to promote a critically engaged approach to novel reading that enables their works to provide tools for mental and moral self-improvement. Much attention has already been paid to the contributions of these women's Scottish male contemporaries to the novel, and above all to Walter Scott's historicization of fiction, by which Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's own contributions have often been eclipsed. Ultimately, therefore, this thesis argues that approaching the novel in Scotland during the opening decades of the nineteenth century from a different angle, and paying closer attention to the works of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, and in particular the models of active and distanced reading they promote, provides us with a new understanding of a pivotal phase in the development of the novel as a genre.

¹ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (Colchester, 1785), 86, ProQuest.

² Susan Ferrier, *Marriage*, ed. Dorothy McMillan (ASLS, 2020), 162.

³ James Paul Hunter, *Before Novels* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), ix.

‘At the dawn of the nineteenth century the literary status of the novel could not have been lower’.⁴ Thus asserts Lionel Stevenson in *The English Novel: A Panorama* and thus emerges the starting point for this thesis. Of course, such categorical assertions should always be approached with a degree of caution. This is especially the case when the assertion relates to the reception of literary texts, the inherent ambiguities and subjectivities of which render exceptions inevitable even to conclusions with careful caveats. Nevertheless, one does not have to look far to find examples of others who agree, more or less, with Stevenson. Writing about the 1790s, Ann H. Jones posits that the reputation of the novel ‘at that time was at its nadir’.⁵ She ascribes the lowest point of the novel’s esteem to a slightly earlier period than Stevenson, but she also acknowledges that ‘by 1800 the reputation of novels was so low that the *Scots* and *Gentleman’s* magazines gave them scant attention’, confirming that this situation was not at all improved by the start of the following decade.⁶ Gary Kelly effectively reconciles both views when he writes that ‘novel reading was disapproved of in Britain from the seventeenth century at least, but never more so than in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries’, by which time, as Yi-Cheng Weng recently observed, ‘fear of the potential dangers posed by novels was widespread’.⁷ Stereotypes pertaining to the dangers of novel reading were by no means a new (or novel) phenomenon at the start of the nineteenth century, but had rather been brewing and building up over many decades, taking on a particular potency around 1800. Critics are undecided on precisely when these stereotypes and anxieties surrounding novel reading first began to manifest, but the general consensus is that they did so at least as far back as the start of the eighteenth century. William B. Warner, for example, contends that ‘novel reading had become a scandal’ as early as the 1720s, thus tempering slightly Kelly’s claim.⁸

⁴ Lionel Stevenson, *The English Novel: A Panorama* (Constable & Company Ltd., 1960), 177.

⁵ Ann H. Jones, *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen’s Age* (AMS Press, 1986), 2.

⁶ Jones, 2.

⁷ Gary Kelly, “‘This Pestiferous Reading’: The Social Basis of Reaction Against the Novel in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain”, *Man and Nature/L’Homme et la nature* 4 (1985): 183, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1011845ar>; Yi-Cheng Weng, “‘She had recourse to her pen’: Radical Voices in Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*”, in ‘Four Nations Fiction by Women, 1789–1830’, ed. Elizabeth Edwards, special issue, *Romantic Textualities* 22 (2017): 37, doi:10.18573/j.2017.10152.

⁸ William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750* (University of California Press, 1998), 148.

As a result of, and in response to, its intensifying notoriety, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a growing number of novels began to appear that had ostensibly been written, as the epigraph from Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* (1785) confirms, to provide an 'antidote' to the purportedly negative effects of novel reading. Their appearance supports Katherine Binhammer's assertion that 'the question for the novel at the turn of the [nineteenth] century was not "Are novels immoral?" but "Which novels are immoral?"'.⁹ In the preface to her 1791 novel *The School for Widows*, Reeve reiterates this point by identifying her own work as an example of a new kind of novel, written 'with a better design: namely, to counteract the poison of Fashion, Folly, and Dissipation; to blend together the *utile* and the *dulcé*; and to impress some moral inferences on the mind of the reader'.¹⁰ Such novels, Reeve presumes, will 'always find patrons and protectors', in contrast to 'the far greater number' of novels intended only 'as the amusement of a vacant hour'.¹¹ In doing so, Reeve clearly acknowledges the cognitive indolence stereotypically associated with novel reading, although it should be noted that this prefacing strategy was also deployed in novels that Reeve considered problematic, including especially those published by William Lane's Minerva Press.¹² Professions of 'a better design' thus constitute, in some cases, a performative device through which the bounds of sincerity are blurred, and they must therefore be read with caution.

Like Reeve, Ina Ferris recognises a distinction between the 'two kinds of novels' into which she contends most late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century, female-authored novels can be categorised: 'the worthless "ordinary novel"' and 'the superior, morally edifying [...] "proper novel"'.¹³ As Ferris explains, the latter was presented as something especially necessary for female readers, who were considered susceptible to the corrosive effects of novel reading in a way that men were not. Thus, 'standing against the ordinary novel', the proper novel 'harness[ed] the asocial energies of female reading', functioning in

⁹ Katherine Binhammer, 'The Persistence of Reading: Governing Female Novel-Reading in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 27, no. 2 (2003): 3, EBSCOHost.

¹⁰ Clara Reeve, *The School for Widows*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1791), 1:iii, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

¹¹ Reeve, *The School for Widows*, 1:iii.

¹² Hannah Doherty Hudson, *Romantic Fiction and Literary Excess in the Minerva Press Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 5.

¹³ Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 35.

so doing ‘as a corrective counterfiction’.¹⁴ This idea of a counterfiction is effectively conveyed in the *Monthly Review*’s appraisal of Hannah More’s *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), in which the reviewer commends More for her attempt ‘to counteract the poison of novels by something which assumes the form of a novel’.¹⁵ Alongside More, Ferris cites Brunton, Hamilton, Amelia Opie, Jane West, Jane Austen, and Maria Edgeworth as recognised authors of ‘proper’ novels. Ferrier is conspicuously absent from this list, and I would therefore add her here, recognising the sustained interest in female education and modes of reading that her novels evince.

One of the main ways through which this self-correcting type of novel achieved its objective was by discussing and self-consciously reflecting on the perceived dangers of novel reading. These discussions and reflections comprise what I term in this thesis a novelistic metadiscourse. This is not to say that novels had not previously been self-reflexive in form. As Clifford Siskin writes, a ‘concern *with* writing was articulated repeatedly during the eighteenth century *in* writing, making writing as much an object of inquiry as a means: writing about writing produced more writing in a self-reflexive proliferation. All writing became, in that sense, critical’.¹⁶ Turning to the novel specifically, he argues that, between them, Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson ‘standardized the self-reflective turns of writing’.¹⁷ The former achieved this through interspersing his novels with introductory chapters ‘of observation and reflection’, in which the fictionality of his novels is clear to readers; the latter through setting ‘standards for the extra-textual turns of novelism, critically contextualising his novels by precirculating the manuscripts, gathering critiques, writing replies, and carefully assembling all of the materials in extended prefaces’.¹⁸ Through the works of eighteenth-century authors such as Richardson and Fielding, Siskin suggests that ‘critical self-reflexivity permeated’ what he describes as ‘novelism’ – a term defined as ‘the discourse of and about novels’, embracing therefore ‘both the novels [themselves] and the

¹⁴ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 52.

¹⁵ ‘*Cælebs in Search of a Wife*’, *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* 58 (02, 1809): 128, ProQuest.

¹⁶ Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830* (John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 176. Siskin’s italics. Patricia Waugh substantiates this point when she writes that ‘to draw exclusively on contemporary fiction’ when discussing ‘metafictional practice’ – that is, the exploration of ‘a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction’ – ‘would be misleading, for, although the term “metafiction” might be new, the practice is as old (if not older) than the novel itself’. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (Routledge, 1984), 5, 2, 5. Waugh’s italics.

¹⁷ Siskin, 179.

¹⁸ Siskin, 179.

reviewing of them'.¹⁹ The emergence of a novelistic metadiscourse towards the turn of the nineteenth century was not an innovation *per se*, therefore, but rather an extension of the already self-reflective nature of the novel to include reflections on its reputation as well as its relationship with its own fictionality.

Jane Austen's defence of the novel in *Northanger Abbey* provides a landmark example of this novelistic metadiscourse in action. In it, the heroine Catherine Morland's stereotypically immersive reading is undercut by the narrator's insistence that novels, when read correctly, comprise works 'in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed' and 'in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature' is 'conveyed to the world in the best chosen language'.²⁰ Ferris describes *Northanger Abbey* as 'the best-known example of the way in which the proper novel functioned self-consciously as an antidote to female reading'.²¹ That it was published in 1817 but composed in 1799, and subsequently revisited by Austen 'perhaps in the autumn of 1802', supports this thesis' contention that the turn of the nineteenth century represented an especially fraught moment in antinovel discourse and the novel's awareness of its own reputation.²² Mary Charlton's novel *Rosella; or, Modern Occurrences* (1799) comprises a further, less often cited, though valuable, example, fittingly described by the *Anti-Jacobin Review* in 1801 as a 'novel upon novels'.²³ The development of a novelistic metadiscourse, which clearly acknowledged the perceived dangers of the novel, invited the possibility that novel reading, if done correctly, could provide readers with a means of moral self-improvement. In the preface to his 1740 novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, Richardson alludes to the same possibility when he writes that the purpose of his novel is 'to cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the Youth of Both Sexes'.²⁴ Similarly, in the preface to her 1749 novel *The Governess: or, the Little Female Academy*, Sarah Fielding asserts that 'the true use of books is to make you wise and better'.²⁵ Here, as with Reeve, the implication is that certain novels, such as those by Richardson and

¹⁹ Siskin, 186, 176, 186.

²⁰ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31.

²¹ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 55.

²² Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye, introduction to *Northanger Abbey* (1818), by Jane Austen, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge University Press, 2006), xxvi.

²³ 'Rosella', *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 8, no. 31 (01, 1801): 59, ProQuest.

²⁴ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.

²⁵ Sarah Fielding, *The Governess: Or, The Little Female Academy* (London, 1749; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2013), v.

Fielding, have the capacity to improve their readers by imparting moral lessons to them, thereby distinguishing themselves from other novels that perpetuate the actions that led to the fears on which antinovel discourse was based. The novelistic metadiscourse therefore reveals and contributes to a wider evolutionary process, through which reading certain kinds of novels became associated with readerly self-improvement.

Whereas, according to Ian Watt's influential account of the novel's proverbial rise, Richardson and Fielding's works comprise relatively early examples of the novel within the context of its generic development, by the start of the nineteenth century, the genre had become much more firmly established.²⁶ This meant that the stereotypes that antidotal novels by Reeve, Charlton, and Austen sought to counteract had in turn become much more widespread and prominent. In his 1815 review of Austen's *Emma* (1815), Walter Scott recognises this evolution when he describes novel reading in relation to 'those vices in civilized society so common that they are hardly acknowledged as stains upon the moral character, the propensity to which is nevertheless carefully concealed'.²⁷ Of course, the former part of this claim cannot be applied to the novel, since its perceived dangers were so often the subject of discussion. Scott recognises this too, observing that 'one would almost think that novel-reading fell under this class of frailties, since among the crowds who read little else, it is not common to find an individual of hardihood sufficient to avow his taste for these frivolous studies', concluding that 'a novel, therefore, is frequently "bread eaten in secret"'.²⁸ Thus, Scott draws to readers' attention the conflicting factors that made up the novel's reputation in Britain during the early nineteenth century. On the one hand, novels were immensely popular, and would become even more so with the arrival of Scott's own *Waverley Novels* in the 1810s. On the other, they were perceived as pernicious and frequently conceptualised as poison or a disease. Consequently, the act of novel reading was characterised as one haunted by feelings of shame and a fear of reproach, as Austen herself notes when observing the 'affected indifference, or momentary shame' of many readers.²⁹ In the introduction to her final novel, *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814), Frances Burney remarks upon the same conundrum, noting that 'in nothing is the force of denomination more striking than in the term Novel; a species of writing which, though never

²⁶ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (The Hogarth Press, 1987), 9.

²⁷ 'Emma', *Quarterly Review* 14, no. 27 (10, 1815): 188, ProQuest.

²⁸ 'Emma', *Quarterly Review*, 188.

²⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 31.

mentioned, even by its supporter, but with a look that fears contempt, is not more rigidly excommunicated, from its appellation, in theory, than sought and fostered, from its attractions, in practice'.³⁰ Like Scott, Burney presents the novel as something that was at once relished by the reading public and yet perceived as harmful and corrosive in its influence.

Critical discourses on the novel's rise in popularity are in keeping with Burney and Scott. Indeed, critics have persistently recognised the fact that, during the closing decades of the eighteenth and opening decades of the nineteenth centuries, more people were writing, publishing, and reading novels than ever before. Tending towards the earlier end of this timeframe, Siskin identifies the 1780s and 1790s as 'precisely the decades when the novel took off', with publication reaching, in James Raven's words, 'unprecedented levels in the late 1780s'.³¹ Siskin refers somewhat wryly to 'the supposedly lyrical advent of Romanticism', emphasising the novel's growing numerical dominance over poetry during these decades.³² Kelly dates the rise of the novel slightly later than Siskin, asserting that the Romantic period (which he defines as taking place between 1789 and 1830, bookended by the outbreak of the French Revolution and the death of King George IV, respectively), 'saw the rise of the novel not only to literary status but to become the most widely disseminated form of writing in society, apart from newspapers and magazines'.³³ Writing in America in 1803, the Presbyterian scholar and theologian Samuel Miller remarked, 'never was the literary world so deluged with the frivolous effusions of ignorance and vanity, in this form as within the last thirty years', observing that 'these ephemeral productions are daily composed, translated, revamped, and reprinted, to indulge the growing demand'.³⁴ Similarly, Vicesimus Knox observes in his often-cited essay 'Of Novel Reading' (1778) that 'fifty years ago there was scarcely a novel in the kingdom', alluding by extension to the proliferation of novels towards the end of the eighteenth century.³⁵ As Markman Ellis notes, this proliferation was triggered by another 'proliferation of modes of distribution and marketing of fiction', which

³⁰ Frances Burney, *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack, and Peter Sabor (Oxford University Press, 2001), 8.

³¹ Siskin, 155; James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750–1800* (Clarendon Press, 1992), 38.

³² Siskin, 155. For more on this, see Gary Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period 1789–1830* (Longman, 1989), x.

³³ Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period*, x.

³⁴ Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1803), 171–72, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.1037/11673-008>.

³⁵ Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary* (London, 1784), 68, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

in turn ‘increased the audience for fiction’.³⁶ He rightly identifies how, in line with these developments, ‘critics’ anxieties about the moral status of fiction’ were exacerbated further.³⁷ Thus, as the number of novel readers increased in the late eighteenth century, concerns pertaining to the dangers of novel reading intensified, pre-empting the dawn of the nineteenth century as a defining period in which antinovel rhetoric would reach a boiling point.

Despite conflicting views about the corrupting nature of the novel, there is no doubt that, during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, its popularity continued to rise.³⁸ Consequently, the novel during this period ‘[made] itself felt decisively as a significant cultural form – one that critical discourse could no longer afford simply to dismiss’, as Ferris has argued compellingly.³⁹ She attributes this transition to Scott himself, writing that ‘the decisive move from literary outsider to literary insider was initiated by Scott’s series of historical fictions’, which comprised another version of the proper novel due to their ‘cultural elevation’ of the genre.⁴⁰ This is not to say, of course, that the novel had not appeared within critical discourse before. Rather, it confirms that the novel, having gained generic stability during the final decades of the eighteenth century, emerged as its own ‘critical category’ during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, ‘thereby granting it a measure of literary authority’.⁴¹ Scott’s review of *Emma*, in addition to the success of his own *Waverley Novels* (the eponymous first of which appeared in 1814), is testimony to this stabilisation. In it, he reflects on the generic trajectory of the novel, before identifying ‘a style of novel [that] has arisen, within the last fifteen or twenty years’, differing from his own works and what had gone before by ‘presenting to the reader [...] a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him’.⁴² Here, Scott recognises ‘a tradition of female-authored domestic fiction’, which he ‘differentiated [...] from his own [historical fiction]’, of which the main practitioners alongside Austen were, as Ian Duncan notes, the Irish novelist

³⁶ Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 198.

³⁷ Ellis, 198.

³⁸ For more on the tension between the novel’s popularity and notoriety, see John Tinnon Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel: Popular Reactions from 1760 to 1830* (King’s Crown Press, 1943), 20; Joyce Marjorie Sanxter Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800* (Constable & Co. Ltd, 1932), 1; Binhammer, 3.

³⁹ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 8.

⁴⁰ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 2; Ian Duncan, ‘Scotland and the Novel’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell, Katie Trumpener, and Ian Duncan (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 255.

⁴¹ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 10, 8.

⁴² ‘*Emma*’, *Quarterly Review*, 192–93.

Maria Edgeworth and the Scottish novelists Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier, and Elizabeth Hamilton.⁴³ Scott's observation is in keeping with Ferris' assertion that the proper novel possessed 'a kind of realism and social utility that the ordinary novel so conspicuously lacked'.⁴⁴ As these lines suggest, works of domestic fiction typically centred around female education, marriage, and moral and religious lessons, often alongside discussions of national character. Duncan identifies Edgeworth as responsible for giving 'the tradition its "national" (Irish) development', which Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton applied to their own works of Scottish domestic fiction.⁴⁵ Scott's observation is echoed by Siskin's identification of an important change in the novel's reception, taking place in 'roughly the 1820s, when critics self-consciously noted a new attitude to what was being described as the "new" novel'.⁴⁶ By reflecting on 'the heightened formal definition of the novel' during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, to which he himself contributed, Scott confirms the novel as a popular genre worthy of critical recognition, despite the longstanding pejorative stereotypes surrounding it, which would nevertheless persist for decades yet to come.⁴⁷

Scott's differentiation between a feminine tradition of domestic fiction and his own historical fiction is fundamental to the framing of this thesis, which analyses the link between novel reading and self-improvement as it is presented within the early-nineteenth-century, female-authored Scottish novel. Building on the highly influential work of scholars including Ian Duncan, Angela Esterhammer, Ina Ferris, Peter Garside, and Katie Trumpener, I argue that the first three decades of the nineteenth century represent a particularly formative period in the novel's development, specifically in terms of its perceived status as a tool for improvement. I do this by demonstrating that within the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and to a lesser extent Hamilton (who acts as a precursor to the other two), we can see strategies developing that promote readerly self-improvement through novel reading. These strategies expand on those of the eighteenth-century novel, while also paving the way for Victorian discourses on self-improvement.

As the Bibliographic Note shows, the novels that form the basis of my analysis were all published between 1800 and 1831. Hamilton's final novel appeared in 1808, and she died in 1816, before Ferrier's first novel was published. Criticism to date has rightly associated her

⁴³ Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 34.

⁴⁴ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 54.

⁴⁵ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 34.

⁴⁶ Siskin, 183.

⁴⁷ Duncan, 'Scotland and the Novel', 251.

more with the Scottish Enlightenment (recognising in particular her non-fictional writings and correspondence with Dugald Stewart) than it has with the Romantic period, and I therefore consider her part of an earlier generation.⁴⁸ Her association with the Jacobin debate of the 1790s further supports this positioning. Ferrier and Brunton form part of a slightly later generation of domestic female novelists (despite the latter's untimely death in 1818), and their works have often been analysed together in chapters on Scottish domestic fiction or the national tale.⁴⁹ My decision to extend this thesis' timeframe to 1837 is a purposeful one to highlight these novelists' formative influence reaching into Victoria's reign, which the Conclusion discusses in depth. The present thesis thus also expands on recent studies of the 1820s by scholars including Esterhammer, Jon Mee, and Matthew Sangster to 'recover the importance of a decade often lost between Romantic and Victorian periodisations'.⁵⁰ In keeping with the epigraph from *Before Novels*, this thesis asserts that the opening decades of the nineteenth century comprise a 'cultural moment' for the novel and its association with self-improvement, 'in which a past is receding and a future developing'.⁵¹

The strategies for readerly improvement that this thesis uncovers are contingent on and revealed through Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's complicated engagement with a range of familiar stereotypes. I contend that during the period under study, stereotypes surrounding the novel, which had been building up over the past two centuries, had become so firmly embedded within literary cultural consciousness that they represented something of a

⁴⁸ See Pam Perkins, *Women Writers and the Edinburgh Enlightenment* (Rodopi, 2010); Jane Rendall, "'Elementary Principles of Education": Elizabeth Hamilton, Maria Edgeworth and the Uses of Common Sense Philosophy', *History of European Ideas* 39, no. 5 (2013): 613–30, doi:10.1080/01916599.2012.735136; Fiona Price, 'Democratizing Taste: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and Elizabeth Hamilton', *Romanticism* 8, no. 2 (2002): 179–96, EBSCOHost; Joanna Wharton, *Material Enlightenment Women Writers and the Science of Mind, 1770–1830* (Boydell & Brewer, 2018).

⁴⁹ See Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell, 'The Other Great Unknowns: Women Fiction Writers of the Early Nineteenth Century', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh University Press, 1997); Ainsley McIntosh, 'Domestic Fiction', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh University Press, 2021); Andrew Monnickendam, 'The Scottish National Tale', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, ed. Murray Pittock (Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

⁵⁰ Jon Mee and Matthew Sangster, 'Introduction', in *Remediating the 1820s*, ed. Jon Mee and Matthew Sangster (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 3. See also Angela Esterhammer, *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 5.

⁵¹ Hunter, ix.

‘cliché’.⁵² Recognising the validity of Raven’s warning that the ‘concern with the effects of novel-mania was a serious one, and should not be unthinkingly dismissed with retrospective levity’, I argue that the ubiquity of antinovel stereotypes at the turn of the nineteenth century, in conjunction with the novel’s increasing generic and critical prominence, is what enables and provides an impetus for these Scottish female novelists to engage self-consciously with the novel’s reputation in their own novels in sophisticated ways that rely on a high level of readerly engagement.⁵³ Building on their preoccupation with reputation, I argue further that these novelists engage in supportive, satirical, and subversive ways with two additional categories of culturally-entrenched stereotypes with which readers of their novels would have been familiar. These stereotypes pertain to national identity and mental cultivation. They comprise the central foci of Chapters Two and Three respectively and highlight an important way in which the novels under study demonstrate the ‘porosity’ that Claire Connolly associates with the novel in Ireland during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Connolly notes how ‘the novel became an active cultural agent in the period because of its ability to absorb and reshape other discourses in the context of wider shifts in the aesthetics of locality and nationality, the politics of representation, and the meaning of national culture’.⁵⁴ Setting its sights firmly on the relationship between novel reading and self-improvement, this thesis contends that the female-authored Scottish novels under study evince a similar, ‘notable permeability’ precisely through their absorption and reshaping of recognisable prejudices pertaining to reading, nation, and mental cultivation.⁵⁵

I argue that, by complicating and expanding on common stereotypes, these novels advocate to their implied readers an improving model of reading, founded on critical engagement, self-reflection, and distance. This model encourages readers to think for themselves and to engage their own judgement, as opposed to reading without thinking or falling victim to imaginative absorption. It thus provides an ameliorative alternative to the dangers historically associated with novel reading, enabling the novel itself to represent a

⁵² Jodi L. Wyett, ‘Female Quixotism Refashioned: *Northanger Abbey*, the Engaged Reader, and the Woman Writer’, *The Eighteenth Century* 56, no. 2 (2015): 261, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24575169>.

⁵³ James Raven, ‘Historical Introduction: the Novel Comes of Age’, in *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, vol. 1, 1770–1799, ed. James Raven, Stephen Bending, and Antonia Forster (Oxford University Press, 2000), 18.

⁵⁴ Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel, 1790–1829* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

⁵⁵ Connolly, 1.

potential tool for moral self-improvement. It also, crucially, confirms the period under study as a pivotal one for the novel and its relation to self-improvement by espousing principles and strategies that would later be adopted by and associated with Victorian writers including Samuel Smiles and George Eliot. To signal its prioritisation of critical engagement, I refer to this model most often as active reading, though I also use the term distanced reading when the emphasis is on readers learning to reflect on themselves based on another's example. Rather than being interchangeable, these two terms help to distinguish between the slightly different characteristics that define this form of reading.

A brief but effective insight into how Ferrier promotes active reading can be found in the second epigraph to this chapter, taken from her debut novel, *Marriage* (1818). In this passage, several metadiscursive components are at play, each of which contributes towards encouraging readers to think for themselves. In the first instance, readers will note that Ferrier is playing on the familiar conceptualisation of the novel as 'a very dangerous thing'.⁵⁶ Many readers reading this passage will in turn recognise the implicit familiarity at play, prompting them perhaps to consider the potential dangers posed by the novel they are in that moment reading (or by their novel reading practices broadly speaking). Readers must also recognise that the dangers surrounding novel reading – namely, that it 'puts things into [young people's] heads that never would have been there, but for books' – are remarked upon here by Miss Grizzy, a fictional character at whom they are encouraged to laugh due to her foolish notions, particularly concerning female education.⁵⁷ On the one hand, then, what Miss Grizzy says about reading would have been familiar to many readers; on the other, those readers are forced to question whether they still believe these stereotypes when they are voiced by a character in whose judgement they have been encouraged not to trust. By redeploying novelistic stereotypes in this nuanced manner, Ferrier advocates a high level of readerly engagement, which is partially dependent on knowledge of ubiquitous stereotypes, and which both catalyses and requires active reading.

Of course, more cynical readers may interpret the degree of humour and familiarity at play in this example as one that discourages or negates serious readerly response. All reading is subjective, and this cynicism may therefore be true for readers who choose to laugh but not to reflect on themselves. In any case, it is clear here, and in other examples discussed throughout this thesis, that performative engagement with familiar stereotypes in the female-

⁵⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 162.

⁵⁷ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 162.

authored novels under study contributes towards, and in some cases pre-empts, what Esterhammer describes as the ‘performance-oriented society of the 1820s’, characterised by an ‘active, adaptive, and experimental climate’.⁵⁸ As Esterhammer explains, ‘the capacious nineteenth-century concept of performance encourages us to understand works, whatever their medium, as events that involve production and reception’.⁵⁹ Beginning from this insight, I reveal how performative references to established prejudices enable Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton to promote readerly self-reflection – or ‘audience response’ – and active reading through their own novels at an important juncture in the novel’s reputation.⁶⁰ Since much of this thesis’ argument relies on the claim that the novels under study redeploy stereotypes that were specific to their own historical moment, I necessarily undertake, like Esterhammer, ‘an effort to read [these] texts in representative relation to the dated historical situation in which they were produced and once consumed’, in keeping with the precedent set by James Chandler.⁶¹ I then broaden our perspective to show how the strategies for promoting self-improvement developed by Ferrier and Brunton highlight the period under study as an influential one in which their novels figure explicitly as tools for improvement, the effects of which extend beyond this thesis’ timeframe.

My decision to focus exclusively on Scottish novels is justified first and foremost by the temporal parameters of this thesis. The turn of the nineteenth century represented a high point for the novel in Britain generally, in terms of popularity and production, but it was Scotland – and Edinburgh very specifically – that represented the epicentre of British literary culture in terms of novel writing, publishing, and reviewing. As Ian Duncan explains, ‘Scotch novels and Scotch reviewers were the most brilliant constellations in a northern literary galaxy which included – besides the historical romance and critical quarterly – a professionalized intellectual class, the entrepreneurial publisher, the nationalist ballad epic, and the monthly magazine’.⁶² These lines clearly echo a posthumous review of Ferrier’s novels, published in 1878, in which the reviewer, Ferrier’s great-nephew John Ferrier, reflects on ‘that literary galaxy that adorned Edinburgh society in the days of Scott, [Francis] Jeffrey, [John] Wilson, and others’, reiterating the city’s status as ‘a literary metropolis to

⁵⁸ Esterhammer, *Print and Performance*, 20, 6.

⁵⁹ Esterhammer, *Print and Performance*, 11.

⁶⁰ Esterhammer, *Print and Performance*, 11.

⁶¹ James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago University Press, 1998), 4. Esterhammer cites the same passage when outlining her methodology in *Print and Performance*, 2.

⁶² Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 20.

rival London'.⁶³ Indeed, it was Scott, by an unambiguously wide margin, who popularised the novel in this period, prompting William St Clair famously – and just a little hyperbolically – to suggest that Scott, during the Romantic period, ‘sold more novels than all the other novelists of the time put together’.⁶⁴ Duncan concurs, asserting that ‘Scott’s novels saturated the British fiction market, outselling all other novels combined’.⁶⁵

The success of Scott’s Waverley Novels led to a significant increase in the ‘proportion of British fiction titles produced in Scotland’ during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, rising ‘from a mere 0.5 percent in the first decade [...] to 4.4 percent in the 1810s and then to 12 percent in the 1820s, reaching 15 percent, or 54 out of 359 titles, in the peak years of 1822–25’.⁶⁶ These figures suggest that Edinburgh’s epicentral status was a qualitative, rather than quantitative, phenomenon, tied above all to the lure of the Great Unknown. The prevailing enthusiasm for Scottish novels was remarked upon at the time by reviewers and in works such as Sarah Green’s satirical *Scotch Novel Reading or, Modern Quackery: A Novel Really Founded on Facts*, which was published in 1824, in the middle of what Duncan identifies as the peak publication period for the novel in Scotland. In Green’s novel, the narrator observes that ‘we have been now, for some years, inundated with showers of Scotch novels, thicker than the snow you now see falling’.⁶⁷ As Esterhammer notes, ‘*Scotch Novel Reading* blends a parody of the “Caledonian Mania” (the title of the first chapter) caused by the Waverley novels with first-hand insight into how the popularity of Scottish fiction has distorted the mid-1820s book market’.⁶⁸ In doing so, she draws attention to the way in which Scottish novels specifically, through their popularity, contributed to novelistic metadiscourse. In *The History of the English Novel*, Ernest Baker alludes similarly to this popularity when he rightly observes that the Scottish novel ‘flourish[ed] in a plot of its own during the nineteenth century’, emphasising like Esterhammer the distinctive and dominating effects of the Scottish novel on British literary culture during the early nineteenth century.⁶⁹

⁶³ John Ferrier, ‘Miss Ferrier’s Novels’, *Temple Bar: A London Magazine for Town and Country Readers* 54 (11, 1878): 308, ProQuest; Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, xi.

⁶⁴ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 221.

⁶⁵ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, xi.

⁶⁶ Duncan, ‘Scotland and the Novel’, 251.

⁶⁷ Sarah Green, *Scotch Novel Reading* (London, 1824), 4.

⁶⁸ Esterhammer, *Print and Performance*, 199.

⁶⁹ Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel*, vol. 7, *The Age of Dickens and Thackeray* (Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1929), 11.

This thesis takes up as its governing rationale an important strand of Duncan's argument that 'Scott's massive success encouraged rather than deterred the production of alternative forms of Scottish fiction' and that 'the demand stimulated by the Waverley Novels made room for a proliferation of Scottish fiction by other hands'.⁷⁰ The fruits of this argument are borne out in Duncan's field-defining study, *Scott's Shadow* (2007), which 'attends to the generative rather than restrictive force of Scott's impact on prose fiction in the Romantic period', revealing how 'in the early 1820s [James] Hogg and [John] Galt emerged as the most original authors of Scottish prose fiction besides Scott, masters of the distinctive genres developed in the Blackwood orbit, regional tale and fictitious autobiography'.⁷¹ *Scott's Shadow* is unparalleled in its forceful establishment of 'the distinctive literary field that flourished in Edinburgh between 1802 (when the *Edinburgh Review* was established) and 1832 (the year of Scott's death)' as a defining period in the novel's history, and it therefore provides an invaluable precedent for this thesis. While making 'Scott's centrality its topic', *Scott's Shadow* also indicates the way in which studies to date of the novel in Scotland during the early nineteenth century have tended to focus on Scott, or on responses to Scott by male writers.⁷² As such, comparatively little attention has been paid to uncovering in particular Ferrier and Brunton's unique contributions to the novel in this period, and their lasting implications. This is not to dismiss the readings of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton that Duncan does provide in *Scott's Shadow*, with which I engage in Chapter Two especially. Ferris, similarly, by no means excludes female novelists from *The Achievement of Literary Authority* (her recognition of Brunton and Hamilton is noted earlier), and she emphasises the systemically gendered imbalance in the history of the novel precisely through contending that Scott imbued the novel with literary authority by interrupting its 'long-standing association with women'.⁷³ Ultimately, however, Ferris' book focuses on, and very convincingly demonstrates, 'the authority of the Waverley novels', which she does by also considering 'the counterfictions by John Galt and James Hogg'.⁷⁴ By centring on the novel and its relationship to self-improvement in the period, this thesis complements *Scott's Shadow* by attending to the still underappreciated contributions of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton to the development of the British novel. Duncan has already proved that 'Scott's historicization of fiction elicits not

⁷⁰ Duncan, 'Scotland and the Novel', 252.

⁷¹ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, xv, 22.

⁷² Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, xv.

⁷³ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 8.

⁷⁴ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 137, 10

fiction's absorption into history but its full categorical emergence, which made possible the Victorian primacy of the novel as a representation of national life'.⁷⁵ In the chapters that follow, I uncover Ferrier and Brunton's concurrent construction of the novel as a tool for outlining models of self-improvement, also considering Hamilton's precursory inventions and interventions. Rather than comprising the recovery of these authors for recovery's sake, this thesis establishes an alternative reason for tracing the development of the novel in Scotland during an especially ascendant period, in which works by women necessarily take priority over those by men.

To an extent, as Duncan notes himself, the underappreciation of the role played by Brunton and Ferrier in shaping the development of the novel is not unique to recent criticism, but is rather one that was already present during the period under study. Reflecting on a scene from the pioneering *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* series, *Noctes Ambrosianae*, Duncan recognises the 'gendered cast of Edinburgh literary life' that the image of 'a private party at a tavern' produces.⁷⁶ 'The rarity of female voices at the feast', he suggests, 'glosses the comparative tenuousness of the feminine tradition of domestic fiction in Scotland'.⁷⁷ This resulted in 'a relative exclusion of women authors from the literary boom in postwar Edinburgh', despite Francis Jeffrey's inclusion of Ferrier alongside Galt and Hogg in his famous review of 'Secondary Scottish Novels'.⁷⁸ Scott himself was publicly supportive of Ferrier, whom he hailed as 'the Scots equivalent of Edgeworth in Ireland and Jane Austen in England', praising 'the very lively work' *Marriage*, and famously referring to her as his 'sister shadow' (in other words, a worthy successor to continue the Scottish novel tradition), at the end of *A Legend of the Wars of Montrose* (1819).⁷⁹ Scott also praises Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808) at the end of *Waverley* (1814), presenting it as an admirable work 'upon similar subjects' by an author 'whose genius is highly creditable to [her] country', suggesting a degree of national pride.⁸⁰ By 1814, Brunton's first novel, *Self-Control* (1811) had already enjoyed critical acclaim and popularity. Her second novel, *Discipline* (1814), appeared five months after *Waverley* and, like Scott's novel, focused on Highland

⁷⁵ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, xii.

⁷⁶ Duncan, 'Scotland and the Novel', 255.

⁷⁷ Duncan, 'Scotland and the Novel', 256.

⁷⁸ Duncan, 'Scotland and the Novel', 256; Francis Jeffrey, 'Secondary Scottish Novels', *Edinburgh Review* 39, no. 77 (1823), ProQuest.

⁷⁹ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 34; Walter Scott, *A Legend of the Wars of Montrose*, ed. J. H. Alexander (Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 183.

⁸⁰ Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Peter D. Garside (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 364.

culture.⁸¹ Hamilton exhibits a similar sense of national pride when she praises Brunton's work alongside Scott's in a letter to the Scottish playwright Joanna Baillie in 1815: 'Let no one say that imagination does not operate on this side of the Tweed!', she writes, 'what do you think of "*Discipline?*" – of "*Waverley*" – of "*Guy Mannering?*" Are they not excellent in their way?'.⁸² Despite these instances of mutual recognition and appreciation, the 'gendered cast' of Edinburgh's metropolitan milieu set the tone for a longstanding underestimation of these female novelists' contributions to the novel's development in Scotland and beyond, in the period under study and in criticism since.

Indeed, as Peter Garside notes, 'traditionally the Romantic period in terms of fiction is viewed as the age of Walter Scott and Jane Austen', in whose metaphorical shadows Ferrier and Brunton have remained, despite Austen's relative insignificance in her own lifetime.⁸³ As William Toynbee, editor of the Romantic-period actor William Charles Macready's diaries, noted in 1912, 'at the present day Miss Austen ranks among the most honoured of English novelists, while probably Mrs. Brunton cannot be credited with a single reader'.⁸⁴ Implicit here is an assumption that Brunton and Ferrier might be, and often are, considered within a female tradition via Austen, as opposed to a Scottish one, which this thesis nuances.⁸⁵ The tendency to remember Scott and Austen, almost without exception, as the only novelists of significance from the decades under study can be traced in studies of the novel throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. These include, but are not limited to: George Saintsbury's *The English Novel* (1913), William Lyon Phelps' *The Advance of the English Novel* (1919), the sixth volume of Ernest Baker's *The History of the English Novel* (1929), Dorothy Van Ghent's *The English Novel: Form and Function* (1961), and, most recently,

⁸¹ Brunton was embarrassed by this similarity, mortified at potentially seeming to have copied Scott, and lamenting: 'the worst of it all is, that I have ventured unconsciously in *Waverley*'s own ground, by carrying my heroine to the Highlands!'. Mary Brunton to Mrs Craigie, 18 December, 1814, in *Emmeline with Some Other Pieces* (Edinburgh: Manners and Mill, Constable, 1819), lxxvi.

⁸² Elizabeth Hamilton to Joanna Baillie, 7 March, 1815, in *Memoirs of the Late Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton with a Selection from her Correspondence, and Other Unpublished Writings*, 2 vols., ed. Elizabeth Benger (London, 1818; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2:186.

⁸³ Peter Garside, 'The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Dispersal', in *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, vol. 2, 1800–1829, ed. Peter Garside and Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

⁸⁴ William Charles Macready, *The Diaries of William Charles Macready, 1833–1851 with 49 Portraits*, vol. 1, ed. William Toynbee (G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1912), 107.

⁸⁵ For examples of the former, see Jones, *Bestsellers of Austen's Age*; Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (Pandora, 1986).

English and British Fiction 1750–1820, edited by Garside and Karen O’Brien (2015).⁸⁶ All of this is not to suggest that earlier studies have been wrong to identify Scott and Austen as the most significant novelists, canonically speaking, from the period under study. Observing the sustained neglect of Scott’s female contemporaries within studies of the novel to date is, however, important because it highlights the limitations that this neglect has placed on our understanding of the novel’s generic development, and Brunton and Ferrier’s influence on this development. It therefore provides an additional justifying impetus for this thesis’ argument.

Scott’s praise of Ferrier and Hamilton in the previous paragraph gestures towards an important finding of this thesis, taken up in the Conclusion, which is that the strategies and ideas that Ferrier and Brunton develop in their novels were able to enter mainstream literary culture during the early nineteenth century, due to the dominance of the Scottish literary milieu within which they were produced. Their novels thus comprise, returning to Duncan, an additional example of an ‘alternative form of Scottish fiction’ that Scott’s success encouraged.⁸⁷ Since then, however, these women have been marginalised within the canon, in a way that Scott, demonstrably, has not, and as such they have not been given credit for advocating these strategies and ideas. *The Novels of Walter Scott and his Literary Relations* (2013) by Andrew Monnickendam provides a recent exception to this comparative neglect, insofar as it makes analysis of the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Christian Isobel Johnstone (whom I do not consider here) central to its investigation. Monnickendam’s work is, however, underpinned by the argument that ‘if we look at Scott after close examination of these supposedly secondary writers, it is possible to see a rather different Great Unknown than we have been accustomed to’.⁸⁸ Ultimately, it focuses on the national tale subgenre as a way of reading these female novelists in relation to Scott.

Beginning from the premise that, as Scott himself recognised, and as Duncan and Trumpener have since noted, Brunton and Ferrier were doing something different to Scott in

⁸⁶ George Saintsbury, *The English Novel* (J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1913), vii; William Lyon Phelps, *The Advance of the English Novel* (John Murray, 1919), 105–06; Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel*, vol. 6, *Edgeworth, Austen, and Scott* (Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1929); Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (Harper Torchbook, 1961), xi; Peter Garside and Karen O’Brien, eds., *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, vol. 2, *English and British Fiction 1750–1820* (Oxford University Press, 2015), vi.

⁸⁷ Duncan, ‘Scotland and the Novel’, 252.

⁸⁸ Andrew Monnickendam, *The Novels of Walter Scott and his Literary Relations: Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier and Christian Johnstone* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.

their novels, this thesis in turn contributes something new to extant criticism.⁸⁹ By purposefully approaching the novel in early nineteenth century Scotland from the hitherto underexplored angle of novel reading and self-improvement, this thesis adopts a perspective from which Ferrier and Brunton (and Hamilton before them) emerge clearly as the frontrunners, as opposed to Scott, Galt, Hogg, or any of their other male contemporaries. In doing so it provides an answer to Garside's question concerning the novel in the decades under study: 'how did the output of women writers relate to that of their male counterparts?'.⁹⁰ In their study of forgotten Scottish women writers during the early nineteenth century, Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell observe that 'women, when they did publish, were expected to be moral or didactic in their fiction. Male writers were also affected by this imperative, for the novel form still had uncertain status, but the pressures were especially intense on women'.⁹¹ This observation, and its identification of gendered expectations concerning reading at the start of the nineteenth century, effectively accounts for this female bias that emerges in these pages. While discourses on and strategies relating to self-improvement are indisputably dominant in the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, they do appear occasionally in the works of Scott, Galt, and Hogg.

This highlights two important points. The first is that, while concerns about novel reading were pervasive within the novel generally during the early nineteenth century, discourses on reading and self-improvement are characteristic of the Scottish female-authored novels under study. This thesis thus confirms that expectations regarding the morality of fiction were more stringently applied to women writers during this period – or, at least, that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton did more to meet these expectations than their male contemporaries. Following on from this, the second point is that, just as to understand the novel in these decades one must study the novel in Scotland, one cannot make arguments about Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton without referencing the novels of Scott and by extension those of Galt and Hogg. As Duncan astutely puts it, 'the meteoric career of Scottish fiction, as everyone at the time acknowledged, traced the career of an individual author, Walter Scott', in which the inevitable need to consider Scott, even as a counterexample, when making claims about the female-authored Scottish novel in this period is clear.⁹² In the

⁸⁹ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 34; Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 132.

⁹⁰ Garside, 15–16.

⁹¹ Anderson and Riddell, 180.

⁹² Duncan, 'Scotland and the Novel', 251.

chapters that follow, comparison to Scott, Galt, and Hogg provides an important means of justifying the claims that this thesis makes about these female novelists' contributions to the development of the novel and their mediatory role regarding the novel's association with self-improvement between the eighteenth century and Victorian period.

The longstanding association of improvement with Scotland provides an adjacent impetus to the focus on the Scottish novel in this thesis. Alex Benchimol and Gerard Lee McKeever are among many to have commented on this association, which manifests particularly in the moral, material, scientific, philosophical, economic, and intellectual advancements that took place in Scotland during its period of Enlightenment.⁹³ Nicholas T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison describe this period as taking place during 'the second half of the eighteenth century': 'almost overnight, Scotland was snatched from the relative cultural isolation in which she passed the seventeenth century and placed in the center of the thinking world'.⁹⁴ Appropriately, Phillipson and Mitchison's edited collection of essays in eighteenth-century Scottish history is titled *Scotland in the Age of Improvement*, in which 'improvement' comprises, alongside 'modernization', 'the most persistent and interesting theme'.⁹⁵ Their collection was published in 1970, and since then scholarly interest in the relation of improvement to Scottish Romanticism has continued to grow. This interest has manifested explicitly in works such as McKeever's *Dialectics of Improvement* (2020), *Cultures of Improvement in Scottish Romanticism* (2018), edited by Benchimol and McKeever, and Nigel Leask's *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (2010), and implicitly in the work of Duncan, Penny Fielding, and Murray Pittock, among others.⁹⁶ The most recent of these titles anticipates the present

⁹³ Alex Benchimol and Gerard Lee McKeever, 'Introduction: Mapping Cultures of Improvement in Scottish Romanticism', in *Cultures of Romanticism in Scottish Romanticism, 1740–1840*, ed. Alex Benchimol and Gerard Lee McKeever (Routledge, 2018), 3.

⁹⁴ Nicholas T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison, 'Introduction', in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement: Essays in Scottish History in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Nicholas T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 1.

⁹⁵ Phillipson and Mitchison, 4.

⁹⁶ See Gerard Lee McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement: Scottish Romanticism, 1786–1831* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Alex Benchimol and Gerard Lee McKeever, eds., *Cultures of Improvement in Scottish Romanticism, 1707–1840* (Routledge, 2018); Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*; Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*; Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford University Press, 2008); Murray Pittock, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Ian Duncan, Leith Davis, and Janet Sorensen, eds., *Scotland and the*

thesis most obviously. In his study of improvement, McKeever argues that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ‘the literary was in conversation with improvement in Scotland’, and that the ‘dialectics of improvement’ represented ‘a principal fulcrum of literary meaning’.⁹⁷ While McKeever’s study comprises four case studies that unite a series of genres associated with Scottish Romanticism (poetry, short fiction, drama, and the novel), my focus on the novel solely, and on the relationship between reading and self-improvement specifically, enables me to expand on the findings of his work. In what follows, I demonstrate that, through their contributions to the ‘conversation’ that McKeever identifies, the female novelists under study render the start of the nineteenth century an important transitional period for the novel, in terms both of the means through which they engaged with ideas of self-improvement and active reading, and how their works were perceived by readers and reviewers as catalysts for individual moral progress.

While the ongoing association of Scotland and the Scottish Enlightenment with improvement provides a feasible rationale for my area of focus, it also raises a tension concerning the objectives of this thesis that I would like to address. First, I do not seek to suggest that what was happening in the female-authored novel in Scotland during the early nineteenth century was not also happening in the novels published in England, Ireland, Wales, or beyond. As the chapters that follow show, and as examples provided in this Introduction have already confirmed, in many cases, these novels were operating in similar ways to other Anglophone fictions, though Ferrier and Brunton’s unique contributions remain overlooked. For reasons of feasibility, I also do not consider these novels within the wider context of European Enlightenment ideals, although this thesis’ Conclusion briefly considers the implications of its findings in relation to the (originally German) literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, bridging the gap between the period under study and the Victorian period, in which the *Bildungsroman* became especially popular. Second, by focusing on the female-authored novel in Scotland, I do not seek to suggest that the novels under study should be read straightforwardly as an extension of the ideas and principles associated with the Scottish Enlightenment, though overlaps inevitably occur. Mark Towsey, for example, rightly observes that ‘the Scottish Enlightenment advocated a particular type of reading, with emphasis put on critical judgement and good taste by writers as varied as David Hume, Adam Smith, Francis Hutcheson, George Campbell and James Beattie’, in which clear parallels

Borders of Romanticism (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760–1830* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁹⁷ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 25, 3.

emerge with the model of active reading that I contend Ferrier, Brunton, and Hamilton advocate to their readers.⁹⁸ While some chapters in this thesis do draw on aspects of Enlightenment discourse, it is always with an agenda to highlight the centrality of the period under study (1800–37) to the novel’s association with self-improvement, and the role played by these Scottish female novelists in developing strategies that support this association at a time when antinovel stereotypes were more widespread than ever before.

Antinovel Stereotypes

In order to have achieved a commonplace status by the start of the nineteenth century, stereotypes pertaining to the harmful effects of novel reading necessarily had a long history, during which they became increasingly familiar to members of the reading public. As Katie Halsey observes, ‘nobody reads in a cultural vacuum, and reading can never be innocent of the influences of social, political and economic structures, both those of the moment and the past’.⁹⁹ Hunter notes similarly that ‘unless readers leave a text altogether unread and untouched they too impinge [on the independence of an individual text], bringing a context of reception and response that determines not only the social place that the text comes to occupy but what it means and ultimately can do’.¹⁰⁰ The novelistic stereotypes that this section introduces (and which underpin Chapters One and Three in particular) represent some of the ‘influences’ and ‘context[s]’ by which readers of these Scottish novels (and, indeed, other novels during the period) would have been affected. By shedding light on the perceived dangers of novel reading, these stereotypes also shed light on the need for novels to advocate active and distanced reading, which I contend Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton do by complicating stereotypes pertaining to national identity and mental cultivation, alongside the antinovel stereotypes, in such a way that enables the novel to comprise a tool for moral self-improvement.

Writing at the very end of the eighteenth century, Hannah More reflects on the novel’s increasingly disruptive trajectory as ‘an unruly medium’ in an oft-quoted passage from her conduct book *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750–1820* (Brill, 2010), 16–17.

⁹⁹ Katie Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers, 1786–1945* (Anthem, 2013), 9.

¹⁰⁰ Hunter, ix.

¹⁰¹ Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody’s Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1670–1820* (Clarendon, 1995), xvii.

Novels, which used chiefly to be dangerous in one respect, are now become mischievous in a thousand. They are continually shifting their ground, and enlarging their sphere, and are daily becoming vehicles of wider mischief. Sometimes they concentrate their force, and are at once employed to diffuse destructive politics, deplorable profligacy, and impudent infidelity. [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau was the first popular dispenser of this complicated drug, in which the deleterious infusion was strong, and the effect proportionably fatal.¹⁰²

Here, More observes the rise of the novel detailed in the previous section and simultaneously highlights some of the perceived dangers of novel reading. Her implicit reference to Rousseau's sentimental novel, *Julie; ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (published almost forty years earlier, in 1761) as an original source of the novel's disrepute emphasises the long-standing nature of these antinovel stereotypes. More's portrayal, moreover, of the novel as a dangerous drug is in keeping with contemporary discourses. Writing in the preface to her debut novel *Evelina* (1778), Burney similarly observes that 'the distemper [novels] have spread seems incurable, since their contagion bids defiance to the medicine of advice or reprehension, and since they are found to baffle all the mental art of physic, save what is prescribed by the slow regimen of Time, and bitter diet of Experience', emphasising at once the rampant rage for and destructive influence of novels.¹⁰³

Burney's self-sabotaging observation that 'our young ladies in general, and boarding-school damsels in particular, might profit' from a 'total extirpation' of the novel effectively draws attention to the fact that most of the perceived dangers of novel reading applied in particular – although not exclusively – to female readers.¹⁰⁴ As Jacqueline Pearson notes in her influential study of female readers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, 'the argument about women's reading centred on the novel, with novel-reading one of the most contested areas in cultural debate', writing that 'the heroine misled by novel-

¹⁰² Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols., (London, 1799; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1:32.

¹⁰³ Frances Burney, *Evelina*, ed. Edward A. Bloom (Oxford University Press, 2002), 9–10. For more on the novel as poison and disease, see Miller, 172; 'Mrs Brunton', *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* 4 (01, 1819): 46, ProQuest; Edward Mangin, *An Essay on Light Reading, as It May Be Supposed to Influence Moral Conduct and Literary Taste* (London, 1808), 14–15.

¹⁰⁴ Burney, *Evelina*, 9.

reading is a common plot-motif especially in the early nineteenth century'.¹⁰⁵ Ferris concurs, writing that 'women, novels, and reading had formed a cluster of critical concern since the eighteenth century, and by the end of that century the perception that the novel was a female field was well entrenched'; this perception provides a governing rationale for Ferris' argument, discussed earlier, about Scott's regendering of the novel.¹⁰⁶ This is not to say that male readers were never depicted experiencing the harmful effects of novel reading; Pearson cites Aubrey in John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Scott's eponymous Edward Waverley as two prominent examples. However, as Kate Flint rightly notes, 'the debate about women as readers in the latter half of the eighteenth century overlapped with a broader discussion concerning the status of the novel and its possible effects'.¹⁰⁷ This raises an important caveat for this thesis, which is that while the discourses on self-improvement and strategies that promote active reading are predominantly found in the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, the model of improvement that this thesis centres on is not unique to female readers. In these novels, we see male and female characters entering into, and refusing, journeys of improvement, and the model of improvement itself is therefore not gendered *per se*. Inevitably, however, due to the gendered nature of antinovel rhetoric, the ways in which male and female readers might approach discourses of improvement vary.

As the example from More's *Strictures* demonstrates, antinovel stereotypes were frequently disseminated during the second half of the eighteenth century in conduct book literature, which forms a central focus of Chapter Three. The intended audience of conduct books was typically female, and examples include James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), John Bennett's *Letters to a Young Lady* (1791), More's *Strictures*, and Jane West's *Letters to a Young Lady* (1806). As Richard De Ritter notes, the 'prescriptive accounts' of moralists 'can tell us much about the anxieties generated by the conjunction of reading and femininity within this period'; their vehemence, in particular, 'provides a vivid image of the period's cultural prejudices'.¹⁰⁸ Women's perceived vulnerability to novel reading was heightened by the fact that, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the number of female readers in Britain increased dramatically. Pearson writes that 'between 1750 and the mid

¹⁰⁵ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women Reading in Britain, 1750–1835* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 196, 198.

¹⁰⁶ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 35.

¹⁰⁷ Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837–1914* (Clarendon Press, 1993), 28.

¹⁰⁸ Richard De Ritter, *Imagining Women Readers, 1789–1820: Well-Regulated Minds* (Manchester University Press, 2014), 2, 3.

1830s literacy among women increased and women became increasingly significant in the literary marketplace: indeed, it has been argued that by the end of the eighteenth century the majority of reading audiences were female'.¹⁰⁹ The rise of the novel thus coincided, as Kelly and Pearson, among many others, have noted, with a widening of the reading public to include more female readers, exacerbating concerns surrounding women's consumption of fiction.

These concerns can be attributed in large part to what Pearson describes as the supposed 'vulnerability of the novel-reading girl to seduction', one of the most prominent antinovel stereotypes during this time period.¹¹⁰ In his aforecited *Brief Retrospect on the Eighteenth Century* of 1803, Miller substantiates this by pointing out that novels are 'seductive and corrupting in their tendency [...] the omnipotence of *love* over all obligations and all duties is continually maintained; and the extravagance of sinful passion represented as the effect of amiable sensibility'.¹¹¹ Here, Miller criticises the novel's failure to distinguish between the allure of passion and the immorality of unbridled passion. Kelly in turn notes how the supposedly seductive effect of novel reading on women was imagined 'to have further, social consequences'.¹¹² He cites the 'anonymous author of *The Evils of Adultery and Prostitution* (1792)', who asserts that 'the increase of novels will help to account for the increase of prostitution and for the numerous adulteries and elopements that we hear of in the different parts of the kingdom'.¹¹³ As Kelly notes, such criticisms are 'testimony to the power fiction was thought to have in shaping the inner self of the reader and this affecting ethical action and social relations'.¹¹⁴ Within the novels under study, many examples can be found of female characters who confirm this stereotype. In Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), for example, Julia Delmond's voracious reading leads to her seduction in real life by her (predictably) rakish suitor. As Binhammer notes, 'Julia defines herself

¹⁰⁹ Pearson, xi. See also Christopher Goulding, introduction to *Romance Readers and Romance Writers*, by Sarah Green, ed. Christopher Goulding (Routledge, 2010), ix; and David Stewart, *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8–10.

¹¹⁰ Pearson, 196.

¹¹¹ Miller, 174.

¹¹² Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period*, 8.

¹¹³ Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period*, 8; Anon., *The Evils of Adultery and Prostitution: With an Inquiry into the Causes of their Present Alarming Increase, and some Means Recommended for Checking their Progress* (London, 1792), 54. See also Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 104.

¹¹⁴ Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period*, 9.

mimetically through novels', prompting her elopement; she then becomes pregnant and dies, regretting the literally 'fatal' effect (to use More's word) of her novel reading habits.¹¹⁵

The fear that female readers would become vulnerable to seduction through novel reading links to, and is facilitated by, another prominent antinovel stereotype, which is that reading novels would prevent readers from being able to distinguish between fiction and real life, by encouraging an overactive imagination. Instead of surrendering themselves to their own ungovernable (or, at least, ungoverned) imaginations, female readers during this period were encouraged by authors of conduct books and educational tracts to cultivate a well-regulated mind. As De Ritter observes, 'a brief survey' of these sorts of text 'published between 1789 and 1820 reveals just how firmly embedded the concept of the "well-regulated mind" was within the period's culture', and indeed the same can be said of the novels under examination in this thesis.¹¹⁶ Alan Richardson, for example, identifies a 'well-regulated mind' as 'a key phrase applied to the heroines in novels by West, More, Edgeworth and Susan Ferrier'.¹¹⁷ Perhaps as a result of the term's contemporary ubiquity, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton do not provide in their novels a definition of the term well-regulated mind. For the sake of clarity, my working definition of the term is someone who demonstrates clear control over their emotions, who does not give into passion or their imagination, and who can consequently think carefully for themselves, all the while maintaining a critical mindset.

The fear that novel reading would mislead and prevent women from regulating their own minds is one that stems directly from the concept of quixotism. Taking its name from Miguel De Cervantes' 1605 novel *Don Quixote*, the term quixotism refers to precisely this failure of readers to distinguish between fiction and real life. During the eighteenth century, translations of Cervantes' novel became extremely popular; as Wendy Motooka writes, 'Don Quixote was everywhere in eighteenth-century England'.¹¹⁸ This popularity led to a proliferation of texts in which 'a parade of indigenous successors' was presented to readers.¹¹⁹ Such quixotic examples can be found in Charlotte Lennox's aptly titled *The Female Quixote* (1752), Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813), and Sarah Green's *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* (1810), the latter of which Pearson usefully

¹¹⁵ Binhammer, 13.

¹¹⁶ De Ritter, 8.

¹¹⁷ Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 189.

¹¹⁸ Wendy Motooka, *The Age of Reasons: Quixotism, Sentimentalism and Political Economy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Routledge, 1998), 2.

¹¹⁹ Motooka, 2.

describes as ‘a routine depiction of the female quixote whose unwise reading of novels leads to seduction and lifelong unhappiness’, emphasising the ubiquity of the (female) quixotic trope.¹²⁰ Aaron Hanlon writes that ‘one who studies the novel is likely to encounter quixotism’, and this much is certainly true of the present thesis.¹²¹ By highlighting the dangers of losing oneself in fiction – in romances, originally – quixotism provided the basis for a recurrent fear that readers of novels would surrender their identity in favour of an identity found in fiction, consequently refusing to engage with real life.

The conflation of the terms ‘novel’ and ‘romance’ throughout this time period is testimony to the influence of quixotism on antinovel discourse during the eighteenth century. In 1692, William Congreve identified what Rebecca Tierney-Hynes refers to as ‘an incipient distinction between novel and romance’ in the preface to his novella, *Incognita*.¹²² He wrote that ‘Novels are of a more familiar nature [than romances]; Come near us, and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unprecedented, such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us’.¹²³ Romances, on the other hand, ‘elevate and surprize the Reader into a giddy Delight, which leaves him flat upon the Ground whenever he gives of, and vexes him to think how he has suffer’d himself to be pleased and transported, concern’d and afflicted at the several Passages which he has Read’.¹²⁴ Congreve subsequently likens novels to comedy, and romances to tragedy, which Tierney-Hynes identifies as a crucial distinction in terms of understanding how readers become more or less immersed when reading these texts. She contends that, according to Congreve’s definition, the novel ‘still allows us critical distance’; ‘we can be “warn’d” and “made asham’d” by comedy’s depiction of vice, Congreve says elsewhere, because we can also reflect while we experience it. It is this reflective capacity,

¹²⁰ Pearson, 213. For an extensive list of further example characters, see Motooka, 2–3. For more on the dissemination of quixotic stereotypes, see Amelia Dale, *The Printed Reader: Gender, Quixotism, and Textual Bodies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Bucknell University Press, 2019), 14.

¹²¹ Aaron R. Hanlon, ‘Toward a Counter-Poetics of Quixotism’, *Studies in the Novel* 46, no. 2 (2014): 141, JSTOR.

¹²² Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, *Novel Minds: Philosophers and Romance Readers, 1680–1740* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

¹²³ William Congreve, *Incognita* (London, 1692), 8–9, ProQuest.

¹²⁴ Congreve, 8. For more on the distinction between romance and the novel, see Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (John Hopkins University Press, 1987), which examines the ‘dialectical’ relationship between the two, 20.

this critical distance, that Congreve is attempting to assign to the novel by comparing it with comedy'.¹²⁵ Conversely, romances prevent readers from reflecting, due to their being unfamiliar, and therefore more conducive to wonder.

As Tierney-Hynes observes, this 'capacity of romance will, in the eighteenth century, come to figure the seductions of text in general. It will become a way to talk about the dangers of reading rather than about the characteristics of a genre'.¹²⁶ While she does not refer to novels specifically here, this generalisation is traceable in the development of antinovel discourse throughout the eighteenth century. In this discourse, the two genres become conflated, with the novel taking on some of the dangerously immersive and absorptive reading practices historically associated with romance reading. Exceptions to this conflation arise when novelists deliberately distinguish their novels from romances. This is the case with *Evelina*, the preface to which announces that readers will not be transported 'in the perusal of these sheets [...] to the fantastic regions of Romance, where Fiction is coloured by all the gay tints of luxurious Imagination, where Reason is an outcast, and where the sublimity of the Marvellous rejects all aid from sober Probability'.¹²⁷ Here, Burney supports Congreve's earlier definition of romance as an inherently less familiar (in the sense of being realistic) genre than the novel. At the same time, that Burney feels the need to confirm that her own novel does not fulfil expectations historically associated with romances is illustrative of the fact that, by the 1770s, the two genres (and the dangers associated with them) had become confused. It also illustrates the strength of antinovel discourse during the period, against which novelists including Burney felt obligated to justify their works.

