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'His Mind moving on no other Axis but that of Love': The Power of Narrative and Caring Strategies in Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* (1744) and *Volume the Last* (1753)

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The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary. Having that real though limited power to put established institutions into question, imaginative literature has also the responsibility of power. The storyteller is the truthteller.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wave in the Mind: Talks and Essays on the Writer, the Reader and the Imagination* (2004)

INTRODUCTION

By the mid-eighteenth century, terms such as *delicacy*, *sensibility*, and *sentimentality* were so popular in Britain that they inevitably became receptacles of several, often contrasting ideas. Lady Bradshaigh's bewilderment at such a semantically elusive terminology is often quoted by literary critics to stress how porous the concept of sensibility was in the cultural context of the age (Brissenden 1974, p. 17; Sherbo 1957, p. 1). Despite its considerable ambiguities, the phenomenon of sentimentalism acquired immense cultural significance, as it carried not only literary but also medical, philosophical, religious, and moral weight in the eighteenth-century society (Harkin 2005, p. 9; Csengei 2012, pp. 1-11).

When approaching the so-called cult of sensibility, literary criticism has paid particular attention to the two-sided discourses it produced. A growing body of literature has investigated the solipsistic obsession with feeling in eighteenth-century fiction, pointing out how the consumption of fictional stories focused on tales of misery led to perverse self-indulgence and egotism in the writer/reader (Brissenden 1974). The notion of sympathy itself came under scrutiny, the contention being that its fabric could paradoxically foster selfishness and cruelty (Csengei 2012). Other scholars, instead, have emphasised the social idealism and potential subversiveness that can be found in sensibility's bosom, notwithstanding its flaws and subsequent cultural decline (Jones 1993; Ellis 2004). What allows for such a flexible range of critical analysis is the inherent ambiguity of the sentimental thought. Not only did it manage to produce discourses centred around notions of human benevolence, goodness, and fellowship, but it also provided fertile ground for anti-social feelings of melancholy and reclusiveness (Csengei 2012; Mullan 1996).

Scholars have shown how, by the end of the century, sensibility has suffered a tragic decline due to a number of intersecting factors, such as a generalised change in taste and an emerging conservative trend in the aftermath of the French Revolution (Todd 1986, pp. 130-146). The sentimental impulse thus moved from the ethical domain to the domain of ridicule. From hope to despair (Csengei 2012; Todd 1986; Brissenden 1974). Brissenden, for instance, ascribes the failure of the sentimental ideals to 'the weaknesses and inconsistencies in the social and moral theories of the enlightenment' (1974, p.126). His claim is that by relying on the delicacy of feelings, sensibility was bound to suffer from a crippling weakness that made it impossible to face the harsh conditions of life without perishing (Brissenden 1974, p. 125). Along similar lines, Mullan (1996, p. 250) warns against any simplistic

interpretation that only sees 'an optimistic creed of benevolence or humanitarianism' at the core of sensibility, while ignoring its sickly side.

It could be argued that the most comfortable stance towards narratives of sentimental distress (and their focus on tenderness and 'tearful displays of sympathy') is suspicion (Ahern 2007, p. 13). Their nonconformity to the conventions of realism makes them dull (at best) to modern readers (Ahern 2007, p. 28; Mullan 1996, p. 245). According to Maureen Harkin (2005, p. 20), 'we are in a distinctly post-sentimental age'. Yet, eighteenth-century interest in individuals' affective life that characterised sentimental discourse foreshadowed some crucial theories concerning the social role of empathy that neuroscientific research would confirm centuries later. While the eighteenth-century theorisation of what was termed 'sympathy' was largely based on philosophical speculation and limited medical knowledge, nowadays the concept of empathy bears psychological and evolutionary foundations, as neuroscientists argue that humans are inherently social beings (Olson 2013; Iacoboni 2009; Lieberman 2013). Underlying sentimental tradition was, therefore, the issue of sociability, closely linked to a specific understanding of human subjectivity as defined by affections of tenderness and benevolence. As Gary Day and Bridget Keegan (2009, p. 111) note,

> the nature of affect raises questions about the very notion of identity. Because the 'culture of sensibility' tended to presume the centrality of the social world, it offers a notion that happily agrees with a key claim in the social constructionist bent of recent criticism – namely, that the self is the effect rather than the source of feeling, and that the source of feelings themselves is encounter with other people.

Sentimental narratives were the arena where this anti-Hobbesian, socially oriented model of personal identity was explored in all of its complexity. Through the portrayal of scenes of suffering and injustice that feature socially marginal characters, sentimental novels engaged in the construction of an ethical system that rested on the idea that feelings could function as 'an instinctive force for good' (Ahern 2007, p. 17; Manning 2004, p. 83). However, the moral capacity for love and benevolence is often presented in a context of loss and melancholy, an odd combination that puzzled several scholars. Stephen Ahern (2007, p. 126) observes that 'for every scene of fleeting yet apparently genuine sympathy, there is a scene marked by deception, coldheartedness, or misanthropy'. Mullan (1996, p. 250) goes as far as to argue that 'sentimentalism in eighteenth-century novels seems much more like the consequence of an anxiety about the sociability of individuals, than the assertion of a faith in human benevolence'. By the end of the century, the 'sentimental image of man as essentially benevolent and sympathetic' will become untenable, Marquis de Sade's novel

Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue (1791) emblematically testifying to the distrust with which the ethical standing of sensibility was approached (Brissenden 1974, p. 66).

Sarah Fielding's fictional work, *The Adventures of David Simple*, published in 1744, and its sequel *Volume the Last* (1753) openly engage in discussions regarding human benevolence and fellow feeling that defined the eighteenth-century cultural milieu (Ellis 1996, p. 14; Bree 2002, pp. xviii-xxi). As a 'novel of sensibility in embryo', *David Simple* is marked by an interest in the relational aspect of affective experience, thematised by presenting a sentimental hero who is bent on finding a friend (Barker 1982, p. 69).

Fielding's 'Moral Romance' partakes of the cult of sensibility in several crucial ways. Its overt interest in 'human nature' places it within larger eighteenth-century philosophical and theological debates about human nature (Bree 2002, p. xxi). Theologians and moral philosophers, such as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Butler, argued for an understanding of human propensity towards social life as naturally disinterested. Disquieted by Hobbes' and Mandeville's emphasis on egoistic passions as the defining feature of human nature, they developed their ideas around the belief that individuals are endowed with natural social affections untainted by selfish motives (Maurer 2013, p. 296).

The propensity towards social affection was linked to the idea that human beings are morally virtuous (Maurer 2013, p. 298). As Maurer (2013, p. 293) points out, 'questions of sociability are closely tied to the questions of whether human beings are capable of performing morally virtuous actions, and whether human nature is morally good or evil'. Moreover, the moral significance of sensibility was buttressed by eighteenth-century medical theories concerning the workings of the nervous system. Brissenden (1974, p. 39) notes the importance of the physiological underpinnings of sensibility by claiming that the 'redefinition of man as a social and moral being took place in the context of a redefinition of man as a physical being'. Medical theories, which defined the human organism as governed by nerves that were responsible both for sensory impressions and sympathetic communications of passions, also became a source of moral theorising (Crouch 2014, p. 210; Brissenden 1974, p. 42). As the first chapter will make it clear, the cultural discourse of sensibility was the result of several intersecting fields of knowledge (Ellis 1996, p.7).

The 'scenes of shared joy' that can be found in Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* reveal the eighteenth-century positive religious and philosophical views of human nature grounded upon goodness and benevolence (Maurer 2013, p. 297; Harkin 2005, p. 11). However, it is worth noting that Fielding's interest in questions regarding human sociability that she explores in her fiction is also a reflection of her personal intellectual background.

As a member of the Bluestocking circle, a group of women intellectuals who stressed the importance of philanthropy and Anglican piety, Sarah Fielding shared its ideals and communitarian aspirations (Pohl and Schellenberg 2002, p. 18). Much like her friend Sarah Scott, she too was drawn to the idea of a mutual community premised on friendship, 'reciprocal services, and correspondent affections' (Green 2014, pp. 140-141). Moreover, given her status as an unmarried, impoverished gentlewoman, bonds of friendship with other women authors represented a source of financial and emotional support for her (Bree 1996, pp. 22-23). Linda Bree (1996, pp. 22-23) observes how, in her final years of life, female friendships were a network of support on which Sarah Fielding heavily relied. Elizabeth Montague, for instance, took care of Sarah by providing money and necessities such as food (Suzuki 1998, p. 17; Bree 1996, p. 25).

Financial struggles and the pursuit of meaningful social connections are at the heart of *David Simple* (Skinner 1999, p. 17). They are inextricably interconnected, and, as will be argued in subsequent chapters, they illuminate one another in important ways. Many scholars have highlighted the contribution of sentimental fiction to debates concerning eighteenth-century economic issues (Skinner 1999; Nicholson 1994; Thompson 1996). For instance, Thompson (1996, p. 14) observes that 'political economy and the novel work together in the eighteenth century to describe a partitioned but symmetrical social whole'. In the same vein, Gillian Skinner (1999), in her work on sensibility and economics in the novel, argues that the novel and the eighteenth-century theories of political economy often tended to intermingle and overlap. The novel of sentiment was responsive to important socioeconomic transformations of the period. The eighteenth-century financial revolution and the expansion of commercial capitalism generated widespread anxieties regarding social relations, communal cohesion, and social responsibility, which fuelled the so-called 'luxury debate' (Nicholson 1994, p. 23; Thompson 1996, p. 23). According to Michael Kwass (2022, p. 11), it was 'the first modern debate on consumption'.

While some saw the emerging commercial environment as an arena of social progress and economic advantages that would benefit all (Mandeville, for instance, was a strong apologist of luxury and passion for wealth, which he considered necessary for the well-being of a society), others, adopting the language of civic humanism, decried the spread of luxury (Dwyer 1987, p. 5; p, 39; Skinner 1999, p. 7). All these preoccupations were absorbed by sentimental fiction that approached economic matters from a moral standpoint (Dwyer 1987). In *David Simple*, for instance, the sentimental hero's quest for friendship is presented

against the backdrop of London's public spaces, which are envisioned as a hotchpotch of luxurious excess, artificiality, and rivalry (Todd 1986, p. 14).

Sarah Fielding's works defy straightforward reading. Critics have debated whether she deserves to be included among (proto)feminist women writers and whether her work serves feminist ends. While Jane Spencer (1986, p. 94) acknowledges the rebellious side in the outspoken and witty Cynthia in *David Simple*, she, nonetheless, argues that Fielding's oeuvre anxiously insists on 'the respectability and submissiveness of the intelligent woman'. She ascribes Fielding's complacency with female subordination to her desire to keep the approval of important male figures in her life, such as her brother Henry Fielding and her friend Samuel Richardson. Ultimately, Sarah Fielding is unsympathetically banished to the circle of 'women novelists of the mid-century [who] sought to keep masculine approval by disclaiming any intention to overturn the sexual hierarchy' (Spencer 1986, p. 94).

Fielding's portrayal of womanhood can be puzzling for feminist critics. *David Simple*'s depiction of two happily married couples seems to reinforce the domestic status of women that sensibility so highly praised. As Todd (1986, p. 20) notes, in the eighteenth century 'domesticity was elevated to the female equivalent of a male profession'. Sensibility was a gendered discourse inscribed on women's bodies. Physiologically, women were believed to have more delicate nerves than men, which also made them morally superior. Endowed with exquisite tenderness and deep compassion, they were idealised as superior moral beings (Todd 1986, pp. 18-20). Yet, the sentimental exaggeration of female delicacy had restricting effects on women's lives. Too weak to become agents in the public world, they were confined to the domestic sphere where their moral purity could be preserved from the predatory nature of the outside world.

The recurrent display of affectionate bonds realised in private and everyday life in Fielding's fiction may seem unappealing to scholars who are bent on finding subversive elements in her work. The emphasis on a heterosexual household in *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* further complicates the reading of these texts as potentially challenging the patriarchal structures. Nevertheless, in the crevices of these novels, and their intimate tone, there lie hints of revolutionary visions. It is the purpose of this thesis to uncover the ways in which these narratives become vehicles of social and political commentary. In order to do so, *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* are analysed through the lens of care. More specifically, through the ethics of care.

The moral theory of care ethics can prove illuminating in analysing sentimental literature since it stresses the relational nature of individuals that strongly defined the culture of

sensibility. Joanne Dobson (1997, p. 268) argues that 'we can recognize sentimental literature by its concern with subject matter that privileges affectional ties, and by conventions and tropes designed to convey the primary vision of human connection in a dehumanised world'. In the same manner, care ethics is concerned with 'human value' anchored in the recognition of the importance of social bonds. As Brugère (2019, p. 9) points out, 'the theory of care was initially elaborated as a relational ethics structured by the attention people give to others'. Questioning the belief that the ideal moral attitude is that of an autonomous and impartial person, care ethicists privilege a form of morality that acknowledges human interdependency and calls for shared responsibility for one another (Brugère 2019, p. 18).

This thesis contends that the search for friendship that functions as a narrative force in *David Simple* is premised on fundamentally care ethical values of mutual regard and concern for others, insofar as the novel and its sequel foreground a form of relational ontology that is embodied in friendship-like nurturing relationships. The lens of care ethics is, therefore, employed to highlight how the eponymous hero and his friends' ability to perceive and respond to the affective states of others, especially when the other is in need, becomes a moral and political imperative both in *David Simple* and *Volume the Last*. Part of the aim of this thesis is to contribute to a re-appreciation of these fictional narratives' emphasis on personal relationships and intimate feelings. Inspired by bell hooks' view of love as a political practice of freedom, this study aims to show how 'the mask of acceptability' that is said to characterise Fielding's work conceals the seeds of a revolutionary societal vision predicated upon affection and love understood not as private matters but as counter-narratives that commit to a vision of a more just, caring social order (Suzuki 1998, p. 10).

The moral and political agenda of *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* that this thesis attempts to highlight is not defined solely by an emphasis on care ethical values of interdependence and concern for others. In fact, this work argues that it is by portraying a caring community amidst a fundamentally uncaring social order of a self-centred consumer culture that the novels are able to achieve political advocacy. The clash between care ethical values of mutual aid and the self-serving ideology of the market that the novels present functions as a scathing indictment of a social order that thrives on misery and inequality.

The concept of 'radical imagination', developed within the context of social change movements, is employed in this thesis in order to highlight the subversive overtones of the two novels. Through the lens of radical imagination, it is possible to see how the group of friends in *David Simple* arises out of an imaginative capacity to conceive social connections

otherwise (Haiven and Khasnabish 2010; 2014). As Haiven and Khasnabish (2010, pp. ii-iii) point out, radical imagination speaks to people's ability 'to create something else, and to create it together'. Radical imagination is, therefore, considered a political force insofar as it does not accept 'the world as it is' but 'always keeps in mind all the other ways the world could be' instead (Haiven and Khasnabish 2010, p. viii). By imagining alternative ways of relating, the novels become vehicles of social critique to the degree that they underline the unfairness of a social order that imagines individuals as essentially isolated, competitive economic agents who thrive on competition and exploitation (Woodward 1992). In *A Political Biography of Sarah Fielding*, Christopher D. Johnson (2017, p. 10) recognises the subversive potential of Fielding's works by claiming that her 'examinations of personal psychology and self-management inform her vision of a more perfect society, one predicated on charity, friendship, economic justice and fairness […]'.

The choice to interpret the fictional community in *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* as an exercise in radical imagination is closely linked to the desire to stress the utopian ethos of these narratives. Alessa Johns' work *Women's Utopias of the Eighteenth Century* (2003) is a scholarly text that has strongly influenced this thesis. Johns' inclusion of *David Simple* amongst feminist utopias provides a fresh perspective on the fictional community of friends not as an exclusionary and conservative circle but as a space of utopian longing that aspires to an ideal society in which care and solidarity represent the basic structure of interpersonal relations. While Johns (2003, p. 90) acknowledges that Fielding's texts struggle to acquire a strong, persistent hope in their representation of utopian subjects, she, nonetheless, stresses the importance of focusing on the 'hopeful moments' her works reveal since, in them, 'we can more easily discern the feminism of her social critique'. This thesis seeks to address these 'hopeful moments' through the perspective of care ethics and radical imagination.

The following three chapters undertake a detailed investigation of the issues delineated here. Chapter One provides an overview of the fields of knowledge that defined the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility in Britain. After an exploration of the nerve theories and their influence on the sentimental novel, the focus then shifts to crucial philosophical and theological ideas that shaped sentimentalism. Latitudinarian theologians and the Methodists are mentioned, given their contribution to the narrative of sociability that characterised the culture of sensibility. While the former emphasised human goodness and the duty to perform charitable deeds, the latter stressed the importance of bonds of affection that connected individuals. Joseph Butler's sermons were crucial in establishing the idea of benevolence as a fellow-feeling that moves each person to promote the happiness of others.

As far as philosophy is concerned, eighteenth-century moral sentimentalism is approached by introducing the ideas of important intellectuals, such as the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith. All, in their different ways, contributed to the discussions about human morality as based on affection rather than reason. Social affections were central to Shaftesbury's idea of an instinctual morality that, he believed, bound humans in a network of collaboration and mutual support. According to him, affections of love and generosity resulted in happiness and satisfaction.

Shaftesbury's sentimentalist doctrines were expanded by Francis Hutcheson, who posited the existence of an internal sixth sense responsible for passing moral approbation or disapprobation. Hutcheson, too, links moral evaluations to affections. He argues that manifestations of benevolence and kindness inspire feelings of love, while actions that intentionally harm others provoke hatred and, consequently, moral disapprobation.