The other perceived danger of novel reading that is worth acknowledging as context for the chapters that follow is the concern that novel reading was simply not a useful pursuit. As Kelly observes, an 'emphasis on utility, a kind of moral-intellectual criticism, is found increasingly in the opposition to the novel in the late eighteenth century, and draws on a long tradition of suspicion of mere entertainment amongst the middle class, especially puritans and Dissenters'.¹²⁸ This suspicion, Kelly claims, 'joined to an increasing concern that reading be

¹²⁵ Tierney-Hynes, 2. Joseph Bartolomeo substantiates this point: 'what remains valuable is Congreve's emphasis on the affective qualities of both genres and on reader response as the principle underlying the contrast'. *A New Species of Criticism: Eighteenth-Century Discourse on the Novel* (University of Delaware Press, 1994), 21.

¹²⁶ Tierney-Hynes, 2.

¹²⁷ Burney, *Evelina*, 10.

¹²⁸ Kelly, 'The Social Basis of Reaction Against the Novel in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', 187.

practical and serve personal and social industriousness'.¹²⁹ Certainly, within the context of women's reading especially, a commonly perceived negative effect of novel reading was that 'it could distract from domestic duties'.¹³⁰ Novels risked instilling in readers the wrong sort of principles. As Miss Grizzy observes, in the epigraph from *Marriage* discussed earlier, the novel was thought to put 'things into [its readers] heads that never would have been there but for books'.¹³¹ It inspired, in other words 'fantasies of social climbing, or imitation of sexually and financially extravagant fashionable follies', obstructing in so doing 'useful learning, and even useful occupations'.¹³²

Within the novels under examination in this thesis, examples abound of instances where the novelist plays on this stereotype by satirising the (typically female) characters who fall into this trap as a consequence of their reading habits. Readers of *Memoirs* learn early on that Bridgetina Botherim is 'too learned' – indeed, 'too great a scholar' – to 'trouble herself about doing any thing [so] useful' as making 'a pudding!'.¹³³ Naturally, she is too busy reading novels. This revelation comes immediately after Bridgetina's older, male relative has wrongly assumed that he has her to thank for the pudding that they are eating. By setting up the exchange in this manner, and in this order, Hamilton carefully draws attention to the stereotype that novel reading prevented female readers from fulfilling their practical 'domestic concerns'.¹³⁴ As a result of this emphasis on usefulness (or lack thereof) in antinovel discourse, utility became a buzzword for novelists attempting to justify their work, and for reviewers when praising a work of fiction. A good example of this can be found in *The Monthly Review*'s account of Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796), in which the review notes that 'amusement is combined with utility, and fiction is enlisted in the cause of virtue and practical philosophy'.¹³⁵ As the next section reveals, utility also comprises a key component of the model of improvement advocated by Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton.

¹²⁹ Kelly, 'The Social Basis of Reaction Against the Novel in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', 187.

¹³⁰ Pearson, 2.

¹³¹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 162.

¹³² Kelly, 'The Social Basis of Reaction Against the Novel in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', 192

¹³³ Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, ed. Claire Grogan (Broadview, 2000), 38, 37.

¹³⁴ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 175.

¹³⁵ 'Art. 20. *A Gossip's Story*', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* 22, (01, 1797): 92, ProQuest.

Improvement

In this thesis, I am principally concerned with the moral and intellectual self-improvement of the individual readers in and of the Scottish female-authored novels under examination. This version of improvement was, however, neither the first nor the only application of the term improvement to proliferate during the period on which this thesis centres (1800–37). Before outlining the working definition of improvement that I employ throughout, it is first necessary to contextualise the history of improvement and how it was defined during and before the early nineteenth century. As Jon Mee recently observed, ‘for a term that operated across so many fields’, the ‘exact definition’ of improvement is often ‘elusive’, lurking in and around such synonyms as reform, progress, utility, and innovation.¹³⁶ Critics including Mee, Mark Girouard, Kurt Heinzelman, and Sarah Tarlow have routinely remarked on the centrality of ‘improvement’ to British society during the eighteenth century, with the former arguing, for example, that ‘eighteenth-century Britain was a heavily networked domain self-consciously committed to the dissemination of improvement’.¹³⁷ McKeever substantiates earlier claims when he asserts that ‘the concept of improvement existed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a series of dialectical relationships encompassing both theory and practice, in a collision between – at its most basic – the old and the new, a key component of the culture of modernity’.¹³⁸ By the start of the nineteenth century, ‘improvement had become a commonplace, an archetype’ – a fact that is reflected in Asa Briggs’s famous identification of the period between 1783 and 1867 as ‘the Age of Improvement’.¹³⁹ To identify the genesis and original meanings of improvement, one must therefore look well before the end of the eighteenth century.

According to Paul Slack, the emergence of improvement can be traced back to seventeenth-century England, where ‘improvement became a fundamental part of the national

¹³⁶ Jon Mee, *Networks of Improvement: Literature, Bodies, and Machines in the Industrial Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 2023), 13.

¹³⁷ Sarah Tarlow, *The Archaeology of Improvement in Britain, 1750–1850* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10; Mark Girouard, *The English Town* (Yale University Press, 1990), 86; Kurt Heinzelman, ‘The Last Georgic: Wealth of Nations and the Scene of Writing’, in *Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland (Manchester University Press, 1995), 177; Jon Mee, ‘Introduction’, in ‘Networks of Improvement’, ed. Jon Mee, special issue, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 475, doi:10.1111/1754-0208.12352.

¹³⁸ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 2.

¹³⁹ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 2; Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783–1867* (Routledge, 2014).

culture, governing how the English saw themselves and the condition of the nation to which they belonged, and their expectations of how it might alter in the future'.¹⁴⁰ Slack writes that the word 'improvement' was 'invented in the early sixteenth century' when 'to improve was to make a profit from land'.¹⁴¹ Slack's claim is supported by other critics, including Raymond Williams, who writes that 'in its earliest uses', starting in the sixteenth century, improvement referred to 'operations for monetary profit, where it was often equivalent to *invest*, and especially to operations on or connected with land, often the enclosing of common or waste land'.¹⁴² Tarlow concurs, noting that 'the word [improvement] was used with increasing frequency in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly in relation to husbandry', while Mee observes that 'the eighteenth century was a dynamic period for agricultural improvement in Scotland' in particular.¹⁴³

In the beginning, then, improvement referred either to things that were being done to the land or to monetary profit, or both. As time marched on, however, its meanings diversified – or, 'pluralised' – to the extent that Slack contends, somewhat ambitiously, that, in the seventeenth century, improvement applied 'to every aspect of human and social endeavour'.¹⁴⁴ Tarlow nuances this claim, observing how improvement came to be employed 'in the moral sense of self-cultivation', meaning that 'by the mid eighteenth century "Improvement" meant both profit and moral benefit'.¹⁴⁵ Williams likewise notes the broadening of improvement to extend to 'moral refinement', in which I am principally interested, but dates it slightly later than Tarlow, writing that this broadening takes place '*from* mC18' as opposed to *by* then.¹⁴⁶ In a study that sought to quantify the number of times the words 'improvement', 'improved', or the verb 'to improve' appeared in titles published between 1550 and 1850, Tarlow reveals that 'even if the results for agriculture and husbandry are aggregated, for the eighteenth century this is the most frequent category in only 1760. Otherwise, the eighteenth century is dominated by texts which are geared towards self-

¹⁴⁰ Paul Slack, *The Invention of Improvement: Information and Material Progress in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

¹⁴¹ Slack, 4.

¹⁴² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Fontana, 1988), 113–14.

¹⁴³ Tarlow, 12; Mee, *Networks of Improvement*, 15.

¹⁴⁴ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 19; Slack, 4. Other meanings of 'improvement', aside from the ones already mentioned, include increases in rent (Slack, 5) and 'theological sense meaning' (Tarlow, 14).

¹⁴⁵ Tarlow, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Williams, 114. My italics.

improvement'.¹⁴⁷ Tarlow thus confirms the centrality of moral self-improvement to educational discourses of the late eighteenth century, in which, as McKeever notes 'the correct types of literary consumption were "improving"'.¹⁴⁸ This development can be traced in the female-authored novels under study here, in which 'improvement' refers principally to the mind and morals, reflecting the term's evolving use. That references to agricultural improvement appear more often in the novels of Scott and Galt substantiates this thesis' argument that moral improvement is a central concern for Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, but a comparatively peripheral one for their male contemporaries.

To date, many studies of improvement have focused on agricultural improvement, or on analysing improvement in historical and archaeological contexts, in keeping with earlier definitions.¹⁴⁹ My focus on the concept of self-improvement, referred to by Slack as 'the intellectual and moral capacities of every individual', and its relation to novel reading, therefore marks a departure from these earlier studies.¹⁵⁰ In the preface to his own work, Slack identifies a need for more studies to address the topic of self-improvement, which he notes 'was still being developed in novel ways in the mid-eighteenth century, and [...] merits a book of its own'.¹⁵¹ Similarly, McKeever observes the need, to which his own work responds in valuable ways, 'for a study directly tackling the complexity of improvement in a range of literary contexts has become evident'.¹⁵² This thesis, which has been written with these observations in mind, addresses an associated area in need of study, which is the relationship between reading and self-improvement in the female-authored Scottish novel and how these novels' treatment of this relationship unveils an additional, overlooked layer of significance to Edinburgh's literary status during the early nineteenth century and its influence on the novel's development.

¹⁴⁷ Tarlow, 15–16. For more on this study, which surveyed texts included in the British Library catalogue, see Tarlow, 13–16.

¹⁴⁸ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 16.

¹⁴⁹ See Slack; Tarlow; and T. M. Devine, *Clearance and Improvement: Land, Power and People in Scotland, 1700–1900* (John Donald Publishers Ltd., 2006).

¹⁵⁰ Slack, vii.

¹⁵¹ Slack, vii.

¹⁵² McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 4. Two additional works that address this need are: Helen O'Connell, *Ireland and the Fiction of Improvement* (Oxford University Press, 2006), which analyses 'the improvement fiction that was distributed directly to the peasantry as pamphlets or disseminated through pedlars packaged in the format of popular chapbooks', 6; and Leask's *Robert Burns and Pastoral*, which posits that 'Burns's poetry of the 1780s was in great measure connected to his occupational concern with the discourse of agricultural improvement', 6.

In this thesis, I define self-improvement as a gradual, ongoing process through which an individual learns to reflect on themselves and their behaviour, evaluating their actions relative to their social, moral, and religious sensibilities. In doing so, I begin from Slack's definition of improvement as 'gradual, piecemeal, but cumulative betterment', and also Tarlow's observation that 'in the eighteenth century improvement at an individual level was accomplished through attention to the self'.¹⁵³ Both are in keeping with More, who asserts that improvement necessarily ripens '*gradually* on the tree of knowledge'.¹⁵⁴ Benevolence, self-reflection, independent thought, emotional regulation, and a desire to be useful to others and to fulfil a perceived duty are both the results and the indicators of this process of improvement, which characters must keep working on in order to maintain the values and habits that they have worked to cultivate. I contend that the process of improvement comprises two steps, the first of which is education. In Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's novels, readers are presented with paragon characters who represent from the outset examples of the moral, religious, or intellectual virtue – and also often the reading practices – that these novels ostensibly seek to instil within their readers. Readers are also presented with characters who lack these qualities and must therefore undertake a process of improvement during the novel in order to cultivate them. While the former category represents examples for both the readers of these novels and the second category of character to learn from, the characters who undertake self-improvement over the course of a narrative comprise warnings – or cautionary examples – for novel readers to learn from. The key difference between them, then, is education. Whereas the paragon characters have already received the right sort of education (in which they learn the values, habits, and reading practices that distinguish them as exemplars) at the beginning of the novel, those in need of improvement must receive this education over its course.

The second step of improvement is application, in which, having cultivated these values and habits, characters must learn to maintain and develop them by applying them to the different situations in which they find themselves, all the while exercising their own judgement and capacity for independent thought. When they reach this second stage,

¹⁵³ Slack, 1; Tarlow, 124. For more on improvement as a gradual process, see Christopher J. Berry, 'Sociality and Socialisation', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie and Craig Smith (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 240; and Christel Fricke, 'The Challenges of *Pride and Prejudice*: Adam Smith and Jane Austen on Moral Education', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 3, no. 269 (2014): 343, JSTOR.

¹⁵⁴ More, 1:175–76.

characters are no longer undergoing the process of improvement *per se* , but they must nevertheless consistently practise the skills and habits that they have learnt. While the education stage is finite, the application stage is infinite, and it thereby reinforces this thesis' definition of improvement as an ongoing process that requires constant labour, effort, and self-reflection.

Of course, examples can also be found in these novels of characters who do not fit into either stage of improvement and who therefore nuance and complicate the binary model of improvement from which this thesis begins. I pay attention to these characters, and their implication on the framework of improvement that these novels advocate, in Chapters Two and Three. By way of foreshadowing, however, it is worth noting Lionel Trilling's suggestion that the novel teaches us, 'as no other genre ever did, the extent of human variety and the value of this variety'.¹⁵⁵ This is certainly true of the novels studied here. By presenting us with ambiguous characters, alongside those who obviously fall into one of the two stages of improvement, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton present readers with their own version of 'the extent of human variety'. Regarding improvement, the 'value of this variety' lies in the fact that these less easily categorised characters force the readers of these novels to differentiate between them and the more easily categorised characters, encouraging them to identify the differences in characters' behaviour and to recognise the values that are necessary for improvement to take place. Thus, readers must activate the active model of reading that I contend these novels encourage, revealing how the spectrum of examples in these novels functions in a similar way to these novelists' treatment of familiar stereotypes. Like the second stage of improvement, the process through which novel readers learn to judge the characters in that novel is ongoing throughout the narrative.

A good example of a paragon character having to apply and maintain the values of improvement can be found in *Marriage*. The heroine, Mary Douglas, experiences a dilemma when her domineering mother, Lady Juliana, forbids her from attending church on Sunday, creating a 'contest of duties' in which Mary must choose between honouring her duty to her mother or her duty to God.¹⁵⁶ Having failed to obtain permission from her mother to attend the local church, Mary 'began seriously to commune with her own heart as to the course she ought to pursue'.¹⁵⁷ During this communion, readers witness Mary employing all the values

¹⁵⁵ Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Secker and Warburg, 1951), 222.

¹⁵⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 224.

¹⁵⁷ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 224.

and principles associated with improvement – self-reflection, independent, critical thought, and a consideration of duty – as she weighs up and reflects on the options that are available to her, in order to arrive at a conclusion that will ‘calm her conscience’.¹⁵⁸ In the end, ‘the result of Mary’s deliberations [is], a firm determination to do what she deemed her duty, however painful’.¹⁵⁹ She attends church, but is importantly secure in the conviction of her own decision, which she is able to make thanks to the principles and habits that have been instilled in her during an early education. Mary’s example therefore demonstrates to readers the application stage of improvement in action. It also showcases the idea that application is not a formula with a one-size-fits-all solution to every problem; rather, it requires individuals to consult their own judgement and then apply it to the circumstances in which they find themselves.

In this thesis, I use the term journeys of improvement to refer to the process of improvement, as opposed, for example, to trajectories of improvement. This is because whereas trajectories denote travel in a specific direction, journeys are more flexible. They therefore accord much better with the examples of characters undergoing the process of education, in which steps forward, or moments of epiphany, are often followed by steps back. Journey also denotes a sense of labour, in a way that trajectory does not, emphasising my contention that improvement is characterised in these novels by sustained and concerted moral effort and toil (as Mary’s example shows). I also employ the terms true and false improvement, arguing that these categories provide a framework for comprehending as fully as possible this thesis’ working definition of improvement. Whereas true improvement refers to the two-step model of improvement described above, false improvement occurs when a character pretends to cultivate the principles and habits necessary for true improvement to take place, or when parts of society valorise the wrong kinds of behaviour (including, for example, performative displays of wealth). Typically, false improvement arises when a character has not yet received and then refuses to engage with the right sort of education to equip them with suitable principles and habits. This refusal is generally attributed to a prioritisation of values that are antithetical to true improvement. Whereas true improvement is characterised by morality and benevolence, false improvement is characterised by selfishness. As the chapters that follow reveal, the true-*versus*-false improvement framework often engages with and plays on eighteenth-century beliefs relating to urban and rural

¹⁵⁸ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 225.

¹⁵⁹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 225.

stereotypes, national stereotypes, and the connection between improvement and monetary wealth. Consequently, readers are presented with a variety of examples, some of which support culturally-embedded stereotypes, some of which oppose them, some of which conform to my working definition of improvement, and some of which subvert it. Taken together, these examples reinforce to readers the importance of the values associated with true improvement. They also, by virtue of their variety, promote reading practices that both require and engender self-reflection and critical thinking, encouraging readers to judge what they read for themselves, thereby improving themselves.

Plan of the Work

This thesis adopts a mixed-methods approach. While the first four chapters are based on textual analysis of the novels under consideration, the fifth analyses evidence of actual readers' experiences, preserved in letters and journal entries, and contemporary periodical reviews of the novels studied in the earlier chapters, alongside quantitative data from the recently-launched *Books and Borrowing* database.¹⁶⁰ Chapters One through Four provide a comprehensive study of representations of true and false improvement. To complement and nuance these representations, the final chapter then analyses evidence of responses to these novels in order to determine the extent to which discussions of improvement actually featured in their discussions. It thus provides an additional layer of scrutiny that studies of this kind often lack, in order to support my claim that the period under study represents a pivotal one regarding the perception of the novel as a tool for self-improvement.¹⁶¹ In his study of female readers, Joe Bray writes that he is more concerned 'with readers *in* the late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century novel than with readers *of* it'.¹⁶² I combine both to highlight the transformational significance of the strategies that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton deploy to promote self-improvement via novel reading.

The historical context of this thesis constitutes an additional aspect of the rationale behind this mixed methodology. As discussed, during the early nineteenth century, Edinburgh represented the epicentre of novelistic review culture as well as novel production, and it is

¹⁶⁰ More details about this database are provided in Chapter Five.

¹⁶¹ Two exceptions to this tendency are Halsey's *Jane Austen and her Readers* and De Ritter's *Imagining Women Readers*, in the latter of which 'theoretical representations of the act of reading' are combined with 'the practices described in letters and diaries', 2.

¹⁶² Joe Bray, *The Female Reader in the English Novel* (Routledge, 2009), 23.

therefore valuable to consider the relationship between novel reading and self-improvement from both perspectives. As Sangster notes, reviews of novels, and the periodicals in which they appeared, amassed a great deal of ‘sociocultural power’ during the time period under study.¹⁶³ During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, ‘key reviewers’ at both the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* ‘eclipsed the vast majority of those that they reviewed in terms of readerships, remuneration and influence’.¹⁶⁴ Taking up Duncan’s analysis of the importance of post-Enlightenment Edinburgh’s literary infrastructures, Chapter Five demonstrates how we might harness the methodological value of analysing reviews of the novels alongside the novels themselves in order to confirm as forcefully as possible this period as a significant one for the novel’s association with improvement and to shed light on Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton’s role in shaping this association. In his study of Romantic-period magazine culture, David Stewart asserts that ‘individual periodicals asked readers to understand them through reference and allusion to other periodicals; they required readers who knew the periodicals to which they referred’.¹⁶⁵ He thus provides a further important point of reference for thinking about novel culture and reading practices during this period. Just as Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton’s novels rely on readers’ familiarity with antinovel discourse, and indeed other novels, so that they can encourage active reading, ‘magazine readerships cannot be considered in isolated opposition to each other. Readers are compelled to see across differences, and to read not simply one magazine, but a magazine culture’.¹⁶⁶ Stewart’s suggestion that periodical culture was reliant on readers’ knowledge of other periodicals in order to function effectively is strikingly similar to the way in which the novels of this period engaged self-consciously with the genre’s reputation. Novel readers were very often also periodical readers, and vice versa, hence the stereotypes represented in one genre are relevant to the other, and hence my decision to analyse both.

Another advantage of adopting a mixed-methods approach is that including evidence of actual readers, and their responses to the novels under study, helps to counterbalance the sometimes unrealistic expectations placed on the figure of the implied – or hypothetical – reader. As Halsey observes, there is a clash between the implied reader who is presupposed in these novels, and who is ultimately therefore ‘a function of the text’, and ‘the actual reader

¹⁶³ Matthew Sangster, *Living as an Author in the Romantic Period* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 233.

¹⁶⁴ Sangster, 233.

¹⁶⁵ David Stewart, *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8.

¹⁶⁶ Stewart, 8.

who may or may not be prepared to meet the demands made of the ideal reader, and whose responses are outside textual control'.¹⁶⁷ She continues, noting that 'an actual reader may, of course, choose complicity with the narrative voice, becoming to an extent an ideal reader'.¹⁶⁸ Alternatively, the same actual reader 'may choose to be, to borrow Judith Fetterley's phrase, a "resisting reader", whose resistance is to the coercion of narrative or stylistic structures and who maintains a difference and distance from the ideal reader'.¹⁶⁹ A particularly good example of this conflict occurs in Austen's reaction to Brunton's *Self-Control*. In March 1811, Brunton wrote to Baillie (to whom she dedicated *Self-Control*), revealing her motivation for writing her debut novel and, in so doing, her implicit hope for readers of this novel: 'I merely intended to shew the power of the religious principle in bestowing self-command'.¹⁷⁰ Writing, meanwhile, to her sister Cassandra in October, 1813, Austen declares that she knows not 'whether Laura's passage down the [North] American River, is not the most natural, possible, every-day thing she ever does'.¹⁷¹ While this is not to say that Austen did not also pick up on Brunton's intention to 'shew the power of the religious principle' (she refers to *Self-Control* as 'excellently-meant' and 'elegantly-written'), these exchanges show that actual readers' responses do not necessarily accord with what the author intended their readers to discern.¹⁷²

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One takes antinovel stereotypes and the concept of novelistic metadiscourse as its starting point, tracing the development of what I term a metadiscourse of improvement by examining a range of explicit and implicit strategies for improvement at work within the novels under study, some of which support the perceived dangers of novel reading, and others of which provide an alternative to them. I argue that use of these combined strategies, many of which comprise extensions of strategies deployed in the eighteenth-century novel, promotes active reading. Chapter Two introduces in more depth the true-*versus*-false framework of improvement, emphasising the model of reading that Chapter One uncovers, and examines examples of false improvement in action.

¹⁶⁷ Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers*, 8. For a comprehensive overview of reader response theory, consult the first chapter of Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695–1870* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁶⁸ Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers*, 8.

¹⁶⁹ Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers*, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Mary Brunton, *Emmeline with Some Other Pieces* (Edinburgh: Manners and Mill, Constable, 1819), xlii.

¹⁷¹ Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11 October, 1813, in *Jane Austen's Letters*, 4th ed., ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford University Press, 2011), 234.

¹⁷² Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11 October, 1813, in *Jane Austen's Letters*, 234.

In this chapter, I argue that this framework is effectively introduced to readers through, but never limited to, discussions of stereotypes pertaining to Scottish and English national identities. Chapter Three argues that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton redeploy the metaphors of cultivation and consumption stereotypically found in Enlightenment and eighteenth-century conduct books and educational treatises to advocate the importance of thinking for oneself and, by extension, active reading. Chapter Four builds on Chapter Three's analysis of the process of improvement, positing that true improvement is best revealed to readers through representations of moral and religious progress. Chapter Five considers historical readers' responses to the novels in question, revealing how this evidence complements the arguments of earlier chapters that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's novels function as tools for self-improvement. It also demonstrates the uneven degree to which an expectation that novels should be morally improving was applied to the male- and female-authored Scottish novels of the period, further elucidating the 'gendered cast' of the Scottish literary scene out of which this thesis develops.¹⁷³ Finally, the Conclusion reflects on these novelists' legacy in the later nineteenth century, paying attention to the ways in which their discussions of and strategies for promoting improvement paved the way for the Victorian concern with self-improvement.

¹⁷³ Duncan, 'Scotland and the Novel', 255.

Chapter One: Identifying a Metadiscourse of Improvement

The public, the part of it, at least, with whom novels form the great portion of amusement, is infinitely obliged to *her* for this admirable exposition of Godwinian principles, and the more so, for having given it in the form of a novel; for the same means by which the poison is offered, are, perhaps, the best by which their antidote may be rendered efficacious.¹

In 1800, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* published a review of Elizabeth Hamilton's second novel, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, which was published that same year. The reviewer (and founding editor of the journal), John Gifford, describes *Memoirs* approvingly as 'the first novel of the day', but he also – as the epigraph to this chapter makes clear – recognises the way in which novels can provide their own corrective.² In doing so, Gifford deftly draws readers' attention to the tensions between desirability and noxiousness that characterised the novel's reputation at the start of the nineteenth century. This epigraph is also effective in introducing what I term in this chapter as a metadiscourse of improvement, which is a subset of novelistic metadiscourse, defined in its broadest sense as the discussions of novels and novel reading that take place within novels. In the novels under examination in this thesis, examples abound of characters who are depicted either reading novels or talking about them. Bell Stewart in Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, Aunt Betty and Uncle Adam in Susan Ferrier's *The Inheritance*, Lady Juliana in Ferrier's *Marriage*, and Julia Dawkins in Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* comprise but a few examples. These discussions are by no means specific to these novels, instead forming part of the broader later-eighteenth-century tradition, discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, in which the novel itself provides a space to discuss the morality of fiction. In the metadiscourse of improvement, novelists play on antinovel stereotypes in order to present their own works as operating self-consciously to provide an antidote to the perceived dangers of novel reading, enabling it to constitute a means of self-improvement.

¹ 'Memoirs of Modern Philosophers', *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 7, no. 30 (12, 1800): 375, ProQuest. Original italics.

² 'Memoirs of Modern Philosophers', *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 7, no. 27 (09, 1800): 39, ProQuest.

The idea of a metadiscourse of improvement has been alluded to (though not explicitly named as such) by critics including Markman Ellis, who writes in his study of sentimental novels that, during the late eighteenth century, the ‘enduring anxieties about the moral status of novels [...] seemed to infect the production of fiction to a noticeable level’, marking a ‘self-reflexive [...] enquiry’ into what he terms ‘the controversialisation of sentimentalism’.³ Ellis observes how ‘individual novels were conceived in order to address the problem of their moral status, through the development of plot and character. In addition, a noticeable number of novels entertained critical discussion within the narrative: assessing the morality of novel writing and novel reading at the level of plot’, thus touching implicitly on the notion of self-correcting novels.⁴ Katherine Binhammer applies this to Hamilton specifically, noting how, by ‘integrating the critical attacks on the novel’ into her own works of fiction, she ‘[interrupts] and [revises] the model of [...] reading they assume’, thereby transforming the reader ‘from a consumer into a critic’.⁵ Similarly, Jacqueline Pearson observes the way in which ‘the issue of fiction-reading’ recurs ‘compulsively and anxiously in contemporary texts’ between the period 1750 and 1835, reinforcing the self-reflexive discussions and interruptions that Ellis and Binhammer identify.⁶

Pearson and Ellis both allude to the idea of a metadiscourse of improvement as a means of emphasising to their own readers the fraught state of the novel’s reputation during the period under study. Building on this, I analyse how the metadiscourse of improvement functions within the early-nineteenth-century Scottish female-authored novel to advocate a model of reading that provides an antidotal response to the immersive reading practices on which antinovel discourse often centred. In this chapter, I argue that Brunton and Hamilton in particular employ a range of novelistic strategies for improvement within their novels, some of which confirm the stereotypically perceived dangers of novel reading, and some of which provide a means of avoiding these dangers and stereotypes. Ferrier deploys many of the same strategies, especially concerning plot and characterisation. The examples from her novels are, however, particularly relevant to Chapter Three and its focus on mental cultivation, and I

³ Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 212, 198.

⁴ Ellis, 212.

⁵ Katherine Binhammer, ‘The Persistence of Reading: Governing Female Novel-Reading in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*’, *Eighteenth-Century Life* 27, no. 2 (2003): 2, EBSCOHost.

⁶ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women Reading in Britain, 1750–1835* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), ix.

therefore discuss them in detail there instead of here. Taken together, the strategies that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton deploy combine to produce a metadiscourse of improvement, which ultimately serves to advocate a model of active reading that centres on reflection, critical engagement, and distanced consideration. By prioritising these values, this model operates (ostensibly) to improve novel readers and to ameliorate the antinovel stereotypes that I outline in the Introduction to this thesis. I say ostensibly, because the fact remains, of course, that some implied readers may remain unchanged – and, therefore, unimproved – by their reading experience, due to the subjectivity of all reading experiences. Ellis himself remarks on this when he acknowledges the inherent ‘ambiguity of the reading experience’, which is necessarily unique to each individual reader.⁷ By honing in on this model of active reading, I develop the position taken by Joe Bray, who argues that female readers within novels of this period are ‘active and creative’, as opposed to ‘passive and impressionable’.⁸ Whereas Bray’s work analyses ‘the diversity of reading practices’ exhibited by ‘readers within novels of this period’, I go one step further by considering the active reading practices that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton encourage their implied readers to adopt in their own reading, outwith any fictional narrative, and the effect this has on establishing the connection between novel reading and self-improvement with which this thesis is concerned.⁹

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, negative stereotypes pertaining to the novel had been building up since at least as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, and they had as such reached something of an apogee. Alongside the novel’s rise in popularity, production, and generic stability, discussed in this thesis’ Introduction, this crescendo is at least partly attributable to the Jacobin debate that raged in Britain throughout the 1790s, in reaction to the revolution in France, during which both parties resorted to writing novels as a means of disseminating their political views.¹⁰ As Matthew O. Grenby notes in his study of anti-Jacobin novels (of which *Memoirs* is a frequently-cited example), the ‘suspicion and hostility to [novel] reading and its agencies received new impetus from the

⁷ Ellis, 46. See also Elaine Bander, “‘O Leave Novels’: Jane Austen, Sir Charles Grandison, Sir Edward Denham, and Rob Missgiel”, *Persuasions* 20 (2008): 206, Gale Academic OneFile; Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 170.

⁸ Joe Bray, *The Female Reader in the English Novel* (Routledge, 2009), 1.

⁹ Bray, 23.

¹⁰ For context on this debate, see Matthew O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790–1827* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

French Revolution and the British radical response to it'.¹¹ Amelia Dale adds to this that 'anti-Jacobin novels share the deep suspicion of novel reading prevalent throughout the century, as well as the more historically specific contempt for Jacobinism'.¹² She continues, positing that anti-Jacobin novels 'persistently associate Jacobinism with novel reading' on the basis that 'fiction has the power to convert the vulnerable reader to radicalism through appealing to their imagination'.¹³ Thus, 'novel reading, already associated with seduction, corruption, and female domestic disobedience' became 'tied to political instability' during the 1790s.¹⁴ This 'political instability' contributed towards the ubiquity of antinovel stereotypes – or, as Elaine Bander puts it, 'the pervasive, culturally-embedded "literary" hostility to the novel genre' – at the start of the nineteenth century.¹⁵

In this chapter, it is my contention that the commonplace status of, and readers' consequent familiarity with, antinovel stereotypes is precisely what enabled Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton to take advantage of the novel's suspicious reputation in playful and refined ways via the means of a metadiscourse of improvement. Gifford too, when writing his review of *Memoirs*, could rely on the assumption that the readers of his review would be well versed in these stereotypes, enabling him to refer metaphorically to the novel as poison, secure in the knowledge that his readers would know exactly what he is talking about. In the novels under consideration here, references to the genre's prevalence during the opening decades of the nineteenth century confirm Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton as novelists who are keenly aware of, and play on, the genre's popularity. In *Memoirs*, Mr Glibb is horrified to learn that his cousin Bridgetina Botherim (one of the novel's heroines) reads only 'novels and metaphysics': "Novels and metaphysics!" repeated her kinsman, casting up his eyes, "*O tempora! O mores!*".¹⁶ Here, his melodramatic reference in Latin to 'the times' and 'the customs' reveals Hamilton's tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of the novel's popularity during, and its association with, this particular historical moment. A similar degree of awareness is apparent, though discussed to a less sustained degree, in the works of these

¹¹ Grenby, 13. Other examples include George Walker's *The Vagabond* (1799), Jane West's *A Tale of the Times* (1799), Edward Du Bois' *St. Godwin* (1800), and Charles Lucas' *The Infernal Quixote: A Tale of the Day* (1801).

¹² Amelia Dale, *The Printed Reader: Gender, Quixotism, and Textual Bodies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Bucknell University Press, 2019), 132.

¹³ Dale, *The Printed Reader*, 132.

¹⁴ Dale, *The Printed Reader*, 132.

¹⁵ Bander, 204.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, ed. Claire Grogan (Broadview, 2000), 38.

authors' male contemporaries, including, John Galt. In *The Entail*, for example, the Leddy's reference to 'thir novelle and play-acting times' testifies to Galt's recognition of the novel's status as a defining sign of the times (both the 1790s, when this particular scene in *The Entail* takes place, and the 1820s, when *The Entail* was published), confirming that this recognition was not exclusive to the female-authored novel, but rather ubiquitous in fiction of the period.¹⁷

These novelists also demonstrate an awareness of the myriad negative stereotypes that continued to surround the novel as a literary form throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In order to provide an effective antidote to something, the nature of the poison must already be clear, and the metadiscourse of improvement is therefore heavily reliant on antinovel stereotypes having become culturally entrenched. In this way, the metadiscourse also helps dialectically to create that which it operates to oppose. In *The Inheritance*, Ferrier demonstrates an astute awareness of antinovel stereotypes through the scenes in which readers witness the miserly Uncle Adam secretly reading novels in his chambers 'with feelings of the deepest humiliation'.¹⁸ In keeping with contemporary stereotypes, Uncle Adam 'had always conceived [novel writers] to be born idiots, and novel readers he considered as something still lower in the scale of intellect', hence his humiliation at becoming so engrossed in Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* (published nine years earlier).¹⁹ On the one hand, we can see glimpses here of Scott's emerging reputation in the period under study (and beyond) as the novelist who provided an exception to these prejudices; on the other, Uncle Adam's reaction is telling of the negative associations of novel reading. His fear of being caught indulging in reading a novel (even a Waverley novel) highlights the way in which Ferrier self-consciously plays with the stereotypical discourse that presented novel reading as a damaging waste of time. In this sense, the scenes containing Uncle Adam cast our minds back to Scott's own description of the novel, considered in this thesis' Introduction, as 'bread eaten in secret'.²⁰ They also exemplify the performativity that characterises Ferrier's treatment of antinovel rhetoric, which functions to an extent as a polite game, played along with knowingly by author and reader, emphasising thus the experimental infusion of 'literature and performance' that Angela Esterhammer identifies as characteristic

¹⁷ John Galt, *The Entail: or The Lairds of Grippy*, ed. Mark Schoenfield and Clare A. Simmons (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 286.

¹⁸ Susan Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, with an Introduction by Ronnie Young (Kennedy & Boyd, 2009), 306.

¹⁹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 306.

²⁰ 'Emma', *Quarterly Review* 14, no. 27 (10, 1815): 188, ProQuest.

of the 1820s, in which *The Inheritance* was published.²¹ This performativity is accentuated even further by the narrator's observation that 'with [Uncle Adam], as with many other excellent, but, we must suppose, mistaken people, novels and mental imbecility were ideas inseparably united in his brain', in which the invitation for readers to rethink their own mistake is extended, knowingly, but never overbearingly.²²

Such stereotypes thus provide the backdrop against which the metadiscourse of improvement operates. While some of the strategies that make up this metadiscourse are explicit – direct references to the reader, or expressions of an author's intentionality in a preface, for example – others are conversely implicit. A novelist might present their readers with an exemplary character but leave it up to the readers themselves to identify and derive value from this character's example. Implicit strategies operate by showing – as opposed to simply telling – readers something from which they can learn. In some instances, a single strategy – say, for example, characterisation – will operate within the novels along a spectrum that ranges from satirical examples at one end to more straightforward examples at the other. While some characters are explicitly satirised (Bridgetina in *Memoirs* is a good example here), others are implicitly posited as direct embodiments of the reading habits that the novelist seeks to instil in their readers (see, for example, Harriet Orwell in *Memoirs* or Mary Douglas in *Marriage*). Other characters are not caricatures *per se* but are nevertheless presented as dangerous readers whom readers of the novel are expected to recognise as warnings to learn from (Julia Delmond in *Memoirs* exemplifies this strategy well).

As analysis of these strategies for improvement shows, the more implicit a strategy, the more readerly engagement is required for improvement to take place, in keeping with the model of active reading that is central to this thesis' argument. It is, after all, often easier, though less conducive to active reading, to be told that something is important rather than having to discern this importance for oneself. As Wolfgang Iser puts it, 'the participation of the reader could not be stimulated if everything were laid out in front of him'.²³ Beginning from this premise, this chapter reveals how use of implicit strategies represents a partial move away from the more explicit addresses to the reader present in many eighteenth-century novels. It also signals a departure from the more empathetic reading practices traditionally

²¹ Angela Esterhammer, *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 6.

²² Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 306.

²³ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 31.

associated with eighteenth-century sentimental novels, making room for an approach to reading that relies on a critical distance between the reader and the text. Indeed, Ellis observes how reading sentimental fiction ‘was to be an improving experience, refining the manners by exercising [a reader’s] ability to feel for others’: a practice in which value is clearly placed on a reader learning to engage emotionally with the fictional characters in a novel.²⁴ Likewise, Juliet Shields observes the tendency of sentimental fiction to emphasise ‘its claims to exercise and even increase readers’ sensibility by encouraging them to pity suffering characters’.²⁵ By encouraging their implied readers to engage critically with what they read, as opposed to engaging by becoming overly emotionally invested in a fictional narrative, I argue that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton contribute, via a metadiscourse of improvement, to the construction of a model of reading that is more measured and reflective than it is emotional and impulsive. In keeping with the wider argument of this thesis, I contend, moreover, that it is precisely through paying attention to the continuations and modifications that this chapter identifies between the eighteenth-century novel and the early-nineteenth-century Scottish novel that we can perceive the period under study as a transformative one for the novel and its association with self-improvement, in ways that analysis of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton’s Victorian successors in the Conclusion further elucidates.

In order to analyse how this metadiscourse functions to promote readerly self-improvement, this chapter draws on the eighteenth-century moral philosopher Adam Smith’s concept of impartial spectatorship, a mechanism of sympathy and a key element of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, which Smith famously outlines in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Whereas sympathy in the Smithian sense refers to what we might more readily describe as empathy today – the idea that one can only imagine how someone else truly feels by imagining oneself in their situation – impartial spectatorship refers to the idea of observing another’s behaviour, or of viewing oneself as one might view another from a distance, as a means of reflecting on and regulating one’s own behaviour. In the next section of this chapter, I consider Smith’s presentation of the process of impartial spectatorship, contending that knowledge of Smith’s theory can help us as readers to understand more fully the metadiscourse through which novels operate to improve readers and the acutely self-reflexive and deliberative reading habits that they purportedly seek to impress on readers.

²⁴ Ellis, 17.

²⁵ Juliet Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745–1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19.

The rest of the chapter is divided into three further sections, moving across the novelistic strategies that make up the metadiscourse of improvement via reading. Sections two and three analyse the use of two explicit strategies for improvement: prefaces and direct addresses to readers. These comprise distancing strategies, which reiterate the move away from reading empathetically to reading critically by cautioning readers against becoming immediately immersed within fiction. Both sections build on the idea of using Smithian spectatorship as a tool for understanding the distanced reading practices that these prefaces and readerly addresses advocate. The final section begins to consider characterisation and plot, both of which are taken up further in subsequent chapters, particularly with reference to Ferrier. It analyses implicit and explicit satirical portrayals of ‘bad’ novel readers, and how plot functions to warn readers against adopting these characters’ reading practices, paving the way for an in-depth discussion of ‘good’ readers, alongside some other bad ones, in Chapter Three. By beginning with explicit novelistic strategies for improvement and concluding with the most implicit, this chapter encompasses the full spectrum of strategies that comprise the metadiscourse of improvement, and the ways in which it operates to counteract the longstanding perception of novel reading as a corrupting activity.

‘A certain distance’

The association of Smithian sympathy with studies of the novel is not a new one.²⁶ Stephanie Degooyer, for example, recently went as far as to suggest that we might ‘refer to Smith’s

²⁶ For work on Smith and the novel, see David Marshall, *The Figure of the Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* (Columbia University Press, 1986); David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaus, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (University of Chicago Press, 1988); Ian Duncan, ‘Fanaticism and Civil Society: Hogg’s Justified Sinner’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 42, no. 2 (2009): 343–48, JSTOR; Stephanie Degooyer, “‘The Eyes of Other People’: Adam Smith’s Triangular Sympathy and the Sentimental Novel”, *ELH*: 85, no. 3 (2018): 669–90, doi:10.1353/elh.2018.0024; Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Pickering & Chatto, 2009); Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (John Hopkins University Press, 2012); Robert Clark, ‘Jane Austen’s *Emma*, Adam Smith’s “Impartial Spectator”, Market Capitalism and Free-Indirect Discourse’, *XVII–XVIII* 77 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4000/1718.4622>; Christel Fricke, ‘The Challenges of Pride and Prejudice: Adam Smith and Jane Austen on Moral Education’, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 3, no. 269 (2014): 343–72, JSTOR; Lauren Kopajtic, “‘Now, how were his sentiments to be read?’: Imagination and Discernment in Austen’s *Persuasion*”, *Philosophy and Literature* 46, no. 2 (2022): 280–300, doi:10.1353/phl.2022.0020. For more on Smith and the impartial spectator, see D. D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator* (Oxford University

theory of sympathy as novelistic', inviting the application of Smith's ideas to fiction.²⁷ To date, studies that apply Smithian sympathy to novels have gravitated towards analysing two categories in particular: the eighteenth-century sentimental novel and the nineteenth-century realist novel.²⁸ In asserting that Smithian theory provides an effective framework for understanding the approach to reading that the early-nineteenth-century, female-authored Scottish novels under study here encourage their implied readers to adopt, I therefore shed light on a selection of works less frequently studied – or more often overlooked – within the context of this theory.

The present chapter builds especially on work by Degooyer, who highlights the importance of 'distance, time, and reflection' in her reading of Smithian sympathy and its application to the sentimental novels of Samuel Richardson, Henry Mackenzie, and Laurence Sterne.²⁹ It also builds on the work of Rae Greiner, who, noting 'the mistaken assumption' that *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 'offers a primarily theatrical account of sympathy production', suggests conversely that Smith's model 'provides nineteenth-century inheritors a compelling paradigm for sympathy production through narrative'.³⁰ Whereas Degooyer and Greiner identify sympathy at work *within* the novels, most often via the means of characterisation, I propose that Smith's framework provides a tool for understanding the model of self-improving reading that these novels encourage their readers to adopt. In this model of reading, sympathy and spectatorship must take place outside, as opposed to exclusively within, the narrative. By inhabiting this perspective, I expand on recent work by Lauren Kopajtic, who analyses the dramatization of Smithian theory in Jane Austen's novels, arguing that witnessing 'the moral imagination in action' in *Persuasion* 'has the effect of encouraging the reader [of *Persuasion*] in the same work of investigation, discernment, and scrutiny'.³¹ Kopajtic contends that 'this dramatization can affect the reader by refining her own moral imagination', implicitly touching on a process of readerly reflection and critical

Press, 2007); Charles L. Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Lamb.

²⁷ Degooyer, 683.

²⁸ For work on the former, see Degooyer; Marshall, *The Figure of the Theatre*; and Shields; for work on the latter, see Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*; and Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*.

²⁹ Degooyer, 670.

³⁰ Rae Greiner, 'Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot and the Realist Novel', *NARRATIVE* 17, no. 3 (2009): 294, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/nar.0.0025>.

³¹ Kopajtic, 'Imagination and Discernment in Austen's *Persuasion*', 297.

engagement, in which the novel itself figures as a catalyst.³² I contend that, similarly, differentiating between models of reading on a narrative level promotes self-reflection and critical engagement among readers outside of the fictional narrative. In doing so, I develop Shields' argument that, 'while providing ample exercise for readers' capacity for sympathy', second-degree spectatorship (the idea of novel readers as spectators of other spectators within a fictional narrative) 'also keeps readers at a critical distance from the narrative, and encourages them to use sensibility *and* reason in judging the propriety of characters' thought and actions', in which a similar sense of readerly labour and negotiation is implied.³³

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith writes that 'we can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us'.³⁴ He suggests that by placing ourselves in the position of an impartial spectator, and viewing ourselves from that position, as if we were another individual, we can better examine our own behaviour and so become aware of our need for self-reform, if indeed such a need exists. Smith's emphasis on distance is important to note. As the examples discussed in this chapter show, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton all advocate a model of reading that is dependent upon 'a certain distance' being maintained at all times between a reader and a novel, in order to facilitate formative self-reflection and critical engagement, in turn enabling the act of reading to provide a catalyst for self-improvement. Distance is thus intrinsic to the model of reading advocated in the Scottish novels under study here and a key factor that confirms the suitability of Smith's theory of impartial spectatorship as a tool for understanding how this model operates within these novels.³⁵

Smith maintains that 'the principle by which we naturally either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, seems to be altogether the same by which we exercise the like judgements concerning the conduct of other people'.³⁶ In this way,

We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it. If, upon placing ourselves in his situation, we thoroughly

³² Kopajtic, 'Imagination and Discernment in Austen's *Persuasion*', 281.

³³ Shields, 20. Original italics.

³⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 128.

³⁵ See Mark Salber Phillips' work for a discussion of distance as a principle of historiography in the period under study, especially, *On Historical Distance* (Yale University Press, 2013).

³⁶ Smith, 128.

enter into all the passions and motives which influenced it, we approve of it, by sympathy with the approbation of this supposed equitable judge. If otherwise, we enter into his disapprobation, and condemn it.³⁷

For Smith, then, through observing the actions of another – or surveying our own actions via an impartial lens, as one might view the actions of someone else from afar – we can successfully examine our own sentiments and motives, opening up the possibility of self-reform, if we find our behaviour wanting. As D. D. Raphael succinctly puts it: ‘each of us judges others as a spectator. Each of us finds spectators judging him. We then come to judge our own conduct by imagining whether an impartial spectator would approve or disapprove of it’.³⁸ Raphael also makes the point of identifying this self-reflexive aspect of impartial spectatorship as distinctly Smithian, writing that ‘the concept, though not the precise name, of an impartial spectator is there already in [David] Hume. What is original in Adam Smith is the development of the concept to explain the judgments of conscience made by an agent about *his own actions*’.³⁹ In addition to the need for distance, this emphasis on self-monitoring is precisely what I contend renders Smith’s framework an effective template for approaching the reading practices advocated by the Scottish female novelists under study. As the next sections of this chapter reveal, within these reading practices, as within Smith’s theory, self-reflection, following a period of observing the actions of a fictional other, comprises a key means of self-improvement through novel reading.

‘Nor is a work of fiction necessarily unprofitable to the readers’

In 1811, Brunton published *Self-Control*, complete with a preface, which she addressed to a fellow Scottish author, the playwright Joanna Baillie. This preface represents an explicit strategy for improvement, in which Brunton outlines both her wish that readers will become improved through reading her novel and how she foresees this process of improvement taking place, thus helping to construct a metadiscourse of improvement. The presence of this preface also marks Brunton’s participation in a longstanding novelistic tradition. In his study of novel reading in the early eighteenth century, William B. Warner observes that ‘the public-sphere

³⁷ Smith, 129.

³⁸ D. D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator*, 35.

³⁹ D. D. Raphael, ‘The Impartial Spectator’, in *Essays on Adam Smith*, ed. A. Skinner and T. Wilson (Clarendon Press, 1995), 87. My italics.

debate about the dangers of novel reading meant that anyone who had the temerity to write a narrative that could be accused of being a novel felt obliged to offer in its preface a defense of the text being introduced'.⁴⁰ A good example of this type of preface can be found at the beginning of *Interesting Memoirs* (1785), a novel by another Scottish novelist, Elizabeth Keir, which predates *Self-Control* by almost thirty years. Keir writes:

Taking advantage of the prevailing rage for Novels, the vehicles by which the most fatal poison is often conveyed to the heart, I send these Volumes into the world, with the humane intention, perhaps presumptuous hope, of counteracting the effects of such productions, by inspiring my young Readers with juster sentiments, and a more correct taste, than what is usually acquired by perusing books of mere amusement.⁴¹

In this passage, one can immediately identify key terms – ‘vehicles’ and ‘poison’ – that foreshadow Gifford’s concerns about and reflections on the novel some fifteen years later, placing Keir firmly within the conventions of both the eighteenth-century prefatory discourse and the ‘public-sphere debate’ that Warner discusses. The combination of this debate and the novel’s popularity (‘the prevailing rage’) provides Keir with the necessary context to present her own ostensibly improving novel. Her ‘humane intention’ and ‘perhaps presumptuous hope’ reflect, meanwhile, the obligation for eighteenth-century novelists – and especially women publishing under their own names – to justify their work.⁴² As Thomas Lockwood writes, ‘it is impossible to overstate the early eighteenth-century predisposition to what might be called a didactic imperative in literary writing for publication’.⁴³ He continues, positing that ‘such was the taint of frivolity or “mereness” upon reading matter designed for entertainment that no work of any serious literary ambition could very well afford to appear in public without some covering of respectable purpose, however thin or cynical’.⁴⁴ Thus we

⁴⁰ William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750* (University of California Press, 1998), 148.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Keir, *Interesting Memoirs. By a Lady. In Two Volumes* (London, 1785), vii. I am indebted to Ainsley McIntosh for bringing Keir’s novel to my attention.

⁴² Maria Edgeworth advertised her 1801 novel *Belinda* as a ‘Moral Tale’, revealing an alternative response to this obligation. *Belinda*, ed. Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick (Oxford University Press, 2008), 3. The frankness of Ferrier’s subtitle to *Marriage, ‘A Novel’*, conversely reflects her self-conscious and playful treatment of antinovel discourse.

⁴³ Thomas Lockwood, ‘The *Pamela* Debate’, in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, vol. 1, *Prose Fiction in English from the Origins of Print to 1750*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford University Press, 2017), 553.

⁴⁴ Lockwood, 553.

see Keir taking care to establish her own respectable purpose, in a similar way to that in which Samuel Richardson evinces his moral objectives when introducing *Pamela* (1740), as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis.

The obligation to defend novels against the stereotypes by which they were so frequently and publicly tarnished meant that prefaces came to be perceived as inherently performative, and by extension problematic, as it became difficult to differentiate between sincere and insincere expressions of intentionality.⁴⁵ Joseph Bartolomeo has written compellingly on this issue, observing the way in which ‘tidy, reductive guidelines that purport to render both message and method transparent have precisely the opposite effect on all but the most naive readers’.⁴⁶ Consequently, he contends, ‘the very placement of the preface arouses suspicion by foregrounding its problematic temporal and spatial relationship to the text’.⁴⁷ Bartolomeo notes specifically that, of all prefaces, those that precede novels are particularly susceptible to ‘the problems of interpretation’: ‘in novels, the fictionalizing that is essential to the text can be – and often is – present in the preface as well. Put more simply, the assertions of the preface may be no more true than the characters and events in the novel’.⁴⁸ Such assertions inevitably put novel readers in the difficult position of distinguishing between the ‘sincerity and ulterior motives’ of this ‘prefatorial feigning’, in order to ascertain a preface’s reliability.⁴⁹ Paul Goring supports this idea, writing that ‘prefaces, as Richardson recognised when mounting his defence of *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), were valued textual spaces which could be exploited for the inscription of a feeling, morally alert reader’.⁵⁰ Here, Goring’s reference to exploitation within the context of Richardson’s preface to *Pamela* accords with Bartolomeo’s identification of prefaces as a ‘manipulative’ strategy, reinforcing the performativity with which they came to be associated.

In her preface to *Self-Control*, Brunton’s tone is often self-deprecating and at times apologetic. She expresses a hope, for example, that readers might ‘tolerate what otherwise

⁴⁵ Christian Isobel Johnstone recognises this when she describes prefaces as ‘heavy performances’ in the Advertisement to her 1815 novel, *Clan-Albin: A National Tale*, ed. Andrew Monnickendam (ASLS, 2003), 1.

⁴⁶ Joseph F. Bartolomeo, *A New Species of Criticism: Eighteenth-Century Discourse on the Novel* (University of Delaware Press, 1994), 19.

⁴⁷ Bartolomeo, 19.

⁴⁸ Bartolomeo, 19.

⁴⁹ Bartolomeo, 20, 19.

⁵⁰ Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 175.

might be thought unworthy of regard'.⁵¹ When combined with the diminutive reference to her novel as 'this little tale', this tone is clearly reminiscent of the defensive, sentimental prefatorial tradition.⁵² There are two instances in particular in which Brunton makes the improving potential of her novel, as she sees it, clear to readers. The first builds explicitly on the self-correcting potential of novels identified by Gifford in this chapter's epigraph. Brunton writes: 'nor is a work of fiction necessarily unprofitable to the readers. When the vitiated appetite refuses its proper food, the alternative may be administered in a sweetmeat', positing that 'it may be imprudent to confess the presence of the medicine, lest the sickly palate, thus warned, turn from it with loathing'.⁵³ Here, Brunton clearly targets the novelistic stereotypes that had, by 1811, become commonplace, hence 'the vitiated appetite'. Her suggestion that fiction need not be 'necessarily unprofitable' demonstrates her awareness of the belief that novels were not typically perceived as benefiting their readers – rather, they represented a distraction from duty and a source of imaginative corruption. Through harnessing this belief, Brunton implies that, contrary to popular expectation, readers *can* profit from *Self-Control*, so long as they adopt the right approach to reading when engaging with it, which is a caveat that Brunton addresses later on in the preface. Her suggestion that fiction can provide its own 'medicine' supports this implication, as she presents her novel as one that provides an antidote for itself and the negative stereotypes of which she is clearly conscious. By engaging in contemporary discussions about the novel's reputation, Brunton channels antinovel rhetoric as a means of highlighting the exceptionality of her own improving work.

These lines are followed by a confession: 'I rely in this instance on the word of the philosopher, who avers that "young ladies never read prefaces"; and I am not without hope, that with you, and with all who form exceptions to his rule, the avowal of a useful purpose may be an inducement to tolerate what otherwise might be thought unworthy of regard'.⁵⁴ Here, again, Brunton plays with the assumption that novels do not generally merit positive recognition – her hope that her novel will not be deemed 'unworthy of regard' speaks to the clichéd belief that reading novels was a frivolous waste of time. Her acknowledgement,

⁵¹ Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, ed. Anthony Mandal (Routledge, 2016), 2.

⁵² Brunton, *Self-Control*, 2.

⁵³ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 2–3.

⁵⁴ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 3. Letitia Elizabeth Landon helpfully begins the preface to her 1831 novel, *Romance and Reality*, by asserting that 'Rousseau says, nobody reads prefaces'. I therefore assume that Brunton, too, is referring to Rousseau. 'Preface', *Romance and Reality* (London, 1831).

moreover, of the stereotype that ‘young ladies never read prefaces’ within her own preface highlights the idea of a fictional sweetmeat in action, indicating the degree of performativity that is at play in this passage. By self-consciously recognising that prefaces are often overlooked, Brunton reiterates the potential of the novel to comprise its own corrective. In this passage, we therefore see her taking steps towards constructing an intensely self-reflexive metadiscourse that centres on ameliorating antinovel stereotypes, precisely through engaging explicitly with, and then redeploying, them for her own purposes.

Whereas Brunton’s preface builds on traditional, eighteenth-century novelistic practices through its discussion of the novel’s reputation and the value of fiction, the introductory epistles that Walter Scott includes in some of his novels comprise full dramatic episodes, suggesting a deeper level of innovation – and freedom – on his part.⁵⁵ Scott’s epistles are inherently performative, depicting in the cases of *The Fortunes of Nigel* and *The Monastery*, to take just two examples, conversations between a fictionalised version of Scott himself, the infamous ‘Author of *Waverley*’, and Captain Clutterbuck, ‘the novel’s pseudoepigraphic editor’.⁵⁶ These epistles fulfil a similar function to Brunton’s preface insofar as they establish a degree of separation between the reader and the novel itself, emphasised by Scott’s interest in historical sources and ideas of transmission. Like Brunton, Scott occasionally makes use of this opportunity to outline an expectation of what he ostensibly believes novel reading ought to do. In the introductory epistle to *The Fortunes of Nigel*, for example, he identifies one of the purposes of novel reading as to ‘fill the place of bad thoughts, or to suggest better’.⁵⁷ Here, then, we have another example of an explicit strategy for improvement, in which Scott theorises about how a novel ought to function in order to improve the minds of its readers. That this example is an aside within, and not the central focus of, Scott’s preface reiterates, however, the fact that the stakes were higher for female authors of fiction, as discussed in this thesis’ Introduction. For Brunton, the morally improving potential of her work represents the governing rationale for her ‘pleading preface’, of which, as Bartolomeo notes, the ‘vast majority were written by women seeking indulgence

⁵⁵ I adopt Alasdair Gray’s inclusive approach here, interpreting the term preface as ‘any beginning entitled Preface, Prologue, Proheme, Introduction, Introductory, Apology, Design, Foreword, Or Advertisement, and a few opening lines or paragraphs which are not labelled but prepare the reader for the following without being essential to it’, in *The Book of Prefaces* (Bloomsbury, 2002), 7.

⁵⁶ Olivia Ferguson, ‘Walter Scott and the Future of Caricature in the Novel’, *Studies in Romanticism* 60, no. 2 (2021): 216, ProQuest.

⁵⁷ Walter Scott, *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), ed. Frank Jordan (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 7.

or candour from readers and critics – due to unique hardships, laudable moral aims, or simply the inadequacies of their gender’.⁵⁸ For Scott, reflections on the improving purpose and benefits of fiction are transitory asides that effectively highlight the gendered imbalance on which this thesis centres.

Brunton’s preface highlights the improving potential of *Self-Control* specifically, while Scott refers to the improving potential of novels more broadly. Both methods, however, operate to establish distance between the novel and the reader, by framing the former as something that is distinct from real life and designed to assist readers in the improvement of their own minds through careful and considered reading. In *Marriage*, readers are met with the example of Colonel Lennox who, on recounting one of his favourite books to his mother and Mary (whom he eventually marries), reveals that: ‘the title of the book offers no encouragement to female readers, but I know few works from which I rise with such renovated feelings of benevolence and good-will’.⁵⁹ Here, Lennox demonstrates Scott’s point, as it is implied that Lennox can rise in this way, with ‘renovated feelings of benevolence and good-will’, precisely because he is a reflective reader, and not one who consumes without thinking, or without distinguishing between fiction and reality. What we can discern from these examples is that a concern with reading and the effects that reading novels might have on readers was pervasive in novels of the period under study. That this concern is attended to especially in the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, and to a less urgent degree in those, for example, of Scott, supports the gendered expectations regarding the morality of fiction that persisted during the early nineteenth century. By paying attention to the discussions of novel reading and self-improvement in both, and the model of distanced reading that emerges forcefully in the female-authored novels under study, we gain a much fuller sense of these female novelists’ contributions to the novel that set them apart from their male contemporaries.

The second instance in which Brunton draws explicit attention to the improving potential of her novel occurs at the very end of the preface to *Self-Control*. Addressing herself to Baillie, Brunton apologises ‘for having left in [her] model traces of human imperfection’, before concluding that: ‘for the generality of my readers, I breath [*sic*] a fervent wish that these pages may assist in enabling their own hearts to furnish proof that the character of Laura, however unnatural, is yet not unattainable’.⁶⁰ Having expressed an awareness of

⁵⁸ Bartolomeo, 89, 90.

⁵⁹ Susan Ferrier, *Marriage*, ed. Dorothy McMillan (ASLS, 2020), 298.

⁶⁰ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 3.

novelistic stereotypes, Brunton outlines her wish that readers of *Self-Control* will become improved if they successfully learn to apply its lessons to themselves, via a model of distanced reading that mirrors Smith's concept of impartial spectatorship. Recognising this, Anthony Mandal rightly suggests that 'Brunton clearly perceives that fiction could itself offer a meaningful, effective tool for social improvement'.⁶¹ I would add to this that it is specifically Brunton's use of a preface before the actual narrative begins that draws to readers' attention the concept of the novel as a tool for self-improvement. Brunton's use of the verb 'assist' at the end of the preface is fundamental in emphasising this concept. By presenting *Self-Control* as a novel that provides its own corrective in the preface, before readers have embarked upon reading the novel's main narrative (assuming, of course, that readers actually read this preface), Brunton establishes a critical distance between the reader and the fictional narrative that the preface assumes the reader is about to read. By expressing a wish that 'these pages may *assist* [readers] in enabling their own hearts to furnish proof that the character of Laura...is yet not unattainable', Brunton presents *Self-Control* as a device for supporting improvement, but she also makes it clear that her novel is an aid and cannot be solely responsible for the improvement of readers.⁶² In this way, Brunton encourages what Catherine Gallagher refers to as 'an effective pulsation between identification with fictional characters and withdrawal from them, between emotional investment and divestment' that allows, somewhat ironically in the present context, the novel to constitute 'an even more efficient exercise in self-control'.⁶³

The responsibility for individual self-improvement ultimately lies with the readers themselves, which Brunton encourages them to recognise and fulfil by advocating a model of reading that teaches readers to approach novel reading critically and to reflect upon themselves, all the while maintaining a degree of distance from the narrative they are reading. As Degooyer notes: 'imagining ourselves as part of the spectacle we look upon, we seemingly enter into the same situation. But, importantly, we do not become the other

⁶¹ Anthony Mandal, introduction to *Self-Control* (1811), by Mary Brunton, ed. Anthony Mandal (Routledge, 2016), xxi. Mandal attributes this perception to Brunton's religious views, suggesting that her presentation of *Self-Control* as a tool for improvement reflects the evangelical belief that fiction might represent a means of improving the morals of the nation. See Chapter Four for an in-depth discussion of the novel as a vehicle for moral and religious improvement.

⁶² My italics.

⁶³ Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1670–1820* (Clarendon, 1995), xvii–xviii.

person'.⁶⁴ Within this example from *Self-Control*, Brunton specifically identifies Laura Montreville, the novel's heroine, as the gold standard to aspire towards. It becomes clear that Laura provides readers of the novel with an opportunity impartially to observe the actions and emotions of another as spectators. Emphasis is then placed on readers applying Laura's example to themselves and to their behaviour, as opposed passively to observing it. Brunton directs readers to enable 'their own hearts to furnish proof' that they can be virtuous in the same ways as Laura. Here, her implicit expectation that readers should self-reflect and engage their own judgment before applying what they read to themselves is crucial in identifying her preface as an explicit strategy for improvement that functions by advocating a distanced and critically appraising approach to reading. It also supports Deidre Shauna Lynch's observation of reading practices in the Romantic period, in which she identifies reading as 'an occasion when readers got to know themselves and their feelings' – an 'interpretative activity' that provides 'support for self-invigilation' or, returning to Brunton, tending to one's own heart, based on Protestant models of reading as spiritual discipline.⁶⁵

Brunton's endorsement of this reflective model of reading is also suggestive of a departure from earlier prefaces. Instead of simply saying, as Richardson does in his preface to *Pamela*, that his novel is designed 'to *Divert* and *Entertain*, and at the same time to *Instruct*, and *Improve* the Minds of the *YOUTH* of *both Sexes*', Brunton details precisely *how* she envisages this process of improvement taking place.⁶⁶ By introducing her novel in this way, Brunton likewise differs from Keir, whose preface to *Interesting Memoirs* is conversely vague in its intentionality, desiring that readers might 'reap [...] improvement from this Work', without elucidating how this improvement should materialise.⁶⁷ Indeed, both Richardson and Keir profess, in quite simple terms, that the novel is capable of promoting readerly improvement. This much is in keeping with Richardson's own assertion in a letter from 1754 that 'something also must be left to the Reader' of a novel 'to make out' – a notion that is in turn expressed by the narrator of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* that 'the truest respect' a writer can pay to their 'reader's understanding, is to [...] leave him something to

⁶⁴ Degooyer, 675.

⁶⁵ Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 216, 149.

⁶⁶ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

⁶⁷ Keir, viii.

imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself'.⁶⁸ Echoing these sentiments, Brunton goes a step further to explain the process through which she hopes that the readers of her novel will improve themselves – what is it that they need to make out and how they might go about achieving this. Taken together, these examples therefore support the historical claim of this thesis that the novel's increased generic stability and prominence at the turn of the nineteenth century, combined with the ubiquity of antinovel discourse, gave rise to a new and responsive phase in the genre's development. In this phase, novelists such as Brunton present the novel as a tool for self-improvement by promoting reading practices that demand careful self-reflection, thus expanding on the allusions to readerly labour and participation that the eighteenth-century novel sets up, but discusses in less detail.

By presenting her readers with a twofold model of reading that is based on fictional spectatorship followed by formative self-reflection, Brunton presents her readers with a strategy that also bears striking resemblance to the process of impartial spectatorship outlined by Smith. By extension, Smith's theory provides us with a template through which to interpret the improving reading practices that Brunton encourages her readers to adopt. Like Smith, Brunton suggests that by witnessing from a distance the behaviour of another (such as Laura) and then reflecting on their own behaviour with Laura's example in mind, readers of *Self-Control* will become adept at identifying the ways in which they diverge from Laura's self-invigilating example. Either they will find their behaviour wanting and thus recognise their need to follow Laura's moral template in order to become more virtuous and more dutiful, or they will find their behaviour in keeping with Laura's example and so continue as they are, having reflected productively on their conduct and motivations.

In proposing this, Brunton builds on ideas put forward by Baillie in the 'Introductory Discourse' to her magnum opus, *Plays on the Passions* (1798), in which critics have often identified parallels with Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁶⁹ Like Brunton, Baillie

⁶⁸ Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 25 February, 1754, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor, *Correspondence with Lady Bradshaigh and Lady Echlin*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 411; Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (1759), ed. Judith Hawley (W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 71.

⁶⁹ See Julie Murray, 'Governing Economic Man: Joanna Baillie's Theatre Of Utility', *ELH* 70, no. 4 (2003): 1043, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/elh.2004.0008>; Gerard Lee McKeeever, *Dialectics of Improvement: Scottish Romanticism, 1786–1831* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), Chapter 3; Lauren Kopajtic, "'In Examining Others We Know Ourselves": Joanna Baillie on Sympathetic Curiosity, Moral Education, and Drama', *Journal of Modern Philosophy* 6 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.25894/jmp.1876>.

expressed an interest in the relationship between spectatorship and improvement. In the ‘Introductory Discourse’, she writes that ‘the Drama improves us by the knowledge we acquire of our own minds, from the natural desire we have to look into the thoughts, and observe the behaviour of others’.⁷⁰ While Baillie is talking specifically about drama here, a modified version of the same argument occurs in Brunton’s preface to *Self-Control*: through observing and critically engaging with Laura’s behaviour, reflecting on their actions, and then applying Laura’s example to themselves, Brunton’s readers will accrue knowledge of their own minds and learn to improve themselves. Instead of endorsing a model of reading in which the reader passively receives information, Brunton’s preface thus operates as an explicit strategy for promoting self-improvement in which she presents her readers with a self-enabling model of reading. By encouraging readers to refrain from becoming irreparably immersed within fiction, this model of reading provides an alternative to the perceived dangers of novel reading and enables works such as *Self-Control* to provide their own antidote. The similarities that arise between Brunton, Baillie, and Smith’s work, moreover, place Brunton within, and highlight her contribution to, a broader discussion about spectatorship as a means of improvement, discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

‘Let the reflecting reader judge’

As the Introduction to this thesis sets out, and as Scott’s example in the previous section attests, a concern with active reading and the development of strategies for self-improvement via reading are predominant within but not unique to the Scottish female-authored novels under study. By comparing these novels with works by male authors including Galt, Scott, and, in what follows, James Hogg, we can perceive the way in which many of these concerns and strategies overlap, although they are less central to the latter. Like Brunton, Hogg broaches the connection between spectatorship and improvement in his novels. In particular, his use of direct addresses to readers and narratorial interjections provide him with a means of advocating the distanced model of reading that *Self-Control* self-consciously prioritises. Use of such direct addresses to novel readers within novels represents another key feature of the eighteenth-century novel. In *Tom Jones* (1749), for example, Henry Fielding makes frequent and explicit references to the ‘sagacious Reader’ of his novel.⁷¹ These instances,

⁷⁰ Joanna Baillie, ‘Introductory Discourse’, *Plays on the Passions*, ed. Peter Duthie (Broadview Press, 2001), 90.

⁷¹ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. Sheridan Baker (W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 34.

which comprise ‘one of the most prominent features of Fielding’s intrusive narration’, serve, as Iser suggests, to ‘arous[e] a sense of discernment’, drawing readers’ attention to important points within the novel of which they should take note, all the while operating on the feigned assumption that the reader is already aware (hence their sagacity).⁷² The addresses to readers that appear at intervals throughout Hogg’s own novels may thus be seen, like Brunton’s preface, as a continuation of a longstanding novelistic strategy. Instead, however, of assuming knowledge on the part of the reader, and thereby encouraging that reader to ‘test his own faculties’, Hogg’s readerly references indicate *how* his readers ought actively to engage with the text they are reading.⁷³ As such, his deployment of this strategy nuances that of his eighteenth-century predecessors, emphasising, like the preface to *Self-Control*, the need for readers to consult their own critical judgment in order to derive this knowledge. Analysis of these readerly references thus comprises an additional way through which we can identify the period under study as one in which transformations were taking place within the novel to draw out the genre’s propensity for encouraging self-improvement via distanced reading practices.

In *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, references to the reader appear in both the eponymous sinner, Robert Wringham’s, memoirs and the anonymous editor’s framing narrative. While the former writes at the end of his memoir: ‘let the reflecting reader judge’ what lies on the pages before them, the latter shortly after this enquires of the same implied reader, ‘what can this work be?’.⁷⁴ Instead, then, of assuming that his reader already understands the answers to these questions, as Fielding’s feigned and complex references to his readers’ sagacity do, Hogg’s references instruct the reader directly to engage with and reflect on the ‘rival realities’, as Ian Duncan calls them, that they see before them.⁷⁵ Just as Brunton’s preface delineates precisely how she perceives her readers will derive improvement through reading her novel, Hogg takes care to signal the processes through which readers of his work should engage critically with the fiction in front of them. Implicit in the works of Brunton, Hogg and Fielding is a persistent expectation that readers

⁷² Henry Power, ‘Henry Fielding, Richard Bentley, and the “Sagacious Reader” of *Tom Jones*’, *The Review of English Studies* 161, no. 252 (2010): 749, doi:10.1093/res/hgp116; Iser, 31.

⁷³ Iser, 31.

⁷⁴ James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. Peter D. Garside (Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 164, 165.

⁷⁵ Ian Duncan, introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) by James Hogg, ed. Ian Duncan (Oxford University Press, 2010), x.

should develop their own critical understanding, but Brunton and Hogg are clearer about the labour of judging and questioning that this process necessitates. Fielding, meanwhile, alludes to the aptitude that readers should have eventually developed, undoubtedly signalling ‘a process of learning’ via reading, but not signalling so clearly what this process should look like or involve.⁷⁶ This distinction signals a wider evolution taking place within the novel, in which Brunton and Hogg encourage critical engagement from their readers in more detailed ways than Fielding does from readers of *Tom Jones*, with the caveat that Hogg’s use of the Gothic convention of the found manuscript also creates an additional impetus for such engagement. Instead of becoming perilously immersed in, or seduced by, their reading material (a stereotype of which Hogg was evidently aware), Hogg’s readers are encouraged, via the means of narratorial interjection, to step back from what they read. This process inevitably creates a degree of distance between the reader and the text (assuming that the reader complies) that Fielding does not theorise about in the same way, paving the way for the nineteenth-century novelists studied here.

With this in mind, I would like to turn attention to *The Three Perils of Woman*, which is divided into three novellas, each of which focuses on one peril in particular: Love, Leasing, and Jealousy. At the end of the first peril, Love, Hogg presents readers with a passage in which, as with Brunton’s preface, readers are encouraged to take heed of the importance of self-examination as a means of improvement:

Let me then implore of the gentle maiden, who shall deign to read these red-letter morals of the mountains that, on the first breathings of youthful affection, when the ready blush first mounts the cheek, and the radiant eye begins to sparkle at the sound of a certain manly voice – let me implore of her then to pause, and say to herself, ‘What am I doing, and whither is my fantasy leading me? Let me beware, lest I be now entering the precincts of the first and greatest peril of woman.’⁷⁷

Hogg is, admittedly, not talking about novel reading specifically here, but rather about the ostensible dangers of love – although the perceived dangers of both bear striking resemblance

⁷⁶ Iser, 31.

⁷⁷ James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Woman*, ed. Anthony Hasler and Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 258–59.

to one another: the dangers of seduction, a resultant lack of any grasp on reality, and so on.⁷⁸ This an important qualification, since it supports this thesis' claim that the female authors under study are more explicitly concerned with reading and self-improvement than Galt, Hogg, and Scott, working on the basis of understanding that expectations surrounding the morality of fiction were higher for women writers of the period under study than they were for men. It is hard to say for certain whether or how much Hogg is making fun of the conventions surrounding female sensibilities in the example above, although the degree to which this might be the case does not detract from the importance of its message for the purposes of this thesis, which lies in Hogg's prioritisation of reflective deliberation over the immediacy of sentimental identification.⁷⁹ The instruction and solution that Hogg offers to readers in this passage create clear parallels with both Brunton's preface and Smith's theoretical framework. By encouraging readers to pause and think for themselves, Hogg echoes the former's wish that novel readers, through witnessing the behaviour of others via the medium of fiction, might stop and turn to themselves to evaluate (and, if necessary, to change) their own behaviour. Like Brunton's preface, Hogg's addresses to his readers function effectively as a distancing strategy, encouraging them to read the narrative as spectators, before crucially returning to themselves and their own reality: 'let me implore of her then to *pause*, and say to *herself*'.⁸⁰ Just as Brunton demonstrates a clear awareness of the stereotype that novels do not profit their readers in any meaningful or valuable way, Hogg evinces an awareness of the stereotype that novel readers are not often in the habit of pausing to consider what they have just read. Devouring novels with ungoverned voracity was a common fear associated (in particular) with female novel readers, which was proverbial by the time that *The Three Perils of Woman* was published. Both Brunton and Hogg therefore express an awareness of prevailing, contemporary concerns about the behaviours associated with novel reading, and this awareness informs their construction of explicit strategies for

⁷⁸ Hogg is, however, specific in his delineation of the dangers posed by novels to young women in his sermon, 'Young Women', in which he identifies Ferrier as one of 'two at present living' female novelists that provide an exception to the rule. Brunton was already deceased when Hogg's *Lay Sermons* first appeared in 1834 and is therefore exempt from this caveat, although that is not to say that Hogg was not familiar with her works. *A Series of Lay Sermons on Good Principles and Good Breeding*, ed. Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 21. See in particular 21–23 for Hogg's discussion of novel reading. I am indebted to Adrian Hunter for directing me to this example.

⁷⁹ To consider this question in more detail, one might turn attention to Barbara Leonardi's recent work on Hogg and his treatment of gender stereotypes in *Marriage in James Hogg's Work: Plotting for Gender, Class, and Ethnic Equality* (Brill, 2022).

⁸⁰ My italics.

improvement within their own novels. Whereas, however, these strategies represent the core justification for Brunton's fiction, they are an auxiliary concern of Hogg's, much like Galt's aforecited reflections on the craze for novel reading in *The Entail*. Through deploying these strategies for improvement, albeit to different lengths, Brunton and Hogg encourage readers to adopt more carefully considered reading practices, thereby ameliorating antinovel stereotypes and presenting their work as guides for improvement.

In the preface to *Self-Control*, Brunton indicates to her readers that this approach to reading comprises a practice, or process (readers observe Laura and then apply her morals and principles to their own behaviour). When addressing his own readers in the passage above, Hogg breaks down the stages that are involved in this process of behavioural reform: the reader reads the novel; the reader deduces, via the distanced reading practices that these novels encourage her to adopt, the lessons in self-reflection that are to be derived from these novels; the reader then returns to examine her own actions, before applying – as necessary – these lessons to herself, so becoming improved. Hogg's reminder to readers to pause and question themselves reinforces the importance of distance that Smith discusses, and the opportunity that impartial spectatorship provides to question one's own conscience. It also promotes among readers a concept that John Plotz describes as semi-detachment, the idea that we must engage with fiction enough that we can critically interact with what we are reading, whilst 'remaining aware of the distance between such invention' and our own reality.⁸¹ Plotz builds here, at his own admission, on Catherine Gallagher's influential work on fictionality, in which she suggests that readers 'feel things for characters not *despite* our awareness of their fictionality but *because* of it'.⁸² Writing in historical terms, he asserts that 'what divides us from the past also connects us: semi-detachment all the way down'.⁸³ The same can be said of the model of reading that Brunton and Hogg promote: distance divides us from what we read in the sense that (ideally speaking) it prevents us from becoming perilously immersed within a narrative, but it also connects us with what we read by enabling us to engage with ourselves and what is written before us in productive and self-improving ways. Plotz argues that self-detachment is especially central in the Victorian realist fiction of Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Henry James, but he also identifies Hogg and Galt as

⁸¹ John Plotz, *Semi-Detached: The Aesthetics of Virtual Experience since Dickens* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 3.

⁸² Catherine Gallagher, 'The Rise of Fictionality', in *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton University Press, 2006), 351–52. Original italics.

⁸³ Plotz, 243.

authors who provide us with earlier examples of it in action. The pertinence of this concept to Brunton, whom Plotz does not include, therefore nuances slightly his claims, supporting this thesis' argument that the effects of Brunton's understudied contributions to the novel's development extend beyond the temporal parameters of this thesis' timeframe. A similar sense of legacy emerges if we turn attention to Greiner's identification of the various mental processes in which she proposes Victorian realist novelists including Dickens and Eliot encourage their readers to engage: 'to re-create other people's mental movements; to reflect on the situations out of which their feelings arise; to gauge the appropriateness of their feelings and ours; to go along with others imaginatively, and imagine them going along with us'.⁸⁴ In these lines, the emphasis that Greiner places on critical engagement (the act of gauging appropriateness, for example) and self-reflection (in relation both to the situations in which we find ourselves and the responses that we have to those situations) further elucidates the way in which the Scottish novels under study here pre-empt the 'mental processes' that later novelists of the Victorian period invite readers to experience via novel reading, highlighting the implications of Brunton's theory on the novel's generic development during the later nineteenth century.

The emphasis on self-reform that is implied through the self-reflexive reading practices that Brunton and Hogg promote is in turn suggestive of a movement away from the more empathetic model of reading associated with many eighteenth-century sentimental novels towards a model of reading that requires and engenders critical, less emotionally immersive engagement with reading material, and that is foreshadowed to some extent in the examples discussed earlier from *Tom Jones*. Indeed, David Marshall identifies 'the possibility of sympathy' as a key expectation and 'concern of the eighteenth-century novel', noting the novel's need 'to move, touch, and secure the sympathy of readers'.⁸⁵ A particularly good example of this expectation can be found in the preface to Tobias Smollett's novel *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748). Smollett writes:

The reader gratifies his curiosity, in pursuing the adventures of a person in whose favour he is prepossessed; he espouses his cause, he sympathizes with him in distress, his indignation is heated against the authors of his calamity; the humane passions are inflamed; the contrast between dejected virtue, and insulting vice, appears with

⁸⁴ Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism*, 160.

⁸⁵ Marshall, *The Figure of the Theater*, 238; Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*, 15.

greater aggravation, and every impression having a double force in the imagination, the memory retains the circumstance, and the heart improves by the example.⁸⁶

Here, improvement takes place via the reader's capacity to sympathise with a character and recall their misfortunes, as opposed to applying the same lessons to their own actions. 'The heart improves by the example', but unlike Brunton or Hogg, Smollett does not encourage his readers to go a step further by applying this example to themselves in the same explicit way that these later Scottish novelists do. By theorising, then, about how they recommend readers respond to and engage with the examples that novel reading provides them with, the early-nineteenth-century novelists under study here are much more specific about the ways through which the novel presents a means of self-improvement, highlighting an important way in which the relationship between novel reading and improvement evolves during the period under study.

The importance of feeling for others when reading novels that Smollett alludes to is also touched on by Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave, who write in their introduction to Henry Mackenzie's sentimental *Man of Feeling* (1771) that 'more important to the eighteenth-century reader of *The Man of Feeling* was its capacity – apparently without irony – to provoke tears', as readers were encouraged to share in the emotions of the characters about whom they read.⁸⁷ This encouragement is, fittingly, alluded to by the fictional 'Editor' in Mackenzie's own introduction to his novel. Introducing to the implied reader the 'scattered chapters, and fragments of chapters' that comprise the novel's narrative, the Editor reveals: 'I was a good deal affected with some of the very trifling passages in it; and had the name of a [Jean-François] Marmontel, or a [Samuel] Richardson, been on the title-page – 'tis odds that I should have wept'.⁸⁸ In this passage, the Editor's identification of weeping as a result of reading the works of Marmontel and Richardson, combined with their being approvingly 'affected' by the chapters in question, supports the association of empathetic reading with the eighteenth-century novel. As the examples of Brunton and Hogg demonstrate, however, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, this inflection had altered, moving from an

⁸⁶ Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Oxford University Press, 2008), xxxiii.

⁸⁷ Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave, introduction to *The Man of Feeling* (1771) by Henry Mackenzie, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford University Press, 2001), xxiii.

⁸⁸ Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford University Press, 2001), 7, 5.

expectation that one will be improved through one's capacity to feel for others (or the characters within a novel), to an expectation that one will be improved through one's capacity to judiciously apply the lessons and examples from one's novel reading to oneself, via the dictates of a metadiscourse of improvement. Consequently, the reading practices that these Scottish novels encourage their readers to adopt are characterised by a capacity to think critically, to reflect honestly on oneself, and to exercise a cautious distance when reading.

'Warning is as good as example'

Thus far, my analysis of novelistic strategies for improvement has shown novelists grappling self-consciously with the historically controversial matter of novel reading, leading to the development of a metadiscourse of improvement through which they present their works as ones that counteract the negative effects of misreading fiction. In this final section, I consider the ways in which characterisation and plot contribute to this metadiscourse by helping readers to distinguish between the value and pitfalls of different models of reading, supporting Bruce F. Kavin's assertion that 'the task of the audience' of 'a self-conscious work of art' is 'particularly complex'.⁸⁹ Within the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, readers are met with examples of both good and bad readers. These cumulatively provide a multiplicity of examples of characters, some of whom occupy our attention for brief scenes of intense satire, and others of whom we follow closely over the course of an entire narrative, witnessing a reform for which we as readers are invited to consider our own personal need. Bad readers provide an opportunity for readers to join in with the novelist in their jokes about novelistic tropes, in keeping with the performativity discussed earlier, with the idea being that, through laughing at these characters and recognising their ridiculousness, readers will partake in this performance to improving ends by recognising the errors of their own reading practices. All of this is contingent, of course, upon the successful enactment of the self-investigating reading practices outlined in the previous two sections of this chapter. In this way, these novelists invoke what Katie Halsey identifies as 'the satirist's need to improve on what had gone before'; it is a version of satirical humour carefully designed to promote readerly self-improvement via antidotal novels.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Bruce F. Kavin, *The Mind of the Novel: Reflexive Fiction and the Ineffable* (Princeton University Press, 1982), 14.

⁹⁰ Katie Halsey, "'Possessing a most exquisite taste in every species of literature": Reading, Moral Taste and Creative Action in Jane Austen's Novels', in *The Edinburgh Companion to*

Instead of confirming the perceived dangers of novel reading, good readers implicitly provide straightforward examples of the distanced model of reading that works to counteract novelistic dangers, on which actual readers of the novels under study can model their own behaviour. In this respect, fictional portrayals of good novel readers fulfil the same function of fostering readerly self-improvement as the prefaces and narratorial interjections discussed earlier. The difference, however, lies in the level of readerly engagement that these strategies demand. The prefaces and addresses to readers function effectively to teach readers that they will be required (or, at the very least, invited) to engage with what they are reading, and to outline the steps they must complete in order to improve themselves through this engagement. Implicit portrayals of good novel readers then provide readers with the opportunity to do precisely this as they work their way through the narrative. They therefore require far more readerly engagement than the explicit strategies, as the success of the implicit strategies relies on readers deducing for themselves *why* certain characters are presented as exemplary figures, and then applying those lessons to themselves. Chapter Three analyses representations of good readers in detail, and it also continues the examination of bad readers, considering in particular Bridgetina in *Memoirs* and Mrs Gaffaw in *Marriage*. The remainder of this chapter therefore paves the way for this analysis by initiating a discussion about bad readers who fail or refuse to develop distanced reading practices.

Failure to distinguish between fiction and reality is a routine hallmark of satirically presented bad readers within the novels under study. It represents a key trope of quixotism (touched on in the Introduction to this thesis), which is in turn, as Dale notes, ‘foundational to the history of the novel in English’.⁹¹ In a recent study of Mary Charlton’s quixotic novel *Rosella*, Dale writes that ‘central to quixotism is an imaginative collapse between reader and writer, book and body. It is, on one level, a readerly generalization gone awry: a forgetting of the artificiality of literary representation’.⁹² In *Self-Control*, Brunton reiterates this trope through the character of Julia Dawkins, an avid novel reader whom Laura meets in London, and who is characterised by ‘preposterous’ affectation.⁹³ Readers learn how ‘having no character of her own, Julia was always, as nearly as she was able, the heroine whom the last

Jane Austen and the Arts, ed. Joe Bray and Hannah Moss (Edinburgh University Press, 2024), 63.

⁹¹ Amelia Dale, ‘The Quixotic Mother, the Female Author, and Mary Charlton’s *Rosella*’, *Studies in the Novel* 52.1 (2020): 2, doi:10.1353/sdn.2020.0001.

⁹² Dale, ‘The Quixotic Mother’, 2.

⁹³ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 53.

read novel inclined her to personate'.⁹⁴ Julia's subsumption of her own identity plays on and supports the stereotype that novel readers, in true quixotic style, become so immersed within the fiction they read that they can no longer differentiate between appropriate conduct in the real world and novelistic convention. As Pearson notes, it was generally accepted that 'the good female reader must not seek to escape from the real world altogether'.⁹⁵ By interpreting fictional artificiality as tangible reality, Julia Dawkins represents a similar kind of disconnect, confirming her as a bad reader. That Julia's reading practices 'sometimes provoked the smiles, but more frequently the pity of Laura' indicates, moreover, the way in which interactions between characters within the novels function as an implicit strategy for improvement.⁹⁶ By taking our cues from Laura's intradiegetic responses, we are encouraged in this passage to respond to Julia's folly in the same disapproving way, though never explicitly instructed to do so. Rather, it is left up to us as readers to distinguish between the virtuous example of Laura and the satirical depiction of Julia, exercising in so doing the distanced and critically engaged model of reading that Brunton's preface encourages us to adopt. The metadiscourse thus operates within the narrative, when good novel readers react to bad novel readers, indicating to readers reading the novel how they ought to react, and also outwith the narrative, when readers of the novel take heed of this implicit strategy for improvement and apply it to themselves. J. A. G. Ardila writes that Cervantes' original quixotic text influenced eighteenth-century British literature 'to an extent that remains beyond compare'.⁹⁷ By considering examples from early-nineteenth-century novels that build on the eighteenth-century feminisation of the quixotic reader, we therefore gain a fuller understanding of the scope of this influence. In particular, we are able to recognise how Brunton and Hamilton transform this stereotype into a deliberate means of encouraging readers to distinguish between dangerous and improving reading habits in their own novels, thereby counteracting eighteenth-century antinovel rhetoric.

Indeed, further parallels can be drawn between Julia Dawkins and her namesake in *Memoirs*, in which readers learn that 'though Julia [Delmond] read with pleasure books of philosophy, history, and travels to her father, she found a pleasure still more poignant in

⁹⁴ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 53.

⁹⁵ Pearson, 103.

⁹⁶ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 53.

⁹⁷ Ardila, J. A. G. 'The Influence and Reception of Cervantes in Britain, 1607–2005', in *The Cervantean Heritage: Reception and Influence of Cervantes in Britain*, ed. J. A. G. Ardila (Legenda, 2009), 10.

devouring the pages of a novel or romance'.⁹⁸ She is subsequently presented as the victim of a 'wild and ungoverned imagination'.⁹⁹ Julia thus conforms to, and confirms, many of the worst stereotypes pertaining to the female novel reader with which readers of *Memoirs* would have been (un)comfortably familiar. Hamilton's implementation, and resulting perpetuation, of these stereotypes at a plot level operates as an implicit, satirical strategy, enabling her novel to provide a corrective to them. One of the most telling examples of the influence that Julia's unreflective reading has on her actions occurs when she announces to Bridgetina her intention to find the estranged parents of her lover Vallaton (ostensibly a learned philosopher, but actually a philandering hairdresser in disguise). '[A]n idea occurred to me', she reveals, 'which, though it may at first seem slightly romantic, is far from improbable, and the more I think of it, appears the more likely to be true. What would you think, if I should make a discovery of his real parents?'.¹⁰⁰ To help her achieve this goal, Julia is subsequently depicted calling 'to her remembrance all the similar events in her most favourite novels': 'in these instructive books the discovery of her hero's parents had always appeared to her a catastrophe particularly interesting, and the idea that she should now have it in her power, not only to witness, but to be a principal actor in so tender a scene, filled her heart with extacy'.¹⁰¹ In this passage, it becomes clear that, like Brunton's Julia, Hamilton's Julia has fallen into the trap of conflating real life with fiction. Whereas, however, the former surrenders her own identity to assume that of a novelistic heroine, the latter inserts the identities of those around her into the templates provided by the novels she has read. Julia can thus be likened to Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* or to Lennox's eponymous female quixote, Arabella, who similarly has recourse to her favourite novels in order to make sense (or so she thinks) of the world around her – for Arabella, 'Romances were real Pictures of Life'.¹⁰²

Hamilton's reference above to novels as 'these instructive books' is emblematic, moreover, of the tongue-in-cheek tone that enables the metadiscourse of improvement to function, and which signals these novels' inherent performativity. By sarcastically playing on, and thus playing up, the popular belief that novels were not instructive, and by presenting her readers with a character who has fallen victim to the perceived traps of novel reading, Hamilton invites the possibility that her own novel has the potential to improve readers by

⁹⁸ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 85.

⁹⁹ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 69.

¹⁰¹ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 71.

¹⁰² Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

alerting them to and offering an alternative to these dangers. It is precisely her failure to ‘witness’, as opposed to becoming immersed in, the narratives of the novels that she reads that results in Julia Delmond’s downfall at the end of the novel: she runs away, returns pregnant with Vallaton’s child, realises the implications of her actions, and dies. Her misdirected reading habits are thus presented implicitly by Hamilton as resulting in her untimely death, and her death in turn serves as a warning to readers of *Memoirs* not to make the same mistakes. Instead, however, of being straightforwardly didactic, Hamilton plays on ubiquitous tropes to encourage readers to reflect on their own reading habits and, if necessary, to correct the error of their ways through self-reflective reading.

The stereotype that novel readers will wrongly apply scenes from real life to the templates of fiction is also addressed by Galt, reiterating its ubiquity. In *The Entail*, the matriarchal Leddy observes that ‘when we reflek how the mim maidens now-a-days hae delivered themselves up to the Little-gude in the shape and glamour o’ novelles and Thomson’s Seasons, we need be nane surprised to fin’ Miss as headstrong in her obdooracy as the lovely young Lavinia that your sister Meg learnt to ’cite at the boarding-school’.¹⁰³ In these lines, Galt, like his female contemporaries, plays on the fear that novel readers (and particularly female ones) will emulate, like Julia Dawkins, the fictional characters about whom they read in novels. The fear that novel reading would result in a breakdown of the barriers between fiction and reality is further emphasised when the Leddy mistakes her granddaughter Robina’s meaning when she says ‘Heaven protect me! I am ruined and undone!’¹⁰⁴ The Leddy interprets this as Robina’s confession that she is pregnant outwith wedlock, when in fact she is simply lamenting that she might not be allowed to marry Walkinshaw Milrookit. Upon realising her mistake, the Leddy deems her ‘delusion’ a ‘very natural’ one, crucially blaming ‘thir novelle and play-acting times’ in which ‘nobody can tell what might happen’.¹⁰⁵ Here, then, Galt presents us with an example of someone who exhibits signs of bad reading and who attributes her misunderstanding of reality to novels. The Leddy’s lack of critical judgment is humorously reflected, for example, in her inclusion of James Thomson’s ‘Seasons’ – a series of four poems published in 1730 – in the ‘novelle’ category. Robina’s reaction to her grandmother’s delusion is also important to note, as it functions in a similar way to Laura’s reaction to Julia Dawkins: “‘Good heavens! How have you fallen into this strange mistake?’” said Robina, so much recovered, that she could scarcely

¹⁰³ Galt, *The Entail*, 251.

¹⁰⁴ Galt, *The Entail*, 285.

¹⁰⁵ Galt, *The Entail*, 286.

refrain from laughing'.¹⁰⁶ Robina's laughter at the ridiculousness of the Leddy's assumption reinforces to readers on an intradiegetic level that satire is at play within this scene, providing a cue for them in turn to laugh at this ridiculousness themselves. It also provides a cue for readers to laugh more generally at the exhausted novelistic tropes, about which Galt, like Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, is patently tongue-in-cheek. Through this brief exchange Galt thus contributes to the tradition identified by DeLucia as central to the works of Brunton and Hamilton, whereby 'they trade in laughter and derision instead of tears'.¹⁰⁷ By expressing a clear awareness of, and then ridiculing, the perceived dangers of novel reading, this scene contributes to the metadiscourse of improvement, by highlighting the dangers of not engaging individual critical judgment. Its treatment of interactional dynamics reiterates, moreover, the centrality of plot to the success of this metadiscourse.

In *The History of the English Novel*, Ernest Baker asserts that by the early nineteenth century, 'the fashion of the world had changed much more than the fashion of novel-writing'.¹⁰⁸ The findings of this chapter, however – and, indeed, the ones that follow – suggest otherwise. In this chapter, we see Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, and to a less frequent extent, Galt, Hogg, and Scott, engaging with popular stereotypes pertaining to the novel ('a fashion of the world') that, far from changing since their emergence in the eighteenth century, had become even more firmly established within literary discourse by the start of the period under study. By analysing these novelists' use of strategies, such as prefaces and direct addresses to their readers, and comparing this with earlier novelists' use of the same strategies, we can discern, in contrast to Baker's assertion, a difference in 'the fashion of novel-writing' between the mid to late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This difference manifests particularly in the ways in which the later novelists considered here refine and develop eighteenth-century strategies for promoting critical readerly engagement and, by extension, self-improvement. It therefore attests to the wider argument of this thesis that the period between 1800 and 1837 represents a pivotal one in the novel's history, in which it becomes increasingly and performatively associated with self-improvement in ways that are eminently clear in the Scottish female-authored novel. An increased emphasis on readers having to engage carefully with what they read is also discernible in these novelists'

¹⁰⁶ Galt, *The Entail*, 260.

¹⁰⁷ JoEllen DeLucia, 'Common Sense Philosophy and Sentimental Fiction: Eighteenth-Century Scottish Women Novelists', *The International Companion to Scottish Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Leith Davis and Janet Sorensen (ASLS, 2021), 221.

¹⁰⁸ Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel*, vol. 6, *Edgeworth, Austen, Scott* (Barnes & Noble, 1929), 11.

use of characterisation and plot. Instead of engaging in straightforward ways with persistent antinovel stereotypes, the Scottish novelists under study transform these stereotypes into a means of encouraging the readers of their own novels to distinguish between, laugh at, and reform their behaviour based on their observation of examples of both good and bad readers. As Mary (a good reader) observes in *Marriage*, warning is ‘as good as example’.¹⁰⁹ Through their utilisation of these explicit and implicit, satirical and straightforward strategies, Brunton, Ferrier, and, Hamilton construct a metadiscourse of improvement within their novels that is complemented by passages from Galt, Hogg, and Scott’s novels, and which promotes the distanced model of reading outlined in this chapter, enabling their works to provide tools for readerly self-improvement.

¹⁰⁹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 175.

Chapter Two: Negotiating Improvement through National Stereotypes

Then, what can I do with a girl who has been educated in Scotland? She must be vulgar – all Scotch women are so. They have red hands and rough voices; they yawn, and blow their noses, and talk, and laugh loud, and do a thousand shocking things. Then, to hear the Scotch brogue – oh, heavens! I should expire every time she opened her mouth!¹

In their study of Scottish women fiction writers of the early nineteenth century, Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell observe of Susan Ferrier's work that 'there are many self-conscious references to the differences between Scottish and English culture; *Marriage*, most famously, is structured on the contrasts between them'.² The epigraph above illustrates effectively this style of reference. In these lines, Lady Juliana Douglas prepares to receive in Bath her daughter, Mary Douglas, whom she abandons as a baby to be raised in Scotland by her aunt, Mrs Douglas, leaving behind her Scottish in-laws to return to her native London. This passage paints an unflattering, though regrettably accurate, portrait of Juliana as a prejudiced, uncompromising individual. Juliana's patent trepidation also signals the way in which Ferrier typecasts her as an English character who gives voice to Scotophobic attitudes that persisted before, throughout, and beyond the eighteenth century, and which provide a central focus of this chapter.

The volume and self-conscious nature of these references in Ferrier's novels is unsurprising when considered within the context of Even Gottlieb's assertion that, by the end of the eighteenth century, 'the novel was becoming the most powerful genre for nation building in the literary sphere', in which he echoes Benedict Anderson's famous argument that the novel provides the 'technical means for "re-presenting" the kind of imagined community that is the nation'.³ Juliet Shields similarly observes that 'although the novel developed slightly later in Scotland than in England, its generic emergence in the early

¹ Susan Ferrier, *Marriage*, ed. Dorothy McMillan (ASLS, 2020), 171.

² Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell, 'The Other Great Unknowns: Women Fiction Writers of the Early Nineteenth Century', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 191.

³ Evan Gottlieb, *Feeling British: Sympathy and National Identity in Scottish and English Writing, 1707–1832* (Bucknell University Press, 2007), 24; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006), 25.

eighteenth century was temporally and politically intertwined with the formation of Great Britain, and its conventions developed to accommodate the tensions of nation formation'.⁴ Recognising Ferrier's attempts to '[dispel] English prejudices against her native land and its people', Benjamine Toussaint supports Shields' observation by noting that 'literature was the appropriate weapon to fight against these prejudices, since it had in fact contributed to creating them'.⁵ The development of the national tale at the turn of the nineteenth century, of which Ferrier's *Marriage* is a frequently cited example, reiterates fiction's formative role in fostering national prejudices and identities. As Katie Trumpener writes, 'the national tale is a genre developed initially by female authors, who from the outset address questions of cultural distinctiveness, national policy, and political separatism'.⁶ Questions of cultural distinctiveness clearly underpin this chapter's epigraph from *Marriage*, and they thus reflect the established correlation in critical discourse between nation and the novel.

In this chapter, I expand this discourse by suggesting a further link between nation and improvement, contending that the two provide ways of talking about each other in the early-nineteenth-century Scottish novel. I argue that national stereotypes are deployed within the works of Ferrier, Mary Brunton, and Elizabeth Hamilton as a means of introducing readers to a framework that foregrounds the notions of true and false improvement. Typically, false improvement comprises a tendency towards affected or immoral behaviour, often manifesting in a character's desire to improve their social standing or to appear as something that they are not. It is generally associated with the fashionable society found in urban areas of England, such as London, or Bath, which, though not a metropolis, is presented as 'a hotbed of frivolous pleasures and petty vices', characterised by 'luxurious ostentation'.⁷ By contrast, true improvement is defined through its rejection of affectation and

⁴ Juliet Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745–1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20.

⁵ Benjamine Toussaint, 'Untrammelled by Theory: Susan Ferrier's Polyphonic Vision of Scotland and the Union in *Marriage*', *Scottish Literary Review* 8, no. 1 (2016): 44, Gale Academic OneFile. For more on the nation and the novel, see Kathryn Kirkpatrick, introduction to *Marriage*, by Susan Ferrier, ed. Herbert Foltinek (Oxford University Press, 1997), xi; Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 28; Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830* (John Hopkins University Press, 1998), especially 172–90.

⁶ Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 132. For more on the history of the national tale, see Shields, 111–13; Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11.

⁷ Shields, 132.

extravagance. It is often associated with rural Scotland, and Scottish characters are frequently presented within the novels under study as paragons of domestic, moral, and religious virtue, even (and sometimes especially) when they have travelled beyond their native land. A key origin text here is *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), by Tobias Smollett, to whom more attention will be paid shortly. In Smollett's novel, the description of Bath as 'a mere sink of profligacy and extortion' contrasts with the relative purity of Scotland and Wales.⁸

As with the novelistic strategies and stereotypes discussed in Chapter One, while some examples in these novels confirm national stereotypes (Lady Juliana's Scotophobia, for example), others nuance or refute them. As Dorothy McMillan observes, 'being purely anything in terms of nationality is rather unusual in *Marriage*; most of the novel's national heritages are mixed if not muddled'.⁹ Similarly, Rivka Swenson notes how, by grappling self-consciously with 'the varieties of Scottish experience', *Marriage* 'renders untenable any singular flattening vision of Scotland'.¹⁰ Beginning from this premise, and in keeping with this thesis' wider argument, this chapter asserts that the novelists under study complicate recognisable national stereotypes in order to promote active reading. By presenting their readers with exceptions to stereotypical rules, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton keep readers on their toes, encouraging them to think for themselves while conforming to the wider moral codes that their novels present as true improvement. Instead of assuming things of the characters they read about based on their knowledge of popular prejudices, readers of these novels are invited to note the ways in which certain characters defy their assumptions. These anomalies thus emphasise the rhetorical impetus of the novels under study, which equates critical engagement with readerly self-improvement. By complicating national stereotypes in this way, these novelists present a model of improvement that cannot be exclusively defined by national identity, but which rather relies on an individual character or reader learning to act on and prioritise their moral and religious duties through the right sort of education.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first contextualises the historical circumstances under which the national stereotypes these novels play on developed. The second analyses the process of false improvement by taking up the stereotypical association of urban England with corruption, extravagance, and affectation. Section three introduces true

⁸ Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, ed. Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford University Press, 2009), 57.

⁹ Dorothy McMillan, introduction to *Marriage* (1818) by Susan Ferrier, ed. Dorothy McMillan (ASLS, 2020), xxxv.

¹⁰ Rivka Swenson, *Essential Scots and the Idea of Unionism in Anglo-Scottish Literature, 1603–1832* (Bucknell University Press, 2016) 176, 177.

improvement, examining the association of Scotland with moral wealth, domestic utility, and a rejection of extravagance. The final section then analyses instances in which Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton subvert these national stereotypes, and the effect this has on defining improvement as a process that relies on readers learning to think and act for themselves.

‘To make a novel altogether provincial is to limit its circulation’

Criticism to date has often analysed novelistic representations of Scottish and English national stereotypes alongside the formation of a cohesive British identity (or lack thereof) following the Act of Union in 1707.¹¹ By referring explicitly to the uncivilised Scots and implicitly to the prejudice-riddled English in the epigraph from *Marriage*, Ferrier pinpoints two of the most culturally-embedded stereotypes pertaining to Scottish and English national identities at the beginning of the nineteenth century. There is an important caveat to state here, which is that these stereotypes had already peaked by then. Tensions were particularly high during the decades following the Battle of Culloden in 1746, climaxing notably in the 1760s, during which John Stuart, the third Earl of Bute, served as the first Scottish Prime Minister of Great Britain since the Union. Bute’s appointment inflamed Scotophobic stereotypes, reflected in the journalistic attacks made on him by John Wilkes and his pointedly titled newspaper the *North Briton*.¹² By the turn of the nineteenth century, these tensions had abated significantly, though they remained sufficiently forceful within cultural memory that readers of the novels under study would have recognised and understood them.

Although the national stereotypes that this chapter considers were by no means created by the Union, they were certainly exacerbated by its political aftermath, catalysing what David Daiches refers to as ‘the cultural uncertainty, what might indeed be called a crisis of national identity, that followed the Union of 1707’.¹³ There is neither sufficient need nor room in the present chapter to analyse in detail the full complexities of this ‘crisis’. However, it is worth detailing two important caveats regarding the development of national stereotypes in Britain during the eighteenth century, which inform my analysis. The first is that attitudes

¹¹ See Gottlieb, *Feeling British*; Shields; Trumpener; and Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707–1830* (Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹² For more on this, and Smollett’s rival newspaper, the *Briton*, see Davis, 75–76; and Shields, 58–60.

¹³ David Daiches, *Literature and Gentility in Scotland* (Edinburgh University Press, 1982), 54.

towards Britishness were complex and uneven across Scotland before and during the period under study. It is clear that inhabitants of the Scottish Highlands experienced a degree of ‘economic and political domination’ that was not present in the Scottish Lowlands, culminating in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Highland Clearances, as scholars including Shields, T. M. Devine, and Janet Sorensen have shown.¹⁴ Recent work by Andrew MacKillop nuances this picture further, revealing how many Scottish Highlanders were economically successful participants in the global project of the British Empire.¹⁵ The second caveat is that Scottish regional complexities are often messily depicted in overgeneralised ways, during the period under study and in criticism since, as tensions between England and Scotland as a whole.¹⁶ Writing to correct this generalisation, Gerard Lee McKeever reveals how ‘emergent forms of cultural nationalism (Scottish, British and otherwise) were enabled – but also contested – by regionalisms across a range of literary contexts’ during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ These ‘regionalisms’ are often ambiguous in the novels under study, hence parts of my analysis inevitably reflect this tendency toward generalisation.

In *Marriage*, Scotophobic prejudices are embodied in the character of Lady Juliana. Upon returning to London from Scotland during the novel’s first volume, Juliana is ‘enraptured at being once more in a civilised country, and restored to the society of human creatures’.¹⁸ Her reference to ‘the Scotch brogue’ in this chapter’s epigraph draws attention to a longstanding emphasis on anglicisation in Scotland, which exacerbated the divide that Penny Fielding identifies between the ‘fierce, barbaric Highlanders’ and the ‘industrious, commercially sophisticated Lowlanders’.¹⁹ Robert Crawford has written extensively on the ‘pro-British’ movement away from Scots towards English in Scotland following the Union, contending that in order to ‘play a full part’ in ‘the newly united political entity of Britain’, Scottish people had to adopt ‘an English which was fully acceptable to the dominant partner

¹⁴ Janet Sorensen, *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3. See also Shields; T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed 1600–1900* (Penguin, 2018).

¹⁵ Andrew MacKillop, *Human Capital and Empire: Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British Imperialism in Asia, c.1690–c.1820* (Manchester University Press, 2021).

¹⁶ See, for example, Shields, 112; Wolfgang Franke, ‘Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker* as a “Party Novel”’, *Studies in Scottish Literature* 9, no. 2 (1973): 97.

¹⁷ Gerard Lee McKeever, *Regional Romanticism: Literature and Southwest Scotland, c.1770–1830* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 8.

¹⁸ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 118.

¹⁹ Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760–1830* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

in the political union. This English, it was argued, both had to replace Scots and had to be purged of what we would now call “markers of Scottish cultural difference”, purged of Scotticisms’.²⁰ Great efforts were made to encourage the use of English in Scotland, including the teaching of rhetoric and the *belles lettres* in Scottish Universities; the foundation of the Select Society, which believed, as David McElroy notes, ‘that the future of Scottish letters was in English’; and the publication of James Beattie’s *Scotticisms, Arranged in Alphabetical Order, Designed to Correct Improperities of Speech and Writing* (1787), described by Leith Davis as ‘a self-help book for Scots wishing to purge their vocabulary of vernacular expressions’.²¹ Kathryn Kirkpatrick concurs with Crawford, noting how many Lowlanders felt obliged to speak in English, which was ‘regarded as the language of the educated and cultured’, eschewing their native language of Scots, which was seen as provincial and, by extension, uncivilised.²² Peter Womack, meanwhile, shows how the same rhetoric applied to Scottish Gaelic: ‘English is the language of Improvement, and Gaelic the reverse’.²³ To illustrate how a version of this continued into the 1820s, we might turn to the title of this section, which is taken from a review of John Galt’s *The Entail*, and which highlights the perceived limitations of provinciality. The review describes *The Entail* as a novel that is ‘eminently Scottish’ and, consequently, less accessible to the (fashionable) reading public.²⁴

The transition from ‘the barbarous Scottish to the polite British’ was perceived as a process of improvement, ‘turning the primitive into the civilized’ via the means of linguistic amelioration, which Nicholas Phillipson identifies as ‘the most characteristic preoccupation

²⁰ Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Clarendon Press, 1992), 18.

²¹ David McElroy, *Scotland’s Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Literary Clubs and Societies* (Washington State University Press, 1969), 55; Davis, 8. For more on linguistic tensions, see Sorensen’s authoritative study.

²² Kirkpatrick, xiv.

²³ Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (Macmillan, 1989), 134.

²⁴ ‘*The Entail: or the Lairds of Grippy*’, *The Literary Gazette: A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* 309 (12, 1822): 800, ProQuest. Contrary to the implications of this review, Joseph Rezek has argued compellingly that provinciality was a key literary currency during the first half of the nineteenth century, positing that ‘the centripetal pull of London created a provincial literary formation that shaped the history of modern aesthetics’, thus nuancing the claims of Galt’s reviewer. *London and the Making of Provincial Literature: Aesthetics and the Transatlantic Book Trade, 1800–1850* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 2.

of the Scottish Enlightenment'.²⁵ Writing about the late eighteenth century, Olivia Smith argues that 'civilization was largely a linguistic concept, establishing a terrain in which vocabulary and syntax distinguished the refined and the civilized from the vulgar and the savage'.²⁶ To define civilisation in exclusively linguistic terms is problematic since it dismisses the lived experiences of, for example, dispossessed Highland cottagers during the Clearances. However, Smith's observation is useful to note for its substantiation of language as central to the process of improvement that Crawford and Phillipson identify. To understand how echoes of this preoccupation with language appear in the period under study, we might again look to Lady Juliana when she declares of Scotland that 'nobody can live in that odious country without being infected with its *patois*!'.²⁷ A similar instance occurs in Brunton's *Self-Control*, when Mrs Jones, an English woman of a lower social class than Juliana, expresses her astonishment that English people might live happily in Scotland and, worse still, feel at ease amidst the use of Scots: "'Mercy upon me", she cried, "can you make that outlandish spluttering so as them savages can know what you says? Well, if I had been among them a thousand years, I should never have made out a word of their jibberish"'.²⁸ Here, references to '*patois*' and 'savages' reveal Brunton and Ferrier's self-conscious engagement with the 'conditions' experienced by Highlanders, which in some ways echoed practices beyond Scotland.²⁹ They also provide a good example of a discourse of prejudice being applied in very broad terms, blurring the boundaries between stereotypes pertaining to Lowland and Highland Scotland, and the varieties of Scots and Gaelic that were spoken in each.

Like Crawford, Emma Letley has written extensively on the use of Scots in Scottish fiction, observing that 'the attitude to regional language in major eighteenth-century fiction can be summed up by the persistent equation of non-standard speech and defect, either physical or moral, or, more often, a combination of the two', while "'good" characters are

²⁵ Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 22, 16; Nicholas Phillipson, 'Culture and Society in the 18th Century Province: the Case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment', in *The University of Society*, vol. 2, ed. Lawrence Stone (Princeton University Press, 1974), 438.

²⁶ Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791–1819* (Clarendon Press, 1984), vii.

²⁷ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 171.

²⁸ Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, ed. Anthony Mandal (Routledge, 2016), 88.

²⁹ Ian Duncan, with Leith Davis and Janet Sorensen, 'Introduction', in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

distinguished by their “pure” English’.³⁰ A sharp irony therefore develops in the example from *Self-Control*, as Brunton presents Mrs Jones’ speech in a non-standard English dialect, referring to ‘them savages’ as opposed to ‘*those* savages’. Due, however, to the fact that Mrs Jones is English by birth, and resides in England, her own dialect is not deemed vulgar (by her, at least) in the way that the Scots’ ‘jibberish’ is. This irony thus serves two important purposes. First, it highlights the culturally ingrained status of prejudices harboured against the Scots by English people from all social classes in the decades leading up to and immediately after the start of the nineteenth century. Second, it demonstrates Brunton’s awareness of, and complicating engagement with, these prejudices, prompting readers to evaluate their preconceptions through active reading practices. Indeed, Letley also asserts that ‘the fact that, by the early nineteenth century, English in Scotland is linked with educational “superiority” and material success means that for a Scot to use English indicated, or can indicate, that he is appealing to a snobbish, genteel standard’.³¹ In *Discipline*, Brunton recognises this, as well as the implicit hypocrisy at play, when she writes that ‘to Scottish ears, the accent of the higher ranks of English conveys an idea of smartness, as well as of gentility’.³² Taken together, these examples confirm these novelists’ familiarity with prevailing national stereotypes, as well as their performative treatment of them.

Critics often cite the works of Tobias Smollett, a Dumbarton-born author who spent most of his life in London, as examples of fiction that engages directly with the effects of the Union on Scottish, English, and British stereotypes and identities. Fellow novelist Horace Walpole famously dismissed *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, Smollett’s aforecited final novel, as ‘a party novel, written [...] to vindicate the Scots’.³³ Gottlieb is more generous, recognising it as a novel that ‘expressly sets out to repair the damage caused by mid-century Anglo-Scottish tensions’, in which he refers to the aforementioned attacks on Bute.³⁴ Jerry C. Beasley concurs, noting Smollett’s ‘vision of reconciliation that validates the Union’.³⁵

³⁰ Emma Letley, *From Galt to Douglas Brown: Nineteenth-Century Fiction and Scots Language* (Scottish Academic Press, 1988), 3.

³¹ Letley, 7.

³² Mary Brunton, *Discipline*, ed. Olivia Murphy (Routledge, 2018), 6.

³³ Cited in Franke, 97.

³⁴ Evan Gottlieb, “Fools of prejudice”: Sympathy and National Identity in the Scottish Enlightenment and *Humphry Clinker*, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 18, no. 1 (2005): 86, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ecf.2006.0007>.

³⁵ Jerry C. Beasley, ‘Tobias Smollett: The Scot in England’, *Studies in Scottish Literature* 29, no. 1 (1996): 18, Scholar Commons. See also Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 66.

Indeed, while he makes use of the novel's epistolary form to allude to the injustices felt by the Scots following the Union, Smollett also appears to endorse the anglicising linguistic cohesion that this Union demanded, prompting the following frequently cited passage, in which the protagonist, Matthew Bramble, observes:

I think the Scots would do well, for their own sakes, to adopt the English idioms and pronunciation; those of them especially, who are resolved to push their fortunes in South-Britain. – I know by experience, how easily an Englishman is influenced by the ear, and how apt he is to laugh, when hears his own language spoken with a foreign or provincial accent.³⁶

Here, Smollett self-consciously engages with and encourages readers to partake in what Daiches refers to as 'an escape from Scots' in order to achieve greater 'gentility of speech'.³⁷ He is thus more forceful in his dealings with the aftermath of the Act of Union than Brunton, for example, who acknowledges eighteenth-century prejudices pertaining to language use, but does not encourage her readers to alter their speech. This indicates a change of focus and suggests that, by the early nineteenth century, the novel in Scotland had moved away from explicitly engaging with this linguistic debate and more towards, as this chapter argues, redeploying national prejudices to encourage readers to distinguish between true and false improvement via active reading. By transforming a concern of the eighteenth-century novel into a way of broaching readerly self-improvement, Brunton and Ferrier demonstrate an important way through which they diverge from their predecessors.

That Brunton and Ferrier did not feel pressure to encourage Scottish readers to alter their speech can also be attributed largely to the more favourable perception of Scotland that developed slowly over a period of many decades between the mid eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Alongside the works of Walter Scott, this perception was, in particular, popularised by the poetry of Robert Burns and James Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (1760), which, despite the controversy surrounding its authenticity, 'played a substantial role in the growth of interest in the native

³⁶ Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*, 231. Bramble's reflections are ironised, of course, by the multiplicity of dialects and idiolects that Smollett's heteroglossic novel represents.

³⁷ Daiches, 67.

literatures of not only the British Isles but Northern Europe'.³⁸ Within the novels under study, Scotland is often associated with 'happiness and moral worth' and the Scots depicted as 'an unusually morally sound' people, softening the lack of civility that eighteenth-century Scotophobia assigned to them, and proffering an alternative definition of civility itself as a moral code that transcends the city.³⁹ As Fiona Stafford notes, Burns published his first poetry collection, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), 'at a time when most Scottish writers laboured so carefully over their work to weed out any trace of Scottish idiom or vocabulary'.⁴⁰ In doing so, he 'proved that poetry of the highest quality could be composed in language that did not conform to the rules laid down by contemporary grammarians and dictionary-makers'.⁴¹ Burns' poem, 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' was particularly pivotal in establishing a pious, morally virtuous image of Lowland Scottish cottagers. As McKeever shows, it represented 'the spotless ur-text for a model of Scottish culture in which literature was the echo of – if not (yet) outright substitute for – religious belief', proffering 'cottage simplicity as a kind of moral lodestone for the [Scottish] nation'.⁴² Through these works, we can perceive a change in perception towards the end of the eighteenth century, as 'rural piety' began to neutralise, if not entirely replace, Scotophobic prejudices.⁴³

This image of moral simplicity – or, as Claire Grogan puts it, this 'sentimentalization of the Scottish cottager' – is touched on in Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*.⁴⁴ During his account of his 'tour through Scotland', the novel's English hero, Henry Sydney, 'effusively describes the virtues of Scottish farm labourers' and their pious reading habits, which he describes as 'superior' to the conversely 'untutored minds of our English

³⁸ Dafydd Moore, 'Introduction', in *The International Companion to James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian*, ed. Dafydd Moore (ASLS, 2017), 6. For more on Ossian, see Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford University Press, 1996); Robert Crawford, *The Modern Poet* (Oxford University Press, 2001); Howard Gaskill, *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (Thoemmes/Continuum, 2004).

³⁹ Anderson and Riddell, 187; Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Clarendon Press, 1996), 22.

⁴⁰ Fiona Stafford, *Local Attachments: The Provinces of Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 143.

⁴¹ Stafford, 143.

⁴² Gerard Lee McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement: Scottish Romanticism, 1786–1831* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 38, 132.

⁴³ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 132.

⁴⁴ Claire Grogan, 'Didacticism after Hannah More', in *Didactic Novels and British Women's Writing, 1790–1820*, ed. Hilary Havens (Routledge, 2017), 168.

peasantry'.⁴⁵ In response to this account, Harriet Orwell, the novel's paragon and Henry's eventual wife, reveals 'how charmed I am [...] to find that the beautiful description given by Burns in his "Cotter's Saturday Night," was not the mere child of fancy, but an original picture taken from truth and nature'.⁴⁶ Harriet thus demonstrates a clear awareness of contemporary representations of Scotland and Scottish national stereotypes at the turn of the nineteenth century. In *Marriage*, an awareness of more positive perceptions of Scotland is revealed during a salon hosted in Bath by the fashionable, English Mrs Bluemits, who refers to Scotland as 'the land of poetry and romance'.⁴⁷ This reputation may be attributed to Macpherson's Ossian, whom Ferrier uncoincidentally refers to earlier in the novel, writing that 'the [Highland] scenery might have had charms for Ossian, but it had none for Lady Juliana'.⁴⁸ It may also be attributed to Scott's highly influential role in burgeoning interest in Scotland as a tourist destination during and before the period under study by inventing, as Nigel Leask notes, 'the literary conditions for [...] Highland tourism'.⁴⁹ Scott's poetry and subsequent Waverley Novels 'invested the Highlands', as Devine notes, 'with an extraordinary romantic aura and magical appeal'.⁵⁰ Anderson and Riddell identify the salon scene as one that reveals Ferrier's 'ironic awareness of the marketability of Romantic Scotland', highlighting once again these novelists' performative engagement with contemporary national prejudices.⁵¹ That Mary and her Aunt Grizzy are, by virtue of being Scottish, 'consequently hailed as the new stars in Mrs Bluemits' horizon' reinforces this notion of fashionable marketability.⁵² It also supports the process of evolution identify by Shields, who notes that 'in the 1770s, *Humphrey Clinker*'s extensive descriptions of Scotland and *Evelina*'s inclusion of a markedly Scottish character were unusual. By the 1820s the ubiquity of novels about Scotland had become remarkable', thanks above all, as the

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, ed. Claire Grogan (Broadview, 2000), 108; Deborah Boyle, 'Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* as a Philosophical Text', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 29, no. 6 (2021): 1082, doi:10.1080/09608788.2021.1917337; Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 110.

⁴⁶ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 115.

⁴⁷ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 371.

⁴⁸ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 35.

⁴⁹ Nigel Leask, *Stepping Westward: Writing the Highland Tour c.1720–1830* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 220.

⁵⁰ Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 8.

⁵¹ Anderson and Riddell, 180. This scene also pre-empt the 'market-conscious attitude of writers' that Angela Esterhammer identifies as intrinsic to the literary culture of the following decade, in *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 209.

⁵² Ferrier, *Marriage*, 371.

Introduction to this thesis makes clear, to Scott's novels.⁵³ Although in *Scotch Novel Reading*, Sarah Green's satirical novel of 1824 that this thesis' Introduction also discusses, the 'Scotch dialect' is described as 'a very unpleasant one', it is also one with which the English Alice Fennel becomes both enamoured and intent on imitating.⁵⁴ Alice is satirised for her obsession with Scottish culture, but her interest marks a departure from pressures to eradicate the use of Scots altogether in the previous century. Between them, Macpherson, Burns, and Scott thus furnished readers with a positive image of Scottish difference, nuancing the Highland incivility on which post-Union, anti-Scottish sentiment had fixated.

By introducing ideas of true and false improvement, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton also demonstrate an awareness of and build on eighteenth-century stereotypes pertaining to rural and urban environments, in which the former is associated with purity, and the latter with corruption. In Galt's *Annals of the Parish*, urban luxuries, including a dancing school of 'the genteelst fashion', are presented by the novel's narrator, Michael Balwhidder, as working to 'the detriment of our country simplicity'.⁵⁵ While this interpretation is shaped by Balwhidder's personal prejudices, presented in the first-person, it highlights the stereotypical divide between rural simplicity and urban dissipation. The same stereotypes feature in eighteenth-century novels by English authors, including Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Frances Burney's *Evelina*. They are not, therefore, a phenomenon of the early-nineteenth-century Scottish novel, but rather an established tradition to which it contributes. In *Evelina*, for example, the eponymous heroine is dismissed by her London-based relatives as 'the country cousin' and scorned for her '*bumpkinish air*'.⁵⁶ Evelina's impression of London is consequently 'perplexing', and often unpleasant, prompting her to resolve 'to leave this bad city' and 'never again [...] enter it!'.⁵⁷ As Harrison Steeves notes in his study of eighteenth-century novels, 'country manners were not good currency in the city', and indeed, as this chapter shows, many of the Scottish characters in the novels under examination are similarly perturbed upon entering the English metropolis from their rural havens.⁵⁸

⁵³ Shields, 110.