Finally, Hume's and Smith's accounts of sympathy are compared. According to Hume, the faculty of sympathy allowed one to participate in and respond to others' feelings. Sympathy is, therefore, not itself a passion, but a process through which a person experiences another's passion by witnessing a manifestation of affection. Smith, on the other hand, believed that it was not possible to access directly what others felt. Sympathetic identification with another person is possible, therefore, only by exercising the imagination, that is, by trying to imaginatively construct how one might feel if one had to experience that person's situation.

The question of gender and how it was shaped by sentimental discourse is also addressed in the first chapter. It is shown how women were fashioned as frail creatures susceptible to the influence of elevated passions. The swoon was the symbol of female delicacy. It represented passivity and the constrictions of an ideology that reduced women to their bodily sensations. Yet, it could also become a subversive tool that, once reclaimed, allowed women some form of agency.

Sensibility affected men, too. Sentimental discourse encouraged a new kind of manhood (more tender and affectionate) modelled on traditionally female features. Women novelists seized such an opportunity to present an ideal of masculinity purged from qualities such as violence, dominance, and sexual aggressiveness that disproportionately harmed them (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 328-344). However, while promoting feminine qualities in men became fashionable, men were not allowed to become like women. A clear-cut separation between the two genders had to be maintained.

Chapter Two focuses on economic and financial changes that affected the eighteenth-century society. It is considered how the expansion of market capitalism and rising consumption resulted in conceptual shifts in the social, cultural, and ethical domains. In such a dynamic and unstable context, moral preoccupations concerning economic improvements and their effects on communal cohesion gained prominence. Adam Smith's attempt to present the commercial economy in a more favourable light testifies to a widespread fear that economic pursuits would result in socially harmful behaviours.

Then, the interplay between economic and novelistic discourse is analysed. Despite being seen as private and domestic, sentimental fiction offered an investigation into eighteenth-century economic theories. Even though the rise of consumerism greatly contributed to the popularisation of the sentimental trend, sentimental novels often approached the socioeconomic changes with suspicion. Sarah Fielding's novels *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) and *Volume the Last* (1753) are introduced as fictional narratives that engage in the material culture of the period by staging disastrous effects of communal disintegration associated with the expansion of the capitalist economy and moneyed interests. With their emphasis on money as a symbol of power that corrupts the relational sphere, the novels are shown to be a commentary on the ethical problem of sociability. They present a quasi-dystopian world in which social bonds are subjected to the logic of gain, exploitation, and competition. Yet, they also carve a space where a way of relating premised on care-ethical values is allowed (although temporarily) to flourish. Care-centred attitudes in the two novels are uncovered by focusing not only on the heterosocial community of friends but also on female friendship, sibling relations, and father-daughter bond.

The way in which *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* deal with the issue of gender, especially masculinity, is also investigated. Two opposing forms of manhood appear to emerge in the novels: one premised on exploitative dynamics that reinforce hierarchical divisions and one based on a willing renunciation of one's power. The feminisation of the sentimental hero is read through the lens of care-ethical values.

Chapter Three, the last chapter of this thesis, discusses the communitarian bent of the two novels and how they imagine communal life. The ideal community as an alternative imaginary space where to belong is explored by employing the concept of radical imagination and utopian hope. The specific practices and features that characterise the fictional community of friends are also investigated.

The issue of the community's instability and ultimate destruction, as seen in *Volume the Last*, is addressed by focusing on the intrinsic qualities and values that define it. The fictional community's progressive descent into precarity is read as a natural continuation of *David Simple*'s implicit political enterprise premised on ethics of care. The ending of *Volume the Last* is also reappraised. Instead of interpreting the novel as merely a hopeless tragedy that stages death upon death, it is claimed that its ambiguous open-endedness manages to preserve the utopian dream.

CHAPTER ONE

Sensibility in eighteenth-century Britain: Tracing the development of a cult

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her?
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (II.ii.586-587)

1.1 Sensibility & nerves

One of the many areas of knowledge that contributed to the development of the cult of sensibility was the medical theory of nerves that flourished in the second half of the century. As George S. Rousseau (1976) points out, as far as the natural sciences are concerned, sensibility 'was a late seventeenth-century development'. He argues that the sensibility movement in fiction came to the fore precisely in the eighteenth century because writers needed time to digest, metabolise, and absorb the seeds sown by late seventeenth-century scientific thinkers. According to G. S. Rousseau (1976, p. 143), the origin of sensibility is therefore to be found in 'physiological texts published shortly after the Restoration', which manifested a deep fascination with the workings of the nerves. While in the early decades of the eighteenth century the predominant view was that of mechanistic physiology, which saw the laws of motion as the basis of human life, the second half of the century witnessed an increased interest in human existence as governed by the responses of the nervous system (Moravia 1978; Csengei 2012). In his essay *From Homme Machine to Homme Sensible*, Sergio Moravia (1978, p. 47) explores the medical thought of the French physician Théophile de Bordeu in order to show how the iatromechanical approach to the human body 'that had so great an influence on European culture in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries' could no longer be accepted without reservation. The anti-mechanistic doctrine, informed by the new medical concepts of irritability and sensibility, thus gradually rose to prominence in the medical field, providing a different perspective on the living human organism:

> Organic beings seem to possess a peculiar capacity of self-control, to act in accordance with particular aims or ends, and to participate harmoniously, by means of ceaseless reciprocal interaction, in that complex dynamism […] which constitutes the life of the living being. […] It had to be admitted that the organism possesses something that we may call a "force" – being careful to emphasize that it is *sui generis*, "intelligent", or at least capable of executing

> functions that no blind "mechanical" motor could. This force Bordeu called "sensitivity", a property which he considered to be diffused by the nerves, not only to some parts of the organism, but throughout the whole organism. (Moravia 1978, p. 54)

Another important contributor to the culture of sensibility was Thomas Willis, a British neuroanatomist. According to G. S. Rousseau (1976), Willis's work *Pathologiae Cerebri* (1667) can be considered as the cornerstone of the sensibility movement. Willis's influential text provided a description of the anatomy of the brain and, most importantly, located the seat of the human soul in the brain itself. By stressing 'man's essentially nervous nature', Willis paved the way for a new theory of the anatomy of human beings (Rousseau 1976, p. 150). As a result, nerves became 'instruments of sensation' responsible for all sensory impressions (Cheyne 1733, cited in Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 8).

Sensibility and feelings were inextricably linked to the nerve paradigm: the more delicate a person's nerves were, the more refined the feelings they experienced. The idea that each human being had an inborn degree of sensibility, which coexisted with the belief that sensibility could also be refined, became an invaluable source for eighteenth-century writers of 'sentimental novel' or 'novel of sentiment'[1] (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 8-9). The process of assimilation of sensational psychology into fiction was paramount. G. S. Rousseau (1976, p. 153) argues that 'no novel of sensibility could appear until a revolution in knowledge concerning the brain, and consequently its slaves, the nerves, had occurred'. Slowly but surely, the belief that the workings of the nerves were responsible for the entire range of human feelings became firmly established as common knowledge in eighteenth-century society (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 15).

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the nerve theory was explicitly gendered. It carried different implications depending on whether it was applied to women or men. George Cheyne, who was also Samuel Richardson's personal physician, believed that the capacity to experience and be affected by intense emotions could be hierarchically structured. On the top of the hierarchy there were women, whose nerves were deemed so delicate that any subtle emotion could provoke strong vibrations of their nerves and affect them deeply (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 23-28). Women were considered weak, naturally

[1] The cultural and historical period this dissertation focuses on presents some terminology problems that, given the purpose of this work, will not be investigated in detail. Suffice it to say, 'sentimental' is employed here maintaining its initial, uncorrupted, early eighteenth-century meaning of being characterized by or expressing refined and humane feelings. 'Sensibility' and 'Sentimentalism', although not synonymous, will be here used interchangeably due to their semantic proximity. See Baker, A. Ernest (1929) *The History of the English Novel, Volume 5: The Novel f Sentiments and the Gothic Romance*, New York: Branes & Noble; Bell, Michael (2000) *Sentimentalism, Ethics, and the Culture of Feeling*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave; Todd, Janet (1986) *Sensibility: An Introduction*, London: Methuen & Co.

timid, and unfit for public life led by men (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 2-3). However, the delicacy of the female nerves was also praised for the imaginative and moral superiority it was thought to denote.

The feminisation of sensibility affected men, too. The fact that men were not seen as naturally susceptible to strong passions as women did not mean that there were no men who displayed fine feelings. In fact, in the context of the culture of sensibility, masculinity was undergoing an important process of transformation. The 'man of feeling' was the emblem of this transformation, and fictional sentimental worlds were the loci where his softened manhood was best delineated. The man of feeling wept, exerted compassion, and expressed deep empathy.

Yet, there was a boundary to male sensibility that, once crossed, would potentially lead to loss of manhood (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 140-141). The issue of 'effeminacy' was an obsessive preoccupation at the time. While men were encouraged to express their virtuous feelings, which were considered a sign of moral superiority, they still had to maintain a toughness of character so that a clear-cut separation line could be drawn between them and the excessive sensibility ascribed to women. Thus, the idea that 'the man is to be honor'd who can weep for the distresses of others' and the constant questioning on the men's part whether they 'must […] be guilty of effeminacy to perform Acts of Generosity' coexisted (Richardson 1980, cited in Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 216; Le Grand 1699, cited in Crane 1934, p. 104).

Men's fear of identification with women was the fear of identification with what was considered inferior, weak, and passive. The question of passivity was to become the crux of sentimentalism. On the one hand, sentimental rhetoric valued the purity of sentiments, which were considered moral and virtuous. On the other, 'fine' sensibility was often associated with sickness, suffering, and inability to survive the contemporary world (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 35-36). The 'nerve paradigm', and the culture of sensibility that absorbed it, was a double-edged sword: delicate nerves that, like musical strings[2], vibrated each time they were touched by strong emotions were both a blessing and a curse. While they did allow for a deeper connection with others, they also made existence in the urban commercial world burdensome (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 219).

[2] The musical metaphor used to describe nerves was very common in the eighteenth century. It derived its success from the Newtonian theorisation of the nerves structure. See Crouch E. C. L. (2014). 'Nerve Theory and Sensibility: Delicacy in the Work of Fanny Burney', *Literature Compass,* 11(3), pp.206-217; Barker-Benfield G. J. (1992) *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, University of Chicago Press.

1.2 Sensibility & gender

Medical discourses centred around the gendered nature of nerves were assimilated by sentimental fiction, a process that further strengthened the gender implications of the culture of sensibility. Although sentimental ideology affected both women and men, it did exert a greater influence on the former (Ellis 1996, p. 24). In particular, the female nerves' delicacy found its expression in a 'sentimental psychosomatic repertoire' employed to portray women of feeling (Csengei 2012, p. 141). This repertoire focused on the physicality of the female body, seen both as the bearer of sentimental values and, at the same time, a passive recipient debilitated by the intensity of sentiment it experienced (Todd 1986, pp. 78-80; Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 302). As Ildiko Csengei (2012, p. 141) observes, 'it is hard to find a sentimental novel without a swooning, dangerously ill or seriously distracted heroine, and fictional representations of the fainting, indisposed woman remain frequent throughout the long eighteenth century'. According to contemporary medical theories, swooning was considered a symptom of a weak constitution, often attributed to the failures of the heart (Csengei 2012, pp. 141-146). The belief that women were of frailer constitution was therefore used to explain why they were more prone to experience loss of sensation.

Swooning, it could be argued, is the emblem of the sentimental tradition. It makes the limits of verbal communication explicit by stressing the truthfulness of bodily manifestations (Todd 1986; Ylivuori 2019). While, nowadays, a display of elevated feelings could be easily brushed aside as insincere and dramatic, in the eighteenth-century context of sensibility exhibitions of pathos such as trembling, tears, sighs, blushes were not only expected but demanded (Todd 1986, p. 8; Brissenden 1974, p. 9). In fact, the inability to feel (and physically manifest) one's passions was synonymous with being a villain (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 17). In her study of the literary history of swooning, Naomi Booth (2021, pp. 10-11) perfectly explains the role of swooning as the symbol of the crisis of language in sentimental fiction:

> Swooning is frequently used in texts to depict the most powerful affective experiences – experiences that are excessive, that are presented as *beyond the measure of language*. Swooning texts mime the failure of language to be adequate to emotional and physical extremes, falling back on the symbolic power of soma to speak when words fail.

It is also important to note that symptoms such as fainting, palpitations of the heart, and effusions of tears were ascribed both to the domain of sensibility and to the medical condition of female hysteria (Csengei 2012, p. 145; Booth 2021, p. 109). The gift of great

sensibility that was mainly associated with women also implied the curse of weak nerves, which meant a higher susceptibility to disorder (Todd 1986, p. 19; Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 9). In her critique of the cultivation of feminine delicacy that weakens the mind, Mary Wollstonecraft (1989 [1792], p. 12) will aptly term it a 'sickly delicacy'.

Given the centrality of the female body in the context of sensibility, it is worth remembering that, as Booth (2021) points out, the body is a complex text that cannot be reduced to its physiological responses but should be read, instead, inside a symbolic framework. In her work *Unbearable Weight* (1993), Susan Bordo provides important insight into how disorders of the female body (anorexia, hysteria, etc.) have political meaning, since they are 'deeply inscribed with an ideological construction of femininity emblematic of the period in question'. Bordo (1993, p. 169) argues that the body demands to be read as 'a cultural statement'. What was then the statement promoted by the culture of sensibility, and how does sentimental fiction narrate the female body and identity?

As a signifier, the gendered sentimental body carried several, often contradicting, implications exemplified in the act of swooning. Samuel Richardson's novels *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740-1741) and *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1747-1748), with their 'exquisite scenes of feeling and distress' of the female protagonists, provide some insight into the complex interplay between sensibility and the construction of femininity (Mullan 1988, p. 58). Richardsonian heroines, who find themselves enmeshed in a rake-victim dynamic, are constantly struggling to preserve their moral and bodily chastity, a quality that was closely associated with the moral superiority of the ideal sentimental woman (Todd 1986, p. 18; Kim 2009, p.152). The eighteenth-century idealization of womanhood as the receptacle of all that is moral and chaste further caged women into passivity and subordination. 'Female virtues were superior ones, then, but they were to be deployed for the benefit of men' (Todd 1986, p. 20). Women were expected to perform their roles of subordinate wives, self-sacrificing mothers, or martyred virgins (Todd 1986, p. 111). Clarissa and Pamela are sentimental virgins who must constantly guard their bodies (and the reputation tied to them) against male aggression. Thus, swooning becomes a device employed by the Richardsonian heroines to escape potential sexual violation on the part of men while simultaneously adhering to a patriarchal form of emotional expression built around the repression of female desires and appetites (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 290; Csengei 2012, p. 149). As Todd (1986, p. 78) observes, 'weak, non-sexual women are, then, the supreme exponents of sensibility for Richardson'. The act of losing consciousness

dramatizes women's powerlessness in a context of a 'male sexual economy' (Todd 1986, p. 113).

Not only did the cult of sensibility contribute to purging the female identity of any possible sexual connotation (which was a direct reaction to a widespread anxiety concerning feminine susceptibility to sexual passions), but it also doomed it to domestic passivity. Household was deemed a woman's natural domain where she can better preserve her innocence by means of what Barker-Benfield (1992, p. 304) terms 'a radical inhibition of all experience'. Denied direct agency, Pamela and Clarissa become oppressed heroines whose fate can end either in marriage or glorifying death (Todd 1986, p. 85).

In addition to uncovering the constrictions of womanhood, fainting can also represent an attempt on the part of women to regain agency by saying 'no' with their bodies (since they cannot utter it) in order to remove themselves from a traumatic environment of physical coercion (Csengei 2012, pp. 147-149). This is how Ildiko Csengei (2012) reads the swoons of the protagonist of Sarah Fielding's novel *The History of Ophelia* (1760). According to Csengei (2012, p. 149), Ophelia's fainting is 'a language of protest', 'a survival strategy, representing the only […] form in which Ophelia can become the protagonist of the narrative'. In the same way, Pamela's 'active, struggling form of unconsciousness' allows her to exercise some power over Mr. B, whose desire is eventually contained within the publicly sanctioned institution of marriage (Booth 2021, p. 119). Despite the restrictive codes of manner imposed on them, women found ways to seize any tools that allowed them to gain some form of freedom and to negotiate the culturally defined category of femininity, even if such freedom was partial and temporary (Kim 2009, p. 164; Ylivuori 2019, p. 5).

This brief survey of the sentimental construction of femininity and one of its manifestations, the swoon, offers a glimpse into the deep ambiguity of the dominant eighteenth-century ideologies of gender (Booth 2021, p. 4). The voyeuristic quality of the act of fainting reasserted the power imbalance between the sexes. To faint meant to become a spectacle, a passive object to be observed (Ylivuori 2019, p. 110; Booth 2021, pp. 100-116). Yet, the swoon also carried sexual undertones, which is not surprising given that women were associated both with moral purity and with potentially excessive sexual indulgence (Jones 1990, pp. 7-8). Swooning could become a guile employed by women to yield into pleasure without incriminating themselves (Csengei 2012, p. 155). It thus allowed for some level of agency while simultaneously reasserting the equation of femininity with bodily sensations, an association that reduced women to their supposedly uncontrollable 'physical expressiveness' and, as a consequence, confirmed their unfitness for the public

sphere. It morally elevated femininity and its feebleness while fostering its social subjugation (Todd 1986, pp. 78-80). It could be a prolepsis of death, as in *Clarissa*, or a tool to secure social stability in a society in which women did not have any economic means and were defined in relation to marriage, as in *Pamela* (Todd 1986, p.85). Whatever the interpretation, it is undeniable that, during the eighteenth century, the female body represented the site of constant political struggle.