⁵⁴ Sarah Green, *Scotch Novel Reading* (London, 1824), 9.

⁵⁵ John Galt, *Annals of the Parish*, ed. Robert P. Irvine (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 15, 160.

⁵⁶ Frances Burney, *Evelina*, ed. Edward A. Bloom (Oxford University Press, 2002), 90, 69. Burney's italics.

⁵⁷ Burney, *Evelina*, 70.

⁵⁸ Harrison Steeves, *Before Jane Austen: The Shaping of the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century* (Allen & Unwin, 1966), 205.

‘I canna say London has improved you’

The citation above comes from *The Inheritance* and is a comment made to the heroine, Gertrude St Clair, by her Scottish relative Uncle Adam on her return from the English capital. On one hand, we might interpret this comment as a rehashed iteration of the town-country dynamic discussed in the previous paragraph, implicitly contrasting Uncle Adam’s Scottish simplicity with English metropolitan corruption. On the other, it establishes a connection between improvement and national specificity, demonstrating how nation provides an effective entry point for thinking about improvement in the novels under study. It also signals Ferrier’s frequent equation of stereotypes pertaining to London specifically with Englishness generally, mirroring the conflation elsewhere of Highland prejudices with Scotland as a whole. In *Marriage*, for example, having ‘heard the morals of the people were not so good, and there were a great many dissipated young men in England’, Mary’s Scottish great-aunts express their hope that Mary will not return to Scotland from London with ‘any extravagant English notions’, in which a narrow, urban definition of Englishness is again established.⁵⁹ As if to satirise her geographical generalisations, Ferrier notes immediately after this how ‘quitting London was bidding adieu to the world’, confirming but also quietly poking fun at the perception of London as representative of a much broader stage.⁶⁰

Ainsley McIntosh identifies the way in which, ‘in conventional manner, [Ferrier] presents fashionable life in London as full of danger and temptation’, and in keeping with established stereotypes about urban England, Gertrude’s time in London is described as her ‘career of folly and extravagance’.⁶¹ Travelling there for the first time to spend the season as the new Countess of Rossville (a title she assumes midway through the novel), Gertrude soon finds herself ‘in the vortex of elegant dissipation’:

Borne like a feather on the tide of fashionable celebrity, she was hurried along she knew not whither; while at the same time, wherever she went, she was hailed as the

⁵⁹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 165.

⁶⁰ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 167. For earlier iterations of this perception, see Samuel Johnson’s famous assertion from 1777 that ‘when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life’, in James Boswell, *Boswell’s Life of Johnson*, vol. 3, *The Life (1776–1780)*, ed. George Birkbeck Normal Hill and Lawrence Fitzroy Powell (Oxford University Press, 2014), 178.

⁶¹ Ainsley McIntosh, ‘Domestic Fiction’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women’s Writing*, ed. Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 56; Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, with an Introduction by Ronnie Young (Kennedy & Boyd, 2009), 418.

leader of every favourite folly. She was the idol of the day, and she breathed in only an atmosphere of adulation, baleful alike in its effects on the head and the heart. Amidst the delusions of the senses she forgot everything save her lover; but even when all looks were turned upon her as the magnet of the glittering throng, it was in his eyes only that she sought to read her triumph.⁶²

In this passage, references to ‘folly’ and its ‘baleful [...] effects’ evoke, in particular, the routine ‘danger and temptation’ that McIntosh identifies, paving the way for Gertrude’s necessary reform later in the novel. Readers subsequently witness the predictably corrupting effect that immersion within fashionable society has on Gertrude’s morals, foreshadowed through her forgetfulness and lack of control over her own whereabouts in the lines above. At the same time, these lines present Gertrude’s stint in fashionable society as a ‘triumph’ – proof of success and a version of improvement, in other words – in which the ‘atmosphere of adulation’ signals her social ascension as a ‘leader’ of English fashion. As readers, we are led to understand this development as a version of false improvement, in which a concern with luxury displaces the careful self-reflection and benevolence that is elsewhere associated with true improvement. By playing in this way on the association of extravagance and immorality with London’s society, and England generally, Ferrier demonstrates how national stereotypes can be deployed to distinguish between contradictory models of improvement.

In Brunton’s *Discipline*, the heroine, Ellen Percy, undergoes a similar journey to Gertrude. Both heroines are presented as the victim of their experience – or, their ‘career[s] of folly’ – within fashionable society and both must therefore learn to cultivate the qualities required for true improvement – namely, a keener sense of moral and religious principles.⁶³ Like Gertrude, Ellen is consumed by extravagance and appears to lose control of herself: ‘I had entered the throng who were in the chase of pleasure, and I was not formed for a languid pursuit [...] I was the fashion; admired by fashionable men; envied by fashionable women; and of course, raved of by their humbler mimics of both sexes’.⁶⁴ The admiration that Ellen receives is ostensibly flattering, and it therefore reflects the false improvement with which Gertrude is associated in the previous example – to be ‘admired’, ‘envied’, and ‘raved of’ is, in this context, to be more fashionable than other people, ergo improved. However, the process of moral improvement (comprising education, then application) that Ellen

⁶² Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 390.

⁶³ Brunton, *Discipline*, 293.

⁶⁴ Brunton, *Discipline*, 53–54.

subsequently undertakes in order to rectify the effects of this experience reiterates to readers the corrupting nature of fashionable life and the deceptive nature of false improvement. It thus supports contemporary national prejudices by perpetuating popular stereotypes surrounding London and Bath. Acknowledging this perpetuation, Olivia Murphy notes that ‘Ellen’s gradual improvement is set against her simultaneous removal from the [fashionable] society which from birth she has seemed destined to join’.⁶⁵ She continues, recognising how, ‘in the third volume, the Highlands become a site not only of natural beauty but also of a moral regeneration that cannot be accomplished in London’s aristocratic circles’.⁶⁶ By observing this correlation between Ellen’s moral development and her travels between countries, Murphy recognises Brunton’s development of, as Ian Duncan puts it, a ‘satirical antithesis between [Scottish] national character and [English] fashionable life’, through which readers become acquainted with the concept of false improvement.⁶⁷

In *The Inheritance*, it is in particular through Ferrier’s descriptions of the improvements that Gertrude seeks, as Countess, to implement within the Rossville estate that readers are warned against the morally corrosive effects of the extravagance associated with metropolitan England, strengthening its association with false improvement. Prior to her time in London, Gertrude is encouraged by her guardian and eventual husband, the Scottish Edward Lyndsay, to improve the estate by building ‘a new school house’ and cottages for the poor.⁶⁸ Subsequently succumbing, however, to the influence of her fashionable lover, Colonel Delmour (mentioned in the ‘feather’ passage above), Gertrude chooses instead to implement ‘new stables [...] to accommodate the additional number of horses [Delmour] declared to be absolutely necessary’, ‘a conservatory’, and ‘an Italian garden, with hanging terraces and marble fountains’.⁶⁹ By referring satirically to these changes as at once ‘improvements’ and schemes of ‘useless profusion’, Ferrier draws to readers’ attention the falsity and dangers of decisions that are based purely on a desire to conform to fashionable standards, supporting the way in which, as Alistair M. Duckworth notes with reference to Jane Austen’s novels, ‘estates function [...] as indexes to the character and social responsibility of their owners’.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Olivia Murphy, introduction to *Discipline* (1814) by Mary Brunton, ed. Olivia Murphy (Routledge, 2018), 7.

⁶⁶ Murphy, 7.

⁶⁷ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 79.

⁶⁸ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 310.

⁶⁹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 380.

⁷⁰ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 380; Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen’s Novels* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 38.

She also draws attention to the fact that displaying extravagance and wealth is perceived by some – wrongly, we are led to believe – as actual improvement. Gertrude’s example thus illustrates what McKeever identifies as a ‘landowner’s personal crisis becoming the nerve centre for a dangerous convolution of improving discourse in the early nineteenth century’.⁷¹

Indeed, discussions of wealth are central to our understanding of improvement more broadly, as McKeever also identifies when he writes that ‘to a significant group of thinkers, improvement is effectively the ideological root discourse of capitalism’.⁷² Raymond Williams concurs, noting that ‘in its earliest uses’, the verb ‘improve’ referred to ‘operations for monetary profit’, and contending that the definition of improvement straddles ‘the complex underlying connection between “making something better” and “making a profit out of something”’.⁷³ At the same time, morality is ‘a cardinal facet of improvement’.⁷⁴ As McKeever argues, it is possible, of course, that ‘commerce and morality are aligned as twin arterials of improvement, parallel forms of exchange susceptible of refinement’.⁷⁵ If, for example, ‘the generation of wealth raises the standard of living and generates happiness, then commerce itself is an inherently moral activity’.⁷⁶ Equally, it is possible that ‘moral improvement and spiritual growth could emerge in direct confrontation with commercial modernisation and the culture of politeness’, which is precisely what we see taking place in the example of Gertrude’s estate improvements, and in other novels from the period, including those by Austen.⁷⁷ Williams notes, for example, how ‘Austen was aware of the sometimes contradictory senses of improvement, where economic operations for profit might not lead to, or might hinder, social and moral refinement’.⁷⁸ Duckworth goes a step further, positing that Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) in particular ‘reveals the evil that may result from economically motivated conduct’, echoes of which are demonstrably present in *The Inheritance*.⁷⁹

The potential immorality of commerce or luxury is a discourse that can be traced back (at least) to Roman times. As Shreyaa Bhatt observes, ‘the growth of luxury, in particular,

⁷¹ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 138.

⁷² McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 6.

⁷³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 114.

⁷⁴ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 6.

⁷⁵ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 6.

⁷⁶ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 6.

⁷⁷ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 8.

⁷⁸ Williams, 114.

⁷⁹ Duckworth, 29.

signified the pollution of the “health” (*salus*) of the *res publica* and its imminent collapse’ by ‘[driving] men to destructive and licentious behavior’.⁸⁰ By the eighteenth century, the perception of luxury ‘as the debilitating consequence of commercial success’ persisted.⁸¹ In his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Adam Ferguson speaks to this point. Recognising that ‘we are far from being agreed on the application of the term luxury, or on that degree of its meaning which is consistent with national prosperity, or with the moral rectitude of our nature’, he observes that ‘luxury and corruption are frequently coupled together, and even pass for synonymous terms’.⁸² Certainly, this coupling appears in the novels considered in this thesis, typically during moments in which the novelist seeks to satirise the belief, associated with false improvement, that wealth or luxury are prerequisites for happiness. By advocating a model of improvement that prioritises utility over luxury, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton collectively contribute to a longstanding debate on the relationship between wealth and improvement, cautioning their readers against the dangers of relying too heavily on material affluence for satisfaction. Reflecting on the national inflections of this debate, John Dwyer notes that ‘in the eyes of many eighteenth-century Scots, the English nation was already headed down the slippery slope of moral extinction’, and indeed Gertrude’s realisation of her own moral deterioration is apparent on her return home to Scotland:⁸³

[Gertrude’s] conscience smote her as she passed some old cottages which she had planned on pulling down, and building new commodious ones in their place. ‘Half of what my opera-box cost me would have done that,’ sighed she; ‘and that bridge!’ as she caught a glimpse of one, half finished – ‘the poor people must still go two miles about, till my diamond necklace is paid;’ and tears of contrition dropped from her eyes.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Shreyaa Bhatt, ‘Useful Vices: Tacitus’s Critique of Corruption’, *Arethusa* 50, no. 3 (2017): 326, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/are.2017.0011>.

⁸¹ Richard De Ritter, *Imagining Women Readers, 1789–1820: Well-Regulated Minds* (Manchester University Press, 2015), 55. See also John Greville Agard Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁸² Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 231, 235.

⁸³ John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1987), 40.

⁸⁴ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 419.

Here, Gertrude's time spent in London is presented as having a direct and indisputably negative impact on her morals and decision-making. By prioritising luxuries such as necklaces and opera-boxes, the attainment of which is presented as a metric of improvement in fashionable society, Gertrude is distracted from fulfilling the moral responsibility she has to provide for 'her poor'.⁸⁵ Her example supports Ferguson's association of luxury with 'all that assemblage which is rather intended to please the fancy, rather than to obviate real wants, and which is rather ornamental than useful', in which usefulness is implicitly linked to attending to the 'real wants' of others.⁸⁶ In doing so, it demonstrates to readers the moral dangers of false improvement, implicitly warning them against adopting the same priorities. Gertrude's example also reveals the way in which national prejudices draw to readers' attention the concept of false improvement in the first place. Ferrier is aware that readers of her novel will be familiar with the ostensible perils of urban English culture, and she therefore harnesses this familiarity to guide them through the process of distinguishing between good and bad interpretations of improvement. By undertaking the right education under Lyndsay's guidance, in which he forces her to reflect on her actions, Gertrude finally 'learns to perceive the irrelevance of social distinctions and the transitoriness of material wealth [...] of the folly of self-interest and pretentiousness' and is thus reformed.⁸⁷

The deleterious effects of false improvement are similarly portrayed in *Marriage* through the example of Adelaide Douglas, Mary's twin sister, who, unlike Mary, is raised amidst 'the dissipation of a London life' by their 'fashionable mother', Lady Juliana.⁸⁸ Following her arrival in London, Mary observes that Adelaide had been 'early instilled' with 'false maxims'.⁸⁹ Their full falsity is revealed when Adelaide is described as having a heart that is 'seared by selfishness and vanity', 'festering with pride, envy, and ambition', as she experiences 'the craving passions of a perverted mind', thus contrasting with Mary, who is conversely characterised (as subsequent chapters detail) as dutiful, benevolent, and emotionally regulated.⁹⁰ Unlike Mary, 'Adelaide possessed no sense of duty' and is instead presented as a 'victim of self-indulgence' who, like their mother, reveals to readers 'the sad

⁸⁵ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 310.

⁸⁶ Ferguson, 232.

⁸⁷ Herbert Foltinek, 'Susan Ferrier Reconsidered', *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Nineteenth Century*, ed. Horst W. Drescher and Joachim Schwend (Verlag Peter Lang, 1985), 135.

⁸⁸ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 166, 123.

⁸⁹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 382.

⁹⁰ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 205, 283, 283–84.

fruits of a fashionable education'.⁹¹ Readers learn, moreover, how Adelaide 'found happiness in those pleasures where she had been taught to expect it': namely, in 'all that rank, wealth, and fashion could bestow', as she seeks 'the gratification of every expensive whim'.⁹² Like Gertrude for a while, Adelaide is taught to prioritise the wrong things, such as material wealth and beauty, and she thus exemplifies, conforms to, and is associated with, the same metrics of false improvement. Through her example, Ferrier reinforces the association of this type of improvement with stereotypes surrounding fashionable society, rejecting earthly luxury as a notional source of satisfaction. Adelaide's immorality is brought to the fore when, succumbing to the envy and ambition by which she is earlier characterised, she becomes the subject of scandal by eloping with Lord Lindore (when she is already married to the Duke of Altamount), 'vainly hoping to find peace and joy amid guilt and infamy'.⁹³ The implication here that exposure to an English metropolis has a directly negative impact on Adelaide's behaviour signals how representations of popular national stereotypes function to help characterise opposing models of improvement in the novels under study. As Ferrier makes clear, the root of Adelaide's and Juliana's problems lies in their 'fashionable education', which carries charged undertones of Englishness. By recognising this example of national stereotyping, readers therefore gain, through their knowledge of these prejudices, a fuller understanding of the importance of education in preparing individuals to cultivate and act on moral principles.

'Young ladies are much more housewifely in Scotland than they are in this country'

Critics including McIntosh and Vineta Colby have noted the correlation that develops in Ferrier's novels 'between moral worth and receptivity to the Scottish landscape', in which Scotland figures as a 'moral-testing ground'.⁹⁴ At the forefront of this line of criticism is Anne K. Mellor, who argues that, in Ferrier's fiction, 'sublime nature is specifically equated with human morality'.⁹⁵ She suggests that 'those characters capable of responding positively to the awesome grandeur of the Scottish highlands are also capable of valuing rational discourse, disciplined behavior, the domestic affections, the equality of women and the

⁹¹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 384, 387, 90.

⁹² Ferrier, *Marriage*, 382.

⁹³ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 387.

⁹⁴ McIntosh, 60; Vineta Colby, *Yesterday's Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1974), 101.

⁹⁵ Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (Routledge: 1993), 103.

dictates of an enlightened Christianity, the hallmarks of Ferrier's feminine Romanticism'.⁹⁶ This observation substantiates the present chapter's argument by presenting nation as a means of measuring the values associated with true improvement, many of which are included in Mellor's capacious definition of Ferrier's 'feminine Romanticism'. Mellor's interest in how characters respond to landscape is, moreover, supportive of the importance that I place in this thesis on considering how characters apply principles such as moral duty when responding to challenging situations. In *Marriage*, for example, Juliana's refusal to adapt to her new Scottish surroundings as a newly-wed, her sustained obsession with material wealth, and her resulting 'moral vulgarity', are all signalled to readers through her lack of appreciation for the Scottish landscape.⁹⁷ This in turn ultimately leads her to return to England shortly after the birth of her daughters: 'woods, and mountains, and lakes, and rivers, were odious things; and her heart panted for dusty squares and suffocating drawing-rooms'.⁹⁸ Here, Ferrier's pointed use of 'dusty' and 'suffocating' to describe fashionable, urban spaces counteracts the negative prejudices pitted against Scotland with similarly unflattering depictions of England.

In contrast to her mother, Mary is at home in the Scottish landscape and enjoys its 'simple pleasures'.⁹⁹ Having been brought up there under the guidance of her aunt, Mrs Douglas, 'her cultivated taste and thoughtful mind could descry beauty in the form of a hill, and grandeur in the foam of a wave, and elegance in the weeping birch as it dipped its now almost leafless boughs in the mountain stream'.¹⁰⁰ In these lines, it becomes clear that Mary can appreciate and derive comfort from things that her mother cannot, signalling their very different educations, and the disparate models of improvement with which they are consequently associated. Throughout *Marriage*, Mary and Mrs Douglas are the characters through whom the idea of true improvement is most effectively conveyed, and who clearly expound the association between Scotland and moral purity. This association is complicated slightly, however, by the fact that both characters are, in fact, half-English (born to English mothers and Scottish fathers), affording them a hybridity that is apparent in the description of Mrs Douglas as 'blending the frankness of the Scotch, with the polished reserve of the

⁹⁶ Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, 104. For more on the relationship between moral worth and the Scottish landscape, see Anderson and Riddell, 192; Toussaint, 43–44; and Womack, 135.

⁹⁷ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 85.

⁹⁸ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 106.

⁹⁹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 180.

¹⁰⁰ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 179–80.

English woman'.¹⁰¹ Critics to date have often commented on this hybridity in relation to the national tale, paying particular attention to the way in which Mrs Douglas acts as a 'cultural mediator' between England and Scotland.¹⁰² When Juliana offends her Scottish relations, it is Mrs Douglas who 'mildly interpose[s], and soothe[s] the offended pride of the Highlanders'.¹⁰³ Similarly, when called upon to sing at a family gathering, 'Mrs Douglas had too much taste to murder Scotch songs with her English accent. She therefore compromised the matter as well as she could, by selecting a Highland ditty clothed in her own native tongue', in which 'compromised' reinforces her mediating role.¹⁰⁴ By uniting the best of Scottish morality and English refinement, Mary and Mrs Douglas demonstrate the flexibility and capacity for application on which this thesis' definition of improvement centres. Their examples also reiterate that national stereotypes can only go so far in helping readers to interpret the differences between true and false improvement. What is valuable above all is the ability to combine, negotiate, and apply moral principles and virtuous habits to the different situations in which one finds oneself, and this is what Mary and, in the examples above, Mrs Douglas both demonstrate. Their portrayal therefore engenders active reading by encouraging readers of Ferrier's novel to perceive the way in which, thanks to their hybridity – or, as McMillan puts it, their 'wise compromise' – they provide a model of improvement that is defined through its direct opposition to the values associated with metropolitan corruption.¹⁰⁵

This opposition is made especially clear through Mrs Douglas' self-comparison with Lady Juliana, which emphasises her distance from England and the fashionable society in which she herself briefly lived. Identifying Juliana as a 'poor victim of indulgence', Mrs Douglas 'beheld the sad fruits of a fashionable education; and thought, with humility, that, under similar circumstances, such might have been her own character'.¹⁰⁶ By contrast, readers learn retrospectively how Mrs Douglas was educated by 'a woman of strong understanding and enlarged mind', early instilling into her 'a deep and strong sense of religion'.¹⁰⁷ As a consequence of this 'support', she very quickly 'sicken[s] in the metropolis [London] at the frivolity of beauty, the heartlessness of fashion, and the insipidity of

¹⁰¹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 71.

¹⁰² Shields, 131.

¹⁰³ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 26.

¹⁰⁴ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 22.

¹⁰⁵ McMillan, xliii.

¹⁰⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 90.

¹⁰⁷ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 71.

elegance'.¹⁰⁸ Upon arriving in Edinburgh as a young woman, exiled by her aunt for falling in love with her cousin, Mrs Douglas experiences 'relief' at being able 'to turn to the variety of character she found beneath the cloak of simple, eccentric, and sometimes coarse manners'.¹⁰⁹ By the time that readers meet Mrs Doulgas for the first time in the novel's present tense, she has transformed these 'manners' with her English polish to present a practicable model of true improvement, on which Mary's education is subsequently based. Mrs Douglas has a 'highly-cultivated understanding', which sheds 'its mild radiance on the path of domestic life, heightening its charms, and softening its asperities, with the benign spirit of Christianity'.¹¹⁰ Implicit in all of these examples is Ferrier's suggestion that characters are principally shaped by their education (the first stage of improvement), as opposed to where they come from, and that an education founded on religion and morality is what enables individuals to apply their understanding to navigate and reconcile different cultures. The contrasting effects of Juliana's and Mrs Doulgas' respective educations therefore illustrates the way in which 'Ferrier channels national character into the ethical category of personal character', deploying national stereotypes to discriminate true from false improvement.¹¹¹

The title of this section, which is an observation made by the gluttonous, English Dr Redgill in *Marriage*, exemplifies this act of channelling further. By suggesting that women in Scotland are more 'housewifely' than they are in England, Dr Redgill attributes a national specificity to the benefits of Mary's education, including a keen awareness of her moral, religious, and domestic duties, and a capacity to exercise honest, individual judgement.¹¹² Over the course of the novel, readers watch Mary apply these principles to the situations in which she finds herself – even in London and Bath, where the temptations of false improvement are purportedly strongest. It comes as little surprise when readers learn that 'neither wealth nor grandeur possessed any sway over Mary's well-regulated mind':

'No,' thought she, 'it is not in splendour and distinction that I shall find happiness; it is in the cultivation of the domestic virtues – the peaceful joys of a happy home, and a

¹⁰⁸ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 71, 82.

¹⁰⁹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 82.

¹¹⁰ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 380.

¹¹¹ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 85.

¹¹² Ferrier, *Marriage*, 211.

loved companion, that my felicity must consist. Without these, I feel that I should still be poor, were I mistress of millions'.¹¹³

Mary thus provides a clear point of contrast with her mother and her sister, both of whom are consumed by opulent desires, perpetuating the stereotypes pertaining to London's fashionable society. Through her advocacy of the moral domesticity that is associated with Scotland, Mary maintains, as Duncan notes, 'a critical distance from English standards that boosts her immunity to fashionable corruption'.¹¹⁴ Her example thus reiterates the way in which national prejudices, such as those strategically voiced by Dr Redgill, provide readers with familiar templates that enable them to establish the key differences between true and false improvement. Indeed, it is no coincidence that, in an attempt to reassure her Scottish great-aunts that she will not return corrupted by her time in England, Mary refers to herself as 'Highland Mary'.¹¹⁵ In doing so, she renders explicit the association of Scotland with moral simplicity, confirming nation and improvement as productive prompts for discussing each other in the novels under study.

Like Mrs Douglas, Mary reflects on the differences between her own education and that of her sister Adelaide: 'she thought, with humility, of the superior advantages she had enjoyed, in having the principles of religion early and deeply engrafted in her soul; and that but for these, such as her sister's fate was, hers might have been'.¹¹⁶ Mary's reflection on the guidance she receives from Mrs Douglas highlights the divide that exists between herself and her sister, reiterating the centrality of education to improvement. This divide is reinforced to readers and astutely remarked upon, by Mary's English cousin, Lady Emily, the daughter of Juliana's brother, the Earl of Courtland. Responding to Mary's notion that, in keeping with her education, her 'duty must ever to be to reverence [her] mother', Emily exclaims:

'My dear cousin [...] you speak a very sweet, but an unknown language here: we none of us make the least pretence to love and reverence each other – quite the reverse, as Adelaide knows: being reasonable people, all we aim is, to keep from hating and despising one another; – so give me all the love you have brought with you from your

¹¹³ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 342.

¹¹⁴ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 85.

¹¹⁵ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 174. This is almost certainly a reference to Burns' extremely well-known poem of the same name, published in 1792.

¹¹⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 388–89.

warm-hearted highland, and I will keep it till I find one more worthy than myself to bestow it upon'.¹¹⁷

Emily's reference to Mary's native 'warm-hearted highland' expands on the association of Scotland with moral virtue, which manifests here in an implied degree of benevolent affection, according to which Mary considers it her duty to act. Adelaide and Emily, in keeping with national prejudices, do not consider this to be their duty; rather, they exhibit a selfishness that is evident in the lack of affection they display to one another. As Teri Doerksen notes, Mary, 'meets with moral impoverishment amidst opulence' in England, and this impoverishment is accordingly alluded to in Emily's suggestion that she 'keep' Mary's love until she is able to find 'one more worthy than [her]self to bestow it upon'.¹¹⁸ By picking up on the national divide between Mary and her English relatives in an appraisal of their behaviour towards each other, Emily's speech forcefully elucidates the central role played by national stereotypes in distinguishing between true and false improvement.

Parallels can be drawn between Mary and Laura Montreville in *Self-Control*, who, despite having two English parents, is born and brought up in Scotland, and is presented as a 'Scotch woman'.¹¹⁹ Much like Mary, 'no creature could less value money for its own sake than did Laura'.¹²⁰ Her staunch resistance to the lure of material wealth distinguishes her from the members of London's fashionable society with whom she is compared (including her rakish suitor, Colonel Hargrave, to whom attention is paid in Chapter Four). Laura's eventual husband, Montague De Courcy, observes that 'she has the courage to rise superior to the silly customs of the world, and can dare to be useful to herself and others'.¹²¹ His references to domestic utility (the idea of being useful to oneself and others) and an implicit aversion to extravagance are helpful in defining the parameters of the model of true improvement that Laura exemplifies, which the next two chapters take up in greater detail. His suggestion, moreover, that 'courage' is required in order to go against the grain of fashionable expectations is effective in drawing readers' attention to the antisocial aspect of true improvement, which is encapsulated in the implied difficulty of rejecting popular

¹¹⁷ Susan Ferrier, *Marriage* (London: Richard Bentley, 1841), 215–16.

¹¹⁸ Teri Doerksen, 'A National Bildungsroman: Didacticism and National Identity in Mary Brunton's *Discipline* and Susan Edmonstone Ferrier's *Marriage*', in *Didactic Novels and British Women's Writing, 1790–1820*, ed. Hilary Havens (Routledge, 2017), 191.

¹¹⁹ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 65.

¹²⁰ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 68.

¹²¹ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 64.

customs. This idea will be developed in Chapter Four, in which I analyse the tension between the counter-cultural challenge of true improvement and its inherently social components.

This chapter has recognised the eighteenth-century pressure on Scots to adopt a standardised version of English, ‘in order to get ahead in the new British society’.¹²² Despite, or perhaps because of, this, early-nineteenth-century Scottish novels often include characters who speak either in the language of Scots or in a non-standardised Scottish dialect. Scott’s Waverley Novels are, inevitably, central to this tradition. As Duncan notes, Scott wrote in ‘a general, obtrusively literary, imperial English’ that extends to his protagonists, but he nevertheless frames within his novels ‘varieties of Scots speech’.¹²³ Conversely, Galt and James Hogg ‘promoted vernacular Scots to the main narrative language’.¹²⁴ The ‘varieties’ to which Scott has recourse typically represent the dialogue of minor, lower-class characters (such as Meg Merillies in *Guy Mannering*), who, despite their marginality, often possess an important moral perspective. In *The Inheritance*, Ferrier replicates Scott’s example by presenting readers with the example of Uncle Adam, whose dialogue is written in Scots, and who condemns the effects of fashionable society and its warped perceptions of improvement, identifying extravagance as ‘the most heinous of all offences’.¹²⁵ In this way, Uncle Adam gives voice to the moral superiority associated with Scotland. Contrary to the eighteenth-century Scotophobic views pertaining to language, identified by Letley earlier, he is presented by Ferrier as a ‘guarantor of authenticity and sympathy’.¹²⁶

Uncle Adam’s insistence that he values ‘money nai mair than the dirt beneath [his] feet’ illustrates, in particular, the authentic simplicity with which his character and Scotland are associated, and is reinforced by his reaction to Gertrude on her return from London: ‘I canna say London has improved you [...] I dinna think I wad ha’e kent you if I had met you. If that’s a’ you have made by it, I think you would have been just as weel at hame’.¹²⁷ His suggestion here that Gertrude would have been better off had she never set foot in London in the first place reinforces his aversion to extravagance and polite society in general, fortifying his association with true improvement. It also gestures towards class as an additional factor in

¹²² Anderson and Riddell, 182.

¹²³ Ian Duncan, ‘Scotland and the Novel’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell, Katie Trumpener, and Ian Duncan (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 261.

¹²⁴ Duncan, ‘Scotland and the Novel’, 261.

¹²⁵ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 266.

¹²⁶ Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, 86.

¹²⁷ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 265, 423.

the relationship between nation and improvement, associating false improvement specifically with upper-class affluence. Uncle Adam's distaste for all things fashionable is reiterated when he returns to his childhood home, Broomyknowes (subsequently known as Bloom Park) to find that it, like Gertrude, has been made the subject (or victim) of false improvement: 'great was his surprise and indignation [...] when he did visit, at beholding the ravages refinement and luxury had committed upon the primitive charms of Broomyknowes'.¹²⁸ In these lines, reference to the destructive 'ravages of refinement and luxury' highlights the deceptively detrimental nature of what is mockingly presented by Ferrier as a series of gentrifying improvements. Uncle Adam's refusal to accept these changes as improvements testifies to his moral function in the novel to see through 'the surface of genteel society', as Anderson and Riddell put it, encouraging readers in turn to look critically on the domineering influence of the English luxury that corrodes Scotland's 'primitive charms'.¹²⁹ That this sentiment is voiced in Scots reinforces the role of nation in nuancing readers' perceptions of improvement and morality in Ferrier's fiction.

The previous section of this chapter discusses the estate improvements instigated by Gertrude while she is under the influence of the fashionable Colonel Delmour and her time spent in England, which catalyses her false improvement. Elsewhere in the novels under study, examples occur of estate improvements that conversely reflect the values of true improvement. Above all, these examples prioritise utility over extravagance, tangibly reinforcing the distaste for ostentatious materiality that characters such as Mary and Laura exhibit. An effective example of this can be found in *Discipline* during a description of the hero Mr Maitland's 'humble plans' for his native Scottish estate, Glen Eredine, all of which are 'compounded of refinement and simplicity'.¹³⁰ Readers learn that 'there was nothing theatrical in his plans for their interest or improvement', which are 'minute and practicable, rather than magnificent. No whole communities were to be hurried into civilization, nor districts depopulated by way of improvement'.¹³¹ Like the example of Bloom Park, this passage depicts the wrong kind of improvement, characterised as a dangerous act of clearance. The principles of utility, benevolence, and a rejection of spectacle are, meanwhile, associated with Scotland through Maitland's moral intentions and humble attempts at improvement. A similar contrast develops in *The Inheritance*, when Edward Lyndsay travels

¹²⁸ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 227.

¹²⁹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 186.

¹³⁰ Brunton, *Discipline*, 289.

¹³¹ Brunton, *Discipline*, 289.

to London to confront Gertrude about her decision to prioritise her own extravagant whims over the construction of improvements designed to benefit her tenants. These include ‘the schoolhouse’, which has, by this point in the novel, been ‘stopped for want of money’.¹³² In this scene, Ferrier juxtaposes Lyndsay’s ‘Scotch parish business’ with the splendour of Gertrude’s ‘ball-room’, performatively deploying national prejudices to accentuate the difference between the moral duty of the former and the redundant splendour of the latter.¹³³

‘If a person speaks sense and truth, what does it signify in what accent it is spoken?’

The title of this final section is a quotation from Lady Emily, Mary’s aforementioned English cousin. By suggesting that whether or not someone ‘speaks sense and truth’ matters more than the ‘accent’ in which they talk, Emily provides an exception to the general rule whereby English characters in the novels under study are typically opposed to the Scots language and Scottish dialects.¹³⁴ By complicating national stereotypes in this way, Ferrier presents true improvement as something that is not, in fact, bound to national identity, but rather contingent on an individual learning to cultivate the right moral principles (such as telling the truth), and then using their judgment to applying them to different contexts, just as the metadiscourse of improvement discussed in Chapter One encourages us to do. Herbert Foltinek writes that ‘in Susan Ferrier’s novels, moral guidance is always of greater importance for the formation of the personality than the effect of hereditary traits’, in which the notion of ‘hereditary traits’ denotes the idea of national prejudices passing down through generations, consequently becoming firmly entrenched within the public psyche.¹³⁵ Doerksen recognises, similarly, that in *Marriage*, Charles Lennox (Mary’s eventual husband) ‘has been nurtured by a woman who has a strong sense of national identity, but who values religious and moral character above blind adherence to national loyalties’, highlighting that piety and morality can sometimes develop in opposition to, instead of in accordance with, the national prejudices with which these novels self-consciously grapple.¹³⁶

¹³² Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 393.

¹³³ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 393, 411.

¹³⁴ Susan Ferrier, *Marriage* (London, Richard Bentley: 1841), 168. In McMillan’s edition, which is based on Blackwood’s second edition of *Marriage*, published in 1819, the line reads ‘if a person speaks sense and truth, what does it signify how it is spoken’, Ferrier, *Marriage*, ed. Dorothy McMillan (ASLS, 2020), 171. I cite Bentley’s 1841 edition, revised by Ferrier, here, since this revision is especially relevant to this chapter’s argument.

¹³⁵ Foltinek, 133.

¹³⁶ Doerksen, 192.

One of the main ways through which Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton complicate national stereotypes is by critically depicting their fellow Scots. These depictions reveal flaws within Scottish characters that are sometimes akin to, and at other times different from, the flaws stereotypically associated with English characters. As Toussaint observes, while ‘the foibles of [Ferrier’s] Scottish characters are usually much less detestable than those of the English characters’, Ferrier ‘insists on the fact that some qualities (or more often than not) some faults witnessed in some of her Scottish characters are universal’.¹³⁷ Anderson and Riddell note, moreover, that within Ferrier’s novels ‘the Scots are often treated satirically as well’, and her ridicule is not therefore uniquely reserved for members of London’s fashionable society.¹³⁸ A consummate example of this treatment resides in the obviously satirical tone used in *Marriage* to describe ‘the guileless sisters’, Mary’s great-aunts, Miss Jacky, Miss Grizzy, and Miss Nicky.¹³⁹ Ferrier effectively summarises their character when she writes that ‘in short, they were not of the M’Larty, or “*canna be fashed*,” school; for their life was one continued fash about every thing or nothing’, warning readers that these characters’ opinions are not of great value.¹⁴⁰ Like Juliana, Mary’s great-aunts are often compared unfavourably with Mrs Douglas. Readers learn how, contrary to Mrs Douglas’ ‘highly cultivated understanding’, ‘their minds never maintained a just equilibrium long upon any subject, but, like falsely-adjusted scales, were ever hovering and vibrating at either extreme’.¹⁴¹ By emphasising here the great-aunts’ lack of critical judgement, Ferrier complicates the nation-coded pattern established by the examples of Mary and Mrs Douglas in the previous section.

Further instances of comparison occur when the great-aunts criticise Mrs Douglas’ methods of educating Mary: ‘it really appears as if Mary, poor thing! was getting no education at all [...] it’s very odd in Mrs Douglas to allow her to be so much neglected’.¹⁴² This is a patent misinterpretation, comprising a kind of test for readers to see if they have understood the schema of improvement at work in Ferrier’s novel. As readers, we are privy to the ‘many faultless theories of education’ in Mrs Douglas’ mind, and we are encouraged to

¹³⁷ Toussaint, 36–37.

¹³⁸ Anderson and Riddell, 191.

¹³⁹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 173.

¹⁴⁰ Ferrier, *Marriage* (London: Richard Bentley, 1841), 38. This passage signals Ferrier’s awareness of other ridiculed Scottish characters, such as the McClarty family in Hamilton’s *Cottagers* (published a decade before *Marriage*). This line appears in Bentley’s 1841 edition, but not Blackwood’s first edition of 1818, or second edition of 1819.

¹⁴¹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 380, 173.

¹⁴² Ferrier, *Marriage*, 146.

recognise her, alongside Mary, as an example to emulate.¹⁴³ By obviously misinterpreting this, Mary's great-aunts therefore encourage us as readers to reflect on, weigh up, and even laugh at, the disparate examples of education with which we are presented. Their misled scepticism of Mrs Douglas is ironised even further when Jacky describes her as 'a most superior woman, though she has rather too many of her English prejudices yet to be all we could wish; but I have no doubt, when she has lived a little longer amongst us, she will just become one of ourselves'.¹⁴⁴ Here, another patent misinterpretation is brought to light since, as the previous section shows, Ferrier clearly presents Mrs Douglas as an emblem of a hybridised version of Scottish morality that is enhanced rather than compromised by her experience of England. By failing to look beyond national stereotypes, and failing therefore to perceive the way in which Mrs Douglas embodies and applies an optimal combination of Scottish morality and English refinement, Jacky unwittingly reveals her inability to apply her own understanding and to look beyond popular beliefs. The presence of the great-aunts thus confirms that while national stereotypes provide a means of opening up discussions about models of improvement, they do not dictate every example of improvement that can be found within the novels under study.

As the examples above demonstrate, Mary's great-aunts exemplify the category of character identified in this thesis' Introduction, who, being obstinately unimprovable, do not fit into the either category of true or false improvement, but rather complicate it by inhabiting a grey area in between the binaries of this framework. They do not attempt to improve themselves, and nor does anyone attempt to encourage them to do so. Instead, they expand the 'extent of human variety' that Lionel Trilling identifies as intrinsic to the novel genre, taking up, as Duncan suggests, their place 'as permanent exhibits in the gallery of comic types'.¹⁴⁵ All of this is not to say, however, that these characters do not contribute to these novels' function as tools for self-improvement. While they obviously typify E. M. Forster's notion of 'flat characters', who 'are easily remembered by the reader afterwards', 'have not to be watched for development, and provide their own atmosphere', they nevertheless contribute in an important way to readerly self-improvement.¹⁴⁶ In his own reading of them, Duncan argues that through their status as 'unimproved national characters', the great-aunts in

¹⁴³ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 144.

¹⁴⁴ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 17.

¹⁴⁵ Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Secker and Warburg, 1951), 222; Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 87.

¹⁴⁶ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Edward Arnold, 1927), 94, 95.

Marriage ‘give the fiction its spice’, even supplying the novel’s ‘main savor for readers’.¹⁴⁷ This creates a tension as, by virtue of their being more entertaining to read about (in keeping with Forster) than, for example, the straitlaced Mary or Mrs Douglas, they potentially detract from the lessons of improvement that are at work in these novels.¹⁴⁸ With this in mind, Duncan identifies the great-aunts’ persistent ‘resistance [...] to the ascendant regime of taste’ as the greatest value that they bring to the novel: ‘unlike the unstable creatures of fashion they are reliably, however murkily, true to themselves’.¹⁴⁹ I would go a step further to suggest that actually these characters’ greatest value in the context of the novel’s ostensibly improving agenda lies in their encouragement of readers to engage their own judgment, in keeping with the model of reading outlined in Chapter One. I thus expand on Swenson’s reflections on Scottish chorography in *Marriage*, in which she notes ‘competing visions of Scotland staged to deliberately disrupt each other, thus disrupting the reader’s absorption into narrative’s “stream,” a quality that leaves us fruitfully “ill at ease”’, but pays less attention to the implications of this readerly disruption.¹⁵⁰ By remaining incorrigibly unimproved, Mary’s great-aunts represent a different kind of cautionary example from someone like Lady Juliana, inviting readers of *Marriage* to consider why they do not follow the same path as the other improving or improved characters, and what it is that distinguishes them from more imitable characters. In this way, they encourage active reading and critical reflection among readers, furnishing them with the key to their respective journeys of self-improvement.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that it is often the great-aunts themselves who give voice to popular stereotypes – such as Grizzy’s reflections on reading discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, or Nicky’s concerns about the ‘extravagant English notions’ discussed at the beginning of this chapter.¹⁵¹ In doing so, they complicate these stereotypes even further by

¹⁴⁷ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 87.

¹⁴⁸ This potential is realised in the following review of *Marriage*: ‘when we have laid the book down, our memory is full of my aunt Grizzy and lady Maclaughlan and Lady Emily; but of the hero and heroine of the tale, what they did and how they suffered, we remember comparatively nothing’. ‘*Marriage, a Novel*’, *The British Critic* 10 (07, 1818): 100–01, ProQuest. Richard Salmon identifies a similar tension in Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1850), writing that ‘in many ways David’s prudent ethos of self-discipline puts him at odds with some of the novel’s more appealing characters’. In this sense, Ferrier develops strategies adopted by Victorian novelists in ways that will be discussed in this thesis’ Conclusion. ‘The English Bildungsroman’, in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel 1820–1880*, ed. John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford University Press, 2021), 97.

¹⁴⁹ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 87.

¹⁵⁰ Swenson, 174.

¹⁵¹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 165

encouraging readers to reflect on whether or not they agree with the stereotype in question, and if their answer to this question changes when that stereotype is brought to their attention by a character in whom they have been encouraged not to trust. As McMillan notes, ‘even the foolish and self-satisfied aunts know that education matters’, but that does not mean that readers should automatically and unthinkingly believe in everything that they say.¹⁵² By failing to deploy their own understanding, and look beyond the prejudices of other people, Mary’s great-aunts entangle national stereotypes, encouraging Ferrier’s readers to consult their own critical faculties. They thus demonstrate the way in which these novels self-consciously foster a connection between reading and self-improvement, supporting McMillan’s observation that ‘Ferrier does not suggest that relationships are the better for complications, but that novels might be’.¹⁵³

National stereotypes are further complicated in the novels under study when Scottish characters are presented as aspiring toward the extravagance traditionally associated with urban England, consequently becoming associated with false improvement. In Hamilton’s *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, Mr Stewart reflects on ‘the epidemical frenzy, which has of late spread through our country [Scotland], the desire of shining in a sphere above our own’, expressing concern that his daughter, Miss Bell Stewart, will be ‘one of the many victims’.¹⁵⁴ He asserts that ‘people who labour under this disease, mistake show for splendour, and splendour for happiness, and while their pulses throb with the fever of vanity, think no sacrifice too great, to procure a momentary gratification to its insatiable thirst’.¹⁵⁵ Mr Stewart’s reference here to the ‘mistake’ of interpreting ‘splendour for happiness’ reflects the flawed perception of false values such as tangible luxury as a version of actual improvement, as discussed earlier. His identification, moreover, of extravagance as a ‘disease’ evokes the disdain that is elsewhere expressed by fashionable English characters towards Scotland. In *Marriage*, Mrs Douglas’ English aunt, Lady Audley, deems it ‘absolute contamination for her niece to have entered [Scotland]’, and Mr Stewart thus provides readers with an example of the inverse reaction.¹⁵⁶ Whereas Lady Audley deplores ‘the coarseness and vulgarity which she deemed inseparable from the manners of every Scotch woman’, Mr Stewart condemns the ‘accursed passion for gentility’ by which his daughter becomes consumed over the course

¹⁵² McMillan, xxx.

¹⁵³ McMillan, xlv.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, ed. Pam Perkins (ASLS, 2010), 181.

¹⁵⁵ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 181.

¹⁵⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 77.

of the novel.¹⁵⁷ In particular, he laments the neglect of the moral and domestic virtue with which true improvement is associated: ‘instead of getting quit of her bad habits, [Bell] lost the good that counterbalanced them, and acquired such a love of dress, and so many foolish notions about gentility, as have utterly destroyed all relish for domestic happiness’.¹⁵⁸ By relying on fashionable performance and material wealth for satisfaction, Bell rejects the domestic duty by which Mary and Laura are defined, cementing her association with false improvement. The equation of false improvement with a ‘desire of shining in a sphere above our own’ also perpetuates the class dimension that was introduced earlier through the example of Uncle Adam. By presenting false improvement as a combination of upward social mobility and concurrent moral decline, this example from *Cottagers* demonstrates how class and nation become messily interlinked with the models of improvement outlined in these novels. In this case, false improvement figures as an invasive force that is principally defined by fashionable English values associated with members of the upper classes.

In *The Inheritance*, Gertrude’s Scottish cousin, Miss Bell Black, represents a similar example. Of all the characters considered in this chapter, Bell provides the best definition of false improvement as a version of improvement that centres on a desire to be seen in a specific way by others – or, the ever-important ‘eyes of the world’.¹⁵⁹ Throughout Ferrier’s novel, the ‘eyes of the world’ is a recurrent motif, invoked satirically by Uncle Adam to criticise anyone who affects to appear fashionable, and sincerely by Bell, who falls into precisely this trap. Having been born to Scottish parents, and having grown up in Scotland, it becomes clear that Bell wishes to disassociate from her native culture and to ascend the social ranks by conforming as closely as possible to the customs of fashionable English society. For her, this dissociation – or ‘mistake’, to use Mr Stewart’s word – presents a means of self-improvement, enabling her to enter into polite society. For Ferrier, conversely, it presents a catalyst for affectation, and is thus an example of false improvement. The most effective example of this disassociation takes place during a scene at the Rossville estate when Bell has ostensibly already achieved her goal by marrying the wealthy but ridiculous English Major Waddell. During this scene, Gertrude asks her cousin to ‘sing [her] a Scotch song’, to which Bell responds: “‘Scotch songs! [...] I hope, cousin, you don’t think me quite so vulgar as to sing Scotch songs. I assure you they are quite exploded from the drawing-room now; they are

¹⁵⁷ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 71; Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 181.

¹⁵⁸ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 99.

¹⁵⁹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 88.

called kitchen songs,” with an affected giggle’.¹⁶⁰ Here, Bell’s rejection of her native music, combined with the ‘astonishment and contempt’ she expresses at being asked to re-engage with it, highlights to readers her embodiment of false improvement by revealing her ‘affected’, performative manner. Bell Black thus contrasts with Mr Bell in Hogg’s *The Three Perils of Woman*, who outlines a specific model of ‘town education’ that he wishes his Scottish daughter, Gatty, to receive.¹⁶¹ Rejecting fashionable accomplishments in favour of Gatty learning to ‘sing a good Scots sang to one of our native melodies, without rising from her place at table’, Mr Bell continues: ‘I am determined that my bairn’s music shall be all inherent, and depend on the tones of her own voice, of which all artificial tones are but mean imitations’.¹⁶² Mr Bell’s rejection of ‘artificial tones’ and imitation in these lines recalls to mind the authenticity which critics such as Pittock associate with Uncle Adam (though he too, of course, is not exempt from Ferrier’s mockery, as Chapter One shows), and which is associated more broadly with Burns’ image of Scotland during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As Foltinek observes, Bell’s marriage ‘demonstrates the folly of self-interest and pretentiousness’, emphasising the inherent performativity and spectacle that is associated with false improvement and highlighted especially in the example of Gertrude.¹⁶³ It also demonstrates how Ferrier subverts national stereotypes to present true improvement as something that has to be laboured for on an individual level, through education and application, as opposed to being automatically granted based on national affiliation.

One of the best examples of the inverse subversion is Lady Emily, who, as discussed, proposes that accent bears little relevance to a person’s value relative to their propensity for honesty. In so doing, she highlights the importance of valuing ‘individual moral character over racial and cultural identity’.¹⁶⁴ Later on in *Marriage*, Lady Emily asserts that ‘vulgarity, even innate vulgarity, is bearable – stupidity itself is pardonable – but affectation is never to be endured or forgiven’.¹⁶⁵ Here, her aversion to affectation distances her further from the false improvement with which the fashionable English society in which she has been raised is associated. Her reference to ‘innate vulgarity’, meanwhile, may or may not be a nod to the Scotophobic stereotype invoked by Juliana in this chapter’s epigraph (‘she must be vulgar –

¹⁶⁰ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 361.

¹⁶¹ James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Woman*, ed. Anthony Hasler and Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 40.

¹⁶² Hogg, *The Three Perils of Woman*, 9.

¹⁶³ Foltinek, 135.

¹⁶⁴ Shields, 133.

¹⁶⁵ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 257.

all Scotch women are so').¹⁶⁶ Lady Emily may thus be read as a spokesperson for the importance of truth over the national prejudices that abound within these Scottish novels, reinforcing that true improvement is not defined by national identity, but also that national stereotypes can provide an effective channel for entering into fruitful discussions about moral self-improvement, and how it was perceived, within the early-nineteenth-century Scottish novel.

This notion is illustrated further by Montague De Courcy in *Self-Control* and the improvements that he makes to his English estate, Norwood. Readers learn how 'the furniture, though not without magnificence, was unadorned and substantial, grandeur holding the second place to usefulness'.¹⁶⁷ The estate also contains cottages that, despite being 'banished by fashion from every lordly residence, were contrived so as to unite beauty with usefulness'.¹⁶⁸ In these examples, De Courcy's prioritisation of 'usefulness' over fashionable adornment creates a parallel with Maitland's plans for estate improvement in *Discipline*. Unlike Maitland, De Courcy is English, though readers tellingly learn that he received his education in Edinburgh as a result of his mother being 'afraid to trust him to the temptations of an English university'.¹⁶⁹ Upon arriving at Norwood, Laura observes how the estate is 'kept with a neatness truly English', noting that although Norwood 'was equally remote from the humble simplicity of her cottage at Glenalbert, and the gaudiness of Lady Pelham's more modern abode, she saw nothing of the gloomy splendour which she had fancied'.¹⁷⁰ Brunton's representation of improvement in this scene as a curated compromise between the rustic and the grand effectively reflects the balance that Mary and Mrs Douglas strike as virtuous hybrids who, though firmly associated with the best of Scottishness, are not wholly Scottish themselves. Despite their different nationalities, Maitland and De Courcy are similarly united by their prioritisation of usefulness over futile luxury, supporting the idea of true improvement as something that transcends national stereotyping to rely instead on the application of moral principle to individual decision-making.

Returning, finally, to *Cottagers*, the national stereotypes discussed in earlier sections of this chapter are complicated even further when, Bell Stewart's example notwithstanding, England is associated with true improvement, and Scotland is depicted, in keeping with

¹⁶⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 171.

¹⁶⁷ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 200.

¹⁶⁸ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 204.

¹⁶⁹ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 73.

¹⁷⁰ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 200.

Scotophobic prejudices, as a backward nation in need of refinement. Grogan notes, on this front, Hamilton's concern 'that people's love of the Scottish cottager, based upon misplaced nostalgia and nationalism, actually preserved the rural areas as social backwaters'; she was, to this end, 'determined to cast a more critical eye over her countrymen in the hopes of stirring them to greater action of self-improvement'.¹⁷¹ McKeever, similarly, observes how 'Hamilton steers restively towards an educational perspective in which the primitive can either be rejected or ameliorated ("improved")', proffering the fictional Highland village of Glenburnie as 'a site of uncivilised potential'.¹⁷² In this novel, then, it is England that is associated with the superior model of improvement, to which Scotland instead must aspire. The protagonist, Mrs Mason, is presented as a catalyst for improvement, and therefore fulfils a similar role to Laura in *Self-Control* or Mrs Douglas in *Marriage*, but to a much more paternalistic degree. Although Scottish by birth, Mrs Mason 'speaks Englished', having spent the majority of her working life in England.¹⁷³ By contrast, the eponymous cottagers, whom she seeks to reform from their slipshod habits 'into a greater degree of nicety with regard to cleanliness', speak in Scots, which is, as Gary Kelly notes, 'equated with lower-class rank'.¹⁷⁴ Letley argues that *Cottagers* represents the 'most extreme' example within the Scottish novel of 'the association of dialect with definitely negative attributes and situations'.¹⁷⁵ It therefore provides a point of contrast with Ferrier's use of Scots in *The Inheritance* to depict 'the superior moral worth of the "untainted" Scot'.¹⁷⁶ In *Cottagers*, readers encounter Scottish characters – most often, the McClarty family, in whom Mrs Mason seeks to instil values of domestic and religious improvement – insisting that they 'do weel enough' and 'canna be fashed'.¹⁷⁷ Mrs Mason subsequently describes this attitude as 'the great bar to all improvement'.¹⁷⁸ Thus, the McClartys maintain an aversion towards cleanliness, domestic duty, and usefulness that is elsewhere in these novels associated with Scottish characters, and

¹⁷¹ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 166–67.

¹⁷² McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 129, 133.

¹⁷³ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 51.

¹⁷⁴ Elizabeth Hamilton to Dugald Stewart (a key figure in the Scottish Enlightenment who became Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh in 1785), 12 June, 1808, in *Memoirs of the Late Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton: With a Selection from her Correspondence, and Other Unpublished Writings*, 2 vols., ed. Elizabeth Benger (London, 1818; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2:73; Gary Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period 1789–1830* (Longman, 1989), 91.

¹⁷⁵ Letley, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Anderson and Riddell, 191.

¹⁷⁷ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 111, 114.

¹⁷⁸ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 113, 134.

which supports the image of Scotland as a country of greater moral worth than its dissipated southern neighbour.

The difference in national stereotypes deployed in *Cottagers* compared with the novels of Brunton and Ferrier can be attributed to the different aims of their novels. As Pam Perkins notes, *Cottagers* was intended – and, indeed, received – as ‘a manual for working-class self-improvement’ that necessarily depicted Scotland and Scottish cottagers as in need of learning how to better themselves.¹⁷⁹ For this reason, *Cottagers* is often likened to Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800) and Hannah More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795–98), which Hamilton herself identifies as a prototype in the epistle at the start of *Cottagers*.¹⁸⁰ It is a novel, then, that is from the outset concerned with class as much as it is about national stereotypes. This combination redirects readers’ attention, as Kelly helpfully puts it, away from ‘false, genteel types of conduct’ towards “‘true” models’.¹⁸¹ In this way, ‘*Cottages* also clearly advertises the idea of literature being used in the service of national “improvement”’.¹⁸² As the examples of Bell Black and Mrs Jones highlight, class also figures implicitly in Ferrier and Brunton’s representations of nation and improvement, contributing to their discourses on moral and religious improvement (which Chapter Four takes up in more detail), but not defining them to the same degree.

These nuances notwithstanding, it is clear that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton each deploy national prejudices as a means of introducing their readers to a true-versus-false framework of improvement and that the examples of ‘cultural distinctiveness’ this provides, identified by Trumpener at the beginning of this chapter, offer readers of these novels a means of distinguishing between examples of good and bad improvement.¹⁸³ By complicating these codes and correlations, these authors present true improvement as something that is contingent upon an individual taking responsibility for their own behaviour. As McKeever notes, in *Cottagers*, it is implied that ‘the miserable [Scottish] poor are so through their own neglect’, just as, in *Marriage*, Mary derives happiness through fulfilling what she perceives as her moral and religious duty, instead of relying on external luxuries.¹⁸⁴ For readers of these novels, taking responsibility for individual conduct begins with learning to self-reflect

¹⁷⁹ Pam Perkins, introduction to *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808) by Elizabeth Hamilton, ed. Pam Perkins (ASLS, 2010), 5.

¹⁸⁰ See Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 47; Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period*, 89–92.

¹⁸¹ Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period*, 91.

¹⁸² Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period*, 91.

¹⁸³ Trumpener, 11.

¹⁸⁴ McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement*, 132.

through active reading. By playing on and embroiling familiar national stereotypes in the intricate ways discussed in this chapter, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton encourage active reading by requiring their readers to engage critically with and negotiate their reading material, before applying its moral lessons to themselves.

Chapter Three: Metaphors of Cultivation and Consumption

‘Much depends on the choice of books,’ said Jacky, with an air of the most profound wisdom, ‘Fordyce’s Sermons and the History of Scotland, are two of the very few books *I* would put in the hands of a young woman. Our girls have read little else,’ – casting a look at Mrs. Douglas, who was calmly pursuing her work in the midst of this shower of darts levelled at her.¹

This passage from *Marriage* details Miss Jacky’s response to her sister’s suggestion that ‘reading’s a very dangerous thing’.² As with the example of Miss Grizzy, discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, whose generalising views highlight her lack of critical judgment, it does not require too much effort for the active reader to detect the satire that is at work here. By identifying the Scottish minister James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) as recommended reading, Susan Ferrier plays on the popularity of conduct literature, and its perceived suitability for female readers over fiction, during and before the period under study. Fordyce defines this suitability in clear terms when, addressing himself to the implied female readers of his work, he writes that ‘we consider the general run of Novels as utterly unfit for you. Instruction they convey none’.³ For reasons discussed in the previous chapter, however, because it is Miss Jacky who gives voice to this stereotype – and not, say, Mrs Douglas, who is tellingly the subject of attack in this passage – we must approach this recommendation with a degree of caution.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, published five years before *Marriage* in 1813, Jane Austen constructs a very similar, and more frequently cited, scene. In this scene, the clergyman Mr Collins – whom Austen portrays in consistently satirical terms – is invited by his cousin Mr Bennet to ‘read aloud to the ladies’, Mr Bennet’s daughters and wife: ‘Mr. Collins readily assented, and a book was produced; but on beholding it, (for everything announced for it to be from a circulating library,) he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never

¹ Susan Ferrier, *Marriage*, ed. Dorothy McMillan (ASLS, 2020), 162. Ferrier’s italics. N.B. Some ideas discussed in this chapter are expanded in an unpublished article, co-authored with Katie Halsey, which is currently under review at *Women’s Writing*.

² Ferrier, *Marriage*, 162.

³ James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* (London, 1766; repr., William Pickering, with an Introduction by Janet Todd, 1996), 211.

read novels. – Kitty stared at him, and Lydia exclaimed. – Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose Fordyce’s *Sermons*’.⁴ In this example, Austen is more explicit than Ferrier about the implied value of different reading materials, but the effect is the same. Both present the readers of their novel with a character who rejects the novel genre outright in favour of the same ostensibly more improving conduct book for women. In both cases, too, the character in question is one whose example readers are encouraged, via means of plot and characterisation, not to emulate. This has the effect of complicating the stereotypical superiority of conduct literature over fiction that Miss Jacky and Mr Collins both affirm, suggesting that readers should reconsider this familiar belief, particularly in light of the medium through which it is presented. Indeed, while Ferrier does not mention the novel specifically in the passage cited above, her critique of the assumption that conduct literature is better placed than the novel to improve readers is clearly implied in two ways: first, through her adoption of the novel genre to satirise this belief, and second through Miss Jacky’s pointed look towards Mrs Douglas, whose contrasting approach to female education, touched on in the previous chapter, is presented throughout the novel as a positive example.⁵ It is no coincidence, indeed, that Mrs Douglas owns a ‘small collection of well-chosen novels’.⁶ In keeping with this thesis’ definition of improvement, Mrs Douglas teaches Mary to think for herself when reading and to apply her own judgment to all situations. This approach to reading enables Mary to circumvent the perceived dangers of fiction, and it also subverts, to Miss Jacky’s patent consternation, an idealised notion of reading as the passive receipt of instruction, which the straightforward didacticism of works such as Fordyce’s *Sermons* perpetuates.

In this chapter, I argue that Ferrier, Mary Brunton, and Elizabeth Hamilton redeploy within their novels metaphors relating to reading and thinking, which were stereotypically found in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century conduct literature, in creative, satirical, and often humorous ways. I contend that this recourse provides them with an important means of promoting active reading, enabling them to emphasise the value of thinking and judging for oneself. This propensity for independent thought comprises a hallmark of true improvement, which I refer to in this chapter as mental cultivation. Ferrier clearly disagreed

⁴ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 76–77.

⁵ As Ferrier’s narrator shrewdly puts it, ‘Mrs. Douglas’ method of conveying instruction, it may easily be imagined, did not square with [the great-aunts’] ideas on that subject’, in *Marriage*, 145. For an example of their opposing methods, see Ferrier, *Marriage*, 57.

⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 90.

with Fordyce that novels fail to provide their readers with instruction, and her satirical treatment of him, combined with her ‘self-conscious reflection on mediality’, therefore provides the rationale for this chapter to reveal how allusions to the metaphors and processes associated with mental cultivation ultimately allow these novelists to present their own works as tools for self-improvement.⁷ I focus on two kinds of metaphor in particular: metaphors of cultivation and metaphors of consumption. The former is not always applied to reading specifically in conduct literature and other educational writings, but rather presents the process of education (which includes learning to think and act for oneself) as one that can be discussed in horticultural terms. The latter does typically relate to reading, and is frequently deployed within the novels under study to distinguish between good and bad readers. In keeping with the precedent set by the two previous chapters, it is the ubiquity of conduct books during the period under study that enables the metaphors considered here to comprise the third and final category of culturally-embedded stereotype that this thesis considers. Alongside conduct literature, I analyse examples from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century educational writings by authors including Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Charles Rollin, in which the same metaphors proliferate and, in some cases, originate. In doing so, I expand on Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell’s observation that ‘traces of the conduct book tradition are especially obvious in the work of Hamilton, Brunton and Ferrier’, revealing these traces as ones that evolve out of Enlightenment discourses.⁸ I then analyse the implications of these traces in order to show how these metaphors of cultivation and consumption ultimately function to promote self-improvement via active reading in the female-authored novels under study, confirming them as works self-consciously concerned with readerly reform.