The sentimental agenda to refine human passions involved men, too. As already mentioned, the result of such a project was typified by a new masculine ideal, the 'man of feeling' (Brodey 1999, p. 116). This new ideal of masculinity stood in stark contrast with the view of men as rough, brutish, and emotionally detached. However, the process that underlay the construction of a softer, more emotionally refined manhood was not free of its tensions and ambiguities. As Barker-Benfield (1992, p. 37) suggests, sentimental ideology brought men 'closer to women in certain aspects, although it also led to the articulation of their differences in new, more elaborate ways'.

In his seminal book *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1992), Barker-Benfield dedicates a whole chapter to the exploration of 'the reformation of male manners'. He points out how the eighteenth century was characterized by a significant increase in reformation campaigns attempting to 'purge men of their wasteful libertine habits' (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 66). Periodicals, sentimental novels, and religious sermons were engaging in the process of shaping a more tender kind of masculinity. Male leisure culture came under attack: public spaces such as taverns and alehouses, traditionally reserved for homosocial bonding, were deemed receptacles of vice and corruption that promoted a debauched lifestyle. Cruel pastimes were also harshly criticized: bearbaiting, cockfighting, and bullbaiting were considered incompatible with the notion of respectability (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 50-58). Antiduelling associations are an ulterior proof of the advocacy of sensibility in men (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 80-81; Clery 2004, p. 157). As Inger S. Brodey (1999, p. 120) suggests, the traditional conception of manhood came under scrutiny alongside the growing belief that 'the language of reason and authority could no longer adequately express the moral aesthetic'. Men felt more encouraged to absorb "feminine" traits since reason was no longer considered sufficient to guide ethical judgement and the passions were elevated as the prime mover of moral behaviour.

Sentimental fiction also played a prominent role in shaping a gentler view of manhood. 'The novel could be a weapon in the campaign for the reformation of manners', claims Barker-Benfield (1992, p. 64), and women novelists did not miss their chance to

deploy it. Living in a patriarchal, predatory world inhabited by "the men of the world" (epitomised by rakes), women writers used fiction to give voice to concerns that were 'gender-specific' such as their fear of being manipulated, lied to, and abused by duplicitous men who, unlike women who were expected to occupy the protected haven of the private sphere, had more knowledge of the ways of the world (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 220-221).

While the male tavern culture centred around men's preference for public spaces that excluded women, sentimental fiction reasserted the importance of the domestic domain as beneficial to both women and men. In its representation of blissful domestic scenes and affectionate familial ties, sentimental novels sought to show how affections could be additionally refined in the family circle. Consistent with the sentimental idealisation of the private sphere, marriage, as opposed to male libertinage, was portrayed as the epitome of domesticity, capable of 'regenerating social affections in opposition to individualism' (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 216). One of the literary conventions often present in sentimental fiction is that of 'virtuous families shown severely distressed by the world's hard-heartedness but drawn together in their pain' (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 217). The re-evaluation of marital relations as based on warmer affective ties between wife and husband represented one of the many attempts to supersede the authoritarian family relationships typical of the sixteenth century with a 'more equal partnership between spouses'[3] (Stone 1977, p. 221).

Female writers' project to smooth the rough edges of traditionally hostile male behaviour so that men would make better husbands and fathers was indirectly endorsed by prominent Scottish philosophers, such as David Hume and Adam Smith, who voiced a commonplace belief that woman's company was necessary if men were to acquire more agreeable manners (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. 248; Brodey 1999, p. 117). A man, it was maintained, grew more civilised in the presence of virtuous women by sharing some of their attributes (Clery 2004, p. 97). The advocacy for the acquisition on the part of men of characteristics considered 'feminine' (compassion, domesticity, free display of passions) may appear revolutionary for its time, but it was, in fact, tinged with a deep misogynist resistance to all things feminine. The dilemma of masculinity was a matter of excess (Cohen 1996, pp. 4-5). There was a boundary between feminine manliness, which embodied 'characteristics gendered feminine', and effeminacy, which could not be crossed (Clery

[3] Stone's too optimistic argument has been contested. As Rebecca D'Monté and Nicole Pohl (2000) point out, 'Stone's contention that the marital relationship moved towards a more egalitarian companionship disagrees with the economic model of separate spheres and the actual if ambivalent legal position of women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'. See D'Monté R. and Pohl N. (2000) *Female Communities 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities*, London: Macmillan Press.

2004, pp. 8-10). Exploring the feminisation debate in eighteenth-century Britain, Clery (2004, pp. 9-10) provides a very useful distinction between 'feminization' and 'effeminization':

> The 'feminized' man is a model of politeness, shaped by his contact with the female sex, full of respect and admiration for moral women, and ably fitted to undertake his heterosexual duties. 'Effeminacy' or 'effeminization', on the other hand, is employed as the sum of a complex of derogatory ideas also gendered 'feminine', including corruption, weakness, cowardice, luxury, immorality and the unbridled play of passions. The 'effeminate' man […] takes on the qualities of self-indulgence, wantonness, vanity and hysteria traditionally attributed to women by misogynist rhetoric.

Paradoxically, the idea that women could function as moral reformers due to their elevated morality coexisted with the deep fear of becoming like women, embodied in the figure of a Frenchified fop whose only crime was that of having interests in common with women and spending time with them (Staves 1982, p. 414; Cohen 2005, pp. 322-324).

Although men were allowed to be softened by female presence, the masculine identity had to continue to retain its "manly" traits of self-control and discipline, which ultimately pitted them against women. Underlying the feminisation process was a deeply rooted idea that men were creatures of the mind and women 'creatures of body' (Spacks 1994, pp. 506-511). Self-control separated the two sexes: unlike a woman, who can't help but be swept off by her passions, a man '*allows* himself to feel' (Spacks 1994, p. 506).

Different, sometimes opposing, implications arise from the culture of sensibility when it is applied to gender. While it allowed men to take pride in their softness and tender feelings, women found themselves limited in the expression of their desires due to a rigid moral code based on the expectation of a higher female morality (Todd 1986, p. 81). The problem of male aggressiveness was tackled by endowing men with softer, "feminine" qualities, a project that had some merits but also flaws.

1.3 Sensibility & moral theology

Theology also played an important role in shaping the culture of sensibility. As highlighted by R.S. Crane (1934), one of the most significant systems of religious thought that strengthened sentimental ideology was Anglican Latitudinarianism. Like G. S. Rousseau, Crane (1934, p. 207) locates the proliferation of sentimental ideas 'from the Restoration onward', claiming that the Latitudinarian clergy played a major role in spreading the core notions of sentimentalism, such as humanitarianism and benevolence.

Latitudinarian divines' teachings, with their emphasis on human beings' good nature, stood in stark contrast to those of Puritanism (Crane 1934, p. 209). As 'men of latitude', they accepted different religious doctrines by foregrounding 'practical morality' (Griffin 1992). The duty of doing good preached in Latitudinarian sermons was based on Christian precepts. It was God who bestowed the feelings of benevolence and sympathy on human beings, and it was a Christian obligation to assist those in need, exactly as Christ did. Being good was considered a natural human inclination to be acted upon, notwithstanding the fact that humankind was deemed irremediably corrupted after the fall of Adam and Eve (Crane 1934; Greene 1977). The belief in the practical application of human goodness is exemplified by an important contributor to Latitudinarian theology, John Tillotson, who argued that 'Believing without doing good is a very cheap and easy, but withal a very worthless way of being religious' (Tillotson 1728, cited in Crane 1934, pp. 210-211).

The sacred feelings of kindness and mutual help that connected all human beings were used as a counterargument to an extremely bleak vision of humanity theorised first by the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes and then expanded by Bernard Mandeville in his *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1705-1725) (Ellis 1996, p. 11; Csengei 2012, p. 33). According to Hobbes, humans were essentially anti-social, constantly competing for resources, and thus unable to live harmoniously together. In the same vein, Mandeville suggested that virtue cannot be found in human actions as all humans are moved by emotions that are essentially selfish. To contrast such a grim view of society, a great number of sermons were preached with an explicit aim to call attention to the sense of community and commonality that Latitudinarian divines believed to characterise all humanity (Crane 1934; Griffin 1992; Barker-Benfield 1992). The natural desire to help those who suffer and to sympathetically bond with fellow human beings represented the key tenets of the anti-Hobbesian preachers' creed (Crane 1934, p. 222).

Crane's essay on Latitudinarian theology's influence on sentimentalism would fit perfectly in the narrative of how and why the culture of sensibility became so ubiquitous in the eighteenth century. Yet, Crane's work has been questioned by another scholar, Donald Greene (1977), who argues that some of the ideas preached by the Latitudinarian divines were not pioneering at all. According to Greene (1977, p. 180), 'Crane's "latitudinarianism" […] is nothing more than general Protestantism of the time – tenets with regard to the nature of man and his relationship to God and his neighbor that has been held and preached from the time of the Restoration and earlier'. While it is true that the Christian beliefs in 'universal benevolence' and love of one's neighbour were not inventions of Latitudinarians, whatever

part the latter played in cementing a sentimental conceptualisation of human nature as sympathetic is worth acknowledging. Undeniably, as Greene (1977, p. 180) stresses in a footnote of his article, the presence of sentimentalism can be found way earlier than the Restoration era[4]. This dissertation, however, is not intended to be an extended discussion of the sentimental trend's temporal boundaries. Instead, the purpose here is to observe what fabric the eighteenth-century sentimental trend was made of and how its fast dissemination in Britain was the product of intersecting areas of knowledge (medical, philosophical, theological). As Todd (1986, p. 3) observes, 'what is new in the eighteenth century is the centrality of sentiment and pathos', which makes this period stand out from all the other historical moments. At the core of the century is the sentimental belief in the bonding power of emotional display, conveyed either through novels, poems, or sermons.

Not only were feelings contagious but they were also a powerful tool in morally improving one's character (Todd 1986, pp. 74-75). The sympathetic bonds of affection that connected individuals carried strong moral implications. Both the Latitudinarian theologians and the Methodists emphasised the moral imperative of human works (Crane 1934, p. 210; Cragg 1960, p. 72; Ellis 1996, p. 14). The aim was to perfect human nature and make men good. As a consequence, to be considered a proper Christian, faith had to be accompanied by acts of kindness that were to promote the well-being of all (Crane 1934, pp. 209-212). These acts of kindness could not be executed without the presence of passions; indeed, they were deemed to be the controlling force of human action (Crane 1934, p. 214; Brinton 1992, p. 57). According to Samuel Clarke, a prominent theologian and philosopher whose ideas were highly influential in the eighteenth century, bare understanding was inert, since it lacked the emotional intensity that swings human beings into action.

Joseph Butler was one of the many theologians who advocated the connection between morality and religion. Influenced by thinkers such as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Clarke, he developed his theological and philosophical position in his sermons. His sermons *Upon Human Nature*, *Upon Compassion*, and *Upon the Love of Our Neighbour* are particularly relevant. Sermon 1, *Upon Human Nature*, challenges the Hobbesian view of human beings' natural tendencies as posing a threat to societal cohesion. Butler's confident conclusion is that 'the whole constitution of man' is adapted to a natural law of virtue they are born under (Butler, cited in McNaughton 2017). Benevolence, which is nothing more than 'the love of another', is the natural principle in all humanity, an affection that leads to

[4] Janet Todd points out that traces of sentimentality can be found in Euripides' drama and medieval morality plays. See Todd, J. (1986) *Sensibility: An Introduction*, London: Methuen & Co.

the good of society. According to Butler, affections 'hold mankind together' as if each single individual formed part of one undivided body. It is the affections that move people to do good, and in doing good individuals find 'satisfaction and enjoyment' (Butler, cited in McNaughton 2017).

Benevolence is guided by another important affection: compassion. Butler describes compassion as 'a call, a demand of nature, to relieve the unhappy', which is as natural as the human need for food (Butler, cited in McNaughton 2017). To assist those in pain and misery through acts of charity becomes thus an imperative that 'we owe […] to ourselves, as well as to the distressed' (Butler, cited in McNaughton 2017). 'The sorrow of compassion' human beings experience cannot be ignored or expunged, and the refusal to relieve those in need is described as unnatural and futile (Butler, cited in McNaughton 2017). Butler's sermons, therefore, promote a moral understanding of human nature and human affections as being characterised by the tendency to do good and contribute to the happiness of other fellow creatures.

The religious doctrine of Methodism in its acknowledgement of 'the limits of reason in understanding religious truths' and its view of the relationship with God as emotionally charged, also contributed to the cultural transformation of the status of feelings (Mack 2008, pp. 14-16). Emotional honesty was crucial for Methodists as it allowed them to share the joys and sorrows of fellow humans through the exercise of sympathy, to be moved by a 'silent tear' or a 'deep sigh' (Mack 2008, p. 17). With its emphasis on one's feeling heart and its capacity for human love, Methodism promulgated sensibility (Barker-Benfield 1992, pp. 266-267). Portrayed as the 'mother of humanity' that renders the soul attuned to the display of feelings, sensibility played a crucial role in Methodist meetings structured around emotional spectacles that required a response on the part of the audience (Todd 1986, p. 23). An account of a woman who attended one of the meetings, quoted in Mack's study on gender and emotion in the early Methodism, is quite telling, as it reveals the importance of emotional experience in the spiritual life of a Methodist:

> When anyone did cry out in the room I always wished to be the next… There was two young women sat behind me and telling how…they had cried out such a time and what an agony they had been in before they had received forgiveness. And they said that those that did not feel those agonies that they deceived themselves. (Mack 2008, p. 6)

Barker-Benfield (1992) is alone in observing the intertwining of Methodism and the discourse of sensibility. Baker (1929, p. 114) recounts how John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, has appropriated a distinctly sentimental novel, John Brooke's *The*

Fool of Quality, and re-published it in an abridged version for his followers. His aim was to share the novel's moral ideas that so strongly impressed him. The sentimental aspect of Methodism lay in its belief in the good will of God who had infused the whole creation with natural goodness (Baker 1929, p. 119).

Notwithstanding the great importance that Latitudinarians and Methodists ascribed to feelings, these were not allowed to flow unregulated. Commenting on the popularity of early eighteenth-century ethical sermons, Alan Brinton (1992, p. 56) observes that

> The general theme, *the government of the passions,* is one which runs through the most characteristic ethical preaching of the eighteenth century and which is arguably the most central theme of its popular moral philosophy.

Scholars such as Crane (1934) and Brinton (1992) have listed several sermons and religious treatises that specifically focused on the issue of unregulated emotional expression. Francis Bragge's *A Practical Treatise of the Regulation of the Passions* (1708) is a good case in point. In the section dedicated to the reader, Bragge clearly states his viewpoint: it is the 'due government' of passions that 'makes them Vertues' (1708). He then goes on to observe that the Stoic aspiration[5] to destroy all human passions is 'unreasonable and impracticable' and suggests, instead, that passions be governed by 'Reason and Religion' (Bragge 1708, pp. 6-10). 'Emotional balance' is thus opposed to the 'Stoic apathy' (Frazer 2010, p. 19). Methodists stressed the importance of controlling emotions, too (Mack 2008, pp. 16-25). In one of his letters, John Wesley claims that '[sensibility] is then only too great when it hurts the body or unfits you for some part of your duty. Otherwise it is a blessed thing to sorrow after a goodly sort.' (Telford 1931, cited in Baker 1969, p. 119).

Christian teaching, infused with compassion and tenderness, became progressively concerned with individual moral duty to the humankind (Brissenden 1974, p. 33; Todd 1986, p. 21). Living harmoniously within a community built on values such as benevolence, virtue, and charity became thus a religious obligation, reinforced by the belief in the 'godlikeness' of humankind and its 'innate faculty of morality' bestowed by the authority of God (Todd 1986, pp. 22-23; Ellis 1996 p. 12).

[5] For a different interpretation of the relation between stoicism and sentimentalism see Frazer M.L. (2010) *The Enlightenment of Sympathy*, Oxford University Press, pp. 18-19, where he argues that sentimentalist ideas should be seen as 'a continuation and a revision of the modern Stoic revival rather than an outright rejection of it'.

1.4 Sensibility & moral philosophy

Christian ethical preaching was not the sole reason for the popularisation of the anti-Stoic belief that feelings had a moral value. It was mainly due to the interplay between the eighteenth-century century religious and philosophical thought that the sphere of ethics became so widely investigated. Alan Brinton (1992, p. 65), in his article concerned with the eighteenth-century tradition of preaching about the passions, has pointed out the connection existing between 'the popular moral philosophy of early eighteenth-century sermons on the passions and "canonical" works in eighteenth-century moral philosophy.' Indeed, both Clarke and Butler were religious men who touched on philosophical issues in their writing, while Shaftesbury was strongly influenced by Cambridge Platonists and Latitudinarian divines (Murray 2021, p. 229). The theological reflections on feelings of benevolence and innate tendency towards altruism did not exclude philosophical speculation. In fact, they promoted it.

The sentimentalist understanding of morality, that is the belief that there is a direct correlation between certain feelings and moral agency, has been developed and extensively explored by a group of thinkers labelled by Michael L. Frazer as the 'philosophers of the sentimentalist Enlightenment' (2010, p. 4). The relevance of moral sentimentalism in the eighteenth century may appear inconspicuous, especially if shadowed by the portrayal of the period as mainly dominated by reason. However, its centrality to the eighteenth-century intellectual life has been, by now, widely acknowledged (Frazer 2010, pp. 4-5). The present section will provide a brief account of sentimentalist ideas about morality as developed by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1714), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), David Hume (1711-1776), and Adam Smith (1723-1790).

The affective component of human existence, stressed by the nerve paradigm, was the cornerstone of moral sentimentalism. Most scholars agree that John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) was pivotal in cementing the primacy of senses as the gateway to knowledge (Brissenden 1974; Rousseau 1976; Todd 1986). James A. Harris (2013, p. 1) notes that the publication of Locke's *Essay* is generally accepted as a key event that marked the beginning of eighteenth-century British philosophy, given that it 'announced a fundamental alteration of the philosophical landscape' of the time. With its numerous ramifications, Locke's epistemological theory was relevant for the eighteenth-century sentimentalism in that it showed the existence of a link between physiology and ethics. As a result, personal affections gradually assumed the role of a moral compass that carried universal authority (Brissenden 1974, pp. 24-26; Rousseau 1976, p. 140).

The ‘hegemonic priority’ of natural affections, featured in ethical sermons of the eighteenth century, was further strengthened by the moral theorists of the time (Lamb 2009, pp. 22-23). Ernest Tuveson (1953) and C. A. Moore (1916) have stressed the considerable influence Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* (1711) exerted not only on the field of moral philosophy but also on popular literature. According to Shaftesbury’s theory of ethics, which posited the idea of moral sense as naturalised, human beings tend to spontaneously promote the public good due to the presence of social affections implanted in them by nature. Consequently, if individuals adhered to nature, they would live harmoniously with each other without the necessity of a divine or natural law to guide their behaviour (Tuveson 1953, pp. 275-276; De Bruyn 2021, p. 49).

Shaftesbury’s assumption of an instinctual morality is intimately bound up with his belief in the interdependence of living creatures. Human beings, having ‘a joint relation to another existence and order of things beyond themselves’, are bound to navigate a complicated system of moral relations that originates in the ‘very nature of existence’ (Shaftesbury [1711] 2003, p. 168; De Bruyn 2021, p. 49):

> So that the creatures are […] to be considered as parts of another system, which is that of a particular race or species of living creatures, who have some one common nature or are provided for by some one order or constitution of things subsisting together and co-operating towards their conservation and support. (Shaftesbury [1711] 2003, p. 168)

Underlying Shaftesbury’s principle of human beings’ moral nature is the theory of social affections. Virtuous actions that promote the good of the whole system necessarily involve the active role of affections. These motivating affections, argues Shaftesbury, are subject to self-reflection, a process that gives rise to ‘another kind of affection towards those very affections themselves, which have been already felt and have now become the subject of a new liking or dislike’ (Shaftesbury [1711] 2003, p. 172). As a result, the ability to reflect on the passions, which is defined as “moral sense”, allows to morally approve of feelings that promote the well-being of humanity and disapprove of those that have deleterious effects. It is only through this process that it is possible to become virtuous:

> Thus the several motions, inclinations, passions, dispositions and consequent carriage and behaviour of creatures in the various parts of life, being in several views or perspectives represented to the mind, which readily discerns the good and ill towards the species or public, there arises a new trial or exercise of the heart, which must either rightly and soundly affect what is just and right and disaffect what is contrary […] (Shaftesbury [1711] 2003, p. 173)

Natural affections, which Shaftesbury identifies with love, pity, generosity, 'or whatever else is of social or friendly sort', are presented as intrinsically moral and necessarily leading to happiness, their immediate object and consequence being the enhancement of the public good (Shaftesbury [1711] 2003, p. 201). No reward or punishment is, therefore, required to make a person virtuous. Enmeshed in social relations, individuals find ultimate satisfaction and contentment, the 'nine-tenth of whatever is enjoyed in life' (Shaftesbury [1711] 2003, p. 205).

Shaftesbury's vague conceptualisation of a moral sense that upon contemplation either approves or disapproves of certain affections was considerably expanded by Francis Hutcheson in his *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725). A prominent Scottish sentimentalist, Hutcheson bolstered the view of human beings as innately virtuous by founding it on naturalistic and religious grounds (Frazer 2010, p. 30; Ellis 1996, pp. 10-11). Against the egoistic argument put forth by the author of *The Fable of the Bees*, he opposed an ethical system based on the existence of an internal and secret sixth sense which is responsible for moral evaluations:

> It is plain we have some secret Sense which determines our Approbation without regard to Self-Interest; otherwise we should always favour the fortunate Side without regard to Virtue, and suppose our selves engaged with that Party. (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, p. 92)

It is the existence of this moral sense that can justify, argues Hutcheson, a 'secret Chain between each Person and Mankind' ([1725] 2004, p. 91).

The faculty for moral approbation and disapprobation implanted in the human body is explored by Hutcheson in close relation with his views regarding affections (Stewart 1996, p. 228). The assumption that moral judgements derive from a moral sense relies on the belief that they inevitably elicit an emotional response (Jensen 1971, p. 10; pp. 39-40). Two types of affections are particularly relevant to Hutcheson: love and hatred. These he identifies as the foundation of human moral agency, claiming that 'every action […] is always suppos'd to flow from some Affection toward rational Agents' (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, p. 101). Love of fellow humans is, he concludes, 'the Spring of our Actions' (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, p. 134).

Hutcheson's moral theory was also crucial in establishing the nature of moral affections as entirely disinterested. He highlights how 'none of these Affections which we call virtuous, spring from Self-love, or Desire of private Interest' (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, p. 102). Virtuous actions are, therefore, the result of 'Love of others' human beings experience (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, p. 116). The feeling of love is kindled by observing

agreeable qualities, such as benevolence and compassion, in another individual, and is so engrafted in the frame of human nature that it can extend beyond 'Neighbourhoods or Acquaintances' (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, p. 114). There is no doubt, argues Hutcheson, that if we were to 'represent a Character as generous, kind, faithful, humane, tho in the most distant Parts of the World' the natural impulse would be to love them 'with Esteem, and Complacence', despite their geographical remoteness (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, p. 103).

While qualities such as benevolence and compassion arouse the affection of love, pernicious actions result in feelings of hatred and aversion on the part of the spectator (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, p. 116). According to Hutcheson ([1725] 2004, p. 121), a vicious man is the one who, swayed by 'a mistaken Self-Love, made so violent, as to overcome Benevolence', causes harm to others. The more suffering an action provokes, the more it is perceived as morally evil (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, pp. 120-125). The fact that malicious actions are ascribed by Hutcheson to an excess of self-love and self-interest is especially noteworthy. He firmly rejects as unconceivable the Sadean idea that a human being could be so wicked as to be moved by mere pleasure of causing misery (Hutcheson [1725] 2004, pp. 120-121).

In a philosophical endeavour to defend the 'lovely Form' of human nature theorised by Hutcheson ([1725] 2004, p. 105), David Hume made a substantial contribution to moral sentimentalism. While it is undeniable that Hutcheson's moral theory was crucial in establishing the premises on which Hume would base his thought, it is worth noting that in his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) Hume rejected any theistic explanation of human morality and sought to understand moral phenomena from an empirical perspective, instead (De Bruyn 2021, p. 52). Given the religious foundations of Hutcheson's sentimentalism, his reception of Hume's Book on morals was quite critical and led Hume to revise his work in order to avoid any theological disagreements (Wright 2006, pp. 6-7).

Hume's account of the passions and the affective nature of morality is presented in Book 2 and 3 of the *Treatise* and further consolidated (and modified) in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) (Kroeker and Lemmens 2021, p. 2). Unlike the rationalist approach that exalts the power of reason, Hume's theory locates morality's origin in human sentiments (Karlsson 2006, p. 235; Radcliffe 2021, p. 13). Book 2 "Of the Passions" can, therefore, be regarded as a prelude to Book 3, in the sense that it prepares the ground for a more detailed discussion about the moral sentiments (Norton 2009, p. 22). Like Shaftesbury, Hume advances an account of morality based on the view of humans as social beings who are desirous 'of acquiring the love and approbation of mankind' (Hume [1739] 2007, p. 215):

> In all creatures […] there appears a remarkable desire of company, which associates them together, without any advantages they can ever propose to reap from their union. This is still more conspicuous in man, as being the creature of the universe, who has the most ardent desire of society, and is fitted for it by the most advantages. We can form no wish, which has not a reference to society. A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer. Every pleasure languishes when enjoy'd apart from company, and every pain becomes more cruel and intolerable. (Hume [1739] 2007, p. 234)

The motives for leading a social life are directly linked to moral behaviour: humans naturally seek the approval of other humans, which, according to Hume, can be attained by virtuous behaviour (Wright 2009, pp. 203-204). Virtuous actions inevitably arouse feelings of pleasure and the consequent passion of pride derived from performing them (Wright 2009, p. 201). Conversely, acting in a manner prejudicial to another person's integrity causes feelings of shame and self-disapproval (Wright 2009, pp. 274-275).

The process of moral evaluation by which an action is deemed to be either virtuous or vicious requires to consider not the action per se, but the motive that underlies it (Brown 2008, p. 230; Taylor 2006, p. 278). As Hume argues,

> 'The external performance has no merit. We must look within to find the moral quality. This we cannot do directly; and therefore fix our attention on actions, as on external signs. But these actions are still consider'd as signs; and the ultimate object of our praise and approbation is the motive, that produc'd them.' (Hume [1739] 2007, p. 307)

Actions alone cannot be morally evaluated because they do not affect human sentiments. It is 'the quality or character from which the action proceeded' that are subject to moral judgement, which is closely related to the so-called "indirect passions" of pride, humility, love, and hatred (Hume [1739] 2007, pp. 367-368).

The fact that over half of Hume's discussion in the *Treatise* is devoted to these complexly generated passions can be interpreted as an indication of their significance in his theory of moral sentiments (Cohon 2008, pp. 160-161). Rachel Cohon (2008, p. 179) has noted a connection between the indirect passions and moral sentiments. According to Cohon, moral sentiments 'have the very features that make Hume's four principal indirect passions indirect'. One of the most relevant features they share is that they are 'person-evaluating attitudes' (Cohon 2008, p. 174). Moral evaluation requires to direct one's attention to some other person's qualities or character, which, upon contemplation, will either arouse sentiments of pleasure or repulsion (Hume [1739] 2007, p. 371). What constitutes moral approval or disapproval is, therefore, the feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction,

agreeableness or aversion (Brown 2008, pp. 231-232). Like Hutcheson, Hume focused on the 'spectator component' of morality by looking specifically at the process of moral assessment that involves an emotional response of an admiring or disapproving spectator (Norton 2009, p. 23). Thus, both philosophers sought to offer 'a theory about what character traits are morally good and bad – a theory of virtue and vice' (Brown 2008, p. 222).

The similarities between Hutcheson's moral theory and that of Hume are considerable. They both agreed that moral evaluation and motivation derive from affections rather than reason, and they both identified utility and agreeableness as the defining traits of virtuous actions (Broiles 1964, pp. 21-24; Wright 2009, pp. 240-241). However, there is one significant way in which their moral theories differ. Hume found unconvincing Hutcheson's assertion that a universal benevolence, coupled with a 'moral sense', is the foundation of civil society (Johnson 2021, p. 118; Brown 2008, p. 232). While he acknowledged as self-evident the existence of fellow-feelings that characterise humanity, he was sceptical of the conclusion that spontaneous other-regarding affections alone could guarantee the common good (Lecaldano 2008, pp. 258-259; Vitz 2016, pp. 316-317). According to Hume ([1739] 2007, p. 309), 'There is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, *merely as such*, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself'.

Hume's view of human nature is predicated upon a limited kind of benevolence that is simply unable to extend to all human beings (Lecaldano 2008, p. 260; Maurer 2013, p. 302). He exemplifies the partiality of human benevolence by drawing attention to the fact that 'a man naturally loves his children better than his nephews, his nephews better than his cousins, his cousins better than strangers […]' (Hume [1739] 2007, p. 311). Benevolence, he argues, is spontaneous within 'small, kinship-based units', but it fails to operate within larger societies (Norton 2009 p. 23; Taylor 2009, p. 314).

Hume's acknowledgement of the partiality of benevolent dispositions led him to the conclusion that when it comes to complex societies, disinterested love of humanity is not sufficient to avoid conflicts and ensure the wellbeing of everyone (Wright 2009, p. 261; Norton 2009, pp. 23-24). Thus, laws and rules of conduct 'are required to provide social stability, protection, and peace' (Johnson 2021, p. 119). But why do individuals follow artificial rules of justice?[6] The answer for Hume is to be found in the faculty of sympathy.

[6] John P. Wright (2009) aptly observes that Hume's discussion of the notion of justice in the *Treatise* is primarily concerned with property and dispositions of external goods. See Wright, P. John (2009*). Hume's 'A Treatise of Human Nature': An Introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

He argues that sympathy (feeling with or for others), rather than an instinctive moral sense, is the source of human altruism:

> The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations; nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature. When I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself. (Hume [1739] 2007, p. 368)

The workings of sympathy, which allow individuals to participate in other people's emotional states, result in an extension of benevolence beyond the intimate circle of friends and family, thus leading to 'a natural approbation' of the rules of justice and their general utility (Lecaldano 2008, pp. 265-266; Wright 2009, pp. 214-236). While Hume concedes that there is a certain degree of selfishness that characterises human nature, he does not take the side of Hobbes and Mandeville. If human beings were purely self-centred, they would not feel compelled to obey rules established to safeguard the public good. Hume contends that individuals feel motivated to observe the law because of their ability 'to receive by communication [other people's] inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to [their] own' (Hume [1739] 2007, p. 206). Experiencing fellow feelings with those who have been wronged will, therefore, necessarily result in moral condemnation of any wrongdoing (Wright 2009, p. 261; Broiles 1964, p. 76). As Hume writes,

> We partake of their uneasiness by *sympathy*; and as every thing, which gives uneasiness in human actions, upon the general survey, is call'd *vice*, and whatever produces satisfaction, in the same manner, is denominated *virtue*; ([1739] 2007, p. 320)

Passions assume a prominent place in Hume's concept of sympathy. Humes speaks of the passions in terms of an emotional contagion that originates regardless of will: 'They pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts' (Hume [1379] 2007, p. 386). By virtue of 'a great resemblance among all human creatures', the infectious exchange of sentiments acquires for Hume a universal and indiscriminate force, notwithstanding the varying degrees of identification it produces (Hume [1739] 2007, pp. 207-208; Lamb 2009, p. 62; Fiori 2023, pp. 90-99). Stefano Fiori (2023, pp. 101-102) argues that Hume's sympathy could be interpreted in terms of 'real empathy', given its ability to transform an initial idea of another person's affection into 'the

very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection' (Hume [1739] 2007, p. 206). However, there is no general agreement among scholars as to whether Hume's sympathy should be read as either a partial or a full form of empathetic identification (Taylor 2015, p. 42; Forget 2003, p. 289; Fleischacker 2012, p. 274).

Several scholars have investigated the similarities and differences between David Hume's and Adam Smith's accounts of sympathy[7]. While both philosophers were particularly interested in sympathy's social importance, they had different views about how it operated (Fleischacker 2012, pp. 299-300). In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Adam Smith lent his own perspective on the peculiar human capacity to enter into the sentiments of others. He presented an account of sympathy that heavily relied on the exercise of imagination (Otteson 2002, pp. 19-21):

> As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and itis by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. (Smith [1759] 2004, p. 11)

The affective identification with others is dependent upon the ability to imagine their mental state. Since there is no direct access to other people's emotions, they can only be constructed by picturing what it would be like to experience the other person's situation (Griswold, Jr 2006, pp. 23-25).

The instinctual 'propensity that one has to receive emotional communications from others' theorised by Hume is thus replaced by the observer's conscious effort to shape the other person's feelings (Fleischacker 2012, pp. 291-296; Schwalm 2015, p. 157). According to Smith, sympathy 'does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situations which excites it' (Smith [1759] 2004, p. 15). Consequently, the sympathetic transmission of feelings is no longer linked to the observation of external signs of another's affections (Fiori 2023, p. 103). The capacity to sympathise with the dead, who are devoid of any feelings, is an example of how sympathy works by projection rather than by 'communication of feelings by means of contagion' (Fiori 2023, p. 91; Campbell 1971, pp.

[7] See Morrow, R. Glenn (1923) The Significance of the Doctrine of Sympathy in Hume and Adam Smith; Rick, John (2007) Hume's and Smith's Partial Sympathies and Impartial Stances; Sayre-McCord, Geoffrey (2013) Hume and Smith on Sympathy, Approbation and Moral Judgment.

94-96): one ‘imaginatively project oneself into another’s situation’ and pictures what they would feel in the other’s place (Wispé 1991, p. 13; Sayre-McCord 2013, p. 215).

Some scholars argue that ‘Smithian sympathy […] succeeds where Hume’s account falls short’ (Rick 2007, p. 135). Others view both Hume’s and Smith’s mechanisms of sympathy as too conservative, ‘dominated by the aristocratic and patriarchal distinction’ (Jones 1993, pp. 28-58). These contrasting scholarly interpretations testify to the ambiguity of the eighteenth-century characterisations of sympathy, which, while promising greater communion with the other, also promoted deep anxiety concerning the other’s ultimate unknowability (Forget 2003, pp. 283-288; Ahern 2007, pp. 133-135).

This section is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion of moral sentimentalism. The richness of the eighteenth-century philosophical debates vis-à-vis sentiment and morality has been here only adumbrated. Yet, what has been discussed so far is sufficient to shed light on some crucial issues that defined the culture of sensibility, such as sociability, affectivity, and ultimately human nature. Both moral and social qualities of sympathy, coupled with the doctrine of natural benevolence, emphasised the human need of others. As noted by Sarah Knott (cited in Reeves 2020, p. 112), ‘eighteenth-century moral philosophers insisted that the self’s social viability depended upon its impulses being once again directed outward, toward other sensible, sympathetic selves’. The sensible self was ‘a socially turned self’ (Knott 2020, p. 5).