As the citation from Fordyce demonstrates, and as touched on in this thesis’ Introduction, conduct books provided a primary means through which antinovel rhetoric circulated during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In particular, they perpetuated the notion that female readers were peculiarly susceptible to novels. Women were, by this time, also the primary demographic for conduct literature, although this was not always the case. As Hilary Havens points out, ‘in the sixteenth century and in the early

⁷ Angela Esterhammer, *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 209.

⁸ Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell, ‘The Other Great Unknowns: Women Fiction Writers of the Early Nineteenth Century’, in *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 180.

decades of the seventeenth, conduct books for women comprised only a small percentage of the general advice literature published during the period'.⁹ Over the course of the seventeenth century, conduct books gradually became more gendered, 'supporting the theory that a woman's mind could be formed by reading' and, after the 1740s, conduct material 'began to be more specifically directed towards women'.¹⁰ Mary Poovey attributes this change to 'the increased emphasis on domestic education and the growing number of middle-class women readers', accounting for the centrality of female education to the conduct books considered in this chapter.¹¹ As Havens notes, 'the treatment of female education in conduct books is bound up with questions concerning the acceptability of the novel genre', although she is also careful to point out that 'advice authors were often divided: some recommended novels with an instructive purpose, while others urged readers to avoid the genre altogether'.¹² In addition, therefore, to outlining the perceived dangers of consuming fiction, conduct books often steered readers towards other genres. As Joe Bray notes, in *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), Hester Chapone 'recommends the reading of history, poetry (especially Shakespeare, Milton, Homer and Virgil) and moral philosophy, but is more cautious when it comes to fiction'.¹³ A similar example occurs in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) when, having expounded on the threats posed by novels, Hannah More writes: 'let not a timid young lady start if I should venture to recommend to her, after a proper course of preparation, to swallow and digest such strong meat as [Isaac] Watts's or [William] Duncan's little book of Logic, some parts of Mr [John] Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, and Bishop [Joseph] Butler's Analogy'.¹⁴ Like Chapone, More directs female readers towards a selection of works in which fiction is conspicuously absent, giving way to more appropriate religious and philosophical titles. Miss Jacky's reading

⁹ Hilary Havens, 'Introduction', in *Didactic Novels and British Women's Writing, 1790–1820*, ed. Hilary Havens (Routledge, 2015), 2.

¹⁰ Havens, 2, 3.

¹¹ Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), 15. See also Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 68.

¹² Havens, 4.

¹³ Joe Bray, *The Female Reader in the English Novel* (Routledge, 2009), 14.

¹⁴ Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols. (London, 1799; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1:183.

recommendations for Mary mimic this tendency, identifying William Robertson's popular *History of Scotland* (1759) as a safe and prudent option.¹⁵

This is not to say, however, that the novel and conduct book were fundamentally opposed to each other. Several writers considered in this chapter, including Hamilton, More, and Jane West, wrote both, demonstrating how the two genres were sometimes deployed to work in tandem. Nancy Armstrong's work is particularly valuable for thinking about the relationship between them. Beginning from the premise that 'a specific female ideal' emerges 'in eighteenth and nineteenth century conduct books', she writes that this 'figure of female subjectivity [...] awaited the substance that the novel and its readers [...] would eventually provide', gesturing towards a continuum between the two.¹⁶ Likewise, Vineta Colby observes how 'the relationship between educational theory and fictional practice was very close in the early nineteenth century'.¹⁷ She notes that 'as increasingly education came to be regarded as child-centered and therefore a function of the home and the mother, the novel became domestic and female-dominated', highlighting a connection between the individual female reader and the wider domestic setting.¹⁸ More recognises this expectation when she writes that 'the chief end to be proposed in cultivating the understandings of women, is to qualify them for the practical purposes of life'; 'the great uses of study are', in other words, 'to enable her to regulate her own mind and be useful to others'.¹⁹ In addition to depicting women as educators, this passage identifies mentorship as an important part of the education process, just as Brunton and Ferrier in particular present mentorship as a key feature of the process of true improvement. Chapter Four discusses these mentoring relationships in detail, but the resemblance is worth noting here because it testifies to the porosity between conduct literature and novels that criticism to date has identified.

A further link, pertaining directly to the remit of this chapter, arises when More writes that 'the best effects of a careful education are often very remote; they are to be discovered in

¹⁵ It is also possible, particularly in light of Chapter Two, that Ferrier uses this opportunity to poke fun at Miss Jacky's Scottishness, alongside satirising her support of Fordyce's *Sermons*.

¹⁶ Armstrong, 16, 68.

¹⁷ Vineta Colby, *Yesterday's Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1974), 97.

¹⁸ Colby, 97. See also Rebecca Davies, *Written Maternal Authority and Eighteenth-Century Education in Britain: Educating by the Book* (Routledge, 2014), 5; Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780–1830* (Indiana University Press, 2002), 28; Richard De Ritter, *Imagining Women Readers, 1789–1820: Well-Regulated Minds* (Manchester University Press, 2015), 6; Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 148.

¹⁹ More, 2:1–2.

future scenes, and exhibited in as yet untried connexions. Every event of life will be putting the heart into fresh situations, and making new demands on its prudence, its firmness, its integrity, or its forbearance'.²⁰ Here, More draws attention to the importance of individuals learning to cultivate what she subsequently describes as 'general principles, and correct habits', which they can then put into practice when a situation calls for it.²¹ More thus clearly distinguishes between the two stages of improvement that the Introduction to this thesis outlines, beginning with education, in which an individual learns to develop principles and habits, followed by application, in which they learn to apply those principles and habits more widely to situations arising outwith their reading – or, as More puts it, 'future scenes'. By focusing on the importance that these novels place on individual thought and judgment, this chapter begins to consider in detail the process of true improvement.

Metaphors of Cultivation

In their study of the 'domesticated landscape', Judith W. Page and Elise Lawton Smith note how 'the idea of cultivating a garden became a foundational metaphor in educational theory and practice'.²² One need only look, they contend, to the works of 'the radical Mary Wollstonecraft and the evangelical conservative Hannah More' to see that 'versions of this metaphor of the garden' proliferate 'in their writings on women and education'.²³ The prominence of the gardening metaphor within late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century educational writings is made all the more apparent by the fact that it was deployed by writers, as Page and Smith note, of different political and religious beliefs, affording it a striking ubiquity. Samantha George concurs, asserting that the cultivation metaphor – or 'flowery diction' – provided a primary means of talking about the process of female education during the period under study.²⁴ George is careful to note the earlier origins of this metaphor in her study, taking 'the interplay between the culture of botany and the cultivation of female minds during the Enlightenment in Britain' as her 'wider theme'.²⁵

²⁰ More, 1:92.

²¹ More, 1:92.

²² Judith W. Page and Elise Lawton Smith, *Women, Literature, and the Domesticated Landscape: England's Disciples of Flora, 1780–1870* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.

²³ Page and Smith, 2.

²⁴ Samantha George, *Botany, Sexuality and Women's Writing, 1760–1830: From Modest Shoot to Forward Plant* (Manchester University Press, 2017), 26.

²⁵ George, 26.

Indeed, to understand the origins of this discourse, one must look back at least as early as Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), in which he persistently describes the education of children in horticultural terms. Seeking to impress on his readers the importance of not allowing 'vicious inclinations' to germinate within children's minds, Locke stresses the need to 'correct [...] those first irregularities': 'thus, one by one, as they appeared, they might all be weeded out without any signs or memory that ever they had been there'.²⁶ Conversely, if parents fail to act early, 'we are fain to come to the plough and the harrow; the spade and the pick-ax must go deep to come at the roots, and all the force, skill, and diligence we can use, is scarce enough to cleanse the vitiated seed-plot overgrown with weeds, and restore us the hopes of fruits to reward our pains in its season'.²⁷ In this elaborate metaphor, 'weeds' represent the bad habits and principles that children are allowed by their parents to adopt; 'roots', or the process of rooting, represent the extent to which a habit becomes engrained in the child's mind; parental intervention figures somewhat clunkily as the vain efforts of gardening tools; the child's mind, finally, is the soil in which the weeds are allowed to grow, and from which bad habits must be 'weeded out'. If successful in weeding out these 'irregularities', parents may 'plant what habits [they] please', in the hope of yielding the 'fruits' of a virtuous education.²⁸

The association between the cultivation metaphor and improvement is helpfully traced by Raymond Williams in his definition of 'culture in all its early uses' as 'a noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops or animals'.²⁹ These early uses then gave way to a new 'stage of meaning, by metaphor. From eC16 the tending of natural growth was extended to a process of human development, and this, alongside the original meaning in husbandry, was the main sense until lC18 and eC19'.³⁰ Turning attention to the derivations of culture, Williams notes that 'cultivation and cultivated went through the same metaphorical extension from a physical to a social or educational sense in C17, and were especially significant words in C18'.³¹ Williams' definitions are substantiated by Samuel Johnson in *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in which 'to cultivate' is 'to improve; to meliorate' while 'culture' is defined as 'the act of cultivation; the act of tilling the ground' and 'the art of improvement

²⁶ John Locke, 'Some Thoughts on Education', in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. John William Adamson (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 68.

²⁷ Locke, 'Some Thoughts on Education', 68.

²⁸ Locke, 'Some Thoughts on Education', 44.

²⁹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Fontana, 1988), 63.

³⁰ Williams, 63.

³¹ Williams, 65.

and melioration'.³² Locke's work clearly accords with Williams' etymology, and by the 1780s his metaphor was firmly entrenched within educational discourse. Writing in 1784, for example, the minister Isaac Watts extends Locke's metaphor to apply to adults, asserting that 'no man is obliged to know everything [...] yet all persons are under some obligation to improve their own understanding, otherwise it will be a barren desert, or a forest overgrown with weeds and brambles. Universal ignorance or infinite errors will overspread the mind, which is utterly neglected and lies without any cultivation'.³³ In Watts' writing, cultivation figures simultaneously as an act of pruning and growth. Conversely, a lack of cultivation is presented variously as 'a barren desert' or an unkempt mix of 'weeds and brambles', signalling a lack of independent thought and judgement. Once again, the process of education is presented in horticultural terms, though with greater emphasis on independent thought, as opposed to children being told what to do. By emphasising the importance of all individuals learning to take responsibility for their own improvement, Watt anticipates the emphasis that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton would later place on mental self-cultivation through their recourse to the same metaphors.

In 1782, the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Henry Home, Lord Kames deployed the same metaphor, though with less room for variety than Watts. 'The mind of man is a rich soil, productive equally of flowers and weeds', he writes; 'good passions and impressions are flowers which ought carefully to be cultivated: bad passions and impressions are weeds which ought to be suppressed, if they cannot be totally rooted out'.³⁴ Like Watts, Kames applies Lockean theory to the adult mind, presenting the act of intellectual engagement as a process of cultivation, and the mind as soil to be cultivated. Also like Watts, Kames reiterates the importance of individuals learning to think and judge for themselves through his suggestion that the mind, or soil, has the potential to produce flowers and weeds in equal measure. The final ratio is therefore up to the individual and their actions. While Page, Smith, and George all focus on cultivation in relation to female education specifically, it is worth noting that in the work of Kames and Watts, references to the female mind are conspicuously

³² Samuel Johnson, 'Cultivate, v.a.', in *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), accessed, 18 June, 2025, <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/views/search.php?term=culture>; Samuel Johnson, 'Culture, n.s.', in *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), accessed 18 June, 2025, <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/views/search.php?term=culture>.

³³ Isaac Watts, *The Improvement of the Mind, or, A Supplement to the Art of Logic* (London, 1784), 1–2, Wellcome Collection.

³⁴ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Loose Hints Upon Education* (Dublin, 1782), 1–2.

absent. Of course, one need not look far for references to female cultivation within conduct literature of the period. More, for example, writes that ‘in training [young women], should we not carefully cultivate intellect, implant religion, and cherish modesty?’.³⁵ But while references to female mental cultivation were undoubtedly prolific, it would not be true to say that cultivation metaphors were applied to women exclusively. Returning attention to Chapone, we might note her neutral statement (despite the gendered title of her work) that ‘human nature is ever liable to corruption, and has in it the seeds of every vice, as well as of every virtue; and the first will be continually shooting forth and growing up, if not carefully watched and rooted out as fast as they appear’.³⁶ Here again, the idea that the mind contains the seeds of both virtue and vice reinforces the role played necessarily by the individual in deciding which seeds will germinate, highlighting by extension the need for all individuals to learn to distinguish between good and bad principles and habits. This process comprises the first stage of this thesis’ definition of improvement.

Within the novels under study, examples abound of characters whose minds are described in terms of cultivation, confirming either that they have already been cultivated by the right sort of education, or that they have yet to receive that education and are as such uncultivated. The volume of these examples demonstrates the metaphor’s ubiquity in the period and also these novelists’ assumption that, by interspersing their novels with references to mental cultivation, readers will understand their implication. In Brunton’s *Self-Control*, readers witness Montague De Courcy (whom the heroine Laura eventually marries) ‘[return] to his former studies, and even [prosecute] them with alacrity, for he knew that Laura respected a cultivated mind. His faults, he was if possible even more than ever studious to correct, for Laura loved virtue’.³⁷ Here, De Courcy works to weed out the faults from his own mind in an act of self-improvement, emphasising the link between mental cultivation and individual labour. In John Galt’s *Annals of the Parish*, Lady Macadam has ‘the element of a kindly spirit, that would sometimes kythe in actions of charity, that showed symptoms of a true Christian grace, had it been properly cultivated’, in which individual conduct is clearly presented as a measure of mental cultivation.³⁸ Lady Macadam’s lack of cultivation is attributed to the fact that ‘her morals had been greatly neglected in her youth’, through which

³⁵ More, 1:76.

³⁶ Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady* (Dublin, 1773; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2013), 77.

³⁷ Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, ed. Anthony Mandal (Routledge, 2016), 160.

³⁸ John Galt, *Annals of the Parish* (1821), ed. Robert P. Irvine (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 50.

detail Galt reiterates the need to distinguish between vice and virtue that Watt and Chapone identify.³⁹ Galt's use of the cultivation metaphor confirms that while discourses on self-improvement are central to the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, they appear peripherally in the novels of their male contemporaries, confirming the concept of a cultivated mind as a familiar one among readers during the early nineteenth century.

In *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, Hamilton presents readers with a sustained metaphor for the education of children, which she terms 'the preparation of the soil'.⁴⁰ In discussion with her kinsman, Mr MacClarty, whose children she seeks to reform, Mrs Mason deploys the cultivation metaphor, asking 'do you imagine [...] that the human soul requires less care in cultivating it, than is necessary to your field?'.⁴¹ Hamilton uses the word 'soul' here, but the implication is that the children's minds (referred to explicitly in later examples) represent soil to be ploughed. As with the example from *Self-Control*, in which mental cultivation is associated with moral virtue, moral and intellectual progress become intertwined through Hamilton's interchangeable use of 'soul' and 'mind'. This is reflected in the model of improvement on which this thesis centres, in which mental, moral, and religious improvement often figure interdependently. Accordingly, Mrs Mason highlights the need to instil principles within the children's minds in order for them to cultivate the right habits: 'by what you say, you think it sufficient to sow the seed, I contend for the necessity of preparing the soil to receive it, and say, that without such preparation, it will never take *root*, nor vegetate', which is to say that the children's behaviour will never truly improve if they are not taught the value of acting on and applying virtuous principles to the situations in which they find themselves.⁴² The importance of application is reiterated in Mrs Mason's second question: 'is it merely by teaching them to say their questions, or even teaching them to read, that the briers and thorns of pride and self-will will be rooted up from your children's minds?'.⁴³ Here again, the need to teach children to apply their understanding is brought to

³⁹ Galt, *Annals of the Parish*, 50.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, ed. Pam Perkins (ASLS, 2010), 125.

⁴¹ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 125. It is worth noting the 'ubiquitous anecdote' of Hamilton reading Kames' *Elements of Criticism* (1762) as a young girl, suggesting an early familiarity with this metaphor. Pam Perkins, *Women Writers and the Edinburgh Enlightenment* (Rodopi, 2010), 68.

⁴² Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 126. In Galt's *The Entail*, Claud reflects similarly on his mistakes as a parent: 'it is fit that I should endure this. I sowed tares, and mauna expek wheat', in which the same metaphor is deployed to highlight the importance of principle to mental cultivation. John Galt, *The Entail: or The Lairds of Grippy*, ed. Mark Schoenfield and Clare A. Simmons (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 169.

⁴³ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 125.

the fore, as Mrs Mason explains that it is not enough simply to plant a seed (or teach someone to read); in order for improvement to take place, their minds must be prepared to germinate that seed by learning how to deploy their judgment to critical ends.

This fairly conventional application of the cultivation metaphor is extended when Mrs Mason reflects on her own experience of learning to ‘read with propriety’ as a child under the guidance of Miss Osburne: ‘my mother had endeavoured to lay in me the foundation of Christian principles when I was a child, but it was not until I had learned [...] to search the scriptures for instruction, instead of running them over as a task, that Christian principles were rooted in my heart’.⁴⁴ Through learning to reflect on the ‘errors’ and ‘weaknesses’ of her heart through active reading practices, Mrs Mason observes how the right principles became ‘rooted’ within her. By repurposing the cultivation metaphor for a fictional context, and revealing to readers the consequences of an uncultivated mind (the MacClarty children all either die or are left destitute by the end of the novel), Hamilton thus underlines the importance of exercising individual judgement, enabling her to promote a critically engaged and reflective approach to reading.

In Ferrier’s *Marriage*, it is the heroine Mary Douglas who provides the definitive example of a well cultivated mind. Her reflective reading is especially apparent during a scene in which she attends, with her aunt Grizzy, a salon in Bath hosted by the fashionable Mrs Bluemits.⁴⁵ Readers learn how ‘Mary had been accustomed to read, and to reflect upon what she read, and to apply it to the purpose for which it is valuable, viz. in enlarging her mind and cultivating her taste’.⁴⁶ In these lines, Ferrier employs the cultivation metaphor loosely to present Mary’s reading habits favourably to her readers, pitting them against the follies of the assembled company. According to Mary’s distanced approach to reading, the acts of engaging critically with what one reads, self-reflecting, and harnessing individual judgment to apply what one reads to other situations, are all presented as means of mental cultivation. This creates a parallel with Mrs Douglas, whom Ferrier describes similarly as having ‘a reflecting mind’: she ‘had read much, and reflected more’.⁴⁷ Mary’s reading habits are thus in keeping with those outlined by Hamilton in *Cottagers*, in which the seeds of Mary’s reading material are allowed to ‘take root’ in her mind precisely because she has been

⁴⁴ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 70.

⁴⁵ As Anderson and Riddell note, Mrs Bluemits’ salon obviously ‘parodies the eighteenth-century English Bluestocking group of women writers and thinkers’, 190.

⁴⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 372–73.

⁴⁷ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 143.

taught to reflect on what she reads, and then to apply relevant principles through her actions. In keeping with Hamilton's 'preparation of the soil' metaphor, Mary's mind has been carefully prepared by her education, enabling reading to provide a catalyst for cultivation and, by extension, self-improvement. Sarah Moss suggests that Ferrier's 'Scottish women are – joyfully or complainingly – mired in domesticity and living too close to the land for intellectual or spiritual activity'.⁴⁸ While this may be true of some Scottish women – including Mary's incorrigible great-aunts, as the previous chapter shows – the above passage confirms that the opposite is true of Mary, underlining the variety of positive and negative examples of improvement that these novelists provide for their readers to learn from.

The implications of Mary's mental cultivation are made clear when readers learn that Mary 'had never been accustomed to prate, or to quote [...] and she began to tremble at hearing authors' names "familiar in their mouths as household words"'.⁴⁹ In this passage, we are presented with a quotation from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. That Ferrier chooses to quote Shakespeare while condemning those who quote authors in order to appear more socially desirable affords this passage a tone that is unmistakably tongue-in-cheek. Her inclusion of this specific line from *Henry V* also provides a particularly good example of a quotation being applied to a situation in which it is relevant and therefore useful. In contrast to Mary, the women assembled at Mrs Bluemits' salon are presented as uncultivated, due to their adoption of the wrong kinds of reading practices. Guests are expected to be distinguished in and are judged according to their 'taste in the *belles lettres*', and this expectation prompts a series of recitals during the salon from works by William Cowper, Thomas Campbell, and Lord Byron, among many others.⁵⁰ Ferrier is clear throughout, however, that although these passages are indeed 'familiar in their mouths as household words', signalling the relevance of the line from *Henry V*, the women only attempt to quote them by heart in order to appear more fashionable. They do not therefore undertake the necessary labour of reflecting on what they read, or of applying their judgement to cultivate their minds, and they are consequently emblematic of false improvement. Ferrier's mockery of them as cautionary examples is reiterated through their frequent misquotation of other authors, highlighting the way in which, as Angela Esterhammer argues, Ferrier uses allusions to other authors 'to focus her impulses toward both comedy and moral education', while her fictional characters' own responses to

⁴⁸ Sarah Moss, *Spilling the Beans: Eating, Cooking, Reading and Writing in British Women's Fiction 1770–1830* (Manchester University Press, 2009), 172.

⁴⁹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 373.

⁵⁰ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 371.

these allusions '[indicate] their mental and moral capacities'.⁵¹ Although the context is different, (Mrs Bluemits' guests are, of course, not assembling on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt), the passage that Ferrier quotes from *Henry V* contains a satirical pertinence to the salon scene that justifies its inclusion. In this way, Ferrier demonstrates to readers precisely what reading and then applying that reading to a valuable purpose in an external scenario looks like, advocating implicitly the approach to reading that readers witness Mary exercise and act on elsewhere in *Marriage*.

The example of Miss Grizzy in this scene warns readers further against adopting the performative reading habits exhibited by the salon-goers. We learn, for example, that 'Grizzy was accustomed to converse, without being able to comprehend', and she is therefore unphased by the other guests' misdirected attitude towards choosing what to read and quote.⁵² In keeping with the 'ignorance' by which she is characterised, and which prevents her from perceiving the importance of distanced reading and astute quotation, Grizzy reproaches Mary for not reciting anything herself, encouraging her to 'take care to learn something by heart' before visiting Mrs Bluemits next time.⁵³ As Lucia Dacome notes, and as the next section discusses in more depth, by the period under study, 'the memorization of sentences had come to be regarded as an obsolete practice informing images of pedantry personified by the bore, the impolite, and the pedant'.⁵⁴ By satirising characters who place more importance on memorisation and appearance than they do on deploying their own understanding while reading, Ferrier thus expands on the implications of the cultivation metaphor to advocate a model of active reading through which it is made clear that readers can improve and cultivate their own minds.

Writing about Mary's twin sister, Ferrier is explicit and slightly more playful in her recourse to the cultivation metaphor: 'at eighteen, Adelaide Douglas was as heartless and ambitious as she was beautiful and accomplished – but the surface was covered with flowers, and who would have thought of analysing the soil?'.⁵⁵ Here, the rhetorical question signals Ferrier's quietly satirical tone, as she demonstrates clear awareness of the popular association

⁵¹ Angela Esterhammer, 'Susan Ferrier's Allusions: Comedy, Morality, and the Presence of Milton', in *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. Laura Dabundo (University Press of America, 2000), 71.

⁵² Ferrier, *Marriage*, 373.

⁵³ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 373, 379.

⁵⁴ Lucia Dacome, 'Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65, no. 4 (2004): 611, Project Muse.

⁵⁵ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 168.

of the female mind with soil. But she also takes the opportunity to criticise, and encourage readers to reflect on, the disproportionate attention paid to Adelaide's flower-like beauty and the consequent neglect of her mind. Instead of simply regurgitating the trope of the female mind as soil, Ferrier plays on the metaphorical discourse with which she knows readers will be familiar, demonstrating (via plot points discussed in the previous chapter) the dangers of not deploying critical judgment to regulate ambition and selfishness, and highlighting the damaging effects of an education that prioritises the wrong values. This scene echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's famous lamentation in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that 'in the education of women the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment', resulting in 'barren blooming'.⁵⁶ Through presenting cultivation as a process through which women can learn to strengthen their minds and apply their own judgment, Ferrier's treatment of the cultivation metaphor is in keeping here with the convention set by Wollstonecraft's earlier example, strengthening the connection between the two writers that Anne K. Mellor and Andrew Monnickendam have noted.⁵⁷ This connection confirms the cultivation metaphor as one that was frequently recycled in debates surrounding female education and improvement around the turn of the nineteenth century, reiterating my argument that the novelists under study incorporate familiar imagery into their fiction in order to promote self-improving reading practices.

Elsewhere in *Marriage*, Ferrier is particularly creative in her treatment of the cultivation metaphor. Two effective examples of this arise when, having escorted Mary to Edinburgh (*en route* to England), Mary's paternal uncle, Mr Douglas, reflects on two of the characters they meet on their journey. "I hope you won't carry away the impression, that these two *lusus naturae* are specimens of Scotchwomen", says Mr Douglas to Mary, "the former, indeed, is rather a sort of weed that infests every soil – the latter, to be sure, is an indigenous plant", in which he outlines two alternative representations of cultivation.⁵⁸ The 'weed' to which Mr Douglas refers is Mrs Gaffaw, a farmer's wife with whom they stay on their way to Edinburgh. By labelling Mrs Gaffaw in this way, Ferrier expands on the cultivation metaphor to direct readers' attention away from discussions of the female mind as soil and specifically towards the results that occur when an individual receives the wrong sort

⁵⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Miriam Brody (Penguin, 2004), 33, 11.

⁵⁷ Andrew Monnickendam, *The Novels of Walter Scott and his Literary Relations: Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier and Christian Johnstone* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 22; Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (Routledge, 1993), 49.

⁵⁸ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 199.

of education. Mrs Gaffaw is still presented as a plant, but Ferrier strategically makes use of the pejorative connotations of ‘weed’ (and, moreover, ‘infest’) to signal to her readers that Mrs Gaffaw’s example is not one they should replicate.

In the scenes that feature Mrs Gaffaw, it becomes clear that everything that is unappealing about her character can be directly attributed to her novel reading habits. Instead of reading to develop and apply her understanding, Mrs Gaffaw is wrongly motivated to read novels in order to seem learned and fashionable, much like Mrs Bluemits and her guests. She desires, in other words, the appearance of culture without having to put in the necessary work to cultivate her mind in the right ways, as Mary does. She is consequently ‘rendered almost disgusting by the air of affectation, folly, and peevishness, that overspread her whole person and deportment’, in which the performativity associating her with false improvement is clear.⁵⁹ Ferrier satirises Mrs Gaffaw’s reading in particular by referring to it as a kind of study: “‘I might not have been caught in this *déshabille*; but I was really so engaged by my studies” pointing to the dirty Novel, “that I was quite unconscious of the lapse of time””.⁶⁰ In keeping with antinovel stereotypes, Mrs Gaffaw eschews her domestic duties in favour of immersing herself in fiction; she ‘read novels’ and was therefore ‘above managing her house’.⁶¹ This, combined with her failure to apply her reading to useful ends, is precisely what leads to her depiction as a ‘weed’. Through the example of Mrs Gaffaw, readers thus witness Ferrier making sophisticated use of a ubiquitous metaphor in order to demonstrate the dangers of unreflective reading. She does so humorously, inviting readers to laugh at the ridiculous, weedlike affectation of Mrs Gaffaw (whose name is, of course, not a coincidence), and deploying this humour to instructive ends, in which her own novel figures implicitly as a catalyst for self-improvement.

The second character to whom Mr Douglas refers is his Edinburgh-based aunt, Mrs Macshake, the ‘indigenous plant’. As this description suggests, Mrs Macshake is not presented negatively like Mrs Gaffaw, but nor is she cultivated in the way that Mary and Mrs Douglas are. Instead, she stands apart as someone from an older generation, to whom the same standards of comparison as Mary and Mrs Douglas cannot be applied, but on whom readers are nevertheless encouraged to look favourably. Questioning whether or not his aunt ‘would have arrived at such perfection in a more cultivated field, or genial clime’, Mr Douglas reveals that ‘she was born at a time when Scotland was very different from what it is

⁵⁹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 183.

⁶⁰ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 184.

⁶¹ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 186.

now. Female education was little attended to, even in families of the highest rank; consequently, the ladies of those days possess a raciness in their manners and ideas that we should vainly seek for in this age of cultivation and refinement'.⁶² Here it is implied that Mrs Macshake lacks the type of mental cultivation associated with Mary, which we as readers are encouraged to emulate, yet we cannot ignore the 'perfection' by which she is characterised. Ferrier thus expands on popular iterations of the cultivation metaphor to suggest to readers that while bad examples of cultivation exist in characters like Mrs Gaffaw, it is possible for there to be more than one acceptable version of good cultivation, particularly over several generations. Just like the great-aunts discussed in Chapter Two, Mrs Macshake is valuable to readers insofar as she forces readers to apply active reading practices in order to work out why she is commendable, performing a kind of review of which it is implied that she herself would not be capable.

Mrs Macshake's anomalous status is reflected in the 'special personal idiom and pronunciation' that Ferrier invents for her, 'while suggesting that it belongs not only to her but to a disappearing group of women', as Dorothy McMillan notes.⁶³ In her conversation with Mary and Mr Douglas, a similar nostalgia develops through Mrs Macshake's disdain for the 'improvements' that have taken place around her in Edinburgh: 'I sometimes wunder if it's the same waurld [...] What see I noo, but stane an' lime, an' stoor an' dirt, an' idle cheels, an' dinket-oot madams prancin'. – Impruvements indeed!'.⁶⁴ Mrs Macshake mourns an older way of life and implies a deterioration in moral standards as a result of these improvements, reflected in the 'idle' fashions of the modern day.⁶⁵ Although not educated in the same ways as Mary, a mutual appreciation develops between the two, as Mrs Macshake is presented as 'in reality, a very good-hearted woman'.⁶⁶ It is, indeed, no coincidence, that Mary immediately thinks of and glorifies the past upon arriving in Edinburgh, in which 'frail memorials remain'.⁶⁷ In Mrs Macshake, as in the example of Uncle Adam discussed in Chapter Two, we can perceive what Ian Duncan refers to as the yearning in Ferrier's novels 'for a moral authenticity that may inhere in old-fashioned national character'.⁶⁸ Mrs

⁶² Ferrier, *Marriage*, 186.

⁶³ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 441, explanatory note 12 by Dorothy McMillan.

⁶⁴ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 194.

⁶⁵ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 194.

⁶⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 192.

⁶⁷ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 188.

⁶⁸ Ian Duncan, 'Scotland and the Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell, Katie Trumpener, and Ian Duncan (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 255.

Macshake's epitomisation of this 'moral authenticity' explains why, as readers, we are encouraged to admire her, in spite of the alternative model that her characterisation as 'an indigenous plant' suggests. By redeploying the cultivation metaphor to highlight key differences between Mrs Macshake, Mary, and Mrs Gaffaw, Ferrier encourages her readers to undertake the mental labour required to discern and learn from these nuances. In doing so, she promotes active reading and reiterates the novel's ability to foster self-improvement.

Metaphors of Consumption

Like the cultivation metaphor, metaphors that liken reading to eating proliferate within conduct literature and other educational writings, both during the period under study and in the decades leading up to it. As with the example of Locke cited at the start of the previous section, one must look well before the eighteenth century to gain a sense of the consumption metaphor's origins and enduring nature. In 1625, Francis Bacon famously theorised about the connection between reading and eating: 'some books are to be tasted', he writes, 'others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested: that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention'.⁶⁹ Bacon's suggestion that different types of reading material accord with different modes of eating paves the way for writers such as More, who in the passage cited earlier associates digestive reading with 'such strong meat as Watts's or Duncan's little book of Logic, some parts of Mr Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, and Bishop Butler's Analogy'.⁷⁰ Conversely, devouring becomes associated with fiction, perpetuating the antinovel rhetoric about the dangers of ungoverned reading.

Upon entering the eighteenth century, one might look to Charles Rollin's *The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* (1737) for a continuation of this metaphor: 'authors should not be read superficially or in a hurry, if we propose to improve by them [...]. The surest way of improving by this perusal of authors, which is to be considered as the food of the understanding, is to digest it at leisure, and so convert it, as it were, into its own substance'.⁷¹ Like Bacon, Rollin clearly associates reading with eating, explicitly presenting digestive reading as synonymous with reading for improvement. He also modifies the

⁶⁹ Francis Bacon, 'Of Study', in *The Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (Penguin, 1985), 209.

⁷⁰ More, 1:183.

⁷¹ Charles Rollin, *The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres*, 2nd ed. (London: 1737), 2:50–1. I am indebted to Matthew Sangster for drawing this example to my attention.

metaphor slightly to underline the importance of applied understanding, in keeping with the passage pertaining to Mary in the previous section. By carefully digesting what we read – that is to say, reflecting on our reading material – Rollin suggests we develop conclusions that we can then apply elsewhere, so becoming improved. Locke reiterates this idea, writing that ‘it is not enough to cram ourselves with a great load of collections; unless we chew them over again, they will not give us strength and nourishment’, in which the association between chewing and nourishment reiterates the value of active reading, presenting it here as a process that will tangibly benefit and sustain the reader.⁷² Rollin’s *Method* was very widely read in Scotland during the eighteenth century, as evidence from the *Books and Borrowing* database clearly shows, suggesting that his work likely played an important role in the wider dissemination of the consumption metaphor, and also confirming that readers of the novels under study would have been familiar with it by the start of the nineteenth century.⁷³

The same ideas accordingly proliferate within female-authored conduct books. Jane West, for example, utilises the consumption metaphor to distinguish between the value of different types of reading, recognising ‘those who *devour* rather than *digest* reading’.⁷⁴ Like Rollin, West explicitly associates digestive reading with self-improvement: ‘one well digested book will improve the mind and the heart more than many volumes hastily devoured for the purpose of saying that we have read them’.⁷⁵ In doing so, West gestures towards the performative, socially aspirational model of reading that Ferrier condemns in the salon scene discussed earlier, associating this particular version of unreflective reading with rash consumption. As Mary notes in *Marriage*, ‘people, who only read to talk of their reading, might as well let it alone’, and we see this idea becoming more established through West’s application of the consumption metaphor.⁷⁶ By associating digestive reading with careful reflection, West presents reading for true improvement as a gradual process, in keeping with this thesis’ definition, which Chapter Four takes up in more detail. Chapone also substantiates these points. Noting that ‘detached sentences are a kind of reading not proper to be continued long at a time’, she maintains nevertheless that ‘a few of them well chosen and digested will

⁷² Locke, ‘Of the Conduct of Understanding’, 217.

⁷³ Rollin is also the second most popular author overall in the database, after Walter Scott. See ‘The Most Popular Authors’, in ‘Facts & Figures’, *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers’ Registers, 1750–1830*, accessed 28 June, 2025, <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/facts/>.

⁷⁴ Jane West, *Letters to A Young Lady, in which the Duties and Character of Women are Considered* (New York, 1838), 312, Alexander Street.

⁷⁵ West, 338.

⁷⁶ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 379.

do you much more service than to read half a dozen chapters together', in which the connection between careful, reflective reading and self-improvement is once again clear.⁷⁷

In the novels under study, clear instances occur of the consumption metaphor being redeployed to underline this connection, encouraging readers to differentiate between good and bad readers. The most striking of all these instances occurs in Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, in which she provides readers with three case studies. The first is Harriet Orwell who, being 'accustomed to think for herself', is a digestive reader, and an example therefore for Hamilton's readers to learn from.⁷⁸ The second is Julia Delmond, a textbook quixotic reader whose conflation of fiction and real life is discussed in detail at the end of Chapter One. By depicting Julia 'devouring the pages of a novel [...] in her own apartment', Hamilton plays self-consciously with the consumption metaphor to highlight Julia's stereotypical, imaginative absorption.⁷⁹ While these examples reveal Hamilton deploying this metaphor in straightforward ways, the manner in which she applies it to Bridgetina Botherim, 'the ostensible heroine of these memoirs', is more complicated.⁸⁰

Bridgetina was, famously, intended as a caricature of Mary Hays, a fellow novelist.⁸¹ In the novel, Bridgetina is an ardent follower – and, crucially, reader – of what was pejoratively referred to as the New Philosophy, against which *Memoirs* is written. The New Philosophy was associated especially with figures including William Godwin during the 1790s, whose work Hamilton cites at length. Throughout *Memoirs*, Bridgetina exhibits many of the characteristics that the conservative loyalists – the anti-Jacobins, among whom Hamilton is generally counted – feared would result from reading novels. Her reform at the end of the novel identifies her as the example from which readers are designed to learn, in order to avoid meeting the same fate as Julia, but throughout the descriptions of Bridgetina's reading we see Hamilton making use of familiar metaphors for comic effect. The first instance takes place when Bridgetina recounts how she came to be such an ardent reader:

⁷⁷ Chapone, 38.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, ed. Claire Grogan (Broadview, 2000), 331.

⁷⁹ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 85.

⁸⁰ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 378.

⁸¹ For more on this, see Matthew Sangster, *Living as an Author in the Romantic Period* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 98; Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790–1827* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 145; Weng, 38–9; Ada Sharpe and Eleanor Ty, 'Mary Hays and the Didactic Novel in the 1790s', *Didactic Novels and British Women's Writing, 1790–1820*, ed. Hilary Havens (Routledge, 2017), 94; Claire Grogan, *Politics and Genre in the Works of Elizabeth Hamilton, 1576–1816* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), 60.

My mother got a packet of brown snuff from London by the mail-coach; it was wrapped in two proof sheets of the quarto edition of the Political Justice. I eagerly snatched up the paper, and notwithstanding the frequent fits of sneezing it occasioned, from the quantity of snuff contained in every fold, I greedily devoured its contents. I read and sneezed, and sneezed and read, till the germ of philosophy began to rectify my soul. From that moment I became a philosopher and need not inform you of the important consequences.⁸²

In these lines, Hamilton recycles the consumption metaphor to portray the established trope of a young female reader hungrily consuming what Jacqueline Pearson refers to as ‘bad books’, meaning ‘novels and sceptical metaphysics’.⁸³ Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness* (1793) falls under the latter category. Hamilton therefore supports Ina Ferris’ observation about representations of women’s reading within the period that they make ‘reading an act of the body rather than the mind’.⁸⁴ Although, in this passage, Bridgetina’s reading transcends even her body, purportedly extending to her soul, in which the hyperbole is in keeping with the satire by which she is consistently characterised. Nina Baym notes similarly the popular conceptualisation ‘of the novel as a substance taken into the body, there to work an effect beyond the reader’s control’, and indeed in the passage above this loss of control is apparent in Bridgetina’s uncontrollable sneezing fits, which intersperse her reading.⁸⁵ Hamilton’s recourse to the consumption metaphor thus warns readers against the dangers of reading without thinking and without maintaining a critical distance between a reader’s body and mind and the text.

By introducing an element of humour to her deployment of this metaphor, this example also represents a departure from the sombre, doctrinal tone of the conduct books and educational writings cited at the start of this section. Like Ferrier, Hamilton demonstrates the improving potential of her own novels by deploying humour as a catalyst for self-reflection.

⁸² Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 176.

⁸³ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women Reading in Britain, 1750–1835* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 165.

⁸⁴ Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 37.

⁸⁵ Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Cornell University Press, 1984), 58.

Bridgetina is funny because she is so ridiculous, but the humour that she invokes also takes on a deeper implication since it is specifically through Hamilton's deployment of a familiar metaphor that this ridiculousness is articulated. As JoEllen DeLucia notes, 'not only does Hamilton make Bridgetina ridiculous, but she links her ridiculousness and her own lack of humour to her reading and subsequent misapplication of sentimental fiction and sceptical philosophy to the world'.⁸⁶ In this way, 'in Hamilton's work, humour prevents readers from sympathising with the plights of the main characters'.⁸⁷ By transforming the didactic use of the consumption metaphor in educational writings as a tool for ironic humour in her novel, Hamilton encourages readers to deploy their own judgment and understanding, as in order to appreciate the humour that is at play, they must first identify the reasons why Bridgetina is supposed to make them laugh. In creating this impetus for greater readerly engagement, Hamilton's use of the consumption metaphor contributes towards and provides another example of the move from explicit to implicit instruction that Chapter One discusses.

Bridgetina's lack of control over her reading is reiterated when she reflects on her appetite for fiction: 'still my ardent sensibility led me back to novels. As I read each sweet, delicious tale, I reasoned, I investigated, I moralized', thus turning attention, in an exception to Ferris' rule, away from the body and towards the mind.⁸⁸ Here, Hamilton's use of verbs such as 'reasoned' and 'investigated' is patently tongue-in-cheek, since thoughtlessly devouring novels neither requires nor enables reasoning or investigation on the part of the reader. These verbs are therefore effective in satirising and consequently dissuading readers from adopting an uncritical approach to reading, working in tandem with the consumption metaphor to cement Bridgetina's status as a warning for readers. They also draw readers' attention to the mental processes – including selecting, arranging, ordering, and applying information – that are intrinsic to mental cultivation, and frequently deployed alongside the consumption metaphor in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century educational discourses. In expounding on the superior value of reading a few sentences 'well chosen and digested', as opposed passively to absorbing a longer passage of writing, for example, Chapone emphasises the importance of selecting parts of one's reading material to consider in greater depth.⁸⁹ In *A Treatise on Self-Knowledge* (1758), John Mason gestures similarly to the central

⁸⁶ JoEllen DeLucia, 'Common Sense Philosophy and Sentimental Fiction: Eighteenth-Century Scottish Women Novelists', *The International Companion to Scottish Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Leith Davis and Janet Sorensen (ASLS, 2021), 232.

⁸⁷ DeLucia, 233.

⁸⁸ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 176.

⁸⁹ Chapone, 38.

role that these processes play in active reading: ‘think it not enough to furnish this storehouse of the mind with good thoughts, but lay them up there in *order*, digested or ranged under proper subjects of classes’.⁹⁰ Mason here depicts the process of digestive reading as one that begins with the selection of ‘good thoughts’. This is followed by the arrangement and ordering of these thoughts within one’s own mind (an act of digestion), before applying them as relevant when ‘you have occasion to think or talk upon’ that particular subject.⁹¹ Mason thus reiterates the centrality of individual judgment and reflection to practical self-improvement. He notes that the successful enactment of this process effectively enables the individual to ‘carry a regular *common place book* in [their] memory’, and in doing so he pinpoints an important cultural tradition within which these processes were prioritised during the long eighteenth century.⁹²

Commonplace booking refers to the practice in which readers would write down in a book words or passages from their reading that seemed particularly pertinent to them; in David Allan’s words, it presents ‘an unrivalled opportunity for a reader to respond tangibly – and thus in a way that can later be scrutinised – to the texts that he or she encounters’.⁹³ Dacome notes, in agreement with Allan, how this practice can be traced back to the classical period, though it was popularised during the eighteenth century in particular by Locke’s *A New Method of Making Common-Place-Books* (1706), in which he offers a modified approach to commonplacing that prioritises the processes of mental cultivation under study, marking an important departure from earlier iterations of the tradition.⁹⁴ Indeed, as Dacome highlights, ‘one of the purposes of early modern commonplace books was [...] to offer reserves of arguments and topics to those who wanted to show inventive genius by elaborating upon them’.⁹⁵ This was in keeping with a much earlier ‘pedagogic heritage’, in which emphasis was placed on ‘oratory and the art of memory’.⁹⁶ By ‘facilitating the memorization of sentences and arguments’, earlier commonplace books therefore ‘provided a means to enhance performance in public situations’, offering readers a space within which to

⁹⁰ John Mason, *Self-Knowledge: A Treatise* (Boston, 1758), 117, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Mason’s italics.

⁹¹ Mason, 117.

⁹² Mason, 117. Mason’s italics.

⁹³ David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20.

⁹⁴ Dacome, 603. See also Allan, 35.

⁹⁵ Dacome, 610.

⁹⁶ Dacome, 610.

record, learn and internalise ideas from their reading.⁹⁷ Beginning from the premise of his own influential theory that each human mind begins as a *tabula rasa*, Locke's new approach to commonplacing moved the emphasis away from simply memorising information and towards managing and organising it based on individual judgment and thinking: 'it was not primarily concerned with the transmission of a specific body of knowledge prescribing the matter to be annotated. Nor was it devoted to the accumulation and memorization of arguments and proofs, for it focused rather on the ordering procedure' as a '[practice] of self-improvement'.⁹⁸ Locke effectively communicates the centrality of reading to ordering when he asserts in *Of the Conduct of Understanding* (1706) that 'reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is thinking makes what we read ours'.⁹⁹ This statement nuances Richard De Ritter's suggestion that reading functions importantly as 'an organising theory of identity formation'.¹⁰⁰ Certainly, reading provides a catalyst for the exercise of individual judgment, enabling readers to select from and adapt what they read, which in turn provides an impetus for self-improvement. As Locke shows, however, and as Chapter One argues, while the act of reading provides an opportunity for self-improvement, the responsibility ultimately lies with the reader to put in the necessary work to apply their reading in order to become truly improved. Locke's emphasis on readerly application is noted in 'Monsieur Le Clerc's Character of Mr. Lock's Method, with his Advice about the use of Common-Places', published as part of *A New Method of Making Common-Place-Books*, when Le Clerc observes that 'it would be to little Purpose to spend our Time in Reading of Books, if we could not apply what we read to our Use'.¹⁰¹

In *Memoirs*, Hamilton's satirisation of Bridgetina's regurgitative reading practices reveals her redeployment of Locke's ideas, which she adapts via a fictional medium, alongside the consumption metaphor, to show the importance of active reading. Bridgetina is consistently depicted learning passages by rote, which she then repeats in conversations with

⁹⁷ Dacome, 610.

⁹⁸ Dacome, 610. See Alan Richardson for a discussion of this theory as a 'contagious metaphor' in Romantic period educational discourses. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12.

⁹⁹ John Locke, 'Of the Conduct of the Understanding', in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. John William Adamson (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 612.

¹⁰⁰ De Ritter, 18.

¹⁰¹ Le Clerc, 'Monsieur Le Clerc's Character of Mr. Lock's Method, with his Advice about the Use of Common-Places', in *A New Method of Making Common-Place-Books*, by John Locke (London, 1706), ii.

other people, as opposed to thinking for herself or applying her judgment to arrive at an individualised perspective. At her own admission, she is ‘seldom wrong in a quotation’, and her repetition of others’ arguments amounts to little more than ‘well-conned conversation’, which, ‘though new to great part of the company, had been delivered in exactly the same words at least seventeen times before’.¹⁰² Bridgetina’s recycling of other people’s arguments represents a hindrance to her own mental cultivation by eliminating the need for her to engage her own understanding through such processes as ordering and arranging. This is in keeping with Locke’s suggestion that ‘the memory may be stored, but the judgement is little better, and the stock of knowledge not increased, by being able to repeat what others have said or produce the arguments we have found in them’.¹⁰³ It is also, of course, the major criticism of the salon guests in *Marriage*. In a similar vein to Ferrier’s quotation of *Henry V*, discussed earlier, Hamilton pointedly includes a citation from Robert Southey’s *Joan of Arc* (1796) as a chapter epigraph in *Memoirs*. In this citation, Southey refers to the ‘noisy emptiness of learned phrase’, in which the active reader can easily discern the implied worthlessness of rote learning.¹⁰⁴

As an additional means of drawing to readers’ attention the limitations of passive reading, Hamilton constructs a scene in which Harriet attempts to instil in Julia the importance of submitting all that she reads to ‘the close examination’ of her own judgment, contending that ‘of all insufferables, a pedant with a good memory is the most insufferable!’.¹⁰⁵ She plays specifically on the processes of mental cultivation discussed by Locke and Mason, referring to the uselessness of subjects that fill the mind ‘in such higgledy piggedly order’: ‘if of this noble store-house judgement does not keep the key, if she does not arrange, and assimilate, and combine the materials that are placed in it, I think it is a great loss to have it too tenacious’.¹⁰⁶ Hamilton’s use of ‘arrange’, ‘assimilate’, and ‘combine’ reinforces the centrality of these processes to mental cultivation, implicitly enabling her to present her own novel as a tool for improvement. By highlighting these fictional characters’ responses to each other’s reading habits, this scene functions intradiegetically to encourage readers to differentiate between Harriet’s careful, selective reading and Bridgetina’s repetitions. In keeping with the instructive thrust of Hamilton’s allusion to these mental

¹⁰² Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 68, 99, 45.

¹⁰³ Locke, ‘Of the Conduct of the Understanding’, 217.

¹⁰⁴ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 51.

¹⁰⁵ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 166.

¹⁰⁶ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 166.

processes, Harriet's warning about the perils of memorisation prompts Julia to make the following observation, in a rare moment of insight: 'I believe, as you say, that the capacity to retain, without the power to digest and combine, is of very little real advantage. But I have often observed that Miss Botherim's power of retention is always confined to one side of the subject. While she remembers with accuracy all she herself has said, she forgets every word advanced by her opponent in the debate'.¹⁰⁷ Here, the comic mockery of Bridgetina's self-absorption – made especially ironic since it is uttered by the quixotic Julia – is combined with serious reflection on reading practices, demonstrating how Hamilton's recourse to an earlier educational discourse operates in tandem with the consumption metaphor to impress on readers the importance of active reading.

Echoes of this recourse appear in novels by James Hogg and Walter Scott. As with the examples provided from Galt in the previous section, these echoes confirm the ubiquity of these mental processes in discourses on reading for improvement in the nineteenth-century Scottish novel. Their fleeting nature also substantiates the wider argument of this thesis that while these discourses are central to the female-authored novels under study, they appear only sporadically in the novels of their male contemporaries. In Hogg's *The Three Perils of Woman*, the heroine Gatty's father says to her: 'ye maun learn to think for yourself, for you canna' always have your mother and me to think and act for you. Ye maun to learn to calculate and weigh, not only your own actions, but your motives of action, as well as the actions and apparent motives of those with whom you have to deal'.¹⁰⁸ In this passage, Hogg picks up on the prevailing emphasis within educational discourses on ordering and arranging information by highlighting the need for characters to reflect on their own motivations and those of others. He thus echoes Bacon's recommendation to 'read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider'.¹⁰⁹ In *Guy Mannering*, meanwhile, Scott portrays Lucy Bertram as a judicious reader due to her ability to '[recall] and [arrange] the subjects of her former reading'.¹¹⁰ Lucy thus exemplifies the processes of mental cultivation that Locke and Mason identify as central to self-improvement, in a way that Bridgetina fails to do. Her example reflects the ubiquity of the processes that novelists want their readers to engage in, while its fleeting nature confirms

¹⁰⁷ Hamilton, *Memoirs*, 166.

¹⁰⁸ James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Woman*, ed. Anthony Hasler and Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 10.

¹⁰⁹ Bacon, 209.

¹¹⁰ Walter Scot, *Guy Mannering; or, The Astrologer*, ed. Peter D. Garside (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 157.

these processes as ones that are not of central importance to Scott in a way that they are to Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton.

In *Self-Control*, Brunton deploys the consumption metaphor to depict the reading habits of the villainous Colonel Hargrave (whose role within the novel's framework of improvement is discussed in detail in the next chapter). While it is popularly agreed that voracious reading was represented as a predominantly female problem, the examples from Locke, Rollin, and Watt show that the representation of reading as eating was not always associated with female readers, and Brunton's application of the consumption metaphor to a male character is in keeping with this discourse. As a boy, Hargrave stumbles on a copy of Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), 'which he devoured with great eagerness', in an unexpected '*turn for reading*'.¹¹¹ In keeping with the examples of children's education discussed earlier in this chapter, a conspicuous lack of parental input means that Hargrave's 'new appetite' never '[pined] for want of gratification'.¹¹² Readers learn that 'to direct it to food wholesome and invigorating, would have required unremitting though gentle labour: and to labour of all kinds Mrs Hargrave had a practical antipathy'.¹¹³ Needless to say, it was, 'very easy to supply the young man with romances, poetry, and plays'.¹¹⁴ Like Hamilton before her, Brunton clearly has recourse in these examples to the tradition established by Bacon, Locke, and Rollin of presenting reading material metaphorically as food. By distinguishing between the varying nutritional value of different reading materials, Brunton extends More's earlier cited portrayal of sermons as 'strong meat', implicitly playing on the idea of fiction as a less nutritious, less 'wholesome' genre. As a consequence of his greedy consumption of fiction, Hargrave fails to engage usefully with what he reads. This results in 'habits of mental inaction', through which Brunton is able carefully to draw out the inverse, implicit association of digestive reading with mental cultivation.

To emphasise the importance of critical engagement, Brunton's tone is clearly satirical when she writes of Hargrave's mother that 'it was pleasing to mistake' the 'intoxicating effect' that reading fiction has on Hargrave 'for bursts of mental vigour'.¹¹⁵ In this scene, Brunton plays on the stereotype that unreflecting overconsumption of fiction is mentally corrosive, but she also subverts it to show that the fault is not with the text but rather

¹¹¹ Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, ed. Anthony Mandal (Routledge, 2016), 36. Brunton's italics.

¹¹² Brunton, *Self-Control*, 36.

¹¹³ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 36.

¹¹⁴ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 36.

¹¹⁵ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 36.

with the reader. An important part of Mrs Hargrave's folly is that while, as the passage above demonstrates, she is aware that different genres are perceived as being more 'wholesome' than others, she is ultimately too lazy to address the most important variable in a reader's relationship with a text, which is the approach to reading that that reader adopts. The consumption metaphor thus enables Brunton to reiterate the importance of engaging individual judgment, inviting readers to recognise Hargrave and his mother's folly, and to adapt their own reading habits through critical self-reflection via the model of distanced reading that Chapter One sets up.

In *Waverley*, Scott applies the consumption metaphor to the eponymous hero Edward Waverley, who represents a more famous example of a feminised male reader – or, as Duncan puts it, 'a young man who starts off as a female quixote'.¹¹⁶ Tellingly, Waverley lacks, like Hargrave, Bridgetina, and all the other bad readers studied in this thesis, any 'habits of firm and incumbent application, of gaining the art of controlling, directing, and concentrating the power of his own mind for earnest investigation – an art far more essential than even that learning which is the primary object of study'.¹¹⁷ Here, Scott echoes Brunton's assertion that it is not so much what one reads as how one reads that is the problem, although it is of course not a coincidence that Waverley's lack of mental cultivation is revealed through his reading habits. As a consequence of his lacking critical engagement, Waverley drives 'through the sea of books, like a vessel without a pilot or a rudder', in which the importance of exercising independent thought and judgment (said 'pilot' or 'rudder') to control one's reading is clear. Scott then deploys the consumption metaphor to emphasise Waverley's ostensible incapacity for critical engagement: 'Edward [...] like the epicure who only deigned to take a single morsel from the sunny side of a peach, read no volume a moment after it ceased to excite his curiosity or interest'.¹¹⁸ The unreflecting speed with which Waverley moves between volumes highlights the danger of not allowing enough time to follow Rollin's suggestion and convert what we have read into useful knowledge and a digested understanding. This passage also perpetuates Chapone's warning that 'one well digested book' will improve the mind much more than 'many volumes hastily devoured' – or, as is the case of Waverley, briefly bitten into and then discarded. Although less sustained

¹¹⁶ Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 13.

¹¹⁷ Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Peter D. Garside (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 13.

¹¹⁸ Scott, *Waverley*, 14.

than Hamilton's, Scott's deployment of the consumption metaphor demonstrates the way in which Scottish novelists of the early nineteenth century call on longstanding educational discourses in order to differentiate between improving and corrupting approaches to reading. This has the effect of creating a focus on the importance of active reading that is predominant in the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, but complemented by examples from the novels of Galt, Hogg, and Scott, attesting to its status as a wider novelistic concern during the period under study.

De Ritter notes how 'eighteenth-century theorists of reading' feared that readers 'would fail to undertake the labour of active thought as they read'.¹¹⁹ As the examples discussed in this chapter reveal, however, it is precisely this fear that provides the catalyst for the novelists under study to promote active reading practices, in which critical engagement with reading material is a prerequisite and the novel itself functions to support readerly self-improvement. By taking advantage of readers' familiarity with metaphors that liken reading and education to horticultural growth and eating, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton forcefully expound on the importance of mental cultivation to both the education and application stages of true improvement. Their satirical and creative recourse to these metaphors emphasises, moreover, the mental processes that they encourage their readers to enter into, enabling the act of novel reading, if executed correctly, to provide a catalyst for reformatory mental labour. Like the antinovel and national stereotypes discussed in the previous two chapters, metaphors of consumption and cultivation represent an important way through which Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton harness the novel's generic porosity to instructive ends, writing back against the antinovel discourse that was perpetuated by figures such as Fordyce, in a satirical and often humorous way, to such a degree that enables them to refashion the novel as a tool for self-improvement.

¹¹⁹ De Ritter, 19.

Chapter Four: Journeys of True Improvement

Christian principles, virtuous habits, and an independent mind will ever preserve even the poor from becoming burdensome to others.¹

Mary had seen, in Mrs Douglas, the effects of a highly-cultivated understanding shedding its mild radiance on the path of domestic life, heightening its charms, and softening its asperities, with the benign spirit of Christianity.²

In Mary Brunton's *Self-Control*, the heroine Laura Montreville tasks her admirer, the libertine Colonel Hargrave, with the challenge of reforming his immoral behaviour and demonstrating 'proofs of real improvement' before she will consider marrying him.³ If no 'real improvement' can be evidenced by the end of 'the stipulated time' of two years, Laura resolves that she will, 'whatever it might cost her, see [Hargrave] no more'.⁴ This moment takes place towards the end of the novel's first volume, after Hargrave has attempted to seduce Laura without marrying her, prompting 'a look of mingled horror, dismay, and anguish' – 'she saw her pure, her magnanimous Hargrave – the god of her idolatry, degraded to a sensualist – a seducer'.⁵ It is a pivotal scene in terms of plot, establishing a clear trajectory for their tumultuous relationship throughout the remaining two volumes. It also explicitly identifies 'real improvement' – or true improvement – as a central theme in Brunton's novel, raising the question of what exactly is meant by this term and how it can be defined.

In Chapter Two, I argued that national stereotypes are deployed in the novels of Brunton, Susan Ferrier, and Elizabeth Hamilton as a means of introducing readers to the concepts of true and false improvement. Having analysed the process of false improvement in detail, I concluded that true improvement ultimately transcends the dictatorial remit of these stereotypes, relying instead on individuals (be they characters in a novel or actual readers)

¹ Susan Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, with an Introduction by Ronnie Young (Kennedy & Boyd, 2009), 214.

² Susan Ferrier, *Marriage*, ed. Dorothy McMillan (ASLS, 2020), 380.

³ Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, ed. Anthony Mandal (Routledge, 2016), 140.

⁴ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 140.

⁵ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 11.

cultivating moral values, or ‘Christian principles’ and ‘virtuous habits’, and then applying these principles and habits to the situations they encounter in life. In keeping with the first epigraph above, this process of application highlights the importance of individuals deploying their own judgement to cultivate an ‘independent mind’, which Chapter Three analysed in detail. This chapter continues the analysis of true improvement that Chapter Three begins. In keeping with the definition provided in this thesis’ Introduction, it presents true improvement as a gradual process during which an individual learns to reflect on and adapt their behaviour in order to fulfil their social, moral, and religious duties. If successful, these individuals provide an unwavering, morally superior marker against which to compare the misguided morals of the characters who display false improvement. The process of true improvement comprises two stages, which I examine in depth here, through plot and characterisation. The first is education, which everyone must complete as part of their journey of improvement, and which, as Brunton astutely puts it in *Discipline* ‘[signifies] learning what is afterwards to be useful’.⁶ Accordingly, characters then proceed to the second stage, application, through which the idea of self-improvement as an ongoing process becomes especially apparent. As the examples in this chapter demonstrate, having cultivated the right principles through their education, it is then up to individuals to keep up the good work by applying these principles to the situations in which they find themselves. While journeys of improvement are often punctuated by formative moments that help to shape an individual’s progress (an interaction with another character, for example, or a period of self-reflection), there is no endpoint to the application stage. Just because a character is already improved does not mean that they should stop doing the things that enabled them to reach that point in the first place. Rather, it means that they have identified and understood the principles and habits that will allow them to maintain a morally virtuous existence, and which they must continue to act on and practise without ceasing.

In this chapter, I argue that the process of true improvement is most effectively revealed to readers by Brunton, Ferrier, and to a slightly more peripheral extent, Hamilton, through representations of moral and religious growth. Reflecting on the pressure for female novelists to evince a ‘moral tenor’ in their fiction, Ann H. Jones notes that “‘moral” did not necessarily mean religious’.⁷ In doing so, she touches on an important caveat for this chapter. Moral and religious improvement are not the same, but they do overlap, and within the novels

⁶ Mary Brunton, *Discipline*, ed. Olivia Murphy (Routledge, 2018), 178.