Sentimental fiction was the space where eighteenth-century discourses around sensibility intersected (Lloyd 2013, p. 4). Sentimental narratives, stressing the natural capacity to feel, elicited sympathetic engagement and moral responsiveness. The novel’s fascination with the human ability to feel for others did not exist in a cultural vacuum: it was charged with political overtones and humanitarian concerns. Stephen Ahern (2007, p. 36) observes that ‘the preoccupation with feeling’ is ‘a way of accessing significant formal and philosophical concerns at […] the heart of Enlightenment literature and culture’. Several scholars have demonstrated that eighteenth-century ‘extraordinary growth in philanthropy’ intertwined with the literary discourse of sensibility and its focus on benevolence and sympathy (Ellis 1996, p. 14-17; London 2012, p. 95).

Although fraught with ‘hybrid ambiguity’, sentimental novel attempted ‘to reformulate social attitudes to inequality through the development of a new humanitarian sensibility’ (Ellis 1996, p. 49; p. 194). By placing emotional display at the centre of social intercourses, eighteenth-century sympathetic sentimentalism, moulded in the novelistic form

(itself intrinsically sociable), can be regarded as a precursor of the modern sociology of emotions (Longo 2020, pp. 3-6; London 2012, p. 139).

CHAPTER TWO

Imagining caring tomorrows: relational ethics as a form of resistance in *David Simple* and *Volume the Last*

> If *money* is the bond binding me to *human* life, binding society to me, connecting me with nature and man, is not money the bond of all *bonds?* Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, also the universal *agent of separation?*
>
> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

> Commitment to a love ethic transforms our lives by offering us a different set of values to live by.
>
> bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*

2.1 The novelistic and economic discourse: an unlikely match?

As already noted, the sentimental preoccupation with social bonds was prominent among eighteenth-century philosophical thinkers (Mullan 1988; Berry 2003). Hume's conception of morality as a social phenomenon, Hutcheson's insistence on the naturalness of human sociability, and Smith's theory of moral sentiments, all present a counternarrative to the Hobbesian-Mandevillean selfish hypothesis by highlighting the human propensity to take an interest in one another (Maurer 2013).

The issue of communal existence and its moral implications, subsumed under the discourse of sensibility, became a matter of pressing urgency in a period of sweeping economic change. Eighteenth-century England was morphing into a consumer society. As Neil McKendrick (1982, p. 13) observes, 'consumer behaviour was so rampant and the acceptance of commercial attitudes so pervasive that no one in the future should doubt that the first of the world's consumer societies had unmistakably emerged by 1800'. This transformation gave rise to 'an ideological need of some urgency': the need to postulate a moral theory that could address the new forms of commercial desires (Knight 1993, p. 164). The 'new material world', characterised by the emergence of a market economy and economic agents, prompted some burning questions: what did it mean to be an economic agent? And what kind of modes of sociality did the market promote? (Kwass 2022, p. 17).

There was a growing preoccupation with the morally corruptible effects of economic evolution on social bonds. The notion of self-interest, understood as love of gain, was at the

centre of eighteenth-century debates about human behaviour in the commercialised context of the period (Hirschman 1977, pp. 41-44; Myers 1983, p. 2). It was feared that the establishment of the material culture, together with the new systems of credit, was promoting a profit-oriented model of individual agency that would result in political and moral mayhem (Dwyer 1987, pp. 1-7; Nicholson 1994, p. 2). Such a suspicious view of the market system was counterbalanced by a more optimistic perception of commercial economy. For instance, Charles K. Knight (1993; pp. 163-164) has highlighted how the eighteenth-century periodical *Spectator* played a crucial role in redeeming the mercantile culture 'by connecting morality and economics'. As Myers (1983, p. 13) has pointed out, Enlightenment was also a period that witnessed 'generous attitudes' towards economic man.

Adam Smith's understanding of commercial society proved pivotal in establishing the idea that private profit could result in public good. One may be initially puzzled by the fact that a moral philosopher who postulated an ethical theory of human sociability, fuelled by unselfish 'imaginative sympathetic exchanges', is also the author of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), a work that appears to advance the doctrine of laissez-faire by arguing that all individuals are moved by self-interest (i.e., a universal and innate desire to better their own material condition) (Campbell 1971, p. 15; Dwyer 2005, pp. 662-665; Evensky 2016, pp. 76-80). Yet, Smith's moral philosophy and economic theory can be read as direct products of his attempt to smooth out the apparent irreconcilability of economic and moral values (Dwyer 1987, p. 4; Hont 2015, p. 8; p. 17). Indeed, the apparent disconnection between Smith's economic and moral philosophies has been addressed and redressed by several scholars who have stressed the continuities between *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*[8].

As a sentimental philosopher and political economist, Smith developed his thought in opposition to Hobbes' and Mandeville's ideas of self-interest (Crisp 2019, p. 158). Smith viewed political economy as existing within the ethical domain. His analysis of the commercial system is founded upon a 'moral defence of self-interest' (Montes 2016, p. 140). While Hobbes insisted on the destructive nature of individuals' self-interested drives, which must be regulated by an external authority, Smith reshaped the concept in a more positive light by arguing that self-interested behaviour, as a form of motivation, can lead to the public good and, therefore, be morally approved of (Mehta 2006; pp. 250-252). For Smith, self-interest does not coincide with unmitigated selfishness. As Donald Winch (1992, p. 101)

[8] See Dwyer, John A. (2005) Ethics and Economics: Bridging Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments and Wealth of Nations; Macfie, Alexander L. (1959) Adam Smith's Moral Sentiments as Foundation for his Wealth of Nations; Lindgren, Ralph J. (1973). *The Social Philosophy of Adam Smith.*

points out, Smith had nothing to do with the 'a-moral' tradition of mercantile writings that posit the pursuit of self-interest as the overriding motive of human behaviour. Mandeville's view of commercial society being governed by greed and amour propre is rejected by Smith who sees it as a 'licentious system' of morality (Otteson 2002, pp. 143-144; Hurtado-Prieto 2006, pp. 221-241). While Smith views human beings as endowed with a natural desire to better their condition, such a tendency is not portrayed as unsocial. Rather, it is 'a prudential regard for personal affairs' that requires self-command and is curbed by the social passions (Winch 1992, p. 103; Werhane 1989, pp. 670-674).

Moreover, Smith believed that individuals resorted to the judgement of an internal 'impartial spectator' (i.e., conscience) to correct their potentially harmful, self-interested behaviour (Reeves 2020, pp. 116-117). To Smith, a well-functioning market system was founded upon a synthesis of economic interests and mutual sympathy (Werhane 1989, p. 670). Therefore, economic pursuit is understood as the direct consequence of human 'noneconomic' desire to gain other people's sympathy and approbation (Werhane 1989, pp. 671-672; Sen 2016, pp. 296-297; Hirschman 1977, p. 108).

It is worth emphasising that Smith was ambivalent towards his economic model of *doux commerce* premised on the idea that the drive for material betterment is a calm passion that can lead to social order and national economic growth (Hirschman p. 66; pp. 100-107). For instance, Dwyer (2005) notes that he was highly critical of the greedy industrialists and merchants. Yet, to Smith the commercial system was the only viable one, despite its flaws. As Sen (2016, p. 287) points out, he 'sought substantial supplementation of the market mechanism, though he would not endorse any proposal to supplant it'.

Adam Smith's blending of economic and ethical matters reveals a pressing necessity to navigate the growing complexity of the eighteenth-century socioeconomic context (Dwyer 1987, pp. 3-5). The emergence of commercial and consumer capitalism, made possible by colonial expansion, world trade, and slavery, had an impact on the whole fabric of British society (Kwass 2022, pp. 12-13). Its transformative nature affected social and cultural practices, the world of fiction, and the ethical domain.

The rising levels of consumption directly correlated to the 'establishment of the political power of money' (Nicholson 1994, p. 23):

> What one notices about it [eighteenth-century society] first of all is the importance of money. The landed gentry are graded not by birth or other marks of status but by rentals: they are worth so many thousand pounds a year. Among the aristocracy and ambitious gentry, courtship is conducted by fathers and by their lawyers, who guide it carefully towards its consummation,

> the well-drawn marriage settlement. Place and office could be bought and sold (provided that the sale did not seriously conflict with the lines of political interest); commissions in the Army; seats in parliament. Use-rights, privileges, liberties, services - all could be translated into an equivalent in money: votes, burgage-rights, immunities from parish office or militia service, the freedom of boroughs, gates on the common. This is the century in which money 'beareth all the stroke' […] (Thompson 1978, p. 138)

Drawing on Marx's *Capital*, James Thompson (1996, p. 31; pp. 41-43) argues that eighteenth-century England saw a 'shift in the conception and use of money from wealth to capital', from 'inert hoard to money in motion'. The political economy's discourse of money shows how money was perceived as 'the essential lifeblood' of the new eighteenth-century economic system (Thompson 1996, p. 43).

The growing capital economy, based on the 'airy substance' of bills and credit, engendered feelings of anxiety (Nicholson 1994, pp. 7-14; Kwass 2022, p. 12). Smith's interest in economic processes emblematically manifests both an optimistic belief in economic progress and a considerable concern over its accompanying dangers (Dwyer 2005, p. 663; Lindgren 1973, p. 84). The fact that the expanding world of commerce and goods became an urgent matter of concern is testified by the 'vigorous Enlightenment debate on luxury', which fiction directly engaged with (Kwass 2022, p. 161). There was a close connection between 'the dynamism of capitalist exchange' and fictional narratives (Thompson 1996, p. 9). This is especially true of the mid-eighteenth-century sentimental novels, which manifested a constant struggle to find meaning in an increasingly commercial era that bred uncertainties and uneasiness (Bellamy 1998, pp. 6-7).

The domesticity and inwardness that critics so often ascribe to sentimental fiction should not obscure the ways in which it engaged with social and economic issues of the time. Such a political aspect of sentimentalism has been investigated by scholars such as Markman Ellis (1996) and Liz Bellamy (1998). Bellamy (1998, p. 86) argues that 'it is in the sentimental novel […] that some of the most thorough and explicit analyses of the economic system can be found'. Since fiction offered imaginative insight into economic and also political and moral issues, Bellamy (1998, pp. 6-7) claims that it should not be viewed as separate from economic discourse.

Gillian Skinner (1999, p. 1) has made a similar point. She notes how eighteenth-century sensibility is 'inescapably' linked to the domain of economics. The emphasis on feeling that characterises the genre is, she suggests, 'a politically significant preoccupation' (Skinner 1999, p. 3). Thus, it is perfectly possible to address 'public' issues of contemporary economic or political debate within the framework of the sentimental exploration of the

'private world of feeling' (Skinner 1999, p. 3). Moreover, the connection between the novel and political economy is strengthened by the fact that they both emerged during the same historical period (Comyn 2018, p. 3; p. 9). The eighteenth-century novel can thus become 'a prime vantage point from which to examine the emergence and contested construction of a subject with defined characteristics such as the rationality and self-interest prized by economic theory' (Comyn 2018, p. 5).

Although sentimental fiction often displays an anti-capitalist ethos, its relationship with economic discourse is far from straightforward (Todd 1986, p. 97). As Sarah Comyn (2018, p. 6) suggests, the novel was 'both participant in and critical of economic theory and practices'. For one thing, the rising literary marketplace was the product of the modern commercial state. Several critics have emphasised how the emergence of the novelistic genre is directly related to the establishment of capitalism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Donovan 1991, pp. 441-442; Goldmann 1975, p. 7).

Scholars have also noticed how sensibility benefitted from the emergence of a consumer society and the expanding market (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. xviii-xix; Kwass 2021, p. 14; p. 111). By calling it the "luxury" of feeling, Barker-Benfield's aim is to make explicit the materialist underpinnings of the culture of sensibility (1992, p. xxvi). Not only does he link consumerism to women's cultivation of sensibility, but he also places the rise of capitalism, with its focus on self-control, politeness, and heterosociality, at the centre of the male reformation of manners (Barker-Benfield 1992, p. xxv).

Other critics have argued that commercial capitalism proved liberating in its egalitarianism. It played a part in the broadening of the readership spectrum and the rise of literacy, making the novel a democratic tool that could reach, much to Samuel Johnson's regret, 'the young, the ignorant, and the idle' (Hunter 1996, pp. 19-20; Kwass 2021, pp. 7-8; pp. 133-136). David A. Bell (2023, p. 663) notes how 'a burgeoning market economy vastly expanded the opportunities for ordinary readers to participate in intellectual life'.

However, the benefits of the eighteenth-century commercial society should not be overemphasised. The capitalist spirit of the time may have brought several positive changes, but it did not cancel inequalities or injustices. In fact, it profited from them (Kwass, 2021, p. 65). In his insightful book *The Consumer Revolution 1650-1800*, Michael Kwass (2021, p. 10) advocates for a more nuanced representation of the eighteenth-century consumer society, drawing attention to the 'evidence of severe material constraints, persistent underemployment, and downward social mobility', which inevitably undermine any 'rosy

portrayals of consumption'. What other historians term 'egalitarianism', Kwass (2021, p. 132) defines as 'inequality transformed'.

The establishment of the power of money in the eighteenth-century commercialised society destabilised and altered the structures of 'private and social experience' (Nicholson 1994, p. 19). In this environment of change, sentimental fiction, which based its ethics upon feeling and sympathy, faced the daunting task of reconciling the disinterested benevolence it preached with the moneyed interests that progressively came to dominate the marketplace. Therefore, it is not surprising that the genre incorporated economic issues of capital and money.

Sarah Fielding's novel *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) provides a particularly fruitful ground for the exploration of the economic discourse of capital within the fictional context of sentimentalism.[9] Money is mentioned before the novel even begins, thus making reality and fiction mirror each other as the Advertisement to the Reader foreshadows one of the novel's central themes: market forces monopolising the full range of human existence. As Linda Bree (2002, p. xiii) observes, the issues raised in the novel had 'a particular personal resonance for Sarah Fielding' who, living as an unmarried woman in a patriarchal society 'based on inheritance and primogeniture', had to face persistent financial instability.

The intersection of gender and economic issues in the novel is apparent. In order to lend verisimilitude to the story, the protagonist had to be a man, the only true independent economic actor in the eighteenth-century society (Bree 2002, p. xxiv). G. A. Starr's (1990, p. 362) view of sentimentalism as 'a working out of Hobbes's principles from a victim's standpoint' is relevant here. Both Sarah Fielding and her fictional characters inhabit a marginal space that makes them outsiders in a society where money equals power, and 'power is everything' (Starr 1990, p. 362).

The story centres around a young, 'tender-hearted' man, David, whose 'design' is 'to seek out one capable of being a real Friend, and to assist all those, who had been thrown into Misfortunes by the ill Usage of others' (p. 24). The novel's setting is particularly relevant. The protagonist's sentimental journey does not require the crossing of national borders but is confined, instead, to the city of London, which functions as a symbolic space for the exploration of the power of money. As Janet Todd (1986, p. 14) notes, 'the average sentimental novel opposing vice and virtue took the virtuous hero to the horrors of London'.

[9] Fielding, Sarah (2002). *The Adventures of David Simple and the Adventures of David Simple, Volume the Last*. Edited by Bree, L. London: Penguin Classics. References are to this edition.

Eighteenth-century London was the hub of financial and commercial affairs, a 'centre of the world's money-markets' that drew together all those interested in conducting 'the private Business of Mankind' (Edison 1711, cited in Nicholson 1994 p. 56; p. 26). The fact that the first place David visits on his quest for genuine friendship is the Royal Exchange is emblematic. It highlights the connection between human affectivity as source of meaning and monetary systems of values. Royal Exchange is described in the novel as a place where 'Men of all Ages and all Nations were assembled, with no other View than to barter for Interest' (p. 25). As the following sections will demonstrate, whether this new, money-driven, commercial environment allows for a sentimental view of human sociability is a paramount concern in the novel.

2.2 'Money do make the Mare go': sociability in the urban commercial society

The novel's persistent mention of money and monetary interests is most conspicuous. When David's parents are introduced at the beginning of the novel, the readers discover that Mr Daniel Simple 'kept a Mercer's Shop on *Ludgate-hill'*, and, together with his wife, led 'a very honest and industrious Life' (p. 7). As Linda Bree (2002, p. 405) explains in a note to the text, Ludgate Hill was to be found 'in the heart of the commercial district of the City of London'. The reference to the protagonist's parentage, therefore, far from being an omissible piece of information, strategically locates the story amidst the workings of London's commercial economy in which David's father took an active part as a merchant.

What is relevant, however, is not the constant mentioning of money per se but, rather, its function. That is to say, the ways in which it serves David in his search for a real friend. While David's father is characterised by his middle-class trading quality of industriousness, his son seems indifferent to the commercial opportunities the city of London offers. Janet Todd's description of the sentimental hero as the one who dispenses 'his own wealth liberally and with speed' is quite fitting (1986, p. 97). David has no intention of investing or transforming the money he has inherited from his father into capital, nor does he simply expend it (Todd 1986, p. 97). In the protagonist's hands, money becomes a tool 'to supply and assist' (p. 7), to share rather than to hoard. The 'strict friendship' between David and his brother Daniel that characterised their boyhood is described as follows: 'while there was any Money in either of their Pockets, the other was sure never to want it: the Notion of whose Property it was, being the last Thing that ever entered into their Heads.' (p. 7). As the story unfolds, the absence of mercenary motivation in the protagonist's disposition is once again

stressed by the narrator, who claims that David 'had no Ambition, nor any Delight in Grandeur. The only use he had for Money, was to serve his Friends' (p. 23).

The novel opposes two different manners of dealing with money that Daniel and David symbolically embody: money as a means to promote the happiness of others and money as a way to satisfy one's personal indulgences. Todd's assertion that David 'simply expends' (1986, p. 97) does not do justice to the rhetoric the novel builds around money: the protagonist's propensity to immediately bring out 'all the Money' he has to assist those in need, rather than being evaluated from a cost-benefit perspective and therefore being dubbed as "naïve", is instead one of the features that makes him of a 'sober prudent Disposition' (p. 7). Daniel, on the other hand, being 'one of those Wretches, whose only Happiness centers in themselves', is explicitly accused of being too 'profuse in his manner of spending' because he spends only to gratify his selfish interests (p. 7; p. 9). As Gillian Skinner (1999, p. 18) points out, Daniel personifies financial extravagance.

Although influenced by the discourse of civic humanism, the novel appears more focused on criticising the transformation of personal relations in the context of market economy, rather than condemning excessive consumerism. This is not to say that there are no instances in the novel in which luxurious prodigality is a subject of criticism. Simon Stern (2012, p. 637), for instance, notices how one of the stock figures in the novel is 'the spendthrift'. However, characters' 'mercenary designs' tend to acquire a relational dimension in the novel, which focuses on the way in which social interactions are redefined by the logic of profit (p. 265). Thus, the apparent 'State of Happiness' the two brothers, David and Daniel, live in comes abruptly to an end when the narrator lays bare the truth behind Daniel's friendly behaviour (p. 8). He is described as

> one of those Wretches, whose only Happiness centres in themselves; and that his Conversation with his Companions had never any other View, but in some shape or other to promote his own Interest. To this it was owing, he endeavoured to keep his Brother from being imposed on, lest his Generosity should lead him to let others share his Money as well as himself (p. 9).

As the story progresses and David gets to meet more people, the exchange value of the inter-relational sphere begins to gain prominence. When Camilla relates the story about how she and her brother Valentine were alienated from their father by their cunning stepmother Livia, the latter's display of and desire for affection is described in terms of monetary gain: 'the Woman looks on her Husband's Love for her, in no other Light, but as it gives her an Opportunity to make Prey of his Fortune, and to impose on his Understanding' (p. 137).

James Thompson's (1996, p. 23) definition of domesticity as a 'zone of affect' that 'provides refuge from the competitive world of civil society as a place exempt from the laws and brutality of capitalist exchange' is repeatedly negated by the novel's several instances of failed social connections due to the logic of profitability. In the fictional world created by Sarah Fielding, money and feeling overlap, dangerously undermining genuine relationships of care. When Livia discovers that her brother has left his fortune to her husband, she becomes 'the most tender Wife in the World', displaying affection as a way to get the fortune for herself (p. 276).

Affection itself is commodified. The emotional bond between Livia and Camilla's father is affirmed through consumer practices and desire for money. Since affection provides access to money, love acquires a commercial nature. Consequently, Camilla's father fondness, being subject to economic calculus, becomes the most profitable when it is shared among fewer individuals possible: 'she thought her Interest incompatible with ours', says Camilla (p. 129). The competitiveness Livia displays for her husband's love fuels her desire to exclude her stepchildren from the family unit. Once Camilla and Valentine have been banished from home (by being unjustly accused of incest), Livia can finally amass, undisturbed, her husband's affection and money.

Livia's false story of incest jeopardises social bonds (Binhammer 2015, p. 10). In her essay 'Effeminacy and Femininity: Domestic Prose Satire and *David Simple*', Felicity Nussbaum (1999, p. 443) observes that, in the novel, 'the family is highly subject to economic sabotage. The fiction of incest becomes Livia's means of gaining emotional control over her husband as she encourages him to disinherit his daughter'. As Camilla tells David, 'the Woman whom I thought my best Friend, from the moment she became my Mother, turned my Enemy, *only* because my Father was fond of me' (p. 128).

The cash-nexus relationships do not penetrate the family unit only. In fact, they seem to infiltrate the fabric of human experience in general. Built on self-possessive individualism, marital, familial, and platonic ties come quickly undone. The marriage of the two servants, John and Peggy, comes through after Peggy is bribed by Daniel into helping him forge a fake will to disinherit his brother David. The couple soon discovers that the only thing that ties them together is the pleasure of spending money:

> John found out, that Peggy had not all those Perfections he once imagined her possessed of; and her Merit decreased every day more and more in his Eyes. However, while the Money lasted, (which was not very long for they were not at all scrupulous of using it, thinking such great Riches were in no danger of being brought to an end) between Upbraidings, Quarrels,

> Reconciliations, kissing and failing out, they made a shift to jumble on together, without coming to an open rupture. (p. 18)

Since there is no love or affection and all that is left is 'Coldness and Neglect', once they run out of money their marriage falls apart, 'for they were eager to part, as they had formerly been to come together' (pp. 18-19). Peggy and John's story functions as a prelude to the marriage market the novel plunges the readers into. Mr Johnson, a jeweller David meets while leaving the Royal Exchange, is explicitly described as a man of a very practical and mercenary turn of mind. Indeed, he views his two daughters as possessions that can be sold to promote 'his Interest' (p. 29). When a rich Jewish man takes an interest in his eldest daughter and offers a generous 'Sum of Money' in the hope that she would be sold to him, Mr Johnson upholds the transactional approach adopted by the suitor by engaging in a rigorous economic analysis that aims to maximise profit. The passage is worth quoting in full:

> As soon as Mr. Johnson was alone, he sat down to think seriously on what he should determine. He was sure by the Sum the Jew had offered for his Daughter, that if he did not comply with his Scheme, he would marry her, rather than go without her. But then he was dubious which he should get most by. He was a good while deliberating, which way his Interest would be best promoted. At last he concluded, if he could get rid of his Daughter, without giving her any Fortune, and make an Alliance with so rich a Man, it would in the end prove more conducive to his Interest than taking the Money.' (p. 29)

Mr Johnson's profit-centred outlook on heterosexual romantic relationships is reaffirmed when David expresses his affection towards his younger daughter Nanny: he 'immediately perceived the young Man was greatly taken with his Daughter; which he resolved to improve, knowing that his Uncle had made him his Heir, and that it was worth while to endeavour to encrease his liking for her' (p. 27).

A scathing attack on marriage as a patriarchal and financial arrangement is delivered by the female character Cynthia. Nussbaum (1999, p. 439) identifies Cynthia as the 'satiric voice' of the novel. An outspoken and witty woman, she challenges the patriarchal authority embodied by her father (who calls himself 'Master' of the family and demands blind obedience) and potential male suitors (p. 98). By calling it 'Prostitution', Cynthia underscores the transactional quality of matrimony in which women are purchasable goods (p. 100). The passage in which her arranged marriage is described is semantically relevant, as a sequence of expressions such as 'Bargain', 'Trade', 'Business', 'Fortune', 'Goods', and

‘Estate’ reveals a thematic pattern that exposes economic power relations implicit in a married state (p. 99). Her refusal to be an object of a commercial transaction in which she has no say results in her exclusion from the protection of the family.

It could be argued that both Camilla and Cynthia become victims of their fathers’ financial abuse. The economic insecurity they experience as women is deliberately targeted to sabotage their ‘ability to acquire, use and maintain financial resources’ (Postmus *et al*. 2018, p. 262). As Linda Bree (1996, p. 38) points out, in his decision to cut his daughter out of the will Cynthia’s father resorts to weapons that are explicitly economic. Cynthia and Camilla’s financial vulnerability and dependence on paternal authority make them easy victims of economic control. Their exclusion from family inheritance or the domestic sphere can be read as tactics deployed to punish them for their insubordination by threatening their potential for self-sufficiency and even access to necessities such as food and clothing.

Unjustly accused of incest and, therefore, no longer employable in the marriage market as a virtuous wife, Camilla finds herself ‘abandoned and destitute of all means of Support’ (p. 150). On the other hand, Cynthia, in her attempt to escape the snares of a patriarchally structured social order by seeking refuge in potentially liberating female relationships, is trapped, again, in a relational dynamic defined by the power of money. She thus becomes a ‘*Toad-eater*’, a puppet financially controlled by a wealthy woman who only pretends to be her friend (p. 103). Masculine supervision is thus replaced by a feminine one. Far from extolling the father-daughter tie by obscuring its economic issues, the novel problematises the encroachment of the market logic into personal relationships and their commodification (Todd 1986, p. 18).

The ethical problem of sociability foregrounded in the novel is particularly relevant in the material context of the eighteenth-century commercial capitalism (Bell 2023 p. 666-667; Kwass 2021, p. 145). In her study on the transformations of family relationships in eighteenth-century English novels, Ruth Perry (2004, pp. 2-19) maintains that an important redefinition of kin relations occurred during the period in question. She links this shift in family identity to the changing economic landscape, claiming that her work is ‘a story about how capitalism affected the family structure that existed in England at the time of the Restoration’ (Perry 2004, p. 4; p. 29).

The impact of economic forces on family relations is paramount in Perry’s analysis. In her work, *David Simple* is featured as one of the many eighteenth-century fictional worlds that thematise the restructuring of family ties (Perry 2004, p. 8; pp. 147-148). The novel is punctuated by several episodes that draw attention to the instability of family relationships

caused by individualistic and competitive tendencies. One of these episodes is a 'remarkable Contention between three Sisters' over the inheritance of a fine Carpet left by their father. An example of sibling rivalry, the episode shows how grief and bereavement can be easily swept away by material acquisitiveness, thus echoing David and Daniel's disintegration of close siblinghood ties described at the beginning of the novel (pp. 40-44). Yet, *David Simple*'s representation of the precariousness of human bonds is not confined to kinship only, but encompasses, instead, a whole spectrum of social interactions built on the corrupting equation between 'Riches' and 'Goodness' (p. 26).

Several studies have revealed a correlation between eighteenth-century rise of commercial capitalism and the transformation of sociability. While Perry (2004, pp. 71-76) focuses on the family unit, arguing that the logic of capital accumulation resulted in the weakening of women's rights vis-à-vis inheritance and succession, David Bell (2022, p. 668; pp. 680-681) claims that the expansion of the consumer marketplace and 'dynamic urban settings' promoted the formation of 'fraternal associations' that 'had no internal hierarchies or divisions'. He notes that

> In this marketplace, a person's status—family, estate, profession— mattered less than their ability to pay, making everyone purchasing the same product in one sense functionally equivalent to everyone else.

Similarly, other scholars have noticed how 'the abstract rules of the marketplace' allowed for greater social mobility and egalitarianism (Kwass 2021, pp. 7-8). William H. Sewell (2014), for example, in tracing the origins of civic equality in eighteenth-century France, shows how commercial capitalism had a 'democratizing effect' on a deeply hierarchical French society. Building on Habermas' influential work *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Sewell's general argument is that the new forms of commercial recreation resulted in the establishment of 'anonymous public spaces', such as promenades, cafés, or salons, where rank was replaced by a more indiscriminate category of an ordinary consumer (Sewell 2014, pp. 39-41). Ultimately, the anonymity promoted by 'commercially mediated forms of social relations' made civic equality possible (Sewell 2014, p. 41).

Eighteenth-century capitalist development was, however, a Janus-faced phenomenon. It allowed for a more fluid society while simultaneously generating new hierarchies of inequalities (Kwass 2021, pp. 181-182). The assumption that consumerism's abstracting tendency fostered equal social relations relies on a tacitly accepted hypothesis that virtually everyone had the money necessary to be included in public space transformed by the new modes of consumption. While the monetary logic of exchange undermined

traditional hierarchies of birth, it also established new forms of exclusion based on 'wealth, property, and taste' (Kwass 2021, pp. 153-156). In an age in which people became consumers, cash functioned as a mark of social standing. Sewell (2014, pp. 20-21) notes how access to the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris (one of many sites revolutionised by the capitalist logic of abstract forms of social relations) was granted to anyone who could afford elegant clothing to 'pass oneself off' as a person of quality, regardless of one's social station. As a 'place in which to see and be seen', what mattered was one's purchasing power (Sewell 2014, p. 19).

The inclusion in capitalist forms of social relations had to be bought. Bell's observation that 'individuals operated as equivalent entities, distinguished by the size of their purse rather than by their birth or occupation' is significant. It shows not the dissolution of hierarchy but, rather, its transformation (Bell 2023, p. 668). All individuals were made equal by exchange while being simultaneously defined by the money they owned. Buying power was becoming the only way to participate in increasingly commercialised eighteenth-century leisure spaces. Kwass (2021, p. 216) notably points out that 'those who could not afford or did not know how to become proficient in the "art" of consumption were easily stigmatized as ignorant, uncouth, and insignificant'.

An apparently inconsequential chapter on the card game of Whist in *David Simple* proves to be a telling comment on how capitalist consumer culture can affect the sites of sociability. When David decides to mingle with 'Persons of Fashion' in the hope of creating genuine human connections, all he has to do is turn to the fashion market and purchase 'a fine Coat, a well-powdered Wig, and a Whist-Book, and he would soon be invited to more Routs than he would be able to go' (p. 70). The fact that it is David's purchasing power that allows him to acquire membership among 'People in High Life' (p. 70) draws attention to the effects of the commodity culture on social interactions explored by Sewell (2014). Yet, rather than glorifying the displacement of status distinctions brought about by commercial capitalism, the novel decries the triumph of capital relations in which individuals are de-socialised. The private meetings where people gather to play the game of Whist are described as 'Assemblies that meet […] to win or lose Money' (p. 70). The mercenary spirit of social interactions is laid bare when the narrator reveals David's observations about the assemblies he visits. In these public spaces, where individuals are divided into categories of 'Conquerors' and 'Vanquished', self-interested profit is the chief motive that drives interpersonal connections and money is the only source of pleasure (p. 72):

> The winning of a Guinea, or perhaps five, (according to the Sum played for) was the only Idea that possessed the Minds of a whole Company of People, none of whom were in any manner of want of it. (p. 72)

Knight (2017, pp. 280-281) observes how the public places David visits are sites of ambition-driven encounters disguised in the form of disinterested interactions. A card game that defines human interaction in terms of sheer competition stands, synecdochally, for the whole range of social relations shaped by profit-oriented logic presented in the novel. Moreover, the chapter's significance is further strengthened by the narrator's observation that this kind of anti-social behaviour is not an exception, but rather 'one of the *chief Scenes* to be viewed at present in this great Town' (p. 74). As Schellenberg (1996, p. 23) points out, 'the social fragmentation of London' caused by the abuse of economic power appears universal in the novel.

The 'Desire of winning', that is, the individualistic hunger to be above others, breeds relationships based on economic and emotional subordination, which are 'a Consummation devoutly to be shun'd by all Men who are not in Love with Slavery' (p. 73; p. 357). To be entrapped in such relationships is, observes the narrator,

> […] worse than working in the Gallies; all Endeavours to please are vain: if you exert yourself, and take any one Steep without previously consulting these Patrons, this they condemn as throwing them off, and seeking other Protection: and if you entirely depend upon them, they accuse you of Imprudence, in that you seem to think them bound to provide for you. And the true Source of all this odd Behaviour seems to be, that such Friends do not desire that a Man they chuse for a Slave, should be provided for; but that he should be kept on in a dependent State, with only barely enough to prevent his being starved, and by that means escaping their Power. (pp. 356-357)

In *Volume the Last*, Mr and Mrs Orgueil's personify this erosion of pro-sociality. Rejecting the idea that disinterested friendship with no ulterior motives but love and care could exist, they view David's desire to relieve 'his distressed Fellow-creatures' as foolishly imprudent (p. 294; pp. 301-302). David's decision to hire a coach to take the dying little Cynthia home where she can be taken care of is fiercely condemned by Mr Orgueil, who

> concealed, as much as possible, from himself, *David*'s true Motive to it, and cherished no other Idea but that of the very Action itself; or if ever any Notion intruded, that it was done in order to save little *Cynthia*, it was always accompanied with the Reflection, that she was not his own Child; and it was a Shame for a Man, in *David*'s Circumstances, to spend his Substance on Strangers. (p. 332)

Mrs Orgueil, on the other hand,

> condemned him for his Pride and Insolence; for she insisted on it, that he only made a Pretence of little Cynthia's Illness, in order to keep Equipages, and put himself on a Footing with Persons of Fortune. (p. 333)

Both for Mr and Mrs Orgueil, human relationships are defined by power dynamics in which one of the parties is financially dependent on the other and exposed to abuse and manipulation. Calculation and self-interest are turned into dogma, thus hindering any potential sympathetic identification with other fellow humans (Terry 2004, p. 530). Paradoxically, Mrs Orgueil is capable of showing compassion only for the dead, a fellow feeling which stems from her fear of the equalising character of death where 'the Poor have an equal Privilege with the Rich' (p. 328). She is, instead, utterly numbed by indifference to the struggles of the living (p. 335). Similarly, Mr Orgueil can be moved to compassion only by dramatic displays of human distress that allow him to sadistically delight in his own economic superiority:

> The more Weakness and Pusillanimity you shew, the more will you move such Compassion: for a Man of this Turn must be reminded, that he is as much your Superior in Constancy of Mind, as in Fortune, before he can bring himself to think you are a fit Object of his Pity. (p. 330)

As Richard Terry (2004, p. 530) observes, Mr Orgueil's 'fastidious moralism' is predicated on love of rectitude that is inseparable from love of *his* own rectitude. Unable to transcend his self-interest, the only piece of advice he can give David, who is struggling to make ends meet, is 'to unlend every Sum of Money he had lost by assisting the Unfortunate, – to ungive every Benefaction his happier Days had enabled him to bestow' (p. 331). The fact that money spent to assist the unfortunate is described as 'lost' is significant because it acts as a foil to David's 'peculiar way of thinking', that is, his belief that happiness can be found in 'relieving the Distress'd' and creating networks of mutual support (p. 92; p. 301).