⁷ Ann H. Jones, *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen’s Age* (AMS Press, 1986), 12, 13.

under study and in critical responses to them they are often presented synonymously – even interdependently.⁸ Moral improvement is frequently measured according to a character's religious sensibilities, while religious improvement is often facilitated through characters reflecting on the morality of their conduct. For this reason, moral and religious improvement are also conflated in my reading of them in this chapter. Tensions surrounding this conflation are not, however, unique to these novels, and instead reflect earlier debates. During the late eighteenth century, for example, the version of moral improvement advocated by some Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, most notably David Hume, was criticised by their contemporaries for being too secular.⁹ As Thomas Ahnert shows, this was due to a 'change of emphasis in much of eighteenth-century thought from theological doctrine to moral conduct as the true measure of religious belief'.¹⁰ Thus, increasingly, 'a sincerely pious person was distinguished not by the precise creeds he or she professed, but by practical acts of virtue and a good character'.¹¹ We see this transition reflected in the novels under study through their emphasis on the application of religious principle through moral acts. As Ahnert also highlights, however, 'there were very few Scots thinkers whose ideas could be regarded as irreligious or atheistic', rendering a degree of coalescence between morality and religion inevitable.¹² In this chapter, a further tension develops between novelistic representations of improvement as a gradual process and the contrast that this provides against certain types of evangelical discourse, namely Methodism, in which religious improvement – or 'conversion' – manifests in 'ecstatic terms', comprising a sudden transformation.¹³ By emphasising the importance of labour, as opposed to salvation by faith alone, this thesis' definition of

⁸ See Teri Doerksen, 'A National Bildungsroman: Didacticism and National Identity in Mary Brunton's *Discipline* and Susan Edmonstone Ferrier's *Marriage*', in *Didactic Novels and British Women's Writing, 1790–1820*, ed. Hilary Havens (Routledge, 2017), 184, 186; Ainsley McIntosh, 'Domestic Fiction', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 53; Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (Pandora, 1986), 325.

⁹ See John Charles Addison Askin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion* (Macmillan, 1988); Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise, Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805* (Yale University Press, 2015), 2.

¹¹ Ahnert, 2. Ahnert counts Hugh Blair, William Robertson, and Thomas Reid, among others who 'reduced the importance of doctrine in favour of an emphasis on conduct', 5.

¹² Ahnert, 1. See Alexander Broadie, *A History of Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 192–93, on the challenge of classifying Hume's religious stance.

¹³ Lisa Wood, 'The Evangelical Novel', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. James Alan Downie (Oxford University Press, 2013), 523.

improvement rejects epiphanic religious improvement in favour of a more measured, Presbyterian process that unites faith with the implementation of moral principle.

Criticism to date has typically commented on these novelists' treatment of religion and morality during attempts to categorise the types of novel that they have written. In these discussions, too, a degree of overlap is necessarily present. While scholars including Anthony Mandal have identified Brunton's works as clear examples of evangelical novels, Ainsley McIntosh and Ian Duncan include Brunton under the umbrella of domestic fiction, alongside Ferrier and Hamilton.¹⁴ The next section of this chapter discusses the distinction between evangelical novels and domestic fiction in more depth, but suffice it for now to say that, in both, emphasis is placed on the moral and spiritual progress of fictional characters, with the idea being that, through witnessing first-hand the behaviour that they should emulate, readers' moral principles will in turn improve. Beginning from this premise, this chapter expands extant criticism by moving the discussion about moral and religious improvement away from distinguishing between novelistic subgenres and towards considering its role in defining self-improvement as an inherently iterative process.

Before moving on to discuss the growing conceptualisation of the novel as a vehicle for moral improvement, I would like to revisit the relation of money to the differences between true and false improvement (alluded to in the first epigraph, and discussed in Chapter Two), since analysing how a character chooses to spend their money often helps to distinguish between them. As Chapter Two demonstrates, false improvement often manifests in an individual's desire to appear more fashionable than they actually are. Ascending the social ranks is perceived as a form of improvement by many superficial individuals within the novels under study – to become more fashionable is to better oneself. In reality, however, this desire has a deleterious effect on the individual's behaviour by causing them to fall victim to the vices associated with fashionable society, including affectation and extravagance. The effects of false improvement are often, though not always, traceable in excessive displays of personal wealth. These displays ostensibly benefit the individual in question by enabling them to appear materially wealthy in front of others (although truly improved characters see through this, of course), but invariably they do not benefit other people. Thus, false improvement is characterised by fundamentally selfish behaviour. The examples of estate improvements discussed in Chapter Two emphasise the relationship between money and

¹⁴ See Anthony Mandal, introduction to *Self-Control* (1811) by Mary Brunton, ed. Anthony Mandal (Routledge, 2016), xx; McIntosh, 56; Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 34.

improvement: while some improvements comprise self-serving displays of individual prosperity (such as Gertrude's in *The Inheritance*), others depict a prosperous individual spending money on changes that will primarily benefit the poor (such as Mr Maitland in *Discipline*). True improvement is associated with this second category, which comprises benevolent acts of charity that are perceived by improved characters as a requisite part of their religious and moral duty.¹⁵ This is not to say that true improvement is associated with having no money at all, or that having money is an inherently bad thing, or indeed that all characters associated with false improvement are invariably wealthy. Rather, within the novels under consideration, analysis of a character's approach to money often reveals the principles by which they are driven, enabling us to differentiate true from false improvement.¹⁶ Benjamine Toussaint touches on this briefly when she writes that: 'Alicia Douglas's insistence [in *Marriage*] on the fact that the beauty of the place is a reflection of the moral improvement of the local population and not something that could be purchased with money suggests that it is actually possible to escape the taint of commercialism'.¹⁷ Often, too, characters who demonstrate true improvement do so after having lost the large fortune into which they were born. As McIntosh notes, Ellen Percy, the wealthy heroine of *Discipline* 'has no real concept of either economic or moral worth until she encounters misfortune' when her father dies and she is left penniless.¹⁸ How individuals adapt in order to uphold virtuous principles in spite of financial adversity therefore represents an additional way through which representations of money (or lack thereof) nuance the framework of improvement at work in these novels.

¹⁵ As Karen O'Brien notes, a similar emphasis on benevolence can be traced back to the Bluestockings of the mid-eighteenth century and their belief that benevolence was 'the main business of a virtuous, socially purposeful life', strengthening the 'moral agency of women'. *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 38–39. Recent studies of Wollstonecraft have also emphasised the association of benevolence with moral independence, including Laura Kirkley, 'Pedagogy as (Cosmo)Politics: Cultivating Benevolence in Mary Wollstonecraft's Educational Work', in *Women's Literary Education, c.1690–1850*, ed. Louise Joy and Jessica Lim (Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

¹⁶ For more on attitudes to money in these novels, see Sarah W. R. Smith, 'Men, Women, and Money: The Case of Mary Brunton', in *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670–1815*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Ohio University Press, 1987), 49; Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell, 'The Other Great Unknowns: Women Fiction Writers of the Early Nineteenth Century', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 186.

¹⁷ 'Untrammelled by Theory: Susan Ferrier's Polyphonic Vision of Scotland and the Union in *Marriage*', *Scottish Literary Review* 8, no. 1 (2016): 42.

¹⁸ McIntosh, 54.

The first epigraph to this chapter, taken from *The Inheritance*, illustrates this point particularly well. In this scene, the (ostensible) mother of the novel's heroine, Gertrude St Clair, is in conversation with her sister, Miss Black, and their sister-in-law, Mrs Black. By suggesting that 'Christian principles, virtuous habits, and an independent mind' are ultimately of greater value to an individual than financial wealth, Miss Black draws to readers' attention the core principles of true improvement.¹⁹ She also highlights the precarity of false improvement, warning that 'wealth itself may, and often has proved insufficient to save the vain, the selfish, and the extravagant', emphasising the danger of replacing values associated with true improvement with false ones, such as material wealth.²⁰ Mrs St Clair's subsequent declaration that 'poverty is the most intolerable evil in life, and has, I am convinced, the most demoralising influence upon society' associates her, in contrast to her pious sister, with the values of false improvement.²¹ Ferrier employs characteristically satirical irony to suggest that Mrs St Clair's obsession with money and her need to appear wealthy in front of others is precisely what has this 'demoralising effect upon society' and not, as she perceives it, the financial poverty of those around her. This point is substantiated in Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* by Mrs Mason, who suggests that 'all that is most truly valuable is given in common, and placed within the reach of the poor and lowly', reinforcing the association between true improvement and moral and religious human principles.²² The same association is reiterated later in *Cottagers*, when inexpensive furniture is carefully restored by some of the novel's more virtuous villagers to ensure Mrs Mason is comfortable in her new lodgings: 'labour and attention' render the furniture, which is 'not nearly so costly' as other furniture, 'in all respects superior'.²³ Once again, the restorative application of benevolence and utility is depicted as more important than monetary value, reflecting the role played by financial wealth in nuancing discourses of improvement in these novels.

The second epigraph to this chapter identifies mentorship as another key component of the process of true improvement, characterising the dynamic between Mary and Mrs Douglas. Readers of *Marriage* learn how Mrs Douglas 'gave a large portion of her time, her thoughts, her fortune, to the most sacred of all duties – charity in its most comprehensive meaning', which is presented as a religious and moral duty belonging 'to her sex and

¹⁹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 214.

²⁰ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 214.

²¹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 214.

²² Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, ed. Pam Perkins (ASLS, 2010), 129.

²³ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 193.

station'.²⁴ Under her aunt's mentorship, Mary learns to act on the principles of Christian duty and benevolence, reiterating care for and usefulness to others as key criteria for true improvement.²⁵ The centrality of mentorship to true improvement also emphasises the iterative nature of improvement as a process. Characters are nearly always presented as having received their education under the mentorship of another. By imparting the knowledge and principles that they themselves had to learn, mentors simultaneously enact their own process of application. Once their education is complete, mentees can then become mentors (as is the case with Mary), and so the cycle of application continues. In this way, mentoring relationships reveal the inherently social nature of improvement, whereby we are reliant on our interactions with other people in order to learn and subsequently act on moral principles.

This chapter has three sections. The first contextualises late-eighteenth-century discourses surrounding the novel as a vehicle for moral growth, which I contend Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton expand in their theorisation about improvement. Section two analyses examples of characters who successfully undergo, and therefore help to characterise, the ongoing process of true improvement. Finally, section three considers examples of characters who are encouraged by others to undergo the process of improvement but who ultimately fail to do so. This failure arises when a character is unwilling to put the effort in to work on themselves or believes that improvement is something they can either pretend to do or that will happen immediately following a single, virtuous (trans)action. These examples therefore serve to reiterate to readers that true improvement requires time and work.

'The excellence of this book [...] consists not so much in the story as in the sentiments'

The citation above comes from a review of *Self-Control*, published in the *Monthly Review* in 1811. In this review, the reviewer describes the novel's sentiments approvingly as ones that, 'though perhaps too enthusiastic, are such as must improve everyone who will attend to

²⁴ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 380.

²⁵ Mentor figures such as Mrs Douglas signal an evolution from earlier examples, including the 'Mentor' character in François Fénelon's 1699 novel, *Les Aventures de Télémaque, Fils d'Ulysse* (*The Adventures of Telemachus, son of Ulysses*), or the eponymous, and unimaginatively named, 'Mentoria' in Ann Murry's 1778 *Mentoria; or the Young Ladies Instructor*. In the novels studied here, mentor characters have their own names, and readers must derive their value for themselves, as opposed simply to being told who the mentor characters are. This move away from explicitly sign-posted roles reinforces Chapter One's argument that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton employ increasingly implicit strategies to promote self-improvement via greater readerly engagement.

them’.²⁶ The reviewer goes on to praise in particular the novel’s heroine, positing that the ‘plain unaffected way’ in which ‘the examples of [Laura’s] self-denial are told’ makes these examples ‘more useful to unwary readers, who take up the book merely for amusement, and who may be beguiled into an amelioration of their morals’.²⁷ By explicitly recognising the potential of *Self-Control* to improve its readers’ morals, the review acknowledges a growing emphasis on the novel as a vehicle for moral and spiritual improvement.

This emphasis develops out of eighteenth-century attitudes towards the novel. As Lauren Kopajtic notes, ‘much has been claimed on behalf of the novel and its ability to develop the moral capacities of readers, whether their empathy with people from different cultures, their awareness of other conditions of life, or their imagination of other possibilities for action’.²⁸ In his study of education during the Romantic period, Alan Richardson reflects on the impetus behind these claims, observing that, by the end of the eighteenth century, ‘it was widely felt that the novel had either to be banned altogether or refashioned into a vehicle for disseminating principle’.²⁹ Reflecting in turn on the antinovel discourse that the Introduction to this thesis discusses in detail, Gary Kelly notes that ‘condemning novels for their corrupting effects on the minds and morals of their readers, and then the linking of this effect to dire social consequences, were the usual grounds of attack on novels in the late eighteenth century’.³⁰ These grounds then provided the backdrop for the ultimatum-like situation that Richardson describes. The move towards actively refashioning the novel into a vehicle for social improvement is reflected in the fact that a lot of female authors, including Hannah More and Jane West, who condemned the novel as frivolous and corruptive in their conduct books (discussed in Chapter Three), also published novels that were explicitly designed to ameliorate these stereotypes and imbue their (typically female) readers with virtuous habits and principles, as established in this thesis’ Introduction.³¹

²⁶ ‘Art. 23. *Self Control*’, *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* 55 (08, 1811): 435, ProQuest.

²⁷ ‘Art. 23. *Self Control*’, *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 435.

²⁸ Lauren Kopajtic, “‘Now, how were his sentiments to be read?’: Imagination and Discernment in Austen’s *Persuasion*”, *Philosophy and Literature* 46, no. 2 (2022): 280, doi:10.1353/phl.2022.0020.

²⁹ Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 186.

³⁰ Gary Kelly, “‘This Pestiferous Reading’: The Social Basis of Reaction Against the Novel in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain”, *Man and Nature / L’Homme et la nature* 4 (1985): 186, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1011845ar>.

³¹ See More’s *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1808) and West’s *A Gossip’s Story* (1796).

In addition to this refashioning of the novel, there was, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a growing consensus that ‘fiction and moral theology served the same ends’.³² This idea is apparent in, for example, Brian Young’s suggestion that the ‘interpenetration of the fictional and the religious informed much literary engagement in this period’ and that, as a consequence of this, ‘it is often difficult to make any ready separation between the world of fiction and that of theological books’.³³ Andrew Monnickendam supports this point, positing that Brunton is ‘a writer whose fiction is dominated by a deep religiosity’ and that this ‘is self-evident from the titles of her two novels which seem more appropriate for sermons than fiction’.³⁴ There was, moreover, a burgeoning suspicion that novels might actually do a better job of encouraging spiritual growth among readers than sermons and other religious writings. In the preface to his 1773 novel *The Spiritual Quixote*, the clergyman Richard Graves wrote, under the guise of the work’s ‘Editor’: ‘I am convinced that *Don Quixote* or *Gil Blas*, *Clarissa* or *Sir Charles Grandison*, will furnish more hints for correcting the follies and regulating the morals of young persons, and impress them more forcibly on their minds, than volumes of severe precepts seriously delivered and dogmatically enforced’.³⁵ Here, Graves suggests, as Norma Clarke has since observed, that theology, when ‘seriously delivered’, was ‘less effective than fiction in delivering “hints for correcting the morals of young persons”’.³⁶ These hints, Clarke writes, ‘were preferable to dogmatic enforcements, a view which fiction – especially [Samuel Richardson’s] *Clarissa*, in which a moral young woman is destroyed by an immoral young man because of the dogmatic enforcement of parental precept – had helped bring about’.³⁷ This, then, was the literary context out of which the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton all developed.

Brunton’s first two novels are definitive examples of evangelical novels, which emerged, to a large extent, out of the ‘interpenetration of the fictional and the religious’ that Young identifies. As a genre, the evangelical novel peaked in Britain, in terms both of

³² Norma Clarke, ‘Bluestocking Fictions: Devotional Writings, Didactic Literature and the Imperative of Female Improvement’, in *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 462.

³³ Brian Young, ‘Theological Books from The Naked Gospel to Nemesis of Faith’, *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. Isabel Rivers (Continuum, 2001), 84.

³⁴ Andrew Monnickendam, *The Novels of Walter Scott and his Literary Relations: Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier and Christian Johnstone* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 25.

³⁵ Graves, Richard. *The Spiritual Quixote* (London, 1773), vi, ProQuest.

³⁶ Clarke, 462.

³⁷ Clarke, 462.

production and popularity, during the opening decades of the nineteenth century. As Mandal notes, it has since been conceived of by critics as ‘an outgrowth of the wider evangelical revival that was taking place in British society in the last third of the eighteenth century’, with examples including More’s *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), Henry Kett’s *Emily, A Moral Tale* (1809–11), Harriet Corp’s *A Sequel to The Antidote to the Miseries of Human Life* (1809), and Barbara Hofland’s *The Blind Farmer and His Children* (1816).³⁸ As David Bebbington writes, the ‘Evangelical religion is a popular Protestant movement that has existed in Britain since the 1730s’, characterised in particular by ‘vigorous attempts to spread the faith’ and a belief that ‘all spiritual truth is to be found in [the Bible’s] pages’.³⁹ One such vigorous attempt manifests in the rise of the evangelical novel, reinforcing its conceptualisation as a vehicle for moral improvement, while remaining true to the religion’s focus on the value of the book that Bebbington highlights. As Olivia Murphy notes, while many evangelicals were suspicious of fiction and of the novel as a form, some ‘saw the potential for fiction to reach a wide audience and function as a tool for conversion’.⁴⁰ Mandal supports this, positing that the evangelical novel ‘became a powerful tool in effecting the evangelicals’ mission to improve the moral condition of the nation’.⁴¹ By presenting readers with examples of characters who display morally virtuous behaviour (such as Laura or Mrs Douglas), or who undergo a process of spiritual transformation or renewal (such as Gertrude or Ellen, as the next section shows), authors like Brunton sought to improve the morals of their readers. They also, in doing so, helped to ameliorate contemporary negative stereotypes pertaining to the novel genre. In this way, as Mandal notes, the novel itself was perceived as ‘a meaningful, effective tool for social improvement’ and fiction became ‘a less “pernicious” genre after all’.⁴²

Mandal continues, suggesting that ‘the essential message of Brunton’s novel is that regulation of the self leads to an understanding of one’s place in the Christian world, and therefore personal and social improvement’.⁴³ Lisa Wood elaborates further upon this focus

³⁸ Mandal, introduction to *Self-Control*, xix.

³⁹ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 1989), 1, 3, 12. For a breakdown of ‘the four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion’, see in particular 2–17.

⁴⁰ Olivia Murphy, introduction to *Discipline* (1814), by Mary Brunton, ed. Olivia Murphy (Routledge, 2018), 5.

⁴¹ Anthony Mandal, ‘Evangelical Fiction’, in *English and British Fiction: 1750–1820*, ed. Peter Garside and Karen O’Brien (Oxford University Press, 2015), 255.

⁴² Mandal, introduction to *Self-Control*, xxi; Mandal, ‘Evangelical Fiction’, 272.

⁴³ Mandal, introduction to *Self-Control*, xxi.

on the individual self, explaining that ‘evangelicalism uses individual feeling and experience as a method for conversion; the novel takes individual experience as its main subject’.⁴⁴ This emphasis on conversion, she contends, ‘requires intense inward attention to the individual’s spiritual development, an almost obsessive daily accounting that is referred to as “self-examination” or “self-discipline”’, as the example of Laura, who is intensely self-scrutinising from an early age, proves.⁴⁵ This thinking was not unique to the evangelical novel and rather draws on a combination of eighteenth-century sources. One might consult, for example, the *Bluestockings* during the mid-eighteenth century, for whom, as Betty A. Schellenberg has observed, ‘the ideal use of the fictional imagination is to elaborate moral and social improvements which may in turn induce further imaginative activity’.⁴⁶ Thus we can perceive the ways in which the model of introspective self-improvement via active reading that these novels espouse built on and expanded ideas explored within eighteenth-century religious and educational discourses.

Domestic fiction of the kind written by Ferrier and Hamilton shared many of the didactic elements contained within the evangelical novel, ‘but in a muted way, representing a more diffuse shift towards a polite moral tone’.⁴⁷ Mandal writes that the moral-domestic novel ‘displays similar concerns with the heroine’s spiritual and moral state, but with less of a categorical focus on religion, concentrating more on appropriate codes of behaviour within the domestic sphere’.⁴⁸ These novels were typically written by female authors ‘coming from two opposite directions: the older type of domestic (often Anti-Jacobin) writer and a newer kind of novelist, motivated by the evangelical phenomenon, if not really a part of it’.⁴⁹ Hamilton fits well into the first category, while Ferrier represents an example of a slightly later novelist whose works have been treated, as Lorraine Fletcher notes, ‘primarily as novels about courtship, marriage, and female education’.⁵⁰ Despite writing different subcategories of novels, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton all employ moral and religious progress as a means

⁴⁴ Wood, 521–22.

⁴⁵ Wood, 522–23.

⁴⁶ Betty A. Schellenberg, ‘Bluestocking Women and Rational Female Fiction’, in *English and British Fiction: 1750–1820*, ed. Peter Garside and Karen O’Brien (Oxford University Press, 2015), 151.

⁴⁷ Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 95.

⁴⁸ Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, 95.

⁴⁹ Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, 95.

⁵⁰ Lorraine Fletcher, ‘Great Expectations: Rank and Inheritance in the Novels of Susan Ferrier’, *Scottish Literary Journal* 16, no. 2 (1989): 60, ProQuest.

through which to present true improvement as an ongoing process characterised by self-reflection, duty, and benevolence. Their self-conscious engagement with self-improvement foreshadows its thematic centrality to the Victorian period, emphasising the period under study as a pivotal one for the novel's generic development in ways that the Conclusion to this thesis discusses in more detail.

'Laboriously the good ground is prepared'

Gerard Lee McKeever writes that 'structurally, the idea of improvement depends on what has been improved or left behind', contending that 'if improvement thus functions dialectically it can also be construed in dialogic terms, with improvement and the unimproved conjoined in an unavoidable symbiosis or symmetry'.⁵¹ The examples discussed in this next section support this idea, revealing that the process of true improvement generally takes place in these novels after a character has acted immorally, thereby encouraging readers to pay attention to the differences between a character's unimproved and subsequently improved behaviour, enabling us to comprehend what real improvement comprises.

One of the most effective cases of true improvement in action is exemplified by Gertrude in *The Inheritance*, who illustrates my argument that the process of true improvement is one characterised by moral and religious growth, taking place after a period of immoral decision-making. Her example also reiterates the pertinence of money and expenditure to representations of improvement within these novels. As Chapter Two demonstrates, the corrupting influence that fashionable society has on Gertrude and her morals is evidenced to readers by her prioritisation of extravagance over utility, as she ensures that all the initial changes made to the Rossville estate are ones that display her wealth and fashionable taste, and which benefit her and her fashionable friends alone, as opposed to useful improvements designed to benefit her tenants. Readers learn that, having spent time in England's fashionable circles, Gertrude's mind 'was now averse to exert itself upon anything that did not bring some semblance of pleasure along with it; and it was not so much the want of leisure, as the utter inability to employ what she had to *any useful purpose* that thus bereft her of all self-command and power of action'.⁵² The improvements that Gertrude makes to her estate are, thus, symptomatic of false improvement, as she falls victim

⁵¹ Gerard Lee McKeever, *Dialectics of Improvement: Scottish Romanticism, 1786–1831* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 4.

⁵² Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 408. My italics.

to affectation and luxury, which in turn contorts her perception of duty and benevolence. Gertrude's transition from spending money in this selfish way to spending money in order to support, and finally to take responsibility for, others marks her real improvement in the later stages of the novel.

As touched on in Chapter Two, Gertrude is mentored by Edward Lyndsay, who is presented consistently as an example of moral and religious virtue. In contrast to Colonel Delmour, Gertrude's suitor during the earlier stages of the novel, Lyndsay prioritises 'moral [...] beauty' and religious duty above all else.⁵³ Delmour, meanwhile, is motivated exclusively by material beauty, social status, and a desire to appear wealthy in 'the eyes of the world [*sic*]'.⁵⁴ To emphasise the difference between the two, Ferrier depicts Delmour drawing a caricature of Lyndsay, in which the latter is pictured 'with a large Bible under his arm'.⁵⁵ In an attempt to make Gertrude realise the error of her ways, Lyndsay pointedly reveals to her that he has 'learned to distinguish real from artificial happiness', in which 'artificial happiness' pertains to the affected, money-centric version of happiness that victims of false improvement aspire towards, as opposed to the 'real' happiness that arises from true improvement – in other words, being useful to others and fulfilling one's moral and religious duties.⁵⁶ It is therefore fitting that Lyndsay makes this comment while attempting to redirect Gertrude's attention towards her own responsibility to her tenants as the Countess of Rossville. 'Broken promises and power misused', he laments, 'ah! Gertrude, what can make up for these?', in which 'power misused' emphasises in particular the centrality of duty to discourses of true improvement in Ferrier's novel, which readers are encouraged to note through Gertrude's mistakes.⁵⁷

Shortly after meeting her for the first time, Lyndsay identifies in Gertrude some of the factors that result in her susceptibility to false improvement, while reiterating the importance of duty. Readers learn, for example, how:

Firm in his own religious principles, [Lyndsay] vainly sought in Gertrude for any corresponding sentiments. Gertrude was religious – what mind of any excellence is not? But hers was the religion of poetry, of taste, of feeling, of impulse, of any and

⁵³ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 44.

⁵⁴ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 88.

⁵⁵ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 31.

⁵⁶ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 413.

⁵⁷ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 415.

everything but Christianity. He saw much of fine and natural feeling; but in vain sought for any guiding principle of duty. Her mind seemed as a lovely, flowery, pathless waste, whose sweets exhaled in vain; all was graceful luxuriance, but all was transient and perishable in its loveliness. No plant of immortal growth grew there, no ‘flowers worthy of Paradise’.⁵⁸

In this passage, Gertrude’s lack of religious understanding reiterates the centrality of Christian values to true improvement. At this point in the novel, Gertrude has not yet received the right sort of education, and she therefore succumbs to social affectation because she has not yet been taught to apply these values through being, for example, responsible for others. This point is reiterated when readers later learn that ‘true Christian piety’ was ‘a species of virtue that Gertrude felt no inclination to imitate; all her ideas of virtue were those of imagination’.⁵⁹ This much is implied, of course, in the passage cited above when readers learn that no ‘plant of immortal growth’ or “‘flowers worthy of Paradise’” grew within Gertrude’s mind, emphasising her lack of religious conscience – a point that is stressed earlier in the novel, when the narrator observes of Gertrude that ‘no deeper principle was felt or understood’.⁶⁰ By reflecting on Gertrude’s unimproved state in these examples, Ferrier’s incorporation of imagery surrounding growth and cultivation (discussed in Chapter Three) emphasise the sense of process that is intrinsic to true improvement and the importance of learning to act according to duty in order that religious principle can take root and flourish.

Alongside this absence of religious principle and duty, Lyndsay identifies Gertrude’s lack of emotional regulation as a contributing factor towards her susceptibility to false improvement. Describing Gertrude as ‘ardent, enthusiastic, and susceptible, but rash, visionary, and unregulated’, Lyndsay ‘feared she was in bad hands, even in her mother’s; but he dreaded still more lest Colonel Delmour should succeed in gaining her affections’.⁶¹ These lines foreshadow how, through her inability to govern her own emotions and judge the suitability of others’ ‘habits and principles’, Gertrude allows herself injudiciously to trust in the wrong mentor figure.⁶² While unregulated emotions are typically presented as precursors

⁵⁸ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 174–75. ‘Flowers worthy of Paradise’ is a reference to Book IV of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, ed. Philip Pullman (Oxford University Press, 2005), 223–42.

⁵⁹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 200.

⁶⁰ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 9.

⁶¹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 175.

⁶² Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 175.

to false improvement, regulated emotions comprise a criterion for and product of true improvement, enabling characters to reflect carefully on, and so fulfil, their Christian duty.

Emotional regulation as a marker of spiritual growth is an idea that recurs elsewhere within the novels under study in this thesis, supporting Katie Halsey's and Jennifer Robertson's suggestion that 'the necessity for emotional self-regulation became, in fact, one area in which women writers, whatever their political affiliation, could agree'.⁶³ In the preface to *Self-Control*, Brunton succinctly identifies the 'regulation of the passions' as 'the triumph of RELIGION', cementing the association of carefully moderated emotion with religious progress.⁶⁴ In Ferrier's *Destiny; or, the Chief's Daughter*, the heroine Edith Malcolm is described initially as having 'religious feeling, but [...] not religious principle; and thus, what might have been the medicine to check and mitigate the fever of her heart, had served rather as the ailment to feed and pamper its sickly sensibilities'.⁶⁵ In these lines, 'religious principle' represents the primary means through which characters such as Edith learn the value of regulating their own emotions in order to avoid the danger of surrendering to unchecked passion. Through its implicit reference to passion as the 'fever of the heart', this passage also broaches the issue of 'enthusiasm', which was perceived within certain religious circles as the dangerous product of a lack of regulation, indicating 'a religious feeling that almost bordered on the sexual'.⁶⁶ In his study of enthusiasm and regulation in the Romantic period, Jon Mee observes that 'if through Methodism and the Evangelical movements, for instance, affect came to play an increasing role in eighteenth-century religion, that role was carefully invigilated to make sure that it did not degenerate into enthusiasm', highlighting the distaste with which enthusiasm was viewed as a 'species of false religion'.⁶⁷ By alluding in this way to religious discourses with which readers of her novels would likely have been familiar, Ferrier warns readers against losing control of their emotions, encouraging them to cultivate an independent mind, and thus, to enter into the process of true improvement.

⁶³ Katie Halsey and Jennifer Robertson, 'Emotional Regulation: Jane Austen, Jane West and Mary Brunton', in *Women's Literary Education, c.1690–1850*, ed. Louise Joy and Jessica Lim (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 217.

⁶⁴ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 2.

⁶⁵ Susan Ferrier, *Destiny; or, the Chief's Daughter*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1831), 2:362.

⁶⁶ Mandal, 'Evangelical Fiction', 267–68.

⁶⁷ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 13; David Hume, 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm', in *Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar (Oxford University Press, 2008), 38.

Edith's successful cultivation of religious principle, supported by her mentor, Mrs Malcolm, is demonstrated to readers when she is depicted reacting to what would otherwise have been an emotionally overwhelming situation: 'at any other time, Edith would have been overpowered by so sudden and unexpected a meeting; but now her mind had been strengthened and calmed by the pious exercises in which she had been engaged'.⁶⁸ This scene takes place when Edith is reunited with her suitor, Reginald, who, it becomes clear, has fallen in love with another and who is consequently the cause of Edith's aforementioned 'fever of the heart'. In this example, Edith's 'pious exercises' are explicitly identified as the source of her new-found ability to regulate her own emotions, applying this principle to '[betray] little emotion', and to '[banish] all lesser and more selfish considerations'.⁶⁹ Like the exemplary Laura in *Self-Control*, Edith has finally learned to 'regulate [her emotions] by a nobler principle'.⁷⁰ Thus, emotional regulation is presented by Ferrier as an indicator of real improvement, in turn narrated to readers of Ferrier's novels through the lens of moral and religious growth.

Alongside Lyndsay, Gertrude is mentored at various points throughout the novel by her cousin, Anne Black, who provides another steadfast example of moral and religious virtue. When Lyndsay refers to Gertrude's 'broken promises and power misused', he directly refers to Gertrude's promise to offer the 'church of Clearburn' on the Rossville estate to Anne and her husband, the minister William Leslie.⁷¹ Unlike her siblings, her mother (the aforementioned Mrs Black), and figures such as Delmour, Anne is pious, unaffected, and unmoved by fashion and wealth. At a relatively early point within the novel, she confides in Gertrude that she wishes to marry William (for love, as opposed to social standing), 'but he is poor, and on that account, and that only, it is not sanctioned by my parents'.⁷² Upon becoming the Countess of Rossville, Gertrude recounts to Delmour how 'the want of a church has hitherto been the only obstacle in the marriage [of Anne and William]. How happy it makes me to have it in my power to remove it!'.⁷³ Delmour replies: 'can you really think, for a moment, of having your relations placed so near you in so inferior a situation?', insisting that if Gertrude is not already ashamed of Anne, 'she will be, when she degenerates

⁶⁸ Ferrier, *Destiny*, 2:391.

⁶⁹ Ferrier, *Destiny*, 2:391.

⁷⁰ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 176.

⁷¹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 181.

⁷² Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 180.

⁷³ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 394.

into the minister's wife'.⁷⁴ Here, Delmour's own preoccupation with social standing and the opinions of others is brought to the fore as he encourages Gertrude to break her promise to Anne, which she does. The lack of care towards others that Gertrude's broken promise signifies highlights once again the destructive influence that Delmour has on her interpretation of her moral duty. It also reiterates the lack of emotional regulation and independent judgement that prevents her from resisting external pressures to neglect what others perceive (and what she later understands) as her moral duty, as both a landowner and family member.

Readers' attention is subsequently redirected to this broken promise when Gertrude takes her first steps towards achieving true improvement by reflecting on the immorality of her past actions. Speaking to Anne, who, thanks to Lyndsay (the new Lord Rossville), has by then moved to Clearburn with William, Gertrude laments: "'You trusted in God, and He has not deceived you, while I —" she stopped, overcome with the acuteness of remembrance [...] "I had power, and I misused it; I had wealth, and I squandered it; I had an idol; oh! my God! — and Thou wast forgot"''.⁷⁵ She concludes that she does not, therefore, 'deserve to be happy', to which Anne responds by insisting that 'God can put a heavenly calm into that heart which is shut against all joys'.⁷⁶ These words have a profound effect on Gertrude, confirming this scene as one of the transformative moments, mentioned at the start of this chapter, by which journeys of improvement such as Gertrude's are punctuated over the course of the novels under study. Upon feeling 'the truth of these simple words', Gertrude 'saw that her heart had gone astray in its own delusions, but these were dispelled', leading in turn to a religious awakening: 'she was calm, for she had Heaven in view'.⁷⁷ By encouraging Gertrude to recognise the value of religious principle and understanding, Anne prompts her to reflect on her actions and, by putting her own independent judgment to introspective use, to realise her mistakes based on her new understanding of Christian morality. This process of self-reflection, and consequent emotional regulation, represents an important step in Gertrude's education, as she begins thereafter to apply the principles that she has been taught by Anne and Lyndsay to other situations. It also clearly demonstrates how the process of true improvement is presented to readers of Ferrier's novels through representations of moral and religious growth, which both requires and rewards moral labour and effort.

⁷⁴ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 394.

⁷⁵ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 498–99.

⁷⁶ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 499.

⁷⁷ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 499.

A good example of Gertrude's process of application takes place shortly after this scene when, in keeping with the guidance she receives from her mentors, Gertrude forgives her (imposter) mother for lying about her identity: 'I am come to offer that forgiveness which I once refused; but God has put better feelings in my heart; and now I forgive you from the heart, as I hope to be forgiven'.⁷⁸ Her attempt at mutual forgiveness demonstrates the way in which, having finally completed the correct education, Gertrude takes on (albeit tentatively here) the role of mentor, encouraging Mrs St Clair also to reflect on herself and to cultivate the religious principle that she so conspicuously lacks. Indeed, Gertrude subsequently admits to Lyndsay: 'you once asked me to forgive her who had injured me, and I would not, for then I was proud, passionate, revengeful; but now I would go to her, I would forgive her, even as I trust I have been forgiven'.⁷⁹ These lines are testimony to Gertrude's improvement, which is reflected in her actions as she works to fulfil what she now perceives to be the morally correct path according to her Christian duty. At the end of the novel, we learn that Gertrude's mind is finally 'enlightened as to the true uses and advantages of power and prosperity', in which the references to 'power' and 'prosperity' recall to mind Gertrude's earlier financial mismanagement.⁸⁰ This has the effect of reiterating how we might as readers consider how characters choose to spend their money as a way of distinguishing between true and false models of improvement; Gertrude's realisation of the 'true uses' of this 'power' and 'prosperity' is thus testimony to her true improvement. Accordingly, the final scene of *The Inheritance* depicts Gertrude ready to embark upon 'a useful life' under 'the calm radiance of piety and virtue', in which the overtones of moral and religious improvement point towards the benevolence and duty that now inform Gertrude's actions.

The heroine of Brunton's *Discipline*, Ellen Percy, provides an additional case study of true improvement in action. If Gertrude's example emphasises the association of responsible expenditure with true improvement, then Ellen's example emphasises the idea that self-improvement demands concerted efforts and labour. Ellen's lack of interest in labour of all kinds, including the moral and spiritual varieties, is made clear in the opening chapter of

⁷⁸ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 502. It eventually transpires that Gertrude is in fact not the heir to the Rossville estate, but rather an unwitting imposter and the daughter of Mrs St Clair's maid. On learning this, Delmour deserts Gertrude, and the title passes next to his older brother, who dies without issue, and finally to Lyndsay, whom Gertrude marries. In the meantime, Gertrude is revealed as the granddaughter of Lizzie Lundie, Uncle Adam's childhood sweetheart. Uncle Adam makes Gertrude heir to his own estate, Bloom Park, and thus she and Lyndsay end up with not one but two estates, in a Richardsonian case of virtue rewarded.

⁷⁹ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 501.

⁸⁰ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 506–07.

Discipline, when readers learn how, at an early age, ‘a connexion was formed in [Ellen’s] mind between the ideas of amusement and happiness, of labour and misery’.⁸¹ Thus, Brunton immediately sets up the steep learning curve that her heroine must undergo over the course of the novel, in order to undo this ‘connexion’ and become truly improved. An important difference between Ellen and Gertrude is that the former narrates retrospectively, reflecting and often commenting critically on her previous follies from a reformed point of view – for example, she ‘look[s] back with astonishment upon’ her mentor Miss Mortimer’s ‘patient endurance of [her] impertinences’.⁸² As readers we therefore witness Ellen’s journey of improvement from a curated perspective, in which her education and initial attempts at application have already passed. Isabelle Bour argues that ‘despite the choice of first-person narration, *Discipline* does not really *show* a rise from turpitude to Christian virtue, because the older narrator, who takes a strictly Christian and moralizing view of her past misdemeanours, keeps interrupting the story of her younger self with moral judgements and maxims’.⁸³ I contend, by contrast, that the effect of this retrospective narration emphasises the transformation that Ellen undertakes and offers additional guidance to readers about how they should interpret the instances of Ellen’s immoral behaviour compared, for example, to *The Inheritance*, in which there is no retrospective narration. This nuance is in keeping with Brunton’s explicit presentation of her novels as tools for self-improvement, discussed in Chapter One. To illustrate this, we might consider the following example, in which the reformed Ellen reflects how ‘misled by an artful adviser, or rather, perhaps by my own inveterate abhorrence of reproof, I chose the clandestine path, in which none can tread with peace of safety. In this decision began a long train of evil’.⁸⁴ Ellen’s self-conscious ‘abhorrence of reproof’ reflects her former lack of self-reflection, in contrast to Laura in *Self-Control*, who is ‘deeply studious of her own [mind]’, having early formed a habit of ‘strict and impartial self-examination’.⁸⁵ This emphasis on self-examination can be attributed in part to the novel’s promotion of evangelical principles, as critics such as Wood and Murphy have noted, though elsewhere such reflection has been considered outwith the evangelical context. For example, Ada Sharpe and Eleanor Ty consider Mary Hays’ ‘emphasis on self-examination’ attributing it to ‘her Dissenting religious beliefs and the Enlightenment

⁸¹ Brunton, *Discipline*, 25.

⁸² Brunton, *Discipline*, 53.

⁸³ Isabelle Bour, ‘Mary Brunton’s Novels, or, The Twilight of Sensibility’, *Scottish Literary Journal* 24, no. 2 (1997): 29, ProQuest.

⁸⁴ Brunton, *Discipline*, 87.

⁸⁵ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 20.

conviction in the power of rational thought to create social change'.⁸⁶ In doing so, they show that the value of introspection was not exclusive to evangelical practice, revealing the possibility that this rationalism was subsequently transformed into a novelistic discourse on religious self-improvement. By learning, gradually, as the narrative progresses, to reflect on her own conduct, and to adapt it according to the moral and religious principles that she learns along the way, Ellen demonstrates to readers of *Discipline* what the process of true improvement looks like.

From the outset, Ellen is presented as Laura's polar opposite. Ellen is 'proud, petulant, and rebellious', reflecting, in her own words, 'the corruption of human kind'.⁸⁷ This difference in character was, as critics have often noted, an active choice made by Brunton, according to the posthumous account of her life published by her husband, Alexander Brunton, in 1819. In a letter to Mrs Izett on 10 April 1810, Brunton wrote that 'if ever I undertake another lady, I will manage her in a very different manner'.⁸⁸ Accordingly, Ellen must undertake a journey of improvement, as opposed to being presented as a paragon from the beginning of the novel. In the preface to *Discipline*, Brunton discusses how its 'subject was chosen chiefly on account of its connection with that of *Self-Control*; the whole moral and religious discipline of life being intended to form those habits of self-command, in which Laura excelled, and in which Ellen Percy is so miserably defective', emphasising the different role that each heroine fulfils.⁸⁹ By introducing Ellen in this way, Brunton establishes an early expectation that Ellen will, over the course of the novel, necessarily undergo what has been described variously as 'a fundamental transformation' and 'a metaphoric enlightenment by Christianity'.⁹⁰ Jacqueline Pearson complicates these descriptions slightly when she refers to Ellen's 'moral reawakening'; 'awakening' is, perhaps, a more accurate word to describe Ellen's journey of improvement since she is presented from the outset as being oblivious towards any moral or religious duty.⁹¹ At her own admission, Ellen suffers from 'a sort of moral disability of choosing right, as often as a choice was presented to me' –

⁸⁶ Ada Sharpe and Eleanor Ty, 'Mary Hays and the Didactic Novel in the 1790s', in *Didactic Novels and British Women's Writing, 1790–1820*, ed. Hilary Havens (Routledge, 2017), 91.

⁸⁷ Brunton, *Discipline*, 24.

⁸⁸ Mary Brunton to Mrs Izett, 10 April 1810, in *Emmeline with Some Other Pieces* (Edinburgh: Manners and Mill, Constable, 1819), xxxi.

⁸⁹ Brunton, *Discipline*, 19.

⁹⁰ Murphy, 7; Wood, 534.

⁹¹ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women Reading in Britain, 1750–1835* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 171.

in other words, she lacks the principles and values that would enable her to make morally virtuous decisions, precisely because she has not yet received the right sort of education.⁹²

Like Gertrude, Ellen falls victim to the corrupting traps of fashionable society. Described as ‘the spoiled child of prosperity’, she prioritises luxury, affectation, and selfish pleasures above duty, self-examination, and a desire to help others: ‘self-importance was fixed in my mind long before I could examine the grounds of this preposterous sentiment’.⁹³ Ellen’s retrospective qualification of ‘preposterous sentiment’ provides an additional means through which Brunton implicitly encourages the readers of her novel to reflect on their own behaviour, in line with Ellen’s example. Also like Gertrude, Ellen receives moral and spiritual guidance from two mentor characters: Mr Maitland, whom she ends up marrying (like Lyndsay), and Miss Mortimer (who is similar to Anne). Much like Delmour’s religious caricature of Lyndsay, Miss Mortimer is the subject of religious satire when she is described unflatteringly as ‘a Methodist’ – an insult used to criticise the excessive piety associated during the period with the evangelical movement.⁹⁴ The fact, however, that this insult is uttered by the unreformed Ellen, and subsequently regretted by the improved, narrating Ellen, nuances the satire at play here. As with the examples of bad readers discussed at the end of Chapters One and Three, it reveals how interactions between characters often function intradiegetically to make readers question whether or not this insult is correct. Ellen’s retrospective self-reproach highlights to readers her previous inaccuracy, simultaneously emphasising Miss Mortimer’s paragon status.

From the beginning of the novel, Miss Mortimer, who inhabits a pseudo-maternal role, encourages Ellen to use her prosperity for benevolent purposes, and to cultivate a sense of religious principle, just like Lyndsay encourages Gertrude: ‘born to such splendid advantages, why should you not aspire to make your life a practical thanksgiving to the bestower?’.⁹⁵ Upon realising that she is dying, Miss Mortimer writes Ellen a letter in which she implores her to reflect on her behaviour, to use her ‘own judgment’, and to consult her ‘own conscience’: ‘dare to be candid with yourself, and though the odious word will grate

⁹² Brunton, *Discipline*, 87.

⁹³ Brunton, *Discipline*, 161, 26.

⁹⁴ Brunton, *Discipline*, 40. For more on this, see Brett McNelly, ‘Redeeming Religion: Wesleyan and Calvinistic Methodism in *Humphry Clinker*’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 85 (2003): 285–96, <https://doi.org/10.7227/BJRL.85.2-3.18>; Brett McNelly, *Textual Warfare and the Making of Methodism* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹⁵ Brunton, *Discipline*, 46.

upon your ear, inquire whether selfishness be not rather your chosen guide'.⁹⁶ By encouraging Ellen to consider critically her own motivations, Miss Mortimer highlights the centrality of an 'independent mind' to true improvement, reiterating that it is only through learning to apply our own judgment to ourselves that we can fulfil our moral and religious duties. Her suggestion that Ellen is wrongly motivated by selfishness perpetuates the established association in this thesis between self-serving behaviour and false improvement, emphasising the corrupting impact that her exposure to the so-called 'splendid advantages' of fashionable society has had on her. Miss Mortimer concludes by writing that 'the true religion, once received, would change the whole current of your hopes and fears; – would ennoble your desires, subdue passion, humble the proud heart, overcome the world. But you will not give her whereon to plant her foot, – for where, amidst the multitude of your toys, shall religion find a place?'.⁹⁷ Here, Miss Mortimer renders explicit her call to Ellen to take notice of her own religious duty, and to regulate her emotions, relinquishing the selfishness by which she has hitherto been governed in favour of her necessary spiritual reformation.

In doing so, Miss Mortimer draws to readers' attention the intrinsic nature of moral and religious growth to representations of true improvement within the novels under study. Ellen subsequently passes 'the night under the scourge of conscience', resolving that she 'would no longer be an unprofitable servant; that [she] would devote part of [her] time and [her] fortune to the service of the Giver'.⁹⁸ This resolve marks the first step towards Ellen's education, though the process is far from straightforward, as she is later depicted wrestling with the prospect of sustained moral labour. Ellen recalls, in her own words, that: 'of the permanence of my resolutions, – of my own ability to put them in practice, – it never entered my imagination to doubt', reflecting her initial underappreciation of moral and intellectual labour as a prerequisite for self-improvement.⁹⁹ Following the death of her father, and resultant loss of her fortune, Ellen goes to live with Miss Mortimer, whose health has (for a time) improved, and whose cottage represents, as Teri Doerksen notes, 'a kind of spiritual halfway house, where the protagonist can begin to make moral progress'.¹⁰⁰ Ellen recounts how 'from the first month of my residence with Miss Mortimer I may date a new era of my existence. My mind had received a new impulse, and new views had opened to me of my

⁹⁶ Brunton, *Discipline*, 112, 113.

⁹⁷ Brunton, *Discipline*, 114.

⁹⁸ Brunton, *Discipline*, 118.

⁹⁹ Brunton, *Discipline*, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Doerksen, 188.

actions, my situation, and my prospects'.¹⁰¹ She continues, acknowledging that 'an important step had been made towards a change in my character. But still it was only a step. The tendencies of nature, strengthened by the habits of seventeen years, remained to be overcome, and this was not the work of a month, or a year'.¹⁰² Miss Mortimer's status as a mentor character is illustrated to readers in this passage, as she facilitates 'a new era' in Ellen's development. As a result, we witness Ellen beginning properly to reflect upon her actions, while at the same time she reinforces that true improvement cannot be achieved through a single virtuous action, or through a short period of benevolence; rather, it requires constant reflection and effort in order to overcome entrenched habits.

This point is reiterated to readers later in the novel, when Mr Maitland writes to Miss Mortimer: 'I will not be dazed by your pictures of [Ellen's] improvement [...] pride and self-indulgence are not to be cured in an hour; nor can the opposite virtues spring without culture'.¹⁰³ In keeping with the importance that Ellen herself retrospectively assigns it, Maitland emphasises in particular the labour that is required for true improvement to take place: 'our habits themselves are of slow growth; slowly the seeds of evil are eradicated; laboriously the good ground is prepared; watered with the dews of Heaven'.¹⁰⁴ In a similar vein to Lyndsay's appraisal of Gertrude's mind in a passage discussed earlier, cultivation metaphors are deployed to present true improvement as a process characterised by an unabating effort to develop the 'Christian principles, virtuous habits' identified at the beginning of this chapter. Religious imagery is incorporated within the wider metaphor, demonstrating once again how true improvement is effectively depicted within the novels of Brunton and Ferrier via the parameters of moral and religious progress, while Maitland's allusion to individual effort emphasises the importance of the continued application of religious principle.

This centrality of application to true improvement is reflected in the many fluctuations that occur during the course of Ellen's journey of improvement, in which her sense of principle is often presented as transient, much like Edith before her religious transformation in *Destiny* is complete. Ellen herself describes principle retrospectively as 'the living light of the higher heaven; which never more will leave us in utter darkness, but lend a steady beam

¹⁰¹ Brunton, *Discipline*, 173.

¹⁰² Brunton, *Discipline*, 173.

¹⁰³ Brunton, *Discipline*, 197.

¹⁰⁴ Brunton, *Discipline*, 197.

to guide our way'.¹⁰⁵ It is a momentary lack of principle that readers witness when, for example, Ellen loses her temper with Mrs St Clare (an acquaintance whom she meets in Edinburgh): 'a review of my feelings and behaviour towards Mrs St Clare, brought me to a full sense of the unsubdued and unchristian temper which they betrayed [...] and I wept in bitterness of heart, to see what my renunciation of my former self had spared so much to show that I was still the same'.¹⁰⁶ Ellen's unsteady principle results in her failure to regulate her emotions, marking a setback in her self-improvement, but also cementing the relationship between the two, as it is only through regulating our emotions that we can carefully reflect on the value of principle and its associated duties. The 'bitterness' that Ellen identifies is also effective in highlighting the difficulty of working to achieve true improvement – as her example demonstrates, this process involves going against the grain, often of the customs of fashionable society, at other times of our own habits, and in many cases both simultaneously.

Later in the novel, Ellen is depicted as having developed a much stronger sense of principle when she successfully regulates her emotions during a confrontation with her then-employer, Mrs Bowell: 'at this coarse accusation, the indignant blood rose to my forehead, but the provocation was great enough to remind me that this was a fit occasion of forbearance; and I subdued by voice and countenance into stern composure', in which her 'composure' represents a positive step, signalled by careful self-reflection, in her journey of improvement.¹⁰⁷ Later still, following a period of time in an asylum (to which she is sent by Mrs Boswell), Ellen's education is presented as being finally complete: 'I now saw, that, even with the despised Mrs Boswell, I had need to exchange forgiveness'.¹⁰⁸ Here, Ellen closely resembles Gertrude in a scene cited earlier in this chapter. Both heroines undertake a process of self-improvement in which they must cultivate religious principle; in both instances, the presence of religious principle is signposted to readers by the heroines' capacity for emotional regulation and forgiveness. Through being tested by adverse circumstances throughout the novel, Ellen's example highlights the toil associated with true improvement and also the perseverance that is required by individuals learning to apply principles (such as forgiveness, or a fulfilment of religious duty) to diverse contexts. As Ellen's example demonstrates, true improvement requires characters to be able adapt to different situations, deploying independent judgment in order to overcome the various trials

¹⁰⁵ Brunton, *Discipline*, 90.

¹⁰⁶ Brunton, *Discipline*, 221.

¹⁰⁷ Brunton, *Discipline*, 251.

¹⁰⁸ Brunton, *Discipline*, 258.

that their interactions with others result in, all the while remaining true to the moral and religious principles that have been instilled in them through education. The role played by others in bringing about the situations to which Ellen must respond emphasises, moreover, the extent to which true improvement is contingent on our interactions with other people – be these mentors, mentees, or instigators of a challenging situation requiring a principled response.

In the closing lines of *Discipline*, Ellen's improved status is brought to readers' attention through the comparison she draws between the 'selfish pleasure' of her early years and the 'useful employment' by which her present, married life with Maitland is characterised.¹⁰⁹ The triumph of benevolence and usefulness over selfishness confirms the terms through which true improvement is defined in fairly conventional terms by Brunton and Ferrier. The narrative concludes appropriately by depicting Ellen as Maitland's 'fellow-labourer' and 'mother of their [clansmen's] future chieftain', in which the forward-facing perspective implies that Ellen will, like Gertrude, continue to fulfil her religious duty according to her newly-cultivated habits and principles, in keeping with the unabating nature of application and of self-regulation.¹¹⁰

'Hargrave had no inclination to discuss the nature of repentance'

Having analysed examples of characters who successfully undergo, and continue to apply the principles of, true improvement, this final section considers examples of characters who fail to complete this process successfully, despite being encouraged to do so by a mentor. I contend that these characters fulfil a specific role within the novels under study, which is to reinforce to readers that the application stage of improvement requires sustained exertion, rather than fleeting attention. By depicting characters who refuse, to their disadvantage, to cultivate the habits and principles necessary for improvement to take place, Brunton and Hamilton highlight what unsuccessful attempts at true improvement (as opposed simply to false improvement) look like. The contrast between these examples and the successful examples of Gertrude and Ellen serves implicitly to reiterate the importance of the moral habits that the reformed characters successfully cultivate and apply.

¹⁰⁹ Brunton, *Discipline*, 325.

¹¹⁰ Brunton, *Discipline*, 137, 325.

One of the most pertinent examples of a character who fails to commit himself fully to true improvement in the first place is Colonel Hargrave, with whom this chapter begins. At first glance, Hargrave is a rich, ‘handsome man of fashion’, thereby embodying many of the attributes that the characters associated with false improvement in Chapter Two aspire towards.¹¹¹ Over the course of *Self-Control*, however, Hargrave’s selfishness and his refusal to emotionally regulate or rectify the immorality of his actions identify him as a character in need of moral and religious improvement. Following his attempt to seduce Laura in the novel’s opening pages, Brunton’s heroine sets Hargrave the following challenge: “‘if for two years’”, said she, her youthful countenance brightening with delight, “‘your conduct is such as you describe – if it will bear the inspection of the wise, of the sober-minded, of the pious, – as my father’s friend, as my own friend, will I welcome you’”.¹¹² Laura stipulates that Hargrave must raise himself ‘to the views, the pursuits, the habits of a Christian’ before she will reconcile herself to him, clearly identifying spiritual and moral growth as central to true improvement, in keeping with previous examples.¹¹³ Whereas Laura, under the guidance of Mrs Douglas, has grown up ‘a pious Christian’, and is therefore motivated by religious principle and ‘self-command’, Hargrave, who lacks both, is ‘ignorant of the standard by which Laura would judge him’.¹¹⁴ In keeping with the emphasis on emotional regulation in previous examples, Hargrave’s lack of religious principle is, moreover, reflected in ‘his constitutionally strong passions ungovernable’.¹¹⁵

In addition to this ignorance, Hargrave is disinclined to commit himself to the ‘labours of duty’ prescribed by Laura.¹¹⁶ His reluctance is evidenced in his reaction to Laura’s challenge and, as this next section reveals, analysis of this reaction helps to confirm what readers of Brunton’s novels are encouraged to understand true improvement to look like. Immediately following Laura’s challenge, Hargrave ‘beg[ins], for the first time in his life, to consider his conduct with a view to its moral fitness’ – to attempt, in other words, a period of self-reflection, which, we learn, ‘he found a subject of inextricable difficulty’.¹¹⁷ This difficulty foreshadows Hargrave’s ultimate failure to meet Laura’s terms, as he considers with ‘some anxiety [...] who were to be his “wise”, “sober-minded”, “pious”

¹¹¹ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 37.

¹¹² Brunton, *Self-Control*, 34.

¹¹³ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 34.

¹¹⁴ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 8, 32, 38.

¹¹⁵ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 36.

¹¹⁶ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 34.

¹¹⁷ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 38.

inspectors'.¹¹⁸ He is able to disregard the first two of these conditions, reasoning that 'his expenses did not much exceed his income' and 'he seldom exceeded to intoxication'; thus, 'reform seemed needless'.¹¹⁹ Upon turning attention to the third condition of piety, however, problems begin to arise: 'to secure the favour of the "pious", he forthwith made a purchase of [Hugh] Blair's sermons, and resolved to be seen in church once at least every Sunday'.¹²⁰ In this passage, the passive phrase 'to be seen' is crucial in highlighting the inherently performative, and therefore insincere, nature of Hargrave's actions. It also reveals his response to personal reform as one that directly opposes the framework of true improvement evidenced, for example, by Gertrude and Ellen's examples. The problem, indeed, is not so much that Hargrave refuses outright to consider his own conduct, or to engage critically with what Laura is asking him to do, but rather that instead of opting honestly to undertake a moral reform, Hargrave attempts to find ways around what he understands is truly required of him. Instead of attending church to work towards religious and moral improvement, Hargrave resolves to create an illusion of intention. His belief that he can remedy his immorality simply by '[making] a purchase of Blair's sermons' is in keeping, in particular, with the aspect of false improvement that has its foundations in selfish expenditure, evidenced by Gertrude's spending spree.¹²¹ It is also in keeping with his characterisation elsewhere in the novel as someone who deploys wealth in place of moral labour. Readers learn, for example, that Hargrave 'could even compassionate the more vulnerable sorrows of cold and hunger to the extent of some relieving them, provided always that the relief cost nothing but money'.¹²² His subsequent purchase of Blair's sermons is at once inherently selfish and self-defeating as it permits him to evade true improvement, all the while enabling him to appear genuine in his intention to reform himself, ostensibly honouring his promise to Laura. By opting thus superficially to perform, as opposed to striving to achieve, improved behaviour, Hargrave disregards Laura's advice to 'let a higher motive influence [him]; for it is not merely the conduct – it is the heart that must have changed'.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 38.

¹¹⁹ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 38.

¹²⁰ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 38. Hugh Blair was a minister in the Church of Scotland and Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Letters at the University of Edinburgh. His *Sermons*, which were published in five volumes between 1777 and 1801, advocate the importance of practical Christian morality.

¹²¹ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 38.

¹²² Brunton, *Self-Control*, 37.

¹²³ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 33.

A similar lack of principle is evidenced in *Discipline*, when readers witness Ellen's initial response to Miss Mortimer's aforementioned letter, in which she implores Ellen to find a place for religion in her life. Ellen recalls 'having heard [her] duties summed up in three comprehensive epithets, "sober, righteous, and godly" – a phrase that comes, as Murphy notes, 'from *The Book of Common Prayer*', reiterating the religious nature of the reform that Ellen and Hargrave are encouraged to undertake.¹²⁴ Ellen subsequently reveals: "'Godly," I certainly intended one day or other to become; but for the present I deferred fixing upon the particulars of this change. It was better not to attempt too much at once'.¹²⁵ Here, then, we see Ellen ignoring, like Hargrave, what is really required of her to achieve true improvement, which is honest action based on virtuous habits. Instead of committing herself immediately to religious reform, Ellen postpones 'the particulars of this change' to a later, unspecified date, highlighting in doing so the disinclination that she shares with Hargrave (retrospectively and at this point in the novel) to labour towards cultivating new habits or to live according to new principles. By refusing to commit themselves to real change, and by interpreting genuine improvement as a cause with which they can re-engage at a later date, Ellen and Hargrave fail to acknowledge it as a continuous process characterised by constant effort and labour. Both conceive of improvement as something with which they can engage intermittently at their convenience, as opposed to viewing it as a fundamental principle of daily life – as is the case in Ferrier's *Destiny*, for example, in which Edith's mentor Mrs Malcolm is depicted representing the 'benign spirit of Christianity, shedding its divine halo over the daily actions of life'.¹²⁶ The key difference between Hargrave and Ellen is that, whereas Ellen does eventually exert herself to 'carefully [...] [review]' her actions, and subsequently acts according to an applied set of moral and religious principles, Hargrave is resolutely disinterested in 'permanent reformation'.¹²⁷ Readers learn that 'the ideas which Laura was labouring to introduce into the mind of Hargrave were such as he had of late too successfully endeavoured to exclude', and his death at the end of the novel signals that his status as an extreme cautionary example, from which readers should learn the danger of disregarding, or deceptively performing, moral and religious growth.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Brunton, *Discipline*, 118, 339 (endnote 163 by Olivia Murphy).

¹²⁵ Brunton, *Discipline*, 118–19.

¹²⁶ Ferrier, *Destiny*, 3:188.

¹²⁷ Brunton, *Discipline*, 258; Brunton, *Self-Control*, 235.

¹²⁸ Brunton, *Self-Control*, 234.

In Hamilton's *Cottagers*, readers are presented with a similar example of a character who fails, despite encouragement, to undertake the process of true improvement. Like Hargrave, Mrs MacClarty reinforces to readers, through her refusal to cultivate the necessary principles and habits, the definition of true improvement as an ongoing process characterised by an individual's fulfilment of their moral and religious duty. Mrs MacClarty's disinterest in complying with the advice of her mentor and cousin, Mrs Mason, therefore provides readers with a further warning from which to learn about the dangers that develop from a lack of moral and religious principle. Upon arriving in the fictional Highland village of Glenburnie, Mrs Mason is horrified by the dirt and disorder within which her cousins appear to live. She consequently resolves to instil in them, and in Mrs MacClarty especially, better domestic habits, in order to ameliorate their living conditions and, crucially, to fulfil her own perceived duty of being 'useful to the good people there'.¹²⁹ Mrs MacClarty's domestic duty is, according to Mrs Mason, directly related to her religious duty, and its fulfilment therefore represents the key to her improvement. Early on in the novel, through the account that Mrs Mason provides of her own education from her mentor Miss Malden, readers learn that 'the performance of duty' is achieved through an open mind 'to perceive the value of [...] Christian principles' and represents the ultimate 'opportunity for improvement'.¹³⁰ Returning to Mrs MacClarty, the issue is not that she is irreligious – Mrs Mason describes the MacClarty family as 'people who [...] sincerely served and worshipped God' – but rather that she does not discern the need to cultivate 'habits of neatness, and of activity, and of attention' within the parameters of this religious service.¹³¹

When confronted, for example, with the suggestion that Mrs Mason might proffer 'such a method of doing every thing about [Mrs MacClarty's] house, as it will soon give it a very different appearance', Mrs MacClarty responds by saying that 'we are owre auld to learn, and we just do weel enough'.¹³² Over the course of the novel, the phrases 'weel enough' and 'canna be fashed' recur frequently, each time reiterating Mrs MacClarty's reluctance to cultivate the new habits deemed by Mrs Mason as requisite for improvement. As Mrs Mason observes, 'this *fear of being fashed* is the great bar to all improvement. I have seen this morning, that you are not afraid of work, for you have exerted yourself with a degree of activity that no one could excel; yet you dread the small additional trouble that

¹²⁹ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 96.