2.3 'that Love for one another': building caring imaginaries

David Simple can be read as an anxious exploration of human sociability in the context of the new capitalist consumer culture. Words such as 'Company', 'Affection', 'Love', 'Tenderness' and 'Care' recur throughout the novel, signalling its preoccupation with the corrosion of disinterested social relations. Since the very beginning, David craves human

connections that eschew the logic of profit and economic abuse. Thus, when he discovers that his younger brother Daniel is the sole heir to their father's fortune (the result of Daniel's manipulation of the will), his tenderness for him is not diminished in the slightest, for the pursuit of economic gain has no appeal to David. In fact, David imagines that the inherited wealth will be employed to establish a utopian household based on reciprocating brotherly generosity:

> So tenderly and affectionately did he love *Daniel*, that he reflected with pleasure how extremely happy his Life must be in continually sharing with his best Friend the Fortune his Father had left him. (p. 12)

While David views money as conducive to an ideal friendship, Daniel revels in the economic power he is able to secure, which, coupled with his pride, leads to a form of sociality that might be said to be founded upon a creditor-debtor dynamic. The fact that Daniel, who is 'in possession of all the Money', allows David to live in *his* house, makes David a debtor who owes his brother (pp. 13-14). The transaction involves financial support provided by Daniel that must be repaid with an attitude of servile obedience on David's part:

> He said, his Brother should be always welcome to live in his House, provided he could be quiet, and contented with what was reasonable; and not be so mad as to think, if he insisted on the Management of his own Family, it was going from that romantic Love he so often talked of. Indeed, so far was true, that if *David* would have been satisfied to have lived in his Brother's House, in a State of Dependency, walked about in a rusty Coat, and an old Tye-Wig, like a decayed Gentleman, thinking it a Favour to have Bread, […] he might have stayed as long as he pleased. (p. 15)

The transactional nature of interpersonal relationships, in which a financially dependent subject bears the burden of a never-ending indebtedness, is evident in Cynthia's experience as a 'toad-eater'. The economic assistance she is offered by an apparently friendly 'Lady' turns into a power relation in which Cynthia is persistently accused of ingratitude every time she exhibits her own will instead of gratifying the lady's wishes and whims (pp. 111-112). As Rebecca Hussey (2009, p. 227) points out, 'Cynthia becomes an owned object, no longer able to think or feel freely'. Forced to obliterate her identity 'for Bread', she dares not to leave the bondage because of the fear of 'the Imputation of Ingratitude, *for there are very few People, who have any Notion of Obligations, that are not pecuniary*' (p. 106; p. 112). The experience of being made 'servile under the pretence of Friendship' has such a profound impact on her that when David offers to help her, she is reluctant to accept (p. 106):

> She dared not ever receive any more Obligations; for she had already suffer'd so much by accepting them, that she heartily wish'd she had gone thro' all the Miseries Poverty could have brought upon her, rather than endured half what she had done for living in Plenty at another's Expense (p. 92).

Cynthia's reference to the obligations she had to accept due to economic hardship foregrounds the novel's reflection on how tying economic aid to the notion of obligation as a form of repayment can transform interpersonal relations into a battleground for power (Landry 2010, pp. 161-162; Knight 2017, p. 288). The title of the chapter in which David meets Cynthia for the first time makes such a preoccupation quite explicit: '*In which People of no Fortune may learn what monstruous Ingratitude they are guilty of, when they are insensible of the great Obligation of being ill used*' (p. 87). In this chapter, the narrator introduces a group of four wealthy ladies who bemoan the lack of gratitude from those they describe as 'low *mean Animals*' (pp. 90-91). These 'low mean animals' are acquaintances the wealthy women have rescued from poverty by using their economic advantage. The ladies' main objection is that their charitable gestures are not repaid equally by the indebted party:

> One of the Ladies, amongst several others, gave the following Instance how ungrateful the World was: 'That she had bred up a young Woman from her Childhood, who was, indeed, the Daughter of a Man of Fashion, a very good Friend of her's, for which Reason she took her, purely from Good-nature; but when she came to be old enough to be capable of serving her, she only desired her *to keep her House, take care of her Children, - overlook all her Servants, - be ready to sit with her when she call'd her,* - with *many more trifling things*; and Madam grew out of humour at it, altho' she never put her at all on the footing of a Servant, *nor paid her any Wages as such*, but *look'd on her as her Companion*. […] I did not dare to speak to her, which I never did but in the *gentlest Terms*, only to tell her what a *Situation she was in*, and how unbecoming it was in her to think herself on a footing *with People of Fortune*; for she was left by her Father on the World, without any Provision, and was beholden to me for every thing she had. (p. 91)

In this scenario, the concept of obligation bears a coercive quality because it is embedded in a relationship characterised by a power imbalance of the parties involved: the distressed young woman is economically dependent on the rich aristocrat for survival. In order to maintain the hierarchy, it is crucial that the exploited party must not acquire any economic independency (by becoming a servant, for instance) but should exist in a constant state of vulnerability and precariousness, instead. The debt must remain unpayable because it is

precisely this indebtedness, coupled with a guilt-laden sense of obligation and accusations of ingratitude, that allows for the exploitation of the indebted person's physical and emotional labour. As Knight (2017, pp. 285-287) points out, 'claims of ingratitude are […] the very method of coercion by which dependence is cemented and obligation bound'. Cynthia's initial 'pleasure on the Thought of the Obligations' she owed her lady, which stems from her belief that the assistance she is offered lacks any ulterior motive, spirals into a dynamic of subordination. The parallelism she draws between her experience and the state of slavery suggests that money has the power to commodify the uncommodifiable, that is, human subjectivity and body (p. 112).

Monetary value defines human value (Hussey 2009, p. 226). Camilla becomes painfully aware of such a maxim when Cynthia's daughter dies as a result of Mrs Orgueil's maltreatment. Mrs Orgueil's failure to provide for the child's basic needs is directly linked to her view of the little girl as 'the Object of her Power' (p. 321). Coming from a family of 'beggarly wits' (p. 305), the child does not have the right to be taken care of because her disadvantaged economic conditions make her less human. As noted by Hussey (2009 p. 215), the novel repeatedly brings up the issue of commodification of human subjectivity. The quasi-dystopian implications of wealth granting access to the status of humanness is voiced by Camilla when, complaining about Mrs Orgueil's mistreatment of little Cynthia, she observes that 'poor Children must not catch cold, thoff they do lie in a wet Room – to be sure, they must be well, whether they be well or no – they must have no Privilege of being ill as rich have' (p. 317).

Money dictates social standing and bestows value on human existence. Mrs Orgueil's hostile reaction to little Cynthia being called 'Miss' can be read as a fear-based response to the disintegration of us-versus-them dichotomy, 'a fear of egalitarianism' (p. 319; Brugère 2019, p. 71). Her assertion that Cynthia 'should know her Station' aims to re-establish the wealth-based hierarchy by stressing, simultaneously, the child's dependency on her economic resources and the refusal to provide any form of support due to Cynthia's lower social standing (which defines her as an inferior less deserving of empathy and care) (p. 320). As James Kim (2010, p. 497) points out, the acquisitive characters in novel are characterised by their 'insistence on policing the boundaries of social rank'. Daniel's struggle 'to get superior Fortune' and the accomplishment of such a plan result in his refusal to 'be on equal footing' with his brother David. Likewise, Nanny's rich husband is convinced that his wife should be obliged to him merely 'on account of his Superiority of Fortune' (p. 15; p. 39).

In the novel's context of 'the economy of scarcity', competition for material resources seems to thwart any prospect of equitable relations (Stern 2012). The 'downward mobility' David experiences at the beginning of the story when he is robbed of his part of the inheritance mirrors Camilla and Valentine's fate, since both situations are the result of a ruthless logic of competition (Kim 2010; Hussey 2009). Paradoxically, Daniel and Livia see their closest relations as rivals with whom they are competing for resources and status. David's 'amiable Behaviour' is 'food' for Daniel's hatred (p. 13). Instead of sympathetically deriving pleasure from other people's success and happiness, they perceive another's abundance as their loss (Kim 2010, p. 633). Mrs Orgueil is the emblem of such a competitive mentality. She treats her daughter Henrietta-Cassandra as a prestigious prize to flaunt by obsessively comparing her to Camilla's and Cynthia's offspring. The narrator explains how Mrs Orgueil's decision to call Camilla's fourth child Joan is for her an opportunity to reassert social hierarchy based on interpersonal antagonism:

> […] according to her Desire, the Child was christened *Joan*. This Circumstance may appear trifling, but yet was it of consequence enough to give Mrs. *Orgueil* great Pleasure, for she delighted as much in opposing the Sound of *Joan* to *Henrietta-Cassandra*, as if she could by that means have heightened or lowered the real Value of the two Children […] (pp. 229-230)

While rapacious characters such as Daniel, Cynthia's lady patron, and Mrs Orgueil use dependence as a tool to increase and maintain their power, David's vision of friendship offers an alternative conception of human relations based on the recognition of mutual interconnectedness and care (Bellamy 1998, p. 130; Knight 2017, p. 288; Hussey 2009, p. 228). Even though David considers the idea of becoming a recluse and shutting 'himself up from the World' several times in the novel, he ultimately recognises that his 'social temper' would make the prospect of such a life unbearable[10] (p. 20; p. 23; p. 44). The resolution to 'live an easy Life, without entering into any Engagements of Friendship or Love with any one' crumbles the moment David's uncle falls ill. His uncle's illness makes him realise that the imperative of care he feels towards his 'Friend' exposes him to pain and disappointment (p. 22).

The form of interdependence David yearns to realise in bonds of friendship reveals an understanding of self that stands in opposition to the atomised individuals that 'row against each other's Interest' while ruthlessly competing for a place at the 'Top of the Pinnacle' (pp. 231-232). Through Daniel the readers discover that David defines interpersonal relations in

[10] Donna Landry (2010, p. 159) observes that David displays 'a recognition of what Marx called species being, a kinship with humanity as species'.

terms of 'Love', which he 'so often talked of' (p. 15). As the story unfolds, the readers come to realise that this love is predicated upon the renunciation of the capitalist marketplace's acquisitive values in favour of nurturing, altruistic relationships (Binhammer 2015, p. 1).

Not once in the story is David compelled to better his material condition for individualistic purposes. He is not even interested in restoring the patrimony he unjustly loses at the beginning of the novel. In his article 'Mourning, Melancholia, and Modernity: Sentimental Irony and Downward Mobility in *David Simple*', Kim (2010, pp. 489-490) ascribes David's mental and physical distress after discovering his brother's scheme to his fall down the social hierarchy. He proceeds to corroborate this statement by quoting a passage from the novel which supposedly shows how the persistence of David's state of unhappiness, even after his inheritance is recovered, is tied to David's unresolved trauma, i.e., him being 'disillusioned by his brush with downward mobility' (Kim 2010, p. 490). However, the passage quoted is incomplete. Kim (2010) omits a crucial part that suggests that David's real trauma has nothing to do with his socioeconomic standing but is linked to the loss of what David believed was a caring sibling relationship. Here is the passage quoted in full:

> When *David* saw himself in the possession of a very easy comfortable Fortune, instead of being over-joyed, as is usual on such occasions, he was at first the more unhappy*; the Consideration of the Pleasure he should have had to share this Fortune with his Brother*, continually brought to his Remembrance his cruel Usage, which made him feel all his old Troubles over again (p. 23) (emphasis added)

David's pleasure does not lie in recovering his fortune but, rather, in sharing it with his brother. It is telling that it is David's uncle who recovers David's lost fortune. David does nothing because he is too dismayed by the loss of his brother's love (which he believed was genuine) (Bree 1996, pp. 34-35). He persistently laments his brother's withdrawal of affection while trying to make up for the affective void by reliving the relationship in his mind: 'all the Scenes of Pleasure he had ever enjoyed in his Brother's Company rushed at once into his Memory'; 'Sometimes in the Confusion of his Thoughts, the Joy of being again well with his Brother, appeared so strong to his imagination, he could hardly refrain going to him' (pp. 15-16).

Friendship relations give meaning to David's sense of self. Estranged from his brother, he turns to his uncle, not to redress the injustice he experienced, but to recover the care he has lost: 'At last, it came into his head he had an Uncle, who when he was a Boy used to be very kind to him; he therefore had some hopes he would receive and take care of

him.' (p. 17). The uncle's caring disposition is crucial to David's recovery: 'The poor young Man […] was grown worse, and thought to be in danger of losing his Life; but by the great Care of the old Gentleman he soon recovered' (p. 21).

David and his uncle establish a relationship based on care and mutual consideration. The latter's responsiveness to David's need of support is reciprocated by the nephew who

> desired his Uncle would let him live with him, that he might take care of him in his old Age; and make as much Return as possible for his generous, good-natured Treatment of him, in his Distress. This Request was easily granted; his Company being the greatest Pleasure the old Man could enjoy (p. 22)

This mutually caring relationship is emblematic of David's conceptualisation of interpersonal relations in terms of ethics of care, also defined as 'relational ethics' or 'the ethic of love' (Held 2009, p. 537). As Carol Gilligan (2011) explains, 'the care ethics starts from the premise that as humans we are inherently relational, responsive beings and the human condition is one of connectedness or interdependence'. David's quest for a friend is premised on the recognition of communal existence that relies on caretaking as the foundation of human well-being. As Nel Noddings (2010, p. 18) points out, 'care ethics is primarily interested in the establishment, maintenance, and enhancement of caring relations'. Peta Bowden (1997, p. 6) defines caring perspective as 'distinguished by concern for care, responsiveness and taking responsibility in interpersonal relationships, and by a context-sensitive mode of deliberation'.

David views himself as an interdependent subject whose identity is determined by relationality. He rejects the 'atomistic view of the self' predicated upon the belief that interpersonal relationships are 'non-essential to the identity of the person who has such […] relationships', in favour of caring practices that stress the importance of 'interpersonal relatedness' (Slote 2007, p. 74; Bowden 1997, p. 1). The care-focused approach David adopts is evident in his desire to altruistically 'assist' those in need, a moral imperative that requires the relinquishing of power and status (represented by money) (p. 24). His reflection on 'how much happier the World would be, if all Parents would sustain the helpless Infancy of their Children, with that Tenderness and Care, which would be thought natural by every good Mind, unexperienced in the World, for all Creatures to have towards every thing immediately placed under their Protection' can be read as a manifesto of care ethics (p. 42). As Virginia Held (2006, p. 10) points out,

> the central focus of the ethics of care is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility […] The ethics of care recognizes that human beings are dependent for many years of their lives, that the moral claim of those dependent on us for the care they need is pressing, and that there are highly important moral aspects in developing the relations of caring that enable human beings to live and progress.

By conceptualising friendship as a care relation, David privileges cooperation over competition (p. 23). He is the anti-thesis of an independent homo economicus. His search for a friend manifests 'an emotional need to be attached to someone', thus making him a *homo sentimentalis* who privileges the affective dimension as a way to establish and preserve social bonds (Brugère 2020, pp. 72-77; Schaffer 2021, p. 119). When David meets Cynthia for the first time, he displays a caring attitude that is based on the empathetic acknowledgement of the other (Schaffer 2021, p. 20; Held 2006, p. 10). As Virginia Held (2009, p. 538) states, the ethics of care value emotions such as 'sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness'. David displays empathetic responsiveness to Cynthia's distress:

> Our Hero, on whose Tenderness the least Appearance of Grief in others made an immediate Impression, could not help observing, in the Countenance of this young Creature, a fix'd Melancholy, which made him uneasy. (p. 90)

David's behaviour can be read in terms of 'phases of care' (Tronto 1998, p. 16). First, there is 'caring about', which requires attentiveness, 'becoming aware of the need for caring', and 'listening to articulated needs' (Tronto 1998, p. 16). David's empathetic disposition allows for genuine attentiveness to Cynthia, which is followed by his desire to discover what are her needs:

> he saw by her Look and Manner she was very unhappy, and begg'd, if it was any way in his power to serve her, she would let him know it; for nothing in this World was capable of giving him so much Pleasure, as relieving the Distress'd. (p. 92)

Listening to Cynthia's story, which Cynthia decides to tell because she trusts David's 'Sincerity' (p. 92), is a way for David to 'experience another's needs or feelings' with a purpose of 'caring for', that is, with the intention to 'assume responsibility to meet a need that has been identified' (Brugère 2020, p. 80; Tronto 1998, p. 16). Cynthia's story reveals the need to acquire economic independence that would also allow her to recover her dignity as a human being. Once David realises that there is the need for care, he performs the

‘necessary caring task’ which is that of providing Cynthia with money; this is the ‘caregiving’ phase (Tronto 1998, p. 17).

One may interpret the act of giving of money as a way to brush off another’s troubles. While it is true that David’s caring attitude does not solve systemic economic precariousness that both Cynthia and Camilla experience as women, he is, nonetheless, able to acknowledge Cynthia’s concrete need to reclaim control of her body and her life, which, according to the monetary system of value, is possible only by possessing economic resources. As Tronto (1993, p. 108) points out, care involves both thought and action’ that are ‘directed toward some end’. David views Cynthia in her ‘particularity’, not as an abstract subject, but as a ‘unique individual’ with a distinctive life story (Miller 2005, cited in Collins 2015, p. 19). It would not be fair to see David’s help as purely financial. His benevolence is both material and affective (Landry 2010, p. 152). He is able to acknowledge Cynthia’s struggle for material subsistence by displaying emotional responsivity that allows Cynthia to share her experience and unburden her emotional distress within a safe space. David’s genuine desire to take responsibility for others’ needs provides Cynthia with the freedom to reveal her past ‘without threat of betrayal, abuse or condescension’ (Bowden 1997, p. 84). Care is an ongoing practice, and David’s ability to provide financial and emotional support functions as a starting point of what will become a caring friendship.