¹³⁰ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 82.

¹³¹ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 116, 122.

¹³² Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 111.

would make your house cheerful, clean, and comfortable'.¹³³ By emphasising Mrs MacClarty's refusal to reflect on and then undertake the necessary work to reform her behaviour, Hamilton reiterates to readers the importance of action, alongside self-examination, to true improvement. Ultimately, Mrs MacClarty resists all entreaties to improve herself or to adopt superior 'habits of industry and virtue', and by the end of the novel she is left destitute, along with her two daughters, who likewise refuse to comply with the principles that Mrs Mason encourages them to adopt.¹³⁴ Whereas Hargrave's need for improvement is prompted by his sexual misconduct, Mrs MacClarty's need for improvement is reflected in the disorder within which she and her family live, in keeping with the explicitly paternalistic agenda of Hamilton's novel to ameliorate the labouring class, touched on at the end of Chapter Two. In both cases, self-improvement is presented as a possibility if they make the effort to cultivate the habits and principles required for them to fulfil their moral and religious duty. In both cases, however, the individual refuses to adapt themselves, reiterating implicitly the centrality of sustained and useful labour, in service of these duties, to true improvement.

By presenting their readers with examples of characters who are located at different points along the spectrum of true improvement (mentor characters, characters who are just starting to reflect on their behaviour, characters who make an active effort to fulfil a moral or religious obligation, and characters who decide not to attempt self-improvement), Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton test out different attitudes towards duty, benevolence, and emotional regulation. By encouraging readers to differentiate between these attitudes, they emphasise the importance of, returning to this chapter's epigraph, 'Christian principles, virtuous habits, and an independent mind', all of which facilitate formative reflection and revised conduct.¹³⁵ Through outlining in detail the process of moral and religious reform in their novels, Brunton, Ferrier, and in some cases Hamilton, present the readers of their novels with examples of what true improvement looks like, how it can be achieved, and the dangers that arise from refusing to commit oneself to the task of self-examination and moral labour. The examples provided in this chapter also reveal a parallel between these novelists' treatment of familiar stereotypes in the previous three chapters and their theorisation of improvement in this chapter as a process of two parts. While the examples in these novels that confirm popular stereotypes relate to the education stage of improvement (by encouraging readers to recognise

¹³³ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 134.

¹³⁴ Hamilton, *Cottagers*, 214.

¹³⁵ Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, 214.

basic prejudices or principles), the examples that then subvert or complicate these stereotypes reflect by extension the application stage of improvement (by requiring readers to apply their knowledge of prejudices, or principles, in order to recognise what has changed, and what the implications of these changes are). In this way, this chapter reveals how the presentation within these novels of stereotypes pertaining to the novel, nation, and mental cultivation, contributes to their theorisation of self-improvement as an iterative process that relies on and promotes readerly engagement via distanced and actively self-appraising reading habits.

Chapter Five: Discerning Improvement

‘Of one thing we can be certain. We cannot recover the effects on readers by ever more careful study of the texts being read, that is attempting to find the outputs of the system from the inputs’.¹ So observes William St Clair in his influential study *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, in which he deploys quantitative and economic analysis to provide a fuller account of actual reading in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Kate Flint concurs with St Clair, asserting that ‘only a naive reader would believe that the representation of reading within fiction offers straightforward, empirical evidence of contemporary reading practices’.² In Flint, we are met once again with the suggestion – indeed, the certainty – that reading practices and the effects of reading on readers as they are represented at a fictional level do not always match the actual reading experiences of historical readers. This certainty comprises the motivating force behind this final chapter, which turns attention away from the ‘inputs’ (the novels analysed in Chapters One through Four), and towards the ‘outputs’ evidenced in historical readers’ responses to these novels.

So far in this thesis, I have argued that the novels of Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier, and Elizabeth Hamilton advocate to readers a model of reading that centres on distance, critical engagement, and self-reflection. This model provides an antidotal response to the novel’s corrupting reputation, which was particularly low at the start of the nineteenth century. At the same time, as the Introduction to this thesis also makes clear, the novel’s generic authority increased significantly during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, due primarily to the popularity of Walter Scott’s Waverley Novels, transforming it into a distinct cultural form. I argue that this, combined with the fact that antinovel rhetoric was more widespread than ever before, is what allowed the female novelists under study during the first three decades of the nineteenth century to present their novels as tools for self-improvement, by leveraging readers’ familiarity with antinovel rhetoric – in playful, satiric, and implicit ways – to promote active reading habits. By engaging in their novels with a range of culturally-

¹ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 401. St Clair’s punctuation.

² Kate Flint, ‘Women, Men and the Reading of *Vanity Fair*’, in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 246.

embedded stereotypes and taking advantage of their readers' knowledge of these prejudices, I contend that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton before them, encourage their readers to distinguish between true and false versions of improvement, in ways that clearly anticipate Victorian discourses on self-improvement, which I discuss in depth in the Conclusion.

Thus far, then, this thesis has centred on analysing representations of reading and of the processes and strategies associated with improvement within the novels themselves in order to suggest that these works encourage their implied readers to read in a critically alert and self-improving way. But what did historical readers of these novels actually think? And to what extent did they conceive of them as novels associated with, or intended for, improving purposes? To answer these questions, and with Flint and St Clair's observations in mind, the final chapter of this thesis examines examples of actual readers reflecting on these novels, considering the ways in and extent to which improvement features in their reflections. In doing so, I build on Ina Ferris' assertion that 'reception plays a formative role in literary history', which is a stance that she shares with Mikhail Bakhtin and Hans Robert Jauss.³ This chapter also builds on methodological precedents established by critics including Richard De Ritter, Katie Halsey, Jacqueline Pearson, and Mark Towsey, in which textual (often novelistic) analysis is combined with evidence of actual reading experiences to enhance our understanding of readers' engagement with texts. In his study of reading during the Scottish Enlightenment, for example, Towsey argues that by turning our attention as readers and scholars 'away from the producers of Enlightenment in Scotland' and considering 'instead the experiences of readers [...] we might learn a great deal more about how the Scottish Enlightenment should be defined, illuminating the impact made by certain books and ideas on people's lives, values and habits of mind'.⁴

Beginning from this theoretical premise, I argue that analysis of historical readers' responses provides a complementary method for making the claim that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton played a formative role in developing the novel as a tool for self-improvement. Specifically, I contend that the examples discussed in this chapter confirm that historical readers recognised the novels under study as ones that promote moral improvement and

³ Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 2–3. See Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (University of Texas press, 1981); and Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

⁴ Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750–1820* (Brill, 2010), 12.

active reading practices, thus supporting the assertions of earlier chapters. I also discuss examples of readers' responses that shed light on and help to construct the gendered hierarchy of the novel during the period under study, in which Scott's historical fiction takes priority over the common, female-authored novel and its stereotypically injudicious and impressionable readers. As the Introduction to this thesis suggests, this hierarchy has precluded us from appreciating the contributions of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton to the novel's generic development relative to those of their Scottish male contemporaries. Some examples in this chapter thus also reflect what Adriana Cracuín describes as 'the contours' of the 'gendered literary landscape' in Romantic-period Scotland, which provide the impetus for this thesis and its focus on the discourse of self-improvement that is demonstrably more dominant in the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton than it is in the novels of Scott, John Galt, and James Hogg.⁵ Ultimately, this chapter reveals the ways in which these female-authored novels were perceived by historical readers as works self-consciously associated with self-improvement in ways that show Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton responding to the moral imperatives of fiction to a degree that male Scottish novelists of the early nineteenth century were not obliged to match.

Of course, turning attention to the 'outputs of the system' of reading is not as simple as it sounds. As Roger Chartier notes, reading is a practice 'that only rarely leaves traces, that is scattered in an infinity of acts, and that easily shakes off all constraints'.⁶ Simon Eliot concurs, asserting that 'little that is commonplace registers in history'.⁷ People read texts all the time without recording it, and even when they do leave a record, it does not mean that that particular instance of reading was more important, instructive, or enjoyable than another unrecorded instance of reading. It is quite possible, indeed, that many of our most formative responses to reading take place exclusively in our minds. In this sense, as Eliot observes with regard to the nineteenth century in particular, 'any reading recorded in an historically recoverable way is, almost by definition, an exceptional recording of an uncharacteristic event by an untypical person'.⁸ This chapter necessarily focuses on records of reading that

⁵ Adriana Cracuín, 'Romantic Spinstrelsy: Anne Bannerman and the Sexual Politics of the Ballad', in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 207.

⁶ Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Polity Press, 1994), 1–2.

⁷ Simon Eliot, foreword to *The History of Reading, Volume 2: Evidence from the British Isles, c.1750–1950*, ed. Katie Halsey and W. R. Owens (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), xiii.

⁸ Simon Eliot, 'The Reading Experience Database; or, What Are We to Do About the History of Reading?', accessed 15 June, 2025,

relate, implicitly or explicitly, to ideas of improvement, and which discuss or relate specifically to the Scottish female-authored novels on which this thesis centres. Placing such limiting criteria on an already limited evidence base therefore means that the examples discussed in this chapter are, in many ways, even more ‘exceptional’, ‘uncharacteristic’, and ‘untypical’ than they might otherwise have been, had the scope of this thesis been broader. In what follows, I reveal how analysing individual reading experiences *en masse* enables us to identify clear discussions and shared views emerging that relate these novels to ideas of improvement. For all their ostensible atypicality, these examples cumulatively allow us to draw important conclusions about the works under study that elucidate Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton’s formative influence on the novel and perceived ability to engender self-improvement.

This chapter includes examples from three types of evidence: contemporary reviews of the novels published in periodicals, magazines, and newspapers; individual readers’ responses, preserved primarily in letters and, in a few cases, journal or diary entries; and initial findings from borrowing records stored in the recently-launched *Books and Borrowing* project database.⁹ This database is a major output of an AHRC-funded project carried out at the Universities of Stirling and Glasgow between 2020 and 2024, in which the borrowing records of eighteen Scottish libraries have been digitised and interpreted.¹⁰ The borrowing records span the period 1750 to 1830 and come from a variety of different libraries including subscription libraries, such as the Kirkwall Library on Orkney, the Leighton Library in Dunblane, near Stirling, and the Wigtown Library in Galloway; institutional libraries such as Glasgow University Library and the library of Edinburgh’s Royal High School; and one circulating library, Robert Chambers’ Circulating Library, also in Edinburgh. The database therefore has the potential to provide users with an enriching, holistic overview of borrowing activity in Scotland during the second half of the eighteenth century and opening decades of the nineteenth. St Clair notes that when *The Reading Nation* was first published in 2004, the history of reading was at a stage in its disciplinary development akin to ‘astronomy before

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240227125129/http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/redback.htm>?. See also St Clair, 6.

⁹ Fewer examples are provided in this chapter from the borrowing records than the other two types of evidence, primarily for reasons of feasibility and time. The examples that are provided are indicative of a fuller analysis that the monograph version of this thesis will include.

¹⁰ *Books and Borrowing 1750–1830: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers’ Registers*, ‘Advanced Search’, accessed 15 June, 2025, <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/>.

telescopes, economics before statistics’.¹¹ The inclusion in this chapter of quantitative data from the *Books and Borrowing* database, alongside the other two primary evidence types, is therefore testimony to the progress that has since been made in enabling us as historians of reading to gain a more empirical understanding of practices and patterns during the early nineteenth century. It also demonstrates how this understanding can be applied to enhance and work in tandem with qualitative accounts of historical reading. By combining analysis of what St Clair refers to as ‘micro evidence for the reading behaviour of individuals’ with quantitative analysis of borrowing behaviour, this chapter evinces a fuller understanding of how the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton were perceived by historical readers in relation to self-improvement.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first focuses on examples from periodical reviews, and the second on responses from individual readers and borrowers. Of course, periodical reviews are in a sense another variation of an individual reader’s response to a novel, but, as the next section shows, they often represented a wider, institutional voice. In this respect, it seems logical to analyse them first, before narrowing the focus to individual readers and borrowers. For each main section, I first delineate the necessary caveats and contexts pertaining to each type of evidence; I then analyse the most pertinent examples arising from each, revealing how their discussions of improvement support – and in some cases nuance – the claims of earlier chapters.

Reviews: Caveats and Contexts

The year 1802 marked the inception of the *Edinburgh Review*. Described by Ian Duncan as the ‘first of the great critical quarterlies’, and founded by ‘a quartet of ingenious Whig lawyers’, including Francis Jeffrey, the *Edinburgh Review* initiated a seismic shift in literary reviewing practices and the dawn of a new era in periodical culture.¹² As Henry Cockburn puts it, in an often cited passage from his biography of Jeffrey, ‘the effect was electrical’.¹³ Part of this effect can be traced in the speed and confidence with which the *Edinburgh Review* established itself as ‘the authoritative forum of cultural commentary for the age’.¹⁴ Its

¹¹ St Clair, 9–10.

¹² Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 21, 20.

¹³ Henry Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey: With a Selection from his Correspondence*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1852), 1:131.

¹⁴ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 21.

appearance soon triggered the establishment of a second, ‘Tory rival’ quarterly, appropriately named the *Quarterly Review*, founded in 1809 by the London publisher John Murray.¹⁵ Matthew Sangster notes how ‘both quarterlies vastly outsold their competition in the first ten years of the nineteenth century’, and critics agree unanimously on the unrivalled authority of the quarterly reviews during the opening decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ As Jon P. Klancher puts it, ‘no discourse was so immediately identified with power in the nineteenth century as that of the great party quarterlies, the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*’, which functioned, as Ina Ferris observes, as ‘the main site for the establishment of literary authority’ during the period.¹⁷ The dominance and popularity of the quarterlies extended to and is even reflected in the novels of the period, including, as Kim Wheatley has observed, Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, in which characters are depicted reading them.¹⁸

Periodicals had, of course, existed and been popular throughout the later eighteenth century, and particularly during the 1790s, as scholars such as Wheatley and Paul Keen have noted, but the foundation of the quarterlies at the start of the nineteenth century established categorically ‘a new chapter in the history of literary criticism’.¹⁹ This chapter was characterised by a chain reaction of new periodicals and literary magazines during the 1810s, 1820s, and early 1830s, including, but not limited to: the *New Monthly Magazine* (1814), *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1817), the *London Magazine* (1821), the *Westminster Review* (1824), the *Athenaeum* (1828), *Fraser’s Magazine* (1830), and the *Metropolitan* (1831). Much like the novel, then, these decades represented a particularly formative and ascendant period for the periodical genre and for literary reviewing culture. As one reviewer began for *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1833, ‘this is the great age of periodicals’.²⁰ The

¹⁵ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 21.

¹⁶ Matthew Sangster, *Living as an Author in the Romantic Period* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 237.

¹⁷ Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 69; Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 3. For more on the dominance of the quarterlies, see also David Stewart, *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Marilyn Butler, ‘Culture’s Medium: The Role of the Review’, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially 137–45.

¹⁸ Kim Wheatley, ‘Introduction’, in *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture*, ed. Kim Wheatley (Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 14–15.

¹⁹ Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu, ‘Introduction’, in *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu (Palgrave, 2002), 2.

²⁰ ‘Johnstone’s Edinburgh Magazine’, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* 3, no. 18 (09, 1833): 783, ProQuest.

examples discussed in the next section come from the following publications: both quarterlies, the *Monthly Review* (founded in 1749 by Ralph Griffiths), the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* newspaper (1750), the *Critical Review* (1756), *The British Critic* (1792), *The Lady's Monthly Museum; or, Polite Repository of Amusement and Instruction* (another English monthly women's magazine, published between 1798 and 1832), *The New London Review; or, Monthly Report of Authors and Books* (1799), the *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* (founded in 1804 by Archibald Constable, and sometimes also referred to as the *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany*), *La Belle Assemblée* (a women's monthly magazine founded in 1806 by the publisher John Bell), the *Literary Panorama* (founded in 1806; it became the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1819 and was published by Henry Colburn), *The Satirist; or, the Monthly Meteor* (1807), *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* (1808), and, finally, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (founded in 1832 by William Tait).

The main caveat to note when using periodical reviews to interpret readerly responses to novels is that they are inherently performative. In addition to generating their own cultural capital, one of the purposes of the eighteenth- and the nineteenth-century reviewer was, as Towsey notes, 'to influence consumers' choices and by inference their reading experiences'.²¹ This perceived purpose and authority is reflected in a letter from a Mrs Graham to Ferrier, in which she praises *The Inheritance*, noting specifically that she has heard 'there are extracts from it and a most flattering, or rather favourable, critique in the "[Edinburgh Evening] Courant"'.²² The ways in which reviewers worked to achieve this goal did, however, evolve over time. Literary reviews in the eighteenth century were generally very descriptive, typically comprising, as Ferris notes, 'a lucid and careful account of a book's contents'.²³ They rarely revealed much of the reviewer's own opinions about the text – the eighteenth-century reviewer was, in this sense, 'more of a cataloguer than a judge' – and reviews were aimed at readers who were not 'already knowledgeable about books, but [...] who might be induced to read or buy them'.²⁴ That these reviews aimed to influence reading choices and experiences was apparent in the fact that, as Keen notes, their success was ultimately based on and measured according to 'their power to persuade', through which

²¹ Towsey, 16–17.

²² Mrs Graham to Ferrier, 19 June, 1824, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier, 1782–1854*, ed. John A. Doyle (London: John Murray, 1898), 181.

²³ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 133.

²⁴ Sangster, 242; Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 129.

a degree of performativity necessarily developed.²⁵ By seeking to influence contemporary readers in this way, and to provide them with a survey understanding of recent publications, eighteenth-century reviewers also aimed, as Marilyn Butler has argued, ‘at creating and developing an audience for “literary intelligence”’.²⁶ In keeping with this idea, Towsey provides compelling examples of readers in Scotland ‘[leaning] heavily on developing notions of canonicity in British literature when making choices about what to read’.²⁷ His observation that readers’ ‘personal responses to books were patrolled by influential critics writing for the *Annual Register*, the *Critical Review*, the *Monthly Review*, and, latterly, the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*’ nicely reflects the influential role played by reviewers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by extension highlighting the value of the periodical review as a measure of readers’ responses to the novels under study here.

In contrast to eighteenth-century reviews, the quarterlies were much more exclusive, resolving, as the advertisement to the inaugural issue of the *Edinburgh Review* announced, not ‘to take notice of every new publication’, but rather to ‘confine their notice [...] to works that either have achieved, or deserve, a certain portion of celebrity’.²⁸ The authority evoked by this decision is reflected in Mark Schoenfield’s observation that ‘to be excluded from the *Edinburgh* marked figural exclusion from the literary marketplace’.²⁹ This decision also revealed a more nuanced aim among the quarterly reviewers: ‘where previous journals had catalogued, nurtured, and responded to literary culture, the *Edinburgh Review* sought to shape and dominate it, leveraging critical authority for political gain’.³⁰ The arrival of the quarterlies thus brought with it a more sustained emphasis on performance. To illustrate this point, Sangster notes how Jeffrey himself observed that the *Edinburgh Review*’s authority was built on its success as a performance and its capacity for originality and discursiveness over mere truth and fact.³¹ Part of this performance can be identified in the ‘commanding authority’ of the quarterly reviews’ tone.³² Moving away from descriptions of texts, they

²⁵ Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 119.

²⁶ Butler, 129.

²⁷ Towsey, 298.

²⁸ ‘Advertisement’, *Edinburgh Review* 1, no. 1 (10, 1802): 2–3, ProQuest.

²⁹ Mark Schoenfield, *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity: The ‘Literary Lower Empire’* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 80.

³⁰ Sangster, 234.

³¹ Sangster, 235.

³² David Stewart, *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 26.

tended towards offering an authoritative opinion on the work itself. They also nearly always employed the collective pronoun ‘we’, suggesting, as David Stewart observes, ‘a hegemonic authority supported by the cultural standing of the periodical’, and emphasising the importance of performance.³³

Another way through which a sense of performance develops in contemporary periodical reviews of Scottish novels specifically is their treatment of recognisable national stereotypes and their allusions to post-Union Anglo-Scottish relations. Many reviews, some of which are discussed in this chapter, objected to Scottish novels of the period on the grounds that they contained too many Scotticisms, or too much Scottish dialect, which some reviewers feared detracted from the plot and, consequently, English readers’ enjoyment. In 1815, the *Quarterly Review* suggested, for example, that Scott’s *Guy Mannering* ‘would be on the whole improved, by being *translated into English*’.³⁴ Here, the preference for greater anglicisation plays on the national prejudices discussed in Chapter Two, with which readers of this review would inevitably have been familiar. This familiarity assigns a degree of performativity to this example, as the reviewer knowingly plays on common tropes in order to draw readers into a discussion of Scott’s novel. In their 1815 review of Brunton’s *Discipline*, *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* observed that ‘a few *Scotticisms* occur in the course of the work, but not sufficiently often to disfigure the style, or to disgust the English reader’.³⁵ Although more favourable overall, the implication here is the same: that if Brunton were to have included more Scotticisms, her readers *would* have been disgusted.

As earlier chapters in this thesis demonstrate, antinovel discourse represents an additional imperative context within which to read the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton. Reviewers were clearly aware of antinovel stereotypes, and that the readers of their reviews would recognise them too. The centrality of this context to novel reviewing practices at the start of the nineteenth century thus produces a degree of performativity within the reviews themselves. As Ferris notes, the relationship between the periodical and the novel was ‘fraught with a complex tension’.³⁶ Duncan substantiates this point, observing that ‘although the quarterlies had condescended to review novels, beginning with Maria Edgeworth and then Scott, they tended to maintain a neoclassical suspicion of fiction as

³³ Stewart, 26.

³⁴ ‘*Guy Mannering, or the Astrologer*’, *Quarterly Review* 12, no. 24 (01, 1815): 507–08, ProQuest.

³⁵ ‘*Discipline; a Novel*’, *Anti-Jacobin Review and True Churchman's Magazine, Or, Monthly, Political and Literary Censor* 48, no. 200 (01, 1815): 30, ProQuest.

³⁶ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 8.

such'.³⁷ Peter Garside offers quantitative insight into this matter when he writes that 'from its inception [...] to the end of the 1820s the whig *Edinburgh Review* gave reviews to fiction on just over thirty occasions. This figure is only slightly exceeded by the Tory *Quarterly*, which included barely forty reviews involving fiction between 1809 and 1829, though noticeably allowing greater leeway in the 1820s'.³⁸ Tensions therefore arose when, as Ferris explains, the novel's growing social currency meant that it 'had to be brought within critical discourse (no matter how reluctantly) if the reviews were to maintain their cultural authority'.³⁹

Within reviews of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's novels, examples can certainly be found of reviewers alluding to antinovel discourse as a means of caveating the novel's transition into 'a critical category'.⁴⁰ In 1819, for example, the *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* observed in a review of Brunton's works how 'works of fiction, whose influence on the public mind must be powerful, from their almost unbounded circulation, had, with a few wandering exceptions, become the vehicles of every sort of mental poison', thus playing on popular figurations of the novel.⁴¹ Similarly, when it did deign to review Scott's *Waverley* in 1814, the *Edinburgh Review* referred to the novel as the 'form of composition the least respected in the whole circle of literature'.⁴² All of this is to point out that periodical reviews were often underpinned by their own didactic, political, and moral agendas, made evident through their engagement with antinovel and national prejudices. Many of the examples discussed in the next section allude to antinovel rhetoric, and this rhetoric therefore comprises a necessary lens through which to interpret periodical reviews as evidence of readerly responses.

Reviews: Analysis

Moral Improvement

³⁷ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 27.

³⁸ Peter Garside, 'The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Dispersal', in *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, vol. 2, 1800–1829, ed. Peter Garside and Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford University Press, 2000), 16–17. Ferrier and Hamilton were both reviewed by the *Edinburgh Review*, but neither they nor Brunton featured in the *Quarterly Review*.

³⁹ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 8, 34

⁴⁰ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 10.

⁴¹ 'Mrs Brunton', *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* 4 (01, 1819): 46, ProQuest.

⁴² 'The Waverley Novels', *Edinburgh Review* 55, no. 109 (04, 1832): 64, ProQuest.

One of the main ways through which contemporary periodical reviews recognise Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's novels as tools for self-improvement is their focus on the moral progress of readers. To an extent, this much is unsurprising. As St Clair notes, many literary reviews in the Romantic period 'shared the assumption that the main criterion against which a work of literature should be judged was its effects on the minds and morals of readers'.⁴³ While St Clair here refers to all literary works, Schoenfield applies this assumption to the novel genre specifically, counting morality alongside aesthetics as the two criteria of a 'dual axis' used to judge the work 'achieved by the novel' during the period.⁴⁴ This idea is clearly reflected in contemporary periodical reviews of the female-authored novels in question here, and speaks to the performativity of the periodical genre. Just as novelists of the period could be confident that their readers would be familiar with antinovel discourse, reviewers could be confident that their readers would be familiar with the expectation that novels should work to inculcate moral lessons in their readers. By playing on this expectation, periodical reviews reinforced and perpetuated it, as is evident, for example, in the following passage from *La Belle Assemblée*'s review of Scott's *Guy Mannering*:

The influx of common place novels have [*sic*] been this year as abundant as ever; but a woeful dearth has taken place in the more excellent works of fiction. We are happy, therefore, whenever a real good novel falls in our way to notice it: for the sentimental trash which monthly issues from the press, our pages have no room, our sole aim being, while we amuse our fair readers, to improve their taste by recommending only to them works of excellence, morality, and instruction.⁴⁵

In keeping with Schoenfield and St Clair's observations, this reviewer clearly acknowledges the need for a novel to be morally commendable in order for it to be publicly recommended, reinforcing the potentially performative, didactic, or reformatory agendas that characterise reviews of this period. In addition to reviewers, many novelists, including those central to this thesis, expressed an awareness of the centrality of moral value to novel-reviewing culture. In a letter written between July 1809 and February 1810 to her friend Charlotte Clavering about

⁴³ St Clair, 285.

⁴⁴ Schoenfield, 68.

⁴⁵ 'Guy Mannering; or, The Astrologer', *La Belle Assemblée: Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (12, 1815): 236, ProQuest.

her plans for *Marriage*, Ferrier remarks: 'I expect it will be the first book every wise matron will put into the hands of our daughters, and even the reviewers will relax of their severity in favour of the morality of this little work'.⁴⁶ Her implication that periodical reviewers will be more in favour of *Marriage* when they learn of its moralising tendencies signals her understanding of what was deemed suitable reading by periodicals and, by extension, the reading public during the early nineteenth century.

In some instances, reviews of the novels under study confirm them as works that were perceived to have the capacity to improve their readers, but do not go into great detail about what this improvement might look like. Examples of this can be found in, for example, the *Monthly Review*, in its characterisation of Brunton as 'pre-eminent' among the period's 'pleasing expounders of morality', or the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, which describes *Discipline* specifically as 'extremely entertaining, moral, and improving', with the added compliment that 'no higher eulogium need be given of any book whatever'.⁴⁷ In its review of *Guy Mannering*, the *Quarterly Review* notes 'the moral lesson inculcated by' *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, while their reviewer of *Waverley* asserts that although 'we do not believe that any man or woman was ever improved in morals or manners by the reading of *Tom Jones* or *Peregrine Pickle*', they are 'confident that many have profited' by 'the *Cottagers of Glenburnie*'.⁴⁸ *The British Critic*, meanwhile, commends 'the piety, and good principles' that Ferrier 'inculcates on every occasion' in *Marriage*, while the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* observes how the 'moral tendency' of *The Inheritance* 'forms one of its highest recommendations'.⁴⁹ These examples do not offer specific insight into what the moral lessons or tendencies of these novels really involve, but taken together they indicate that contemporary reviewers were clear in their estimation of the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton as ones that offered moral instruction to readers, in keeping with prevailing expectations.

Other reviews offer more detail. In 1819, for example, the *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* noted how Brunton and Hamilton, alongside Maria Edgeworth,

⁴⁶ Susan Ferrier to Charlotte Clavering, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, 76.

⁴⁷ 'Mrs. Brunton's *Emmeline, &c.*', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* (02, 1820): 175, ProQuest; 'Discipline, a Novel; by the Author of *Self-Control*', *The Lady's Monthly Museum* 1 (04, 1815): 228, ProQuest.

⁴⁸ 'Waverley; or, 'tis Sixty Years Since', *Quarterly Review* (07, 1814): 355, ProQuest; 'Guy Mannering, or the Astrologer', *Quarterly Review*, 508.

⁴⁹ 'Marriage, a Novel', *The British Critic* (07, 1818): 105, ProQuest; *Edinburgh Evening Courant* (14 June, 1824): 4.

succeeded ‘not so much [in] conform[ing] to the taste of the age as creat[ing] for themselves, by the mere force of their genius, an appetite for moral and religious truths among readers to whom these were formerly a mockery and a discord’, in which the implication is that readers will likely want to engage more with ‘moral and religious truths’ after reading these authors’ works, indicating their improvement.⁵⁰ In Brunton’s novels, this reviewer contends, readers are ‘instructed and made better by irresistible example, without the exhibition of technical maxims or formal morality being impertinently thrust in our way, while we are merely seeking for amusement’.⁵¹ Here, they recognise the implicit strategies through which Brunton’s fiction operates to promote self-improvement, alongside the preface to *Self-Control*, which explicitly encourages distanced reading, in a way that is distinct from straightforward didacticism. They then helpfully identify the specific effects that they perceive readers will experience when reading, or after having read, *Self-Control*. These include: ‘a warmer glow of religious feeling, a firmer purpose of upright conduct, a more expanded benevolence of heart, and a more marked revolting at vice and crime’, all of which correspond closely with the model of true improvement outlined in Chapter Four, which prioritises religious duty and benevolence towards others.⁵² In a similar vein, *The New London Review* observes how Hamilton (then anonymous) provides in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* ‘bright examples of unfeigned virtue and genuine philanthropy’ for her readers to imitate, in which the same principles prevail.⁵³ Analysis of contemporary reviews thus fortifies our understanding of the precise ways through which novels including *Self-Control* were thought to contribute to the moral improvement of readers by enhancing those readers’ perception of their religious and moral duties, emphasising in particular the importance of caring for others and self-invigilating conduct. It also confirms that the features of moral improvement identified in these reviews align with this thesis’ definition of true improvement, revealing that reviewers picked up on these aspects of the works in ways that these novels seem to anticipate, enabling them to figure as catalysts for readerly self-reform.

That moral improvement is such a central concern in reviews of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton’s works forces us to confront the unevenness with which the expectation that novels should be morally improving was applied to male- and female-authored Scottish

⁵⁰ ‘Mrs Brunton’, *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, 46.

⁵¹ ‘Mrs Brunton’, *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, 47–48.

⁵² ‘Mrs Brunton’, *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, 48.

⁵³ ‘*Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*’, *The New London Review; or, Monthly Report of Authors and Books* 17 (05, 1800): 451, ProQuest.

novels of the period. This unevenness relates directly to the gendered hierarchy of the novel, in which Scott's historical novels score significantly more highly than the novels of his female contemporaries, and through which it becomes clear that the moral imperative of fiction was applied more rigorously to Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton than it was to Scott, who presents historical knowledge as an alternative source of improvement in his novels that supersedes moral lessons. Reflecting on the novel's emergence as a distinct critical category in the 1810s, Ferris argues that *Waverley* was 'precisely the text to accelerate this process of incorporation', deploying historical fiction as the means through which to transform the novel into a respectable, authoritative genre.⁵⁴ In 1832, the *Edinburgh Review* acknowledged this transformation, observing that 'for novel-writing, in general, the Author of *Waverley* has done much [...] he has made it a more creditable exercise of ability than it was previously considered; and thus invited to it many writers who might otherwise have considered it unworthy of their regard'.⁵⁵ As Ferris writes, 'the very name "historical novel" [...] allowed important openings in both the fictional and historical genres dominant in Scott's time', imbuing the novel with a new authority that reviewers recognised, and placing Scott above all other novelists.⁵⁶ The gendered nature of the novel's authority is in turn alluded to by Garside, who notes the 'broad distaste for the common "female" novel' in both the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Review*'.⁵⁷

That Scott's novels would be judged according to a different metric from the moral standards applied to the female-authored novels under study here is foreshadowed in *The British Critic*'s 1814 review of *Waverley*:

We are unwilling to consider this publication in the light of a common novel, whose fate it is to be devoured with rapidity for the day, and to be afterwards forgotten for ever [*sic*]; but as a vehicle of curious accurate information upon a subject which must at all times demand our attention – the history and manners of a very very large and renowned portion of the inhabitants of these islands.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 10.

⁵⁵ 'The *Waverley* Novels', *Edinburgh Review*, 77.

⁵⁶ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 6.

⁵⁷ Garside, 17.

⁵⁸ '*Waverley*: Supposed by W. Scott', *The British Critic* 2 (08, 1814): 204, ProQuest.

In these lines, the emergence of a gendered hierarchy is immediately discernible. In showing ‘how history ought to be made available for the purposes of fiction’, Scott was perceived as doing something different with the novel from his implied female contemporaries, marking what Duncan refers to in his reiteration of Ferris’ argument as ‘the rhetorical accession of masculine “authority” over feminine “romance” in the early reception of Scott’s novels’.⁵⁹ The reviewer notes in particular the long-term value of historical knowledge, presenting the development of this knowledge as an important way through which readers of *Waverley* will become improved. This improving potential of Scott’s fiction is presented in contrast here and elsewhere to the ‘common novel’, in which the derogatory connotations of antinovel discourse are clear, and to which the pressure of moral justification was firmly applied. Although the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton are, as this chapter argues, by no means dismissed by contemporary reviewers as worthless works of fiction, they are clearly judged based on their response to moral expectations, as opposed to presenting historical knowledge as a worthy means of self-improvement. These expectations emphasise the gendered nature of perceptions about what male- and female-authored novels could and should offer their readers, which the novelistic hierarchy that is implicit in the passage above helped to establish. Implicit within it is that women deal with, and are perhaps in special need of, moral lessons, whereas educated men simply need to trade in the gathering of information. Different novels thus became associated with different types of reader and modes of reading. In their review of *Waverley*, the *Quarterly Review* echoes this by concluding that ‘the interest and merit of the work is derived, not from any of the ordinary qualities of a novel, but from the truth of its facts, and the accuracy of its delineations’, reiterating the way in which Scott’s novels became associated with and were measured according to a model of readerly improvement that was distinct from the models offered by Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton.⁶⁰

One does not have to look far to find examples of other reviews that recognise this distinction. The *Monthly Review*, for example, identifies Scott’s delineation of ‘national character, manners, customs, and opinions’ as being above all ‘instructive’ to the ‘present readers of *Waverley*’.⁶¹ Similar, the *Scots Magazine* observes of *Waverley* how ‘reasoning and information have been alike attempted to be conveyed through this channel [the novel]’, among which no attempt has been more pleasing than Scott’s attempt ‘to delineate the

⁵⁹ ‘The Waverley Novels’, *Edinburgh Review*, 65; Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 43.

⁶⁰ ‘*Waverley; or, ’tis Sixty Years Since*’, *Quarterly Review*, 377.

⁶¹ ‘*Waverley; or, ’tis Sixty Years Since*’, *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* 75 (11, 1814): 277, ProQuest.

peculiarities of national manners', in which historical learning again constitutes a version of readerly development.⁶² In 1821, the *Inverness Courier* identified the similar design of Galt's *Annals of the Parish* 'to present a lively record of that change in manners and national character', in which knowledge and information figure as the primary sources of instruction, instead of moral lessons, emphasising the emergence of a gendered discourse on the novel.⁶³

All of this is not to say that discussions about morality were excluded from reviews of Scott's fiction, or those of Galt's and Hogg's. The review of *Guy Mannering* cited at the beginning of this section attests to this by counting Scott's novels among other 'works of excellence, morality, and instruction', and in 1833 Harriet Martineau asserted that 'there is little reason to question that Scott has done more for the morals of society, taking the expression in its largest sense, than all the divines, and other express moral teachers, of a century past'.⁶⁴ Towsey has noted the way in which readers' understanding of history carried moral implications during the second half of the eighteenth century, before Scott had turned the novel into a medium for historical learning. History books, Towsey writes, provoked among Scottish readers 'critical opinions of a more worldly nature, not simply encouraging readers to learn from the mistakes and triumphs of their historical exempla but also challenging them to rationalise momentous events in the world around them'.⁶⁵ He continues, writing that 'there was little doubt in [...] readers' minds that the historical examples furnished by Scottish Enlightenment historians were not only genuine but also useable', providing them, for example, with 'a range of ready-made maxims on virtue and vice'.⁶⁶ While the reviews cited here do not explicitly associate Scott's fictionalisation of history with readers' moral decision-making, Towsey's point is a useful one to note, confirming that novelistic depictions of history and morality are not mutually exclusive. Scott was, moreover, clearly aware of the expectation that novels should be moral. In a diary entry dated 8 July 1819, Frances Lady Shelley recalls Scott's reflections in an earlier conversation on 'the

⁶² 'Review.---*Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*', *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* (07, 1814): 524, ProQuest.

⁶³ *Inverness Courier* (10 May, 1821), cited in '*Annals of the Parish*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 9, no. 50 (05, 1821): 210, ProQuest.

⁶⁴ Harriet Martineau, 'The Achievements of the Genius of Scott', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 2, no. 10 (01, 1833): 445, ProQuest.

⁶⁵ Towsey, 226.

⁶⁶ Towsey, 203–04, 205.

author's fear of being charged with immorality; he therefore made his characters as blameless as possible. "An author," said he, "would not like to have his work called immoral".⁶⁷

By paying attention to reviewers' recognition of historical knowledge as a primary means of self-improvement in Scott's novels, we do, however, gain a fuller understanding of the gendered bias that characterises the application of moral expectations to the novels under study. As one reviewer puts it, although Scott's novels are 'favourable to morality', they 'never exhibit an attempt to enforce any distinct moral'.⁶⁸ In their appraisal of Brunton's novels, another reviewer goes as far as to note the 'undesigned morality' of the *Waverley Novels*.⁶⁹ In doing so, they highlight the difference between how female-authored works such as *Self-Control* and *Discipline* and Scott's works were judged, while also recognising Scott's works as ones that were not self-consciously concerned with ideas of moral self-improvement in the ways that, as this thesis shows, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's were. What these disparities therefore show is that the expectation to provide moral lessons was applied much more stringently to the female-authored novels under study than it was to the male-authored ones. It also reveals how the novelistic hierarchy that develops in reviews contributed to the relative exclusion of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton within Scotland's gendered literary scene on which critics including Duncan and Craicu have both remarked, resulting in a critical oversight of their contributions to the novel and its generic trajectory. In this way, analysis of periodical reviews enables us to discern the degree of moral expectation placed on these female authors, and the ways in which they were perceived as meeting these expectations through their presentation of their works as tools for moral self-improvement.

Inevitably, examples can also be found of reviews that complicate or dispute this presentation. This is particularly true of Brunton's novels, with which some reviewers took issue on two counts. The first relates to the issue of probability, with many deeming Laura's transatlantic escape from Hargrave via canoe an improbable distraction from the novel's moral lessons. *Self-Control*, a reviewer for the *Scots Magazine* suggests, is 'interspersed' with 'a number of strained and improbable incidents [...] which are entirely adverse to the tone of sober sense and correct observation, which distinguish the better parts of this work'.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Frances Lady Shelley, *The Diary of Frances Lady Shelley*, vol. 2, 1818–1873, ed. Richard Edgcumbe (John Murray, 1913), 48.

⁶⁸ 'The *Waverley Novels*', *Edinburgh Review*, 72.

⁶⁹ 'Memoir of Mrs Brunton', *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* (06, 1819): 489, ProQuest.

⁷⁰ 'Review---*Self-Control*, a Novel', *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* (03, 1811): 204, ProQuest.

Elsewhere, the same reviewer who identifies the hallmarks of true improvement in the example cited above picks up on this ‘air of improbability, which, to readers of less lively fancy, may destroy the charm which her fictions would otherwise wear’.⁷¹ In their study of *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth recognise that ‘the demand that a novel be moral was at least as frequently made as the requirements that it be real’.⁷² As these examples signify, however, this demand predates the start of the Victorian period and clearly contributed towards these reviewers’ approach to Brunton’s fiction, in which a tension consequently develops between probability and morality. That her novels are ultimately praised by both reviewers, in spite of these improbable instances, is testimony to the degree to which they were nevertheless perceived as having morally improving purposes, but it also emphasises the greater degree to which the pressure to justify fiction as morally improving was applied to female-authored novels relative to Scott’s.

The second count on which reviewers, including the present one from the *Scots Magazine*, criticised *Self-Control* relates to Laura’s infatuation with Hargrave. Observing the ‘error into which Laura has fallen, of being seduced by mere figure and superficial accomplishments, is not one of rare or improbable occurrence’, they assert that ‘our self-controlling heroine, therefore [...] has set an exceedingly bad example to the world, and to the rest of her sex’.⁷³ Such criticism necessarily threatens the moral integrity of Brunton’s work, but once again the important thing to note here is that *Self-Control* is still understood to promote moral lessons among readers, this ostensible fault notwithstanding. While the reviewer remains sceptical of Laura’s response to Hargrave’s initial attempts at seduction (wondering ‘that self-control should have been so necessary’), they maintain that ‘the character of Laura, however, unless in the single instance which we have now noticed, is well supported’, confirming its value to readers in spite of this exception.⁷⁴ Alongside this reviewer’s approving resolve, their identification of Laura’s temporarily ‘bad example’ is useful to note since it recognises and implies that she is otherwise intended to provide readers with a good example. Similarly, by identifying the ‘superficial accomplishments’ that briefly distract Laura as an exception within the novel, the reviewer emphasises the ‘vigorous, solid, and practical excellence’ that characterises the rest of Brunton’s work.⁷⁵ While reviews of

⁷¹ ‘Mrs Brunton’, *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, 49.

⁷² Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth, ‘Introductory Essay’, in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, ed. Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 7.

⁷³ ‘Review---*Self-Control*, a Novel’, *Scots Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, 212.

⁷⁴ ‘Review---*Self-Control*, a Novel’, *Scots Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, 213.

⁷⁵ ‘Review---*Self-Control*, a Novel’, *Scots Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, 213.

these female-authored novels were not afraid to highlight their moral faults, then, it is often the case that, in doing so, the reviewer inadvertently reiterates the prevailing moral purpose of the work in question, confirming readerly improvement as a principal concern of these novelists, even if perceived errors occur in their attempts to provide readers with improving and practicable examples.

Active Reading

Paying attention to periodical reviews of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's novels reveals their identification of these works as ones that promote and reward critically engaged, reflective reading practices. In this way, the reviewers respond to these novels in ways that earlier chapters of this thesis suggest that they seem to expect. In its review of Hamilton's *Memoirs*, for example, the *Critical Review* asserts that 'the characters of Captain and Mrs. Delmond gratify the penetration of the sagacious reader', in which the reference to a 'sagacious reader' indicates an implicit requirement for readers to engage their own judgement in order to discern meaning from the novel.⁷⁶ This reference may also be a reference to Henry Fielding (discussed briefly in Chapter One), reflecting the promotion of 'bookish knowledge' via novel reviews that was touched on in the previous section.⁷⁷ Reviewers of Scott's novels also pay attention to the need for active reading, confirming as previous chapters have done that although strategies to promote active reading are central to the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, a concern with different models of reading appears occasionally in the novels of Galt, Hogg, and Scott too. In its aforecited review of *Waverley*, *The British Critic* writes that the novel's sentiments are 'uniformly good, and such as cannot fail to make a strong impression upon the mind of a thinking reader'.⁷⁸ Here, reference to an implied 'thinking reader' denotes that Scott's novel requires a degree of critical engagement to derive value from its lessons – namely, to avoid 'that inordinate self-confidence, and that over-bearing petulance, which teaches [people] to despise that order, that labour, and that discipline of the mind, which can alone secure to them the full completion of their ambitious views'.⁷⁹ The review concludes with the assertion that 'the most fatal enemies

⁷⁶ 'Memoirs of Modern Philosophers', *Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature* 29 (07, 1800): 313, ProQuest.

⁷⁷ Sangster, 42, in relation to Butler's argument.

⁷⁸ 'Waverley: Supposed by W. Scott', *The British Critic*, 208.

⁷⁹ 'Waverley: Supposed by W. Scott', *The British Critic*, 209.

to the bright prospects of future distinction are the ramblings of superficial enquiry, and the pride of conceited indolence', in which the reference to superficiality reinforces the dangers of failing to engage with what one reads, and recalls to mind Edward Waverley's uncritical reading habits discussed in Chapter Three.⁸⁰

Other reviews go into more detail about how Brunton and Hamilton's novels in particular operate to advocate improving reading practices, and what these practices look like. In its review of *Self-Control*, for example, the *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* acknowledges what they interpret as Brunton's 'laudable wish of inspiring that self-distrust, and of communicating that knowledge of the secret avenues by which unworthy passions insinuate themselves without which the best intentions are often of little avail in the pursuit of moral improvement'.⁸¹ This reviewer's reference to 'self-distrust' and 'secret avenues' signals their recognition of *Self-Control* as a novel concerned with active reading practices, encouraging its readers carefully to consider what they read and to apply the examples and lessons that the novel provides to their own situations. These lessons then enable the reader to guard themselves against 'unworthy passions'. In this sense, 'self-distrust' can be understood as a version of the introspection necessary to identify and respond to an individual reader's need for moral self-improvement.

The *Monthly Review*'s appraisal of *Self-Control* reflects similarly on the model of reading that Brunton advocates. Noting that the novel's sentiments 'are such as must improve every one who will attend to them', the reviewer observes that 'many of the characters by whom [Laura] is surrounded may be contemplated with advantage; and, indeed, among those who condescend to be instructed by what they read, and therefore examine what *caps fits them*, few will long study this work *bare-headed*'.⁸² In these lines, the importance of self-examination during the reading process is again identified as a concern of Brunton's fiction, reiterating its association with individual improvement. Emphasis is, moreover, placed on the importance of application – stage two of true improvement. By likening the process of self-improvement via novel reading to trying on different hats, the reviewer draws attention to the importance of both actions. The reader must first identify the principles and lessons advocated within the narrative, before applying these principles to their own conduct – in other words, ascertaining which 'cap fits them' through active reading, and then continuing to

⁸⁰ 'Waverley: Supposed by W. Scott', *The British Critic*, 209.

⁸¹ 'Review---*Self-Control*, a Novel', *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany*, 205.

⁸² 'Art. 23. *Self Control*', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* 55 (08, 1811): 435, ProQuest.

wear it. Even when a review identifies an inconsistency or weakness within one of the novels under study, this act of identification often helpfully recognises the pressure that weakness or inconsistency places on readers to think for themselves. The same *Monthly Review* reviewer is, for example, cautiously sceptical when they assert that ‘whether Laura’s “self-control” be perfectly natural is mere matter of opinion’.⁸³ Their suggestion that the answer to this ‘depends, in a great measure, on the disposition of the reader’ is important because it places the onus of decision-making on the reader, just as Brunton’s preface to *Self-Control* encourages readers to take responsibility for their own self-reform. Writing about Brunton’s unfinished novel, *Emmeline*, a different review in the *Monthly Review* commends the novel’s ‘excellent’ moral, but reproaches Brunton for ‘throw[ing] too much nobleness and grace round the characters of those whose actions she would represent as vicious and immoral’.⁸⁴ This has the effect, the reviewer argues, of ‘setting our feelings at war with our better judgement’, which they perceive as a weakness within the novel.⁸⁵ At the same time, however, in suggesting that readers of *Emmeline* must learn to navigate the tension between critical judgment and emotional response, the reviewer also presents Brunton’s novel as a catalyst for active reading and thus a tool for self-improvement.

The importance of active reading is in turn remarked upon in the *Edinburgh Review*’s account of *Cottagers*, in which the reviewer associates Hamilton’s novel with critical readerly engagement and the practical application of lessons learnt through novel reading. They write:

It would be extravagant to hope, that the mere perusal of this, or any other narrative, should effect a reformation which is truly represented as having been so laborious. But a strong current of improvement runs at present through all Scotland, and a much smaller impulse than would once have been necessary, will now throw the peasantry within the sphere of its action. Besides, *our* cottagers are reading and reasoning animals; and are more likely perhaps to be moved from their old habits by hints and suggestions which they themselves may glean up from a book, than by the officious and insulting interference of a living reformer. It does not appear to us altogether visionary, therefore, to expect that some good may actually be done by the circulation of such a work as this among the lower classes of society; and therefore, we earnestly

⁸³ ‘Art. 23. *Self-Control*’, *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 435.

⁸⁴ ‘Mrs. Brunton’s *Emmeline, &c.*’, *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 177.

⁸⁵ ‘Mrs. Brunton’s *Emmeline, &c.*’, *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 177.

recommend it to Mrs Hamilton to take measures for facilitating its admission into their economical circles.⁸⁶

In this passage, part of the novel's perceived success as a tool for improvement is admittedly attributed to the broader 'current of improvement' that flourished in Scotland at the time, but the reviewer also acknowledges the approach to reading that Hamilton implicitly advocates within her fiction. The idea, for example, that readers of Hamilton's novels must 'glean' 'hints' and suggestions from the fiction for themselves is reflective of the critical engagement and self-examination that Mrs Mason's example encourages them to adopt. The phrase 'they themselves', in particular, signals this reviewer's recognition of the importance of applying individual judgement, as opposed simply to absorbing information when one reads, that Hamilton's novel advocates. There is an obvious undercurrent of national pride in this review, which also helps to promote a self-serving approach to reading. Through their pointed recognition of 'the officious and insulting interference of a living reformer', for example, the reviewer presents a critical approach to reading that prioritises individual judgment as an appealing defence mechanism against implicitly unwelcome, anglicising obtrusions. Their concluding reflection that 'some good may actually be done by the circulation' of *Cottagers* emphasises, finally, the reviewer's recognition of Hamilton's novel as a tool for self-improvement due specifically to its appeal to and development of readers' extant 'reasoning' faculties.

The same idea is suggested in *The Satirist's* review of *Cottagers*. 'We anticipate great and extensive benefit to all classes of society from its sale', the reviewer writes, 'in its affecting pages the rich may read a clear statement of the best mode to ensure popularity, the moderate in fortune and desire may trace the best source of domestic comfort, the poor may perceive the best way to independence, and even the indigent may learn to grow content'.⁸⁷ Implicit here is the reviewer's recognition of the need for active reading in order that readers can reap the social benefits that *Cottagers* is understood to offer. On the one hand the review is itself promoting improving reading practices, but, importantly for my purposes, it also recognises Hamilton's novel as one that lends itself to and rewards this model of reading. The reviewer's use of verbs such as 'trace', 'perceive', and 'learn' emphasises this point,

⁸⁶ 'Mrs Hamilton's *Cottagers*', *Edinburgh Review* 12, no. 24 (07, 1808): 410, ProQuest. Original italics.

⁸⁷ '*The Cottagers of Glenburnie*', *The Satirist, or, Monthly Meteor* 3 (12, 1808): 512–13, ProQuest.

gesturing to the processes of mental cultivation discussed in Chapter Three and also the importance of distance between a reader and a text in order that readers can glean from the novel the lessons that will be most valuable to them – be these in relation to ‘popularity’, ‘domestic comfort’, ‘independence’, or ‘content[ment]’.

This idea of learning to discern and act on the lessons in a novel that are applicable to ourselves as readers recurs in a later review, published in 1816 by the *Literary Panorama*, which considers the relevance of *Cottagers* to readers in Ireland:

In Ireland, in particular, the history of the *Cottagers of Glenburnie* has been read with peculiar avidity, and it has probably done as much good to the Irish as to the Scotch. While the Irish have seized and enjoyed the opportunity it afforded of a good-humoured laugh at their Scotch neighbours they have secretly seen, through shades of difference, a resemblance to themselves; and are conscious that, changing the names, the tale might be told of them.⁸⁸

The implication here that Irish readers of *Cottagers* have learnt to apply the principles of improvement, which the reviewer cites earlier as ‘truth, justice, and family affection and religion’, and which they recognise were originally intended for the Scots, to themselves implicitly identifies Hamilton’s novel as a catalyst for distanced reading.⁸⁹ Recognising, as previous reviews discussed in this chapter do, that readers might react less favourably to the preachiness of overly didactic novels, the reviewer notes how the ‘Hibernian reader’ can rest easy, ‘happily relieved from all apprehension that the lesson was intended for him’.⁹⁰ In this way, ‘his good sense takes and profits by the advice that is offered to another’, in which the profit is necessarily contingent on the distanced reading practices that *Cottagers* promotes, through which the reader learns to reflect on the examples of others before applying them to themselves.⁹¹ In keeping with the argument put forward in Chapter Two, this reviewer also recognises national stereotypes as useful for drawing to readers’ attention the need for improvement to take place in the first place. This is, of course, very much the case in *Cottagers*, as Hamilton plays on national prejudices by depicting the Scottish Highlands as

⁸⁸ ‘Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton’, *The Literary Panorama* 5, no. 26 (11, 1816): 288, ProQuest.

⁸⁹ ‘Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton’, *The Literary Panorama*, 288.

⁹⁰ ‘Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton’, *The Literary Panorama*, 288.

⁹¹ ‘Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton’, *The Literary Panorama*, 288.

‘dirty’ and ‘uncivilised’, presenting in so doing what the reviewer characterises as a ‘faithful representation’ of perceived ‘local manners and customs’.⁹² That this particular review notes that Irish readers recognised the relevance of the lessons of *Cottagers* to their own situations therefore indicates that these principles were perceived by historical readers as ones with the potential to be applied more broadly beyond their original context. That Ireland, and not England, is proffered as a point of comparison in this review reiterates another national stereotype, in which England figures as the ostensibly more civilised country, therefore not in need of the same ‘good’ that *Cottagers* might provide. While not exempt from this prejudice, the reviewer identifies a degree of flexibility in the model of improvement that novels such as Hamilton’s evoke, recognising that while national prejudices can provide a useful impetus for introducing moral principles to readers, the same principles can be applied elsewhere if readers are willing to reflect on their behaviour.

This recognition extends to another review of *Cottagers*, published in *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*. Once again, the reviewer acknowledges that ‘the book in question’ was ‘written purposely for the improvement of the Scotch peasantry’, but argues that it may ‘in many points [...] be found applicable to ourselves’, once again necessitating a distanced approach to reading.⁹³ Hamilton’s harnessing of national stereotypes to introduce readers to the necessary principles of improvement does not, for this reader, preclude *Cottagers* from offering help to those of a different national identity. Instead they note that ‘improvement is a nation’s blessing; a blessing which can never be duly appreciated until we are conscious of our own wants’ contending that the writer in this case is ‘deserving of his country’s thanks’ for pointing out ‘with the candour and courage of a true friend [...] its defects in hopes of applying a remedy’.⁹⁴ Although, as this review recognises, nation represents a way of talking about improvement in these novels, it does not mean that that version of improvement, or the principles associated with it, are tied to a specific nation. Indeed, the reviewer instead goes so far as to state explicitly that if ‘the book in question [...] be again brought forward before the public eye for this purpose, and held up in this particular point of view, as a means of introducing a system of domestic economy among the lower classes in [Ireland]’ then it ‘will

⁹² ‘Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton’, *The Literary Panorama*, 288.

⁹³ ‘*The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, a Tale for the Farmer’s Inglenook’, *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 10 (05, 1809): 379–80, ProQuest.

⁹⁴ ‘*The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, a Tale for the Farmer’s Inglenook’, *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, 80.

not be without its use'.⁹⁵ Here we can perceive the same national prejudice at work, connecting Scotland to Ireland, but conspicuously not England, and thereby caveating slightly the parameters of influence of Hamilton's improving framework. Importantly, though, this review recognises that the novel itself can provide a tool for self-improvement and that an important part of this process involves readers learning to identify, or become 'conscious' of, their own wants, thereby opening up the possibility of self-reform through active reading.

Individual Readers and Borrowers: Caveats and Contexts

Writing about the value of periodical reviews, St Clair observes that 'such reviews may be useful for some purposes, such as reconstructing horizons of readerly expectations, or the dominant discursive frameworks within which a particular text was understood and debated at the time of publication'.⁹⁶ They cannot, however, 'be assumed to be representative records of the actual reception of the reviewed text by its many other readers'.⁹⁷ With this in mind, attention will now turn to the 'many other readers' of these novels, analysing their responses to them in letters, alongside some diary and journal entries. As with the periodical reviews, it is necessary in the first instance to acknowledge the various caveats and provisos associated with these sources of evidence.

One of the most important caveats to consider when analysing the history of reading is summarised effectively in Chartier's observation that 'reading, by definition, is rebellious and vagabond. Readers use infinite numbers of subterfuges to procure prohibited books, to read between the lines, and to subvert the lessons imposed on them'.⁹⁸ That is to say, that actual, historical readers rarely conform to or meet the expectations that are placed by an author on the implied, hypothetical, or ideal reader of their text. Indeed, reading is an inherently subjective act, although not necessarily subversive to the extent that Chartier suggests. As Bernadette Cunningham notes, 'each reader, each listener to a text being read, responds to it in the light of his or her own prior knowledge and life experience', and is

⁹⁵ 'The Cottagers of Glenburnie, a Tale for the Farmer's Inglenook', *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, 379–80.

⁹⁶ St Clair, 6.

⁹⁷ St Clair, 6.

⁹⁸ Chartier, viii.

therefore highly likely to respond to texts in varied, novel, and unexpected ways.⁹⁹ Alan Kennedy also attests to this when he writes that ‘readers must actively construct anew for themselves the meaning of fictions’.¹⁰⁰ Although, as he notes, ‘this does not mean that the meanings they construct and their experiences are necessarily different on the whole from the meanings and experiences of previous readers’, the fact remains that reading is an intensely personal experience.¹⁰¹ In addition to responding to texts differently, readers are motivated to engage with texts in the first place for very different reasons. These motivations bring with them uneven levels of critical attention and attitudes towards reading, which in turn produces very varied results in terms of what readers actually take away from a text. Essentially, then, as Halsey puts it, ‘interpreting accounts of reading is problematic, for a number of reasons to do with the nature of reading itself’, and if, as St Clair notes, ‘we wish to investigate the consequences of reading’, then it is important first to acknowledge the many prerogatives and that readers might choose to exercise before, during, or after reading.¹⁰²

A particularly good example of rebellious reading is alluded in the letters of the author Mary Russell Mitford. Writing to her friend and fellow novelist Barbara Hofland about *Marriage*, Mitford describes a ‘book laden with an impeccable heroine’ as ‘the heaviest millstone of all’: ‘how I do hate those over-good book-people! They are just like triple refined sugar—sweet and bright and hard and spotless, and good for nothing till united with some ardent spirit or some powerful acid’.¹⁰³ Mitford’s amusing rejection of Mary as a moral exemplar is immediately effective in revealing one of the ways through which historical readers might refuse to comply with the expectations placed on the implied reader – with the expectation here being that readers might revise their behaviour based on Mary’s example, so becoming improved. For Mitford, Mary’s ‘wisdom and virtue’ comprise only ‘sins’, as she firmly resists the opportunity to engage with her example.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, as a means of

⁹⁹ Bernadette Cunningham, ‘Introduction: The Experience of Reading’, in *The Experience of Reading: Irish Historical Perspectives*, ed. Bernadette Cunningham and Máire Kennedy (Rare Books Group of the Library Association of Ireland and Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 1999), 2.

¹⁰⁰ Alan Kennedy, *Meaning and Signs in Fiction* (Macmillan, 1979), ix.

¹⁰¹ Kennedy, ix.

¹⁰² Katie Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers, 1786–1945* (Anthem Press, 2013), 92; St Clair, 5.

¹⁰³ Mary Russell Mitford to Mrs [Barbara] Hofland, 18 March, 1819, in *Letters of Mary Russell Mitford*, 2nd ser., 2 vols., ed. Henry Chorley (London: Richard Bentley, 1872), 1:52.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Russell Mitford to Mrs [Barbara] Hofland, 18 March, 1819, in *Letters of Mary Russell Mitford*, 1:52. See also Lady Caroline Lamb’s rejection of Harriet Orwell in Hamilton’s *Memoirs*, whom Lamb criticises for giving ‘one rather too much the idea of a

circumventing these sins, Mitford writes ‘luckily I know how to skip (invaluable art, I wonder no one has written an essay on it)’, revealing a further ‘resisting strategy’ through which actual readers refuse to comply with a novel’s ostensible intentions.¹⁰⁵ Other readers mention that they have read a novel but then proceed to comment on an aspect of that novel that does not at all pertain to its moral lessons. A good example of this can be found in Jane Austen’s review of *Self-Control*, discussed briefly in the Introduction to this thesis, in which she famously remarks on the improbability of Laura’s escape down a North American river.¹⁰⁶ Other readers refuse to read a novel at all, for reasons as trivial as not liking the title: “‘*Discipline*’ people tell me to read,’ writes Sarah Harriet Burney in 1815, ‘but I have no stomach to it, I believe because of the name, fool that I am!’.¹⁰⁷

These freedoms are an inevitability of this kind of research. Many examples can be found in responses to these novels of readers who reference a novel in a letter but then move on without offering further comment. Towsey refers to these as ‘stray comments’.¹⁰⁸ In other cases, a comment might relate to the author and not the work itself, as is the case when Joanna Baillie writes to Margaret Holford Hodson: ‘I dare say you have read that very popular Novel called *Inheritance*’, and then proceeds to offer comment on Ferrier’s character as ‘a very diffident, retiring, simple minded & mannered person’, rather than her novel, or when Baillie alludes to the success of *Destiny* before moving on to discuss Ferrier’s failing eyesight.¹⁰⁹ Other readers focus on a novel’s characterisation or humour, without reflecting on the potentially improving implications of these features. In 1824, for example, Hogg wrote

blushing maid with a workbag’, in which Harriet’s industrious virtues, much like Mary’s ‘sins of wisdom and virtue’ are rejected on the basis of their being overbearing. Both examples demonstrate just how easy it is for a reader to reject the implicit moral coding of a novel if they so desire. Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Bessborough, 24 April, 1808, in *The Whole Disgraceful Truth: Selected Letters of Caroline Lamb*, ed. Paul Douglass (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 38.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Russell Mitford to Mrs [Barbara] Hofland, 18 March, 1819, in *Letters of Mary Russell Mitford*, 1:52; Jacqueline Pearson, *Women Reading in Britain, 1750–1835* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17.

¹⁰⁶ Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11 October, 1813, in *Jane Austen’s Letters*, 4th ed., ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford University Press, 2011), 234.

¹⁰⁷ Sarah Harriet Burney to Charlotte Francis Barrett, 5 April, 1815, in *The Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney*, ed. Lorna J. Clark (University of Georgia Press, 1997), 193.

¹⁰⁸ Towsey, 164.

¹⁰⁹ Joanna Baillie to Margaret Holford Hodson, 28 May, 1830 and 28 June, 1831, in *The Collected Letters of Joanna Baillie*, 2 vols., ed. Judith Bailey Slagle (Dickinson University Press, 1999), 2:619, 2:630.

of Ferrier to William Blackwood: ‘never was there such a painter as she’.¹¹⁰ In 1818, meanwhile, Hester Thrale Piozzi observed that: ‘the novel called “Marriage” is the newest and merriest. How marriage should be a new thing that is at least as old as Adam, the author may tell: but ’tis a very comical thing, and would make Lady Fellowes laugh on a long evening’.¹¹¹ Between them, these brief insights emphasise the prerogative that all readers have when reading (or refusing to read) and commenting (or not) on the novels under study.

Other provisos relate to the nature of evidence sources, as opposed to that of reading itself. These include, for example, the degree of performativity that can occur in personal letters and diaries or journals. As Halsey observes, a ‘letter-writer [...] may communicate different feelings to different correspondents, write deliberately to deceive, or may express him- or herself ambiguously’.¹¹² Pearson provides useful insights into this particular caveat in her study of the letters of Elizabeth Carter, whom, Pearson notes, ‘creates interestingly different views of herself as reader for her different female correspondents’.¹¹³ Letters between relatives or close friends may, also ‘like Austen’s, contain in-jokes, interpretation of which depends largely on recognition of tone and context’.¹¹⁴ Regarding journals and diary entries, Halsey observes that these can be ‘vulnerable to being read by unfriendly eyes, and may therefore withhold or doctor the truth, however confessional they might appear’.¹¹⁵ This final section also considers evidence pertaining to the borrowers of novels, for whom another caveat must be acknowledged, succinctly – if a little exaggeratedly – identified by Eliot: ‘to own, buy, borrow or steal a book is no proof of wishing to read it, let alone proof of having read it’.¹¹⁶ Towsey concurs, writing that ‘of course, to show that readers had the opportunity to read a specific book is not to prove that they ever actually read it. Nor is it to demonstrate why they read it, whether they understood it, or how they responded to its ideas’.¹¹⁷ While

¹¹⁰ James Hogg to William Blackwood, 28 June, 1824, in *The Collected Letters of James Hogg*, vol. 2, ed. Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 202.

¹¹¹ Hester Thrale Piozzi to Sir James Fellowes, 1 December, 1818, in *Autobiography, Letters and Literary Remains of Mrs Piozzi (Thrale)*, vol. 2, ed. Abraham Hayward (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 415–16.

¹¹² Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers*, 93.

¹¹³ Pearson, 138.

¹¹⁴ Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers*, 93.

¹¹⁵ Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers*, 93. For a compelling analysis of the value of using evidence from historical readers’ diaries, see Towsey, 170–71.

¹¹⁶ Simon Eliot, ‘The Reading Experience Database; or, What Are We to Do About the History of Reading?’, accessed 15 June, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240227125129/http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/redback.htm?>

¹¹⁷ Towsey, 19.

evidence of borrowing is therefore by no means evidence of reading, or of intellectual engagement, it can be used productively to enhance our understanding of responses to reading detailed in other mediums.

Individual Readers and Borrowers: Analysis

Moral Improvement

As with the periodical reviews, references to moral improvement feature often in historical readers' letters, reiterating it as a primary metric applied to the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, and also as a recognisably central theme within them. Some references are vague in the sense that they identify a moral purpose within the novel in question but do not go into detail about precisely what this moral purpose involves, or what its perceived effects on readers are. A good example of this type of reference can be found in a letter from Granville Penn to a Miss Erskine of Cardross (a friend of Ferrier's who then forwarded the letter to Ferrier in 1831), who notes 'the sound and salutary moral that pervades' *Destiny*.¹¹⁸ Similarly, in a letter to Ferrier, the travel writer Basil Hall writes: 'Captain Hall presents his respectful compliments to the author of "Inheritance," and begs she will do him the honour to accept a copy of his work on South America, in humble but sincere testimony of his gratitude for the pleasure and, he hopes, improvement which he has derived from the perusal of her very admirable work'.¹¹⁹ In 1810, Agnes Porter wrote to Lady Mary Talbot that '*The Cottage of Glenburney* [sic] may be of great local utility', but does not offer further insight into how or why it might prove useful.¹²⁰ The correspondence between Sarah Harriet Burney and Charlotte Francis Barrett abounds with comparable references, with the latter asserting, for example, that *Self-Control* 'really gives good lessons'.¹²¹ Barrett does not, however, elucidate what she perceives these lessons to be. Writing in her journal in January 1813, Ellen Weeton offers specific insights into her perception of *Cottagers* as 'a little tale tending to shew the

¹¹⁸ Granville Penn to Miss Erskine of Cardross, 1 May, 1831, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, 229.

¹¹⁹ Captain Basil Hall to Susan Ferrier, 15 August, 1824, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, 187.

¹²⁰ Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Talbot, 22 March, 1810, in *A Governess in the Time of Jane Austen: The Journals and Letters of Agnes Porter*, ed. Joanna Martin (Hambleton Press, 1988), 293.

¹²¹ Charlotte Francis Barrett to Sarah Harriet Burney, 17 May, 1811, cited in *The Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney*, 130.

folly of adhering to old customs merely because they have been habitual for many generations, particularly the Scottish tenacity, indolence, and want of cleanliness in their houses and about their farms'.¹²² Her appraisal concludes more vaguely, noting that *Cottagers* 'may very probably have some influence in affecting a reformation'.¹²³ She offers no further insight into the nature of this reformation, although it is to a degree implicit that such a reformation would presumably relate to the novel's moral lessons that Weeton earlier identifies. To an extent, the lack of specificity in a lot of these examples about what moral instruction, fables, or improvement might look like is indicative of the contexts in which they appear. Many comprise written interactions between friends, in which it is never indicated that one is necessarily teaching the other about how to read or about the specific value of novel reading in relation to moral improvement.¹²⁴ This lacking detail notwithstanding, what these references do make clear is that historical readers were explicit in their recognition of these novels as works with a moral purpose – in keeping with popular expectation – and by extension, as works self-consciously concerned with engendering self-improvement.

As with the reviews discussed in the previous section, individual readers' responses to Scott's novels reflect more on their propensity to develop readers' historical knowledge than they do on their moral value. Writing in 1820 to Miss Louisa Clinton, Lady Louisa Stuart writes that 'your observation of the Waverley novels is perfectly just; instead of misleading one concerning the true history, or giving one a distaste for it, they make one relish it the better', in which she recognises the way in which the fictional elements of *Waverley* enhance readers' understanding of history, thus constituting a version of self-improvement.¹²⁵ Writing, moreover, to Joanna Baillie in 1814, Hamilton asks: 'have you heard of *Waverly* [*sic*] – a novel supposed to be from the pen of W. S—? I have only seen the first volume; but was so charmed with it, that I am all impatience for the remainder. It is quite Scotch, and gives such a picture of a state of society and manners now obsolete, as appears to me invaluable'.¹²⁶

¹²² *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess*, vol. 2, 1811–1825 (Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), 78.

¹²³ *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess*, vol. 2, 1811–1825, 78.

¹²⁴ The correspondence between Lady Louisa Stuart and Miss Louisa Clinton provides an exception to this. In January 1822, Stuart wrote to Clinton that 'I discuss [fictional] characters with you for your improvement in studying human beings', in *Letters of Lady Louisa Stuart to Miss Louisa Clinton*, 2 vols., ed. Hon. James A. Home (David Douglas, 1901), 1:213.

¹²⁵ Lady Louisa Stuart to Miss Louisa Clinton, 10 February, 1820, in *Letters of Lady Louisa Stuart to Miss Louisa Clinton*, 1:55.

¹²⁶ Elizabeth Hamilton to Joanna Baillie, 9 July, 1814, in *Memoirs of the Late Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton with a Selection from her Correspondence, and Other Unpublished Writings*, 2 vols., ed. Elizabeth Benger (London, 1818; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2:181.

Although Hamilton does not specify precisely why the knowledge that *Waverley*, through its depiction of ancient Scottish manners and customs, is ‘invaluable’ to readers, her description of it in these terms is in keeping with the reviewer’s identification of historical information as a potential source of self-improvement among Scott’s readers. It also reiterates the way in which novelistic hierarchies resulted in an unequal application of moral pressures to male- and female-authored novels respectively during the period under study.

When combined with evidence from the *Books and Borrowing* database, references to the moral tendencies of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton’s novels accrue further significance. The database enables us to consider which texts these purportedly morally improving novels were borrowed alongside during the period and, additionally, who was borrowing them. While none of the historical readers cited in the previous paragraph appear themselves in the database, clear trends can be identified in the borrowing patterns of other historical readers (or, at least, borrowers) that confirm that both Ferrier and Brunton’s novels were often borrowed alongside other moral, didactic, domestic fiction, including Maria Edgeworth’s *Moral Tales*, published ten years before *Self-Control* in 1801. According to the Wigtown Library borrowing records, for example, Miss Briarcliff (the sixth most prolific female borrower in the database) consistently alternates between borrowing Brunton’s *Self-Control* and *Discipline* and Edgeworth’s *Moral Tales* between 1830 and 1834. Mrs Blair, Mrs McDonald, and Mrs Douglas are among other readers to borrow Brunton and Edgeworth in quick succession. Meanwhile, Mr Murray and Major McAffie both borrow Ferrier’s novels alongside Edgeworth’s *Tales*. At Orkney Library, several male borrowers, including John Robertson, Archibald Petrie, and Mr Fotheringhame, all borrow Brunton’s novels alongside Hannah More’s evangelical novel *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1808). This is not to say that these borrowers were definitely reading these texts for morally improving purposes. Indeed, it is possible, for example, that these borrowers were simply interested in these authors, or that they felt a particular interest in Brunton as a native of Orkney herself. Critical parallels have often been drawn between Brunton and More – both in recent years and during the period in which the novels were published.¹²⁷ This context may also, therefore, have had some bearing on these borrowers’ borrowing patterns. Inevitably, moreover, all borrowing choices are contingent on which books are available to borrow at any given time. These factors aside, it is useful to observe that Brunton and Ferrier’s novels were borrowed alongside other ostensibly improving texts, and all the more so when these examples are considered alongside the earlier

¹²⁷ See, for example, ‘Mrs Brunton’, *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, 47–48.

examples from readers' correspondence, cumulatively uncovering a broader trend in which these novels figure as texts that have the capacity to improve their readers.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of borrowing records pertaining to *Cottagers*. Out of a total 161 borrowing records relating to Hamilton's novel, it is possible to ascertain that a total of ten priests and ministers borrowed *Cottagers*, accounting for 7.4 percent of the total borrowings. In almost every one of these cases, *Cottagers* was one in a very narrow selection of novels deemed ostensibly appropriate for reading, likely reflecting its perceived capacity as a tool for moral and religious improvement. If we take Reverend Mr Patrick Murray as an example, the database records indicate that he has a total of 113 borrowing records at the Leighton Library. Out of this total 113 borrowing records, 15.9 percent relates to history, 15.9 percent to theology, 12.3 percent to the *belles lettres*, 11.5 percent to philosophy and mortality, and, finally, 4.4 percent relate to fictional titles. His borrowing of novels thus equates to a much smaller percentage of his overall borrowings than other genres. The same pattern applies to Reverend Mr Christopher Tait, another subscriber of the Leighton Library. Out of 272 total borrowing records, 19.4 percent relates to history, 12.5 percent to theology, 9.5 percent to travel, and only 4.0 percent to fiction – the last of which equates, again, to under a quarter of the total percentage of borrowings relating to history titles. Similarly, Dr James Robertson, a minister in Leighton, has a total of 141 borrowing records to his name. Of this 141, 19.1 percent relates to theology, 17.7 percent to history, 15.6 percent to travel, and 7.8 percent to fiction. For Robertson, the total number of borrowed novels represents an overall higher percentage of the total borrowings, but still less than half of his most popular genre, theology. Finally, Reverend Mr John Wallace is associated with a total of 188 borrowing records. Of this 188, 32.4 percent relates to theology, 26.9 percent to history, and only 1.5 percent to fiction, representing just under 5 percent of the total number of theology titles borrowed. These ratios are generally in keeping with the ten most popular genres overall among male borrowers at the Leighton, in which history, followed by theology, and then travel, are the most popular, and fiction comprises the least popular, emphasising the perceived exceptionality of *Cottagers*.¹²⁸

Indeed, other titles borrowed by the same individuals included Richard Graves' *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773, discussed briefly in Chapter Four) and John Moore's *Zeluco* (1789),

¹²⁸ *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750–1830*, 'The Most Popular Genres by Male Borrowers', under 'Leighton Library', in 'Facts & Figures', accessed 28 June, 2025, <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/facts/leighton>.

both of which were considered novels with similarly pious and improving potential. Both also feature in the top ten most popular book works at the Leighton Library overall, and among its male borrowers specifically.¹²⁹ *Zeluco* opens with the statement that ‘Religion teaches, that Vice leads to endless misery in a future state; and experience proves, that in spite of the gayest and most prosperous appearances, inward misery accompanies her [...] To recall a truth of such importance to the recollection of mankind, and to illustrate it by example, may therefore be of use’.¹³⁰ In this passage, the idea that readers might be improved through cautionary examples via the novel is similar to Hamilton’s own intention in *Cottagers* – an intention that, as we have seen, was also recognised by periodical reviewers. By combining textual analysis of *Cottagers* with analysis of reviews and borrowings, alongside readers’ references to its moral tendencies in letters and journals, we therefore gain a much more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which it was recognised as a possible tool for readerly self-improvement.

In addition to those discussed at the start of this section, evidence can be found of historical readers who offer more specific insights into the nature of the moral lessons that Ferrier’s novels teach their readers. An effective example can be found in a letter from Mrs Eliza Fletcher to Ferrier, dated 16 April 1831, in which Fletcher compliments Ferrier on the publication of *Destiny* before turning attention to the question of what might be next:

Go on, dear Miss Ferrier; you are accountable for future volumes; go on to detect selfishness in all its various forms and foldings, to put pride and vanity to shame, to prove that vulgarity belongs more to character than condition, and that all who make this world their standard are essentially vulgar and low minded, however polished their exterior or refined their manners may be, and that true dignity and elevation belong only to those to whom Milton’s lines may be applied –

Thy care is fixed and zealously attends
To fill thy odorous lamps with deeds of light
– And hope that reaps not shame.¹³¹

¹²⁹ *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers’ Registers, 1750–1830*, ‘The Most Popular Book Works’, under ‘Leighton Library’, in ‘Facts & Figures’, accessed 28 June, 2025, <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/facts/leighton>.

¹³⁰ John Moore, *Zeluco*, ed. Pam Perkins (Valancourt Books, 2008), 3.

¹³¹ Mrs Eliza Fletcher to Susan Ferrier, 16 April, 1831, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, 222.

This passage is particularly useful to consider for its identification of some of the hallmarks of the moral lessons that are discernible in Ferrier's novels. Fletcher clearly draws attention to their rejection of selfishness, and by citing John Milton's sonnet, 'To a Virtuous Young Lady' (1753), she also highlights these novels' emphasis on the importance of benevolence, especially for young women. Taken together, these details render explicit both the capacity of Ferrier's novels to offer moral instruction to their readers and actual readers' recognition of this capacity. Fletcher's insights also touch on some of the key differences between true and false improvement, even though she does not use those specific terms. The notion that Ferrier's novels teach that 'vulgarity belongs more to character than condition' supports claims put forward in Chapters Two, for example, that true improvement is not contingent on where an individual is from but, rather, on the principles that they work to cultivate and apply. It also implicitly alludes to the superior value of moral wealth ('character') over material wealth ('condition') in the model of true improvement that Ferrier's novels put forward, as discussed in Chapter Four. Fletcher's recognition, moreover, that this much remains true 'however polished [someone's] exterior or refined their manners may be' reiterates that, while false improvement is often demonstrated by characters for whom social status and fashion are paramount, true improvement is characterised by a rejection of these principles. In a similar vein, Lady Lilford writes to Ferrier that *The Inheritance* 'began to show [her] the worthlessness of what this world most prizes', in which moral improvement in Ferrier's novels is once again associated by historical readers with a rejection of fashionable principles.¹³² By alluding to and recognising this distinction between true and false models of improvement, these examples demonstrate the degree to which actual readers were alert and receptive to the moral principles and opposing models of improvement that are central to these works. They thus support this thesis' contention that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton responded in careful ways to pressures concerning the morality of fiction on which their works were judged, and that in doing so they played a formative role in strengthening the perception of the novel as a tool for self-improvement during the early nineteenth century.

Active Reading

¹³² Undated letter from Lady Lilford (daughter of Lord Holland) to Susan Ferrier, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, 230.

Lilford's letter also provides a valuable example of an historical reader commenting on the propensity of Ferrier's novels to promote active reading practices by encouraging self-examination among readers. She writes: 'I cannot tell you how delighted I am that my most humble but heartfelt tribute should have reached Miss Ferrier! For years, from my earliest youth, I have longed that she should know she was the first human instrument permitted to make a joyous, thoughtless young girl *pause* and reflect'.¹³³ In this passage, Lilford clearly identifies Ferrier's novels as a catalyst for reflection. The process that she describes bears striking resemblance to the model of distanced reading that Brunton outlines in her preface to *Self-Control*, and to habits of self-questioning and self-reproach (or, 'self-mistrust', as the *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* puts it in a review cited above), both of which are examined in Chapter One as strategies through which the novelists under study promote improving reading practices. While it is hard to know exactly the effects that Lilford's reading of Ferrier's novels had on her conduct in real life (as Towsey has noted, this is a limitation of this particular type of inference), her praise of Ferrier's fiction forcefully demonstrates an understanding of these novels as works that promote a model of reading that prioritises critical engagement, both with oneself and one's reading material.¹³⁴ In doing so, Lilford's example demonstrates how analysis of historical readers' responses enables wider conclusions about these novels to be drawn, confirming them as works that readers recognised as having improving purposes, but also that readers were awake to the strategies through which these works operate to make self-improvement via novel reading possible.

In a letter dated 23 October 1821, the Scottish author Anne Grant similarly associates active reading practices with Galt's *Annals of the Parish*. 'Ordinary readers think the book tame and vulgar, and some great faults it certainly has', she writes:

But by the higher class of readers it is admired for its unique simplicity, and for its illustrating so completely the position which it seems to have been the object of the author to establish; that is, that among simple country people a clergyman even of the humblest scale of intellect, with the most perfect ignorance of the world and of literature, may, by the mere power of good intentions and an earnest wish to preach

¹³³ Undated letter from Lady Lilford (daughter of Lord Holland) to Susan Ferrier, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, 230. Lilford's italics.

¹³⁴ Towsey, 206.

the Gospel in its purity, be, under all these disadvantages, useful, happy, and beloved.¹³⁵

Grant's comparison here between 'ordinary' and 'higher' readers indicates a similar approach to that adopted by *The British Critic* and the *Critical Review* in the examples discussed earlier, in which the reviewers distinguish between different types of reader (each with their own propensity for critical thought), always with a view to suggesting that the novel in question will reward reading practices that exhibit rigorous engagement with the text. Grant suggests that *Annals* promotes and rewards thoughtful and considered reading practices by centring on an 'object' that can only be fully understood by readers who engage actively enough with the novel to discern its 'unique simplicity' and, importantly, the 'useful' nature of the 'position' it seeks 'to establish'. As a consequence, she reiterates, as many periodical reviewers do, that a concern with active reading was not exclusive to the female-authored novels under study, although it is undoubtedly more central to them.

Turning attention to individual responses to Scott's novels enables us to perceive how some historical readers perpetuate, in a similar way to the periodical reviews cited above, gendered stereotypes pertaining to the novelistic hierarchy. Writing in 1814 directly to Scott, with whom he was friends, John Bacon Sawrey Morritt asserts that:

Your manner of narrating is so different from the slipshod sauntering verbiage of common novels, and from the stiff, precise and prim sententiousness of some of our female novelists that it cannot, I think, fail to strike anybody who knows what stile [*sic*] means, though amongst the gentle class of readers, who swallow every blue-backed book in a circulating library for the sake of the story, I should fear that half the knowledge of nature it contains and all the real Humour would be thrown away.¹³⁶

By referring, as *The British Critic*'s aforecited review of *Waverley* does, to the 'sauntering verbiage of common novels', Morritt recalls to mind Ferris' argument about the hierarchical evolution of the novel during this period, at the top of which resides Scott and his *Waverley* Novels. While contemporary reviews of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton clearly exclude them

¹³⁵ Anne Grant to Mrs Gorman, 23 October, 1821, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs Grant of Laggan*, ed. J. P. Grant (London, 1844), 2:304–05.

¹³⁶ John Bacon Sawrey Morritt to Walter Scott, 14 July, 1814, in *The Private Letter-Books of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Wilfred Partington (Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 111.

from inclusion in Morritt's definition of 'common novels', it is not too much of a leap to venture that he might have had Brunton, Hamilton, and perhaps also Ferrier in mind when he refers to 'our female novelists' whom, he suggests here, deal in humourless female morality. On one hand, Morritt's phrasing is helpful in cementing a notional recognition of these female novelists' works as ones that clearly expound moral lessons and critical reading habits, thereby distinguishing them from the inferior contents of the circulating library trope. On the other, the differentiation perpetuates the hierarchical inferiority of their works to Scott's historical fiction and, by extension, the fact that it is invariably Scott's contributions to the novel's generic development during this period that are best remembered.

By implying that active and discerning reading habits are required to understand and appreciate fully the 'knowledge of nature' and 'Humour' that *Waverley* can provide, Morritt also alludes to the different types of reader associated with the different types of novel that constitute this hierarchy. In contrast to the critically astute and discerning implied male readers of *Waverley*, Morritt draws explicit attention to the 'the gentle class of readers', which is to say, the stereotypically injudicious female readers to whom antinovel discourse most readily applies, and whom he clearly associates pejoratively with the common novel of the circulating library. The association of different types of reader with different types of novel is alluded to similarly by Henry Crabb Robinson who, writing just outwith this thesis' timeframe, on 15 September 1838, suggests that *Waverley*'s treatment of 'national history' is what renders it instructive and potentially improving for readers.¹³⁷ He indicates that *Waverley*, due to its focus on history, will be read even 'by the grave class of readers who want an apology for opening a novel'.¹³⁸ By observing that there are some readers who would need 'an apology' for opening a novel in the first place, Robinson recognises the naturalised notion that novel reading constitutes an idle waste of time, and he also plays further on the hierarchical implications that Morritt sets up by suggesting that *Waverley*, due to its generic authority, will appeal to those readers, likely male, who reject the common novel in favour of something respectable and self-improving.

The reflections provided in the entries of the actor and theatre manager William Charles Macready push back against the 'prim sententiousness' that Morritt identifies, and also expand on Lilford's letter by providing insight into the effect that reading Brunton's fiction has on his behaviour. On 4 February 1834, Macready writes: 'I could not forbear

¹³⁷ Henry Crabb Robinson, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers*, vol. 1, ed. Edith J. Morley (J. M. Dent and Sons, 1938), 173.

¹³⁸ Robinson, 173.

measuring out half an hour's reading of the sweet book I began last night, and which indeed I persisted in devouring till my dying candle robbed me of my enjoyment: it was Mrs. Brunton's *Self-Control*', in which his enjoyment resists association with the 'stiff' moralising to which Morritt refers.¹³⁹ While Macready asserts, in the same entry, that Brunton's novel 'has touched [his] heart and temporarily, at least, improved [his] mind', he also reflects that 'I ought not, however, to have sacrificed my study of *Macbeth* to this delightful influence'.¹⁴⁰ By presenting *Self-Control* at once as a tool for self-improvement and a distraction from his occupational duties, Macready's response is a complicated one, and testimony to the fact that recognising a novel's improving purpose does not necessarily equate or lead to permanently improved behaviour. In keeping with Brunton's emphasis on self-examination in *Self-Control*, Macready does indeed reflect on his behaviour, but not to the extent that he can muster – on this occasion, at least – enough self-control to prioritise duty over pleasure, emphasised of course through his voracious account of his own reading. His suggestion that his improvement is temporary also opposes the definition of improvement as an ongoing process that this thesis offers based on analysis of *Self-Control*. While Macready thus reiterates the disparity between the implied reader of a text and the potential shortcomings of its actual reader, he nevertheless provides a valuable example of one who explicitly recognises the improving potential of Brunton's novels. Writing on 15 February 1834, having just finished Austen's *Emma*, he goes so far as to suggest that 'Mrs. Brunton's books have a far higher aim [than Austen's]; they try to make us better'.¹⁴¹

Critics including Klancher and St Clair have reflected on the ultimate futility of trying to recover too much from historical readers' responses to reading, noting the 'unbridgeable difference between their reading and ours'.¹⁴² While there is certainly some truth in this, the findings of this chapter confirm the value of analysing acts of reception in order to unveil a complementary set of arguments to those based on textual analysis of the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton and, in some cases, Galt, Hogg, and Scott. Analysing historical readers' responses to these novels substantiates this thesis' claims that the female-authored novels under study foreground moral improvement, that they promote critically engaged, reflective reading practices, and even in some cases that they encourage readers to distinguish

¹³⁹ William Charles Macready, *The Diaries of William Charles Macready, 1833–1851 with 49 Portraits*, vol. 1, ed. William Toynbee (G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1912), 98.

¹⁴⁰ Macready, 98.

¹⁴¹ Macready, 107.

¹⁴² Klancher, 174.

between what this thesis defines as true and false improvement. Through their recourse to perceived novelistic and readerly hierarchies, the findings of this chapter also help to elucidate another central claim of this thesis. By tending to base their judgment of female-authored novels on different criteria, namely moral principles, these readers and reviewers point towards different types of novel within the generic hierarchy on which Ferris constructs her argument, in which the works of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton rate less highly than Scott's. For this reason, it is easy to overlook their contributions to the authoritative, generic transformations that Ferris associates with the period under study. As this chapter shows, however, the female-authored novels under study were clearly perceived as tools for self-improvement by contemporary reviewers in a different way from Scott's *Waverley Novels*, assigning them a degree of authority in their own right. The Conclusion to this thesis takes up the implications of this authority in detail, revealing that although they have not hitherto been perceived as having a discernible influence on the novel's development in the way that Scott's historical fiction has, the strategies that Brunton and Ferrier in particular deploy in order to promote moral self-reform and active reading provide a clear point of origin for the Victorian novel and its own claims to readerly self-improvement.

Conclusion: Legacies of Self-Improvement

Canonisation

In January 1842, the *Edinburgh Review* published a review of all three of Susan Ferrier's novels, which had been revised by Ferrier and republished by Richard Bentley the previous year in his series of Standard Novels. This review is significant, in part since, as Stuart Curran observes, 'no women wrote for the *Edinburgh Review*, and, more surprisingly still, relatively few were critically noticed in its pages' – a fact to which the reviewer, George Moir, alludes when announcing his wish 'to repair an omission to which our critical conscience pleads guilty'.¹ The review therefore implicitly awards Ferrier a degree of elite recognition, promoting her to a sparsely populated rank alongside Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, and Elizabeth Hamilton. Even more importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, Moir's review explicitly identifies Ferrier's novels as tools that have the capacity to aid the self-improvement of their readers. 'Yet these works are really Novels', he writes, 'not "dramatic sermons," in the manner of *Cælebs*; they are pervaded not too much by the form as by the spirit of religion; – not paraded in the conventional language of a sect, but appearing as a natural spring of action in the characters – a source of consolation, endurance, or improvement'.² Chapter Five reveals that historical readers' and reviewers' responses to Ferrier's novels, dating from the period on which this thesis centres (between 1800 and 1837), confirm them as ones that foreground self-improvement, both in their promotion of reflective, distanced reading practices and in their dealings with moral principles. Moir's

¹ Stuart Curran, 'Women and the *Edinburgh Review*', in *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 195; George Moir, 'Miss Ferrier's Novels', *Edinburgh Review* 74, no. 150 (01, 1842): 498, ProQuest. Moir was a Scottish lawyer and literary critic, who served as Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh between 1835 and 1840. In this review, he adopts the institutional voice of the *Edinburgh Review*, though his reference to Ferrier in his essay 'Modern Romance and Novel', reveals a more personal attempt to make amends for this 'omission'. Here, Moir includes 'the authoress of *Marriage*, *The Inheritance*, and *Destiny*' among 'those who have struck out an independent path for themselves'. He offers no further comment, but his inclusion of Ferrier's name alongside John Gibson Lockhart, John Wilson, John Galt, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton is testimony to her central and innovative role as a novelist during the early nineteenth century. George Moir, 'Modern Romance and Novel', *Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and General Literature*, vol. 19 (Edinburgh, 1842), 349, ProQuest.

² Moir, 'Miss Ferrier's Novels', *Edinburgh Review*, 498.

review from 1842 is therefore also valuable because it confirms that readers during the opening decade of the Victorian period likewise perceived Ferrier's novels as ones that had the capacity to support readerly improvement. Rather than being straightforwardly didactic, as the comparison with Hannah More's novel *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* implies, Moir recognises Ferrier's works as successful literary performances of novels. This forms a central component of their specific moral potential. Instead of dictating to readers how they should think and act, Ferrier's works both require and promote independent readerly engagement, recognising the caveat to which the narrator of *The Inheritance* self-consciously alludes, that 'few readers are fond of digressions, especially when of a moral or didactic nature'.³ Moir thus commends Ferrier's deft avoidance of these digressions. His references to 'consolation' and 'endurance' are, moreover, effective in presenting Ferrier's novels as instructive aids for use by readers in challenging times. In this way, they speak to the definition of true improvement that this thesis unveils as an ongoing – or, enduring – process of applying values and principles to real-life situations.

That Ferrier and her novels continued to be revered beyond 1837 and into the Victorian period is reflected explicitly in their canonisation in Bentley's aforementioned Standard Novels series, which comprised an influential facet of Victorian print culture. The later years of this thesis' timeframe brought with them a seismic shift in British publication culture (similar in scope to the one brought about by the arrival of the quarterly reviews, detailed in Chapter Five), which saw London replace Edinburgh as 'the undisputed capital of literary [...] markets'.⁴ As Ian Duncan writes, 'the reviewers of 1832 were not wrong to read Scott's death and the Reform Bill as signs of the times, the end of the Edinburgh post-Enlightenment'.⁵ He explains that 'modernizing transport and financial technologies brought [Edinburgh] too close to London for it to retain the gravity of a rival center, so that when the British book trade recovered from the post-1826 slump, it was decisively London-based'.⁶ A defining feature of this new, London-centric book trade was the practice of reprinting earlier novels cheaply and in a serialised format. Walter Scott himself played an important role here through the publication of his Magnum Opus edition of the Waverley Novels, which appeared between 1829 and 1833 and represented their canonising 'Victorian

³ Susan Ferrier, *The Inheritance*, with an Introduction by Ronnie Young (Kennedy & Boyd, 2009), 172.

⁴ Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 306.

⁵ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 306.

⁶ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 306.

monumentalization'.⁷ Published as 'five-shilling monthly issue' volumes, the Magnum Opus edition 'set the pattern for fiction reprint publishing for most of the [nineteenth] century' and was imitated most notably by Bentley, whose Standard Novels appeared between 1831 and 1855, priced at six shillings, and comprising one volume each.⁸ The purpose of Bentley's series, as Moir acknowledges, was to republish novels 'in a cheap and popular form', thereby rendering them accessible to the increasingly wide (in terms both of size and class) reading public that developed throughout the Victorian period.⁹ Alongside Ferrier's works, the novels of Mary Brunton were published in Bentley's series, alongside some of John Galt and Scott's.

Between 1881 and 1882, Bentley published a second reprint of Ferrier's three novels, comprising six volumes, and often referred to as the Edinburgh edition. The first volume of this edition of *Marriage* contains a 'Prefatory Note', in which Bentley contends that the 'almost exceptional position' that Ferrier's novels occupy 'give[s] Miss Ferrier a place to herself in English fiction; and it is felt that a time has come to recognise this by producing her works in a form which fits them for the library, and in a type which enables them to be read with enjoyment'.¹⁰ The performative nature of publishers' advertising language notwithstanding, Bentley's reference to 'English fiction' here is significant, as it demonstrates how, through this process of reprinting, Ferrier's novels came to be recognised as part of a wider English (or British) literary canon, as opposed to a uniquely Scottish one. Analysis of Bentley's Standard Novels thus demonstrates that – despite the craze for Scottish novels that subsided with Scott's death, and the concurrent weakening of Edinburgh's once-pioneering literary infrastructures – the novels examined in this thesis were clearly perceived as ones worth sharing with readers. This in turn confirms the pertinence of their treatment of

⁷ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, xv.

⁸ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 300. See Troy J. Bassett for more on Bentley, 'the second-most prolific publisher of multi-volume fiction during the period', and his Standard Novels series, in *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Three-Volume Novel* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 5. See also Elliot Engel and Margaret F. King, *The Victorian Novel before Victoria: British Fiction during the Reign of William IV, 1830–37* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), 5.

⁹ Moir, 'Miss Ferrier's Novels', *Edinburgh Review*, 498. Kelly J. Mays provides a useful summary of the 'dramatic increase' in readers during the Victorian period in 'The Disease of Reading and Victorian Periodicals', in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Susan Ferrier, *Marriage*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1881), 1:v–vi.

self-improvement to the development, canonisation, and concerns of the novel during Victoria's reign, in which the form reached its 'zenith'.¹¹

Familiar Stereotypes and Active Reading

This thesis has argued that by playing on and, in some cases, complicating familiar stereotypes that would have been easily recognisable to readers of their novels, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton promote within their fiction a model of reading that centres on distance, critical engagement, and self-reflection. By prioritising these values, this model provides an antidote, if applied correctly, to the dangers historically associated with novel reading, enabling the novel to provide a feasible tool for moral self-improvement. A primary category of stereotype with which these novels engage relates directly to the novel itself. As the Introduction to this thesis explains, by 1800, antinovel discourse had been building up and developing over many decades, to the extent that, by the start of the nineteenth century, antinovel stereotypes were sufficiently ubiquitous that novelists could engage with them in their own works in increasingly satirical, sophisticated, and implicit ways. The opening decades of the nineteenth century were also ones in which the novel began forcefully to assert its burgeoning generic authority, thanks especially to Scott's *Waverley Novels*. This provided a growing impetus for Brunton, Ferrier, and before them Hamilton, to harness the novel's reputation as a catalyst for moral corrosion and to refashion it as a means of self-improvement, further justifying its entry into mainstream literary discourses.

With these contexts in mind, Chapter One analyses the strategies deployed by Brunton and Hamilton in particular in their novels – including use of a preface, direct addresses to the reader, characterisation, and plot – all of which play on antinovel stereotypes, and build on mechanisms of the eighteenth-century novel, to cumulatively comprise what I describe as a metadiscourse of improvement. The metadiscourse of improvement promotes active reading by encouraging readers of the novel not to become uncritically immersed within the narrative but instead to consider the ways in which the novel self-consciously reflects on its own reputation in order to highlight the value of distanced over quixotic reading. Comparative examples from the novels of James Hogg, Galt, and Scott intersperse this chapter and demonstrate that while a concern with distanced reading is also

¹¹ Ian Duncan, *Human Forms: The Novel in the Age of Evolution* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 11.

present in the male-authored Scottish novels of the period, it is ultimately central to and especially characteristic of the works of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton. This disparity signals the uneven application of the expectation that novels should be morally commendable to male- and female-authored novels respectively, which Chapter Five explores in depth. By implicitly dissuading readers from indulging in one of the novel's greatest perceived traps – imaginative absorption – the metadiscourse of improvement that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton construct provides a means through which certain novels can provide their own solution to the genre's notoriety.

Chapter Two reveals how these novels engage substantively, sarcastically, and subversively with stereotypes pertaining to English and Scottish national identities. Through their astute, and often contradictory, treatment of these stereotypes, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton encourage their readers to distinguish between what I term true and false models of improvement. The critical engagement and mental labour that is required to interpret their reconstructive treatment of popular prejudices promotes, once again, self-reflective and considered reading practices among the novels' implied readers. It also anticipates a similar strategy for promoting readerly engagement adopted by novelists including George Eliot during the later nineteenth century. Writing with reference to Eliot's novels, George Levine asserts that 'even as they articulate the social codes, these novels complicate them, engaging our sympathy'.¹² In doing so, he reveals an important way through which the Scottish female-authored novels studied here anticipate a mechanism that the Victorian realist novel would subsequently deploy to promote the sympathetic attention and improvement of its readers. Chapter Three turns attention to Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's recourse to ubiquitous metaphors of cultivation and consumption, traditionally found in Enlightenment and eighteenth-century conduct books and educational writings, and which comprise the third category of stereotype considered in this thesis. By engaging with these metaphors in satirical, and often humorous, ways, this chapter argues that these novelists encourage active reading by prompting readers to consider, rather than passively accepting, familiar tropes that have been removed from their original, non-fictional context and redeployed to promote the application of independent, critical judgement, and, by extension, self-improvement.

In his study of criticism of the novel during the second half of the nineteenth century, Kenneth Graham observes a change in the expectations surrounding what the novel should

¹² George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 20–21.

provide. Acknowledging, first, the longstanding expectation that novel reading should furnish readers with some sort of ‘moral profit’, Graham identifies the emergence of a superseding expectation in periodical culture: ‘a new emphasis not only on the morally uplifting but on the intellectual and imaginative elements of the novel’.¹³ This new emphasis, Graham contends, arose out of a fear that novels did not sufficiently ‘encourage strenuous thought’ and that they therefore had the capacity to ‘soften the intellectual fibre’ of readers’ minds.¹⁴ As one reviewer puts it in 1873, ‘a mind nourished by modern novels would hardly be fitted for vigorous intellectual labour’.¹⁵ While, demonstrably, they did not succeed in preventing the Victorians from having these concerns in the first place, the novelists studied in this thesis clearly pre-empt and attend to the ‘new emphasis’ that Graham identifies. By promoting, via their treatment of familiar beliefs and stereotypes in their own novels, an approach to reading that prioritises and theorises about precisely the kind of intellectual labour that Victorian critics feared the novel lacked, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton evince a self-conscious concern with self-improvement through reading that would characterise Victorian attitudes towards the genre in subsequent decades.

Self-Improvement: True and False

This thesis has also argued that the Scottish female-authored novels under study present readers with opposing models of self-improvement, described throughout as true and false improvement. Chapter Two reveals how Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton’s treatment of national stereotypes introduces and helps readers to differentiate between these different models. I contend that by deploying recognisable prejudices to reveal the values and attributes of each version of improvement, these novelists then elucidate the process of false improvement in action, which is typically associated with affected, selfish behaviour, often evidenced by a lack of critical judgment. Chapter Four then argues that the process of true individual improvement is most effectively illustrated to readers through these novels’ discussions of moral and religious progress. Unlike false improvement, true improvement comprises a gradual and iterative process, characterised above all by benevolence, emotional regulation, critical thinking, and a fulfilment of perceived duty. The first step of true

¹³ Kenneth Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel, 1865–1900* (Clarendon Press, 1965), 7.

¹⁴ ‘Mr. Trollope on Novels’, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 36, no. 943 (11, 1873): 657, ProQuest.

¹⁵ ‘Mr. Trollope on Novels’, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 657.

improvement is education, which characters undertake either before or during the novel, and which invariably requires time and conscious effort. The second step is application, in which a character learns to apply the correct principles to situations outwith their reading, just as they witness the characters in the novels doing. Application is, necessarily, indefinite, and confirms true improvement as an ongoing process underpinned by the need to perform continuously a version of moral and intellectual labour. Through their advocacy of this model of improvement, Brunton and Ferrier's novels in particular connect to the European literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, 'a type of novel pioneered, and popularized, during the nineteenth century'.¹⁶ As Richard Salmon notes, 'in its original German context, the word refers to a specific cultural ideal or praxis – that of *Bildung*, commonly translated as the idea of self-cultivation or self-formation'.¹⁷ Duncan concurs, defining 'individual *Bildung*' as 'moral and spiritual formation'.¹⁸ An alternative iteration of this thesis might have traced the treatment of this process in the Scottish female-authored novel with the 'German context' in mind. While I did not choose to focus in depth on this particular line of enquiry here, clear parallels can be drawn between these wider discourses on education and self-improvement and the novels under study, confirming even more firmly the period under study as a significant one for the relationship between novel reading and self-improvement, and Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton as important propagators of this association.

In Britain, the Victorians' interest in self-improvement as a concept was reflected in the publication in 1859 of Samuel Smiles' highly influential conduct manual, *Self-Help*. In keeping with prevailing attitudes, Smiles is cautious of the novel, writing that while he does not seek to debar his readers 'from its enjoyment in a reasonable degree', 'to make it the exclusive literary diet [...] and to occupy the greater portion of the leisure hours in studying the preposterous pictures of human life which so many of them present, is worse than waste of time – it is positively pernicious'.¹⁹ Despite clear thematic resonances between Smiles' work and the novels studied in this thesis, Smiles' suggestion that 'the literary pity evoked by fiction leads to no corresponding action' goes directly against the theorised model of reading

¹⁶ Richard Salmon, 'The English *Bildungsroman*', in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel 1820–1880*, ed. John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford University Press, 2021), 90.

¹⁷ Salmon, 90.

¹⁸ Ian Duncan, *Human Forms: The Novel in the Age of Evolution* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.

¹⁹ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1859; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2014), 269–70.

advocated in, for example, Brunton's novels, which figure as guides for behavioural reform.²⁰ In her study of modern discourses on self-improvement, Beth Blum reflects on *Self-Help*, observing that 'espousing the Victorian tenets of industriousness, perseverance, honesty, and self-discipline, the book became an international sensation and an antecedent of the contemporary self-improvement guide'.²¹ In a similar vein, parallels can be traced between the values associated with the model of true improvement that the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton promote and the values that are intrinsic to Smiles' model of self-improvement. In the introduction to *Self-Help*, Smiles writes that the happiness and wellbeing of every individual depends 'upon their own diligent self-culture, self-discipline, and self-control – and, above all, on that honest and upright performance of individual duty, which is the glory of manly character'.²² The indisputable echoes of Brunton's works in these lines are unsurprising when considered alongside the fact that Smiles was himself a Scot, who was educated in Edinburgh during the late 1820s. It is therefore likely that he would have read, or at the very least been aware of, the works of Brunton, Ferrier, and perhaps also those of Hamilton. Smiles' refusal to acknowledge them in his own work, combined with his ostensible distrust of the novel, suggests that he considered himself to be in competition with the novel genre, and indeed recent work by Rebecca Richardson confirms Smiles' success on this front. With *Self-Help*, she writes 'Smiles rivalled the sales of even such popular novelists as Dickens and George Eliot. *Self-Help* sold twenty thousand copies in its first year – one-third more than the "literary sensation" also released in 1859, Eliot's *Adam Bede*, and roughly five times the sales of *Great Expectations* in its first year [1861]'.²³ The popularity of Smiles' conduct manual is testimony to diversification of genres through which ideas about self-improvement were popularised in the years following the end of this thesis' timeframe. It does not, however, and cannot detract from the degree to which the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton clearly anticipate and speak to the subsequent craze for self-improvement that developed among the Victorians, likely accounting for their canonisation in the long nineteenth century. Indeed, Smiles may have dismissed the novel on account of its longstanding connotations of idleness, but examples can be found that suggest not everyone agreed. Writing in her journal in 1857 (just two years before *Self-Help* was published),

²⁰ Smiles, *Self-Help*, 270.

²¹ Beth Blum, *The Self-Help Compulsion: Searching for Advice in Modern Literature* (Columbia University Press, 2020), 13.

²² Blum, v.

²³ Rebecca Richardson, *Material Ambitions: Self-Help and Victorian Literature* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 12.

George Eliot notes ‘Miss Ferrier’s high reputation’, signalling a wider recognition among the readers of Ferrier’s novels as antecedents to the discourses on self-improvement about which Smiles writes.²⁴

By differentiating between true and false improvement, the novels studied in this thesis also pre-empt aspects of Eliot’s reflections on realism, and its generic dedication to truth. These reflections are indicative of the way in which discussions about the ‘moral end’ of fiction persisted and evolved over the course of the nineteenth century.²⁵ In a routinely cited passage from *Adam Bede*, ‘In Which The Story Pauses A Little’, Eliot (or, rather, the narrator of her novel) considers a potential challenge posed by realism’s commitment to truth.²⁶ ‘So I am content to tell my simple story’, the narrator reveals, ‘without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in spite of one’s best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult’.²⁷ There is an obvious caveat to state here, which is that whereas the model of true improvement discussed in this thesis is concerned with truth as an intrinsic component of moral self-improvement, Eliot is concerned with the moral implications of (mis)representing the truth, or reality, of common life. She thus proceeds on the assumption that accurate fictional representation of their fellow men can lead to the moral improvement of readers: ‘the thing for mankind to know is, not what are the motives and influences which the moralist thinks *ought* to act on the labourer or the artisan, hut what are the motives and influences which *do* act on him’.²⁸ This difference notwithstanding, the important thing to notice when comparing the above passage with the findings of this thesis is that in both *Adam Bede* and the Scottish female-authored novels under study, representing and remaining committed to the truth is a challenging and laborious process. As analysis of these novels has shown, whereas false

²⁴ George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, vol. 2, 1852–58 (Yale University Press, 1954), 367. Several reviews of Ferrier’s novels appear towards the end of the nineteenth century, which continue to praise, and in doing so, to canonise, her novels as ones associated with moral improvement. These include: ‘Miss Ferrier’s Novels’, *The Scottish Review* 34, no. 67 (07, 1899), ProQuest; John Ferrier, ‘Miss Ferrier’s Novels’, *Temple Bar: A London Magazine for Town and Country Readers* 54 (11, 1878), ProQuest; George Saintsbury, ‘Miss Ferrier’s Novels’, *Fortnightly Review* 31, no. 183 (03, 1882), ProQuest; George Saintsbury, ‘Miss Ferrier’s Novels’, *The Sketch* 8, no. 97 (12, 1894), ProQuest.

²⁵ George Eliot, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, *The Westminster Review* (07, 1856): 54, ProQuest.

²⁶ George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Carol A. Martin (Oxford University Press, 2008), 159.

²⁷ Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 160.

²⁸ Eliot, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, *The Westminster Review*, 54.

improvement is almost invariably depicted via the stereotypical parameters of fashionable society, true improvement constitutes a rejection of this society's values, and a dedication to common values such as Christian duty and benevolence. While, as Chapter Four especially shows, true improvement is a fundamentally social process, it contains an antisocial element, in the specific sense that it opposes a certain kind of fashionable society. This fact of being in direct opposition to others, and the material extravagance to which it is so easy to succumb, renders the process of true improvement, as Eliot puts it, 'difficult'.

Of course, these tensions would likely not have applied so much to readers during the mid nineteenth century, by which time works such as *Self-Help* had popularised the concept of self-improvement, rendering the values that Smiles shares with Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton conversely fashionable. In her essay 'The Natural History of German Life' (1856), Eliot is, moreover, clear that 'falsification' (or misrepresentation) is not so bad when it relates to the 'evanescent fashions' that are so forcefully rejected in the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton, but it is serious when the lives of 'our more heavily-laden fellow-men' are misrepresented, allowing our sympathy to 'turn towards a false object instead of the true one'.²⁹ In doing so, she identifies a more concerted effort to focus on and depict the experiences of the common man in the decades following the ones under study here. Nevertheless, by turning attention to Victorian works such as *Adam Bede*, we can perceive that a commitment to truth and honesty (as opposed to affectation) underpins Smiles' formula for self-improvement, Eliot's approach to realism, and the model of true improvement that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton advocate to their readers through their novels. We can also perceive that the terms true and false improvement are particularly useful for aiding us as modern readers to trace and intuit the implications of continuities between early- and later-nineteenth-century novels. In these ways, the findings of this thesis forcefully disclose that the representations of improvement within the works under study anticipate ensuing discourses on self-improvement within and relating to the Victorian novel. This disclosure in turn elucidates the hitherto overlooked legacy of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's contributions to the novel and its generic development, facilitating its association with self-improvement in strategic and impactful ways during the early nineteenth century.

Novel Reading and Improvement

²⁹ Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', *The Westminster Review*, 54.

This thesis has revealed the ways in which the female-authored novel in Scotland during the opening decades of the nineteenth century engaged in performative ways with its own notoriety, alongside other familiar stereotypes, in order to promote active reading, thereby demonstrating that novel reading could feasibly provide a tool for self-improvement. By combining analysis of the representations of improvement within the novels themselves with analysis of contemporary periodical reviews and historical readers' responses, this thesis confirms that the novels of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton were indeed ones that theorised about self-improvement, to a degree unmatched by their male contemporaries, Galt, Hogg, and Scott, whom I consider intermittently. Their novels are works, in other words, that readers perceived as having the capacity to influence their own minds, morals, and in some cases even reading habits, alongside those of other readers. Even in spite of these responses, however, the novel's reputation continued to be debated well into the nineteenth century, particularly regarding female novel readers, as works including Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader* (the timeframe of which begins at the conclusion of this project's own timeframe) have recognised.³⁰ Just as critics remain undecided about the genesis of the antinovel debate, they remain similarly uncertain about the precise moment in time when the novel's reputation began noticeably to improve – with the exception of Scott's novels, which, as discussed, effectively transcended this debate due to their 'overwhelming critical prestige'.³¹ Rohan Maitzen writes, for example, that 'by the mid-nineteenth century, the novel's popularity and importance [were] firmly established'.³² Duncan concurs, observing that 'scarcely regarded as "Literature" at the beginning of the century, by 1850 in Britain the novel was the ascendant form for the representation of a national cultural identity', while Graham suggests that by the same point in time the novel 'had still not established its full claim to legitimacy in the eyes of critics and readers'.³³ As a general rule, the novel's reputation is thought to have improved by the end of the nineteenth century – Graham notes, 'discussions of the novel's moral usefulness decline noticeably around 1880' – but the ambiguity of the parameters of

³⁰ As Flint observes, 'there was nothing new for the Victorians in proclaiming woman's affectability, nor in recommending that she should be protected from reading certain texts, as she should be encouraged to read others', in *The Woman Reader 1837–1914* (Clarendon Press, 1993), 22.

³¹ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, xi.

³² Rohan Maitzen, 'Introduction', in *The Victorian Art of Fiction: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the Novel*, ed. Rohan Maitzen (Broadview Press, 2009), 14.

³³ Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2; Graham, 1.

this debate is testimony to the fraught relationship between novel reading and self-improvement.³⁴

This relationship remains one of scholarly interest and enquiry today. For example, research conducted at the University of Edinburgh recently sought to uncover contemporary readers' perception of the value of reading fiction. The findings of this project reveal readers discussing the value of 'personal introspection' that novels can catalyse, and reflecting on fiction as 'a tool for [...] learning', in keeping with some historical readers' responses discussed in this thesis.³⁵ In 2024, Bridget T. Chalk published *Novel Schooling*, which argues for the 'edifying potential of reading fiction' with reference to the novels of Charles Dickens through to those of contemporary writers including Zadie Smith.³⁶ *Reading Novels in the Covid-19 Pandemic*, meanwhile, details contemporary readers in Britain and Denmark turning to novel reading in order to reflect on, make sense of, and derive comfort during a particularly challenging global health context. In some instances, readers turned to 'long, weighty books, often classics' because they finally had time to read them – implying, perhaps, an inkling of the historic belief that novel reading is not an easily justified use of one's time.³⁷ At the same time, the capacity of the novel to immerse these readers and remove them from their immediate reality is perceived as a good thing, highlighting a stark difference between the eighteenth-century antinovel discourse with which this thesis begins and contemporary attitudes towards novel reading.³⁸ Reflecting on the ongoing discussions surrounding the novel and self-improvement, Blum observes that, in 2020, 'the boundary between self-help manuals and literary fiction appears curiously blurred'.³⁹ In his antiguide, *Stand Firm: Resisting the Self-Improvement Craze*, the Danish psychologist Svend

³⁴ Graham, 5.

³⁵ Nicola Currie, 'Reading and Wellbeing: Exploring the Relationship between Reading Fiction and Wellbeing across the Lifespan', *British Educational Research Association (BERA) Blog*, May 12, 2023, <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/reading-and-wellbeing-exploring-the-relationship-between-reading-fiction-and-wellbeing-across-the-lifespan>.

³⁶ Bridget T. Chalk, *Novel Schooling: Education, Formation, and Reading in Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 2.

³⁷ Ben Davies, Christina Lupton, and Johanne Gormsen Schmidt, *Reading Novels During the Covid-19 Pandemic* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 155. For more on this, see Christina Lupton's study of eighteenth-century readers, most of whom 'struggle, in terms that should resonate in the twenty-first century, with the fear that time for the kind of reading they associate with books (rather than newspapers or sermons or letters) is always too short'. *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 3.

³⁸ Davies, Lupton, and Schmidt, 30–33.

³⁹ Blum, 1.

Brinkmann attempts ostensibly to clarify this blurring, urging readers of his book to read novels in place of self-help guides, reasoning that novels ‘enable you to understand the human life as complex and unmanageable’, providing implicitly a better starting point for self-improvement.⁴⁰

In a sense, then, the status of the novel as a tool for self-improvement has yet to find a fixed position. Analysis of Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton’s novels, and of the antinovel debate that began before and continued beyond the decades in which they wrote novels, suggests that actually it is not so much the novel itself that is the problem, as how some readers choose to engage with it, often resulting in a lack of emotional and mental control. To illustrate this point, it is worth returning to the passage from *Marriage* that provides an epigraph to this thesis’ Introduction. In this passage, Aunt Grizzy asserts that reading ‘puts things into [young people’s] heads that never would have been there but for books’ and is therefore ‘a very dangerous thing’.⁴¹ Such an assertion inevitably raises the question, however, of how we as readers should engage with what we read. When a reader chooses to engage critically with a novel, actively considering whether they agree with its moral implications, and how these implications compare with their own values and principles, as opposed passively to absorbing what they read, then that reader is also choosing which ‘things’ they allow, or do not allow, into their head. Based on this logic, if a novel reader appears to have been misled or corrupted by what they have read, then it is not so much the novel itself that is dangerous as the way in which that reader has chosen (consciously or not) to approach its fictional contents. By inviting her readers to consider the implications of the serial misinterpreter Miss Grizzy’s endorsement of a popular opinion about novel reading, Ferrier implicitly directs them towards making a judicious choice.

Through demonstrating the ways in which Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton subvert and transform popular stereotypes to encourage their readers to think for themselves and reflect on what they read, this thesis confirms the beginning of the nineteenth century in Scotland as an especially formative time in the novel’s history as a facilitating medium for self-improvement. It is the period in which antinovel discourse, having become a commonplace within British literary culture, comprised the means through which these authors were able strategically to harness the novel’s reputation in order to present it as a genre capable of catalysing moral and intellectual progress, and as a genre therefore worthy of entering

⁴⁰ Svend Brinkmann, *Stand Firm: Resisting the Self-Improvement Craze*, trans. Tam McTurk (Polity Press, 2017), 86.

⁴¹ Susan Ferrier, *Marriage*, ed. Dorothy McMillan (ASLS, 2020), 162.

mainstream critical discourse in the way that Scott's *Waverley Novels* made possible. While it is hard to overstate Scott's own influence on and legacy within the Victorian novel, it is very easy to understate that of Brunton and Ferrier especially. In *The History of the English Novel*, Ernest Baker describes the *Waverley Novels* as 'the most important event in the history of fiction between Fielding's time and that of Dickens and Thackeray', contending that 'Scott's performance' is what led to the novel subsequently becoming 'the most popular of literary forms' in the Victorian period.⁴² While there is certainly truth to Baker's statement, his domineering superlative attests to the relative lack of attention historically paid to the female novelists studied in this thesis. Although they are by no means absent, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton do not feature significantly in male-centric works such as *Scott's Shadow*, which considers Galt and Hogg in addition to Scott. By beginning from the premise that Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton were doing something different with the novel from their male contemporaries in Edinburgh's literary heyday, this thesis provides something that other studies to date have not, which is a sustained demonstration of the central role played by these female authors in presenting the novel as a tool for self-improvement. As Chapter Five demonstrates, their ideas relating to reading and self-reform had little difficulty entering the literary mainstream during the period under study. This was in part due to the Edinburgh-centric, literary-intellectual milieu within which they were produced, and also thanks to Scott himself. As Bentley writes in the Edinburgh edition of *Marriage*, 'works which have received the praise of Sir Walter Scott [...] and been thought worthy of discussion in the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* [sic], require no further introduction to the reader'.⁴³ What they do require, and what this thesis imparts, is recognition for their impact on the novel's generic trajectory during the nineteenth century. Ironically, this precise failing is pinpointed in a review of Brunton's *Emmeline* in 1820. 'If the celebrity of authors were proportioned to the utility of their productions', the reviewer writes, 'scarcely any class of male writers could boast a reputation equal to that which their fair rivals have gained'.⁴⁴ There, of course, is the rub.

By implicitly promoting active reading, the novels studied in this thesis demonstrate strategic, innovative continuities between themselves and the eighteenth-century novel, while also paving the way for a Victorian preoccupation with self-improvement. They thus bridge a

⁴² Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel*, vol. 7, *The Age of Dickens and Thackeray* (Barnes & Noble, 1929), 11.

⁴³ Ferrier, *Marriage*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1881), 1:v.

⁴⁴ 'Mrs. Brunton's *Emmeline*, &c', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* (02, 1820): 174, ProQuest.

nineteenth-century gap in which Jane Austen and the Waverley Novels are traditionally prioritised. In arguing this, this thesis demonstrates that many of the concerns of later-nineteenth-century literary culture were already being discussed in the early-nineteenth-century, female-authored Scottish novel, in ways and by authors whose contributions have not been fully understood before now. Writing this conclusion, I am struck by Richard Cronin's reflections on the period spanning 1824 to 1840, on which this thesis has partly centred, and which provides the basis for his study of *Romantic Victorians*. 'One attraction of the period that I have chosen', he writes, 'is that it covers a number of years in which it is possible neither to ignore the work of women writers nor to isolate their work from that of their male contemporaries'.⁴⁵ Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton have not been entirely ignored, but the attention that their works have received has been disproportionate to the impact of their contributions to the novel in Romantic-period Scotland, especially when compared with those of Galt, Hogg, and in particular Scott, both during that period and in the readings of their works that have since appeared. This thesis has not read these female-authored novels in isolation from those of Galt, Hogg, and Scott's, since it is only through paying attention to the varying degrees to which they all engage with antinovel stereotypes, and with wider ideas about self-improvement, that we can perceive the central significance of Brunton, Ferrier, and before them Hamilton's works. By recognising the implications of this variation, this thesis has shown that if we think about the novel in Scotland during the early nineteenth century in terms specifically of mental and moral self-improvement, then Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton emerge emphatically as the writers whom it is impossible to ignore. Their male contemporaries necessarily retreat, not out of sight, but certainly into the shadows.

This thesis therefore articulates an additional reason for scholars to focus on and interrogate this period in Scottish and British literary history, by shedding light on an aspect of its fruitful complexity in a way that has not yet been properly considered. As these pages show, by prioritising the value of critical distance, Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier, and Elizabeth Hamilton clearly responded to the concerns of their own literary climate, in ways that foreshadowed those of subsequent decades. They thus highlight, alongside and in a different way to Scott, the transitional significance of the period between 1800 and 1837 for the novel genre. Above all, Brunton, Ferrier, and Hamilton's innovation resides in their self-conscious concern with the theoretical process of self-improvement – or, as Lionel Trilling puts it, in 'the unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him

⁴⁵ Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824–40* (Palgrave, 2002), 3.

to put his own motives under examination', thereby evincing the 'practical usefulness' of the novel.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Secker and Warburg, 1951), 222.

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This Bibliography includes all the works referenced in this thesis. For ease of reference, I have included all the periodical reviews, articles, and other texts published before 1900 under ‘Primary Sources’, even if some are consulted in a secondary capacity elsewhere in the thesis.

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