Once Cynthia’s economic status changes, she is able to break free from a dehumanising, exploitative relationship. Thus, in a final speech before leaving her ‘Lady’, she remarks:

> I am certain, the meanest Person in your House has not gone thro’ half what I have done for *Bread*: And, in short, Madam, here your Power is at an end, to-morrow I shall take my leave of you; I cannot help wishing you happy, but must own, I heartily hope you will never have any body so much in your *Power* again. (p. 112)

David’s care helps Cynthia to embark on her journey of self-affirmation and new-found independency (she will come into possession of a small inheritance left by a cousin of hers).

There is, of course, the risk that care could become a tool of oppression in heterosocial relationships due to systemic gender inequality (Hamington 2021, p. 4; Bowden 1997, p. 92). It is, for instance, what happens to Nanny, whose father manipulates her under the pretence of paternal affection. Conversely, David’s behaviour is sincerely caring because it is ‘authentically aimed towards the growth and flourishing of the other’ (Hamington 2021, p. 5). When Cynthia is unsure whether to accept David’s help because she fears being exploited (‘She knew too much of the World, to be easily persuaded that any Man could act as David did by her, from *pure Friendship*’), David reassures her by claiming that ‘he would

submit to what Rules she pleased, supply her with whatever she wanted, and at the same time deny himself even the Pleasure of seeing her, if she thought it proper' (p. 113; p. 111). David's 'pure Friendship' is based on his disposition to care for others that never 'crosses over into controlling domination' (Held 2009, p. 540). He neither wants nor expects anything in return. As Landry (2010, pp. 161-162) points out, Sarah Fielding's fictional works envision genuine charitable acts as free from the expectation of obligation or gratitude. When Cynthia decides to visit her cousin, David does 'not attempt to say any thing to dissuade her from what he saw she had so great an Inclination to; only insisted on her accepting Money enough to bear her Expences' (p. 113).

The novel's emphasis on the duty to care for others is closely linked to its 'ostensible subject' of friendship (Down-Miers 1986, p. 311). Personal relationships tend to assume moral value. When David witnesses the appalling conditions Camilla and Valentine live in, the moral imperative to care comes to the fore: 'he would not leave them, till he saw them recovered from the Condition they were now in' (p. 117). He thus calls a doctor, buys them some clothes, and pays for their lodgings (pp. 118-119). The kind of care David provides is aimed at satisfying 'the basic biological needs necessary for survival and basic functioning (Engster 2005, p. 51). His 'monetary giving', as in Cynthia's case, is directly linked to the recovery of the status of humanness, since basic human needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter, can be satisfied only through material prosperity (Landry 2010, p. 151). As Valentine tells David, 'Sir, your Goodness has worked a Miracle on me, for it is so long since I have layed in a Place *fit for a Human Creature*' (p. 119) (emphasis added).

In helping Camilla and Valentine, David's non-domineering, caring disposition is, once again, stressed by the narrator. David does not dare asking Camilla and Valentine about their personal story because of the fear 'it would look like thinking he had a right to know what he pleased, because they were obliged to him' (p. 120). It is care and empathetic concern, rather than personal gain, that motivate David to act. In the framework of care ethics, David's treatment of Camilla, Valentine, and Cynthia can be defined as 'respectful', since he treats his new friends 'in ways that do not degrade them in their own eyes or the eyes of others' simply because 'they have needs they cannot meet' (Engster 2005, p. 55). According to Landry (2010, p. 155) David displays 'active material benevolence', which necessarily requires the denouncement of obligation and abandonment of self-interest, so that the needs of the cared-for subject can be appropriately taken into account.

Deborah Down-Miers (1986, p. 311) argues that *David Simple* focuses on 'the necessity for true friendship within marriage and how that is to be achieved'. Yet, by overemphasising

the importance of the double-marriage one risks overlooking how the novel's relational approach extends beyond marital bliss (Mangano 2014, p. 180; Bree 1996, p. 42). Cynthia and Camilla's relationship is worth mentioning. The female bond they form carries subversive possibilities of caring. As Alessa Johns (2003, p. 74) points out, 'the same-sex relationship between […] the young Cynthia and Camilla in *David Simple* prove[s] as significant as the latter heterosexual links between […] Camilla and David, or Cynthia and Valentine'.

The relationship between Camilla and Cynthia, two like-minded women who pursue knowledge in the face of traditional gender roles, functions as a space of freedom that is threatening to the patriarchal social structure. As Cynthia tells David,

> for as she [Camilla] too was fond of Reading, my Mother was frighten'd out of her Wits, to think what would become of us, if we were much together. I verily believe, she thought we should draw *Circles* – and turn *Conjurers*. (pp. 97-98)

Forced by her family to adhere to a role of a wife who 'must not enquire too far into things' and scorned because of her intellectual bent, Cynthia finds solace in a caring friendship with her 'Companion' Camilla (p. 92; p. 98). Camilla's 'recognition of, and effective concern for the worth' and well-being of Cynthia allow the latter to be her authentic self, a person of value that is neither despised nor derided (Bowden 1997, p. 70; p. 79). In a 'bond of shared meaning and value', individual differences are caringly acknowledged, while any competitive or adversarial tendencies are banished: 'If *Cynthia* knew her Understanding, without being proud of it, *Camilla* could acknowledge it without Envy' (p. 307).

Cynthia and Camilla form an affectionate relationship that leads to self-affirmation and mutual flourishing, in which concern for the needs of the other is also expressed in the form of financial assistance. When Cynthia needs money, Camilla is so generous as to let her 'have all the little Money she was mistress of' (p. 101). This female friendship of mutual trust and support can be read as an attempt at creating a safe haven from the disempowering, transactional nature of heterosexual marriage that casts women into the role of dependent subjects vulnerable to abuse and manipulation.

Likewise, care is paramount in Valentine and Camilla's relationship. Their caring bond is forged within a nurturing family that prioritises cooperative, non-hierarchical relations based on mutual consideration and cultivation of 'Love for one another' (p. 122). Camilla describes the relationship with her parents and her brother in terms of collective caring and loving practices. Each member of the family strives to promote the well-being and happiness of the other:

> […] my Brother and I passed our Childhood in all the Happiness that state is capable of enjoying; and the only Punishment we ever had for any Fault, was that of being sent from our Parents sight, which made us more afraid to offend than any thing else could possibly have done: for we soon became so fond of our kind Indulgers, that our chief Pleasure was to prattle round them, and see them delighted with our little childish Remarks. […] We loved each other with a perfect Fondness; there was no Partiality shewn to either of us, nor were we ever told, if we did not do right, the other should be loved best, in order to teach us to *envy*, and consequently to *hate* each other. (p. 122)

When the family falls apart due to Livia's competitive individualism, which makes her unable to genuinely reciprocate or share her husband's affection, Camilla suffers the loss of caring social relations the most (p. 277). To Camilla, familial ties are a sustaining network that provides protection and financial stability without which she would not be able to survive because, as a woman, she is not legally entitled to hold property or have direct access to money (Bree 1996, p. 37). When discussing the care ethical perspective of the novel, it is crucial to bear in mind the gender-based imbalance of power that lies at the heart of the concept of care. As Talia Schaffer (2021, p. 15) points out, 'discussions of care need to address the history of care as a feminized, maternal practice'. Camilla's caring disposition could thus be interpreted as an outcome of patriarchal indoctrination, as her mother, who always submitted to her husband (p. 122), urges her to follow her lead and perform dutifully her role of a caring sister and daughter:

> […] she went so far as to say, *Camilla*, make it the business of your Life to obey, and please your Father: if you should live to see him an old Man, return him the Care by which he has supported your Infancy, cherish your Brother's Love, don't remember me to afflict yourself, but only follow my Example in your Behaviour to the Man who has been so good to us both.

Linda Bree (1996, p. 39), for instance, argues that Camilla is a victim of patriarchal structures because she 'seeks to sublimate self in care for others'.

Camilla's and Cynthia's caring practices are complicated by their subordinate social position as women, an asymmetry that makes them more disadvantaged and their existence more precarious than that of men. Yet, the novel resists a straightforward association of caring attitudes with womanhood by reconfiguring masculinity in terms of nurturance and relationality (Woodward 1992, pp. 73-76). Care is presented as a social practice that both women and men should voluntarily embrace in order to build affective relations premised on mutuality and equality. Johns (2003, p. 74) observes how within the confines of the caring

community of David, Valentine, Cynthia, and Camilla, 'sex and gender' are 'insignificant': 'labor is done cheerfully for the benefit of all, and children are care for communally'.

The novel seems to suggest that what is truly desirable is not that female characters acquire wealth and power (which would position them alongside men within a patriarchal, capitalist framework[11]) but, rather, that male characters refashion their identity by making values of care an integral part of their masculinity (a process that would position them alongside women on the margins of patriarchal capitalism). As Felicity Nussbaum (1999, p. 245) points out, 'the novel refuses a strictly symmetrical understanding or simple reversal of sexual difference'.

Woodward (1992, p. 74) argues that 'in creating the character David Simple, Fielding created a model for the man of feeling as feminine, one whose condition in life is very like that of a woman'. What makes David a feminised hero is his rejection of 'the powerful fantasy of masculine authority' (Nussbaum 1999, p. 426; Pettit 1999, p. 182). David's quest is premised on his will to connect with others in affectionate, non-hierarchical ties:

> He spent whole Days in thinking on this Subject, wishing he could meet with a Friend that he could live with, who could throw off all separate Interests; for where Selfishness reigns in any of the Community, there can be no Happiness.' (p. 23)

David views ideal friendship as a set of caring practices centred on mutuality and 'care about each other's well-being without selfish motivation' (Bowden 1997, p. 65). As Virginia Held (2006, p. 12) points out, 'those who conscientiously care for others are not seeking primarily to further their own individual interests; their interests are intertwined with the persons they care for […] Persons in caring relations are acting for self-and-other together'.

The way David uses his economic privilege shows his uneasiness with the power money can yield. While other characters employ money for self-advancement in a 'system of debits and gains', David shares his material resources with a specific aim of 'caring for others and maintaining interpersonal relationships' (Woodward 1992, p. 72; Friedman p. 83). David's search for a friend reflects an anti-commodification ethos, his journey resulting in a decrease, rather than accumulation, of material wealth. His personal development is

[11] Mrs Orgueil and the aristocratic Lady who forces Cynthia into the role of a 'Toad-eater' are examples of women who have adopted the values of patriarchal capitalism (such as the transactional view of interpersonal relations, competition, and power relations) for their own personal benefit. Carolyn Woodward (1992, p. 72) notes how these female characters experience a divided consciousness, 'joined to the dominant culture by their class but excluded by their sex'. According to bell hook (2000, p. 152) 'the privilege of power is at the heart of patriarchal thinking. […] Women and men who have been taught to think this way almost always believe love is not important, or if it is, it is never as important as being powerful, dominant, in control, on top […]'.

closely linked to his ability to become part of a relational web of caring and dependency, irrespective of economic status.

David's kindness, his desire to alleviate suffering, and his condemnation of passions that actively hurt others (such as resentment and vengefulness) make him an anomaly in the novel's dominant social order (pp. 87-88). As the narrator observes, 'Hatred and Indignation found in David's Breast a barren Soil, in which they could take no Root' (p. 363). The 'new religion of the market' conceptualises individuals as 'utility maximizers', whose decision to establish relationships is based on 'calculated self-interest' (Friedman 1989, p. 275; Landry 2010, p. 151). David's wish for a caring friendship challenges such an 'individualist conception of the person' and is, therefore, perceived as odd (Held 2009, p. 544).

His belief in the centrality of caring friendships to the realisation of personal identity is ridiculed both by Mr Varnish (who dismisses David's resolution by stating that it is 'just the same thing as little Children do, when they cry for the Moon') and by Mr Orgueil, who deems foolish David's 'romantic Notions' (p. 88; p. 69; p. 370). In a world of self-made (often at the expense of others), atomistic individuals, David's desire for disinterested attachments is quixotic for two reasons. Firstly, because his conception of self as inherently relational does not adhere to the logic of competition and struggle for power; and secondly, because he disrupts the traditional gender expectations by searching for a friend instead of looking for a wife. As Johns (2003, p. 74) observes, 'David Simple sets out on his search for a friend, and it matters not whether this person should prove male or female'.

Even though David's rejection of the assertive qualities traditionally associated with his gender aligns him with feminine characters, it is difficult to support Woodward's claim that 'his condition in life is very like that of a woman' (Woodward 1992, p. 74; Hussey 2009, p. 214). As a man, David has the privilege not to worry about his 'Loss of Reputation' or about becoming the object of male sexual aggression (something Cynthia experiences when she travels in a coach with three men) (p. 155; pp. 160-161). Moreover, as a man with financial resources, David can enter or opt out of interpersonal relations freely, while for the impoverished female characters such as Cynthia and Camilla 'practices of friendship […] are in danger of becoming instrumental practices in securing personal safety and protection […]' (Bowden 1997, p. 89).

Relinquishment of care results in oppressive, competing forms of relationality that characters such as Mr and Mrs Orgueil, Livia, and Mr Ratcliff embody (Woodward 1992, p. 69). As already noted, Cynthia is caught in a relationship of domination in which the economic inequality between her and the aristocratic lady results in an illegitimate exercise

of power by the latter. The novel seems thus to suggest that dominating aims are not a male prerogative and caring is not an innate characteristic of women (Bree 1996, p. 85; Johns 2003, pp. 53-54). In fact, David, Valentine, and Camilla's father represent 'caring masculinities', in that they reject domination in favour of practices of care (Elliott 2015). As Woodward (1992, p. 70) notes, David demonstrates a nurturing disposition: he refuses 'to play the role of seducer and rapist when he helps Cynthia find lodgings'.

Likewise, Camilla's father takes an active, nurturing role in familial caretaking. Far from being a remote, unemotional father exclusively in charge of economic provision, his relationship with Camilla and Valentine is caring and sensitive. It is based on communication, emotional openness, and affective closeness. Before asking Livia to marry him, he seeks Camilla's approval, a behaviour that centres his children's well-being. The child-parent bond is thus reconfigured as a non-hierarchical relationship, in which the interests of the children are as important as those of the parents[12]:

> […] my Love of you [Camilla] is the Cause of my Uneasiness, for I have let a Passion unawares steal on me, which I am afraid will be to tour disadvantage; for altho' with Economy I am able to support you and your Brother in a tolerable manner, yet my Fortune is not large, and if I should marry, and have an Increase of Family, it might injure you.' (p. 126)

As Camilla tells David, 'so indulgent was this Parent, that he used every Art he was master of, to give me all the pleasing Sensations that arise from Generosity and Delicacy' (p. 125). Unlike Cynthia's father, who takes on the patriarchal role of the 'Master' of the family and coerces his daughter to marry for profit (p. 98), Camilla's father does not question his daughter's decision 'never to marry' (p. 125). He allows her to be the agent of her own destiny. It is only by resorting to the terrible accusation of incest that Livia can destroy such a nurturing bond.

Unjustly ostracised by their father and their aunt, Camilla and Valentine find themselves deprived of relations of care that sustained them: 'Thus we were abandoned and destitute of all means of Support, for we had but one Guinea in the World' (p. 150). The loss of nurturing relations negatively affects Camilla's and Valentine's physical and mental state.

[12] Compare this form of caring fatherhood with the controlling, manipulative one embodied by Miss Nanny's father who views his daughter 'as property to be deployed in the family interest rather than as lifetime kin'. See Perry, Ruth (2004). *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818*. Cambridge University Press. (p. 79).

While Valentine falls into a 'violent Fever' (p. 150), Camilla is emotionally distraught by the remembrance of family affection she has lost:

> […] the want of those trifling Instances of his Affection I once enjoyed, began to rise in my Mind again, and I had all the Pain my Heart had felt at the loss of them, to suffer afresh. (p. 138)

By embracing care as the organising principle of her existence, Camilla, much like David, conceptualises her identity in relational terms. As a consequence, loss of parental love, which was a generative source of happiness and personal flourishing, becomes intolerable to her:

> Oh! Valentine, in this House I can live no longer; the Sight of my Father, now I have such evident Proofs his Affection is so entirely alienated from me, is become as great a Torment to me as ever it was a Blessing. I value not what I shall go through in being a Vagabond, and not knowing where to go; for I am certain, no Poverty, - no Misery, - can ever equal what I suffer here. (p. 144)

To Camilla, love, connectedness, and belonging are essential needs that can only be met in a system of mutually caring relations.

Camilla and Valentine's story of social rejection seems to suggest that being deprived of care is a form of social injustice, inasmuch as 'the affective relations involved in reproducing love, care, and solidarity are a core part' of what produces 'our relational humanity' (Cantillon and Lynch 2017, p. 170; Lynch 2022, p. 7). As Johns (2003, p. 77) points out, for a poor gentlewoman such as Camilla, 'the fear of placelessness and isolation threatened as much as the fear of starvation'. The novel repeatedly emphasises the importance of caring practices. The community of four friends is shown to prioritise the formation of webs of 'care, sympathy, and mutuality' over monetary gains (Knight 2017, p. 271).

In the novel's 'ethical project of friendship', state of friendlessness is unnatural and painful because it results in the impossibility of fully achieving one's well-being and happiness (Knight 2017). Daniel and Isabelle exemplify the tragedy of friendlessness. While Daniel's story is about his inability to form caring bonds, Isabelle's is about the painful loss of a nurturing social network.

Isabelle's caring community comes undone because of Dorimene's self-absorbed and destructive passion for Isabelle's suitor Dumont. Dorimene's aggressiveness and her indifference to the feelings of others corrode the community bonds, as a series of misunderstandings lead to death and despair (p. 216). Her need to have Dumont for herself overrides the needs of her friends. Dorimene's behaviour violates the fundamental principle

of caring relations, namely that 'care implies reaching out to something other than the self' (Tronto 1993, p. 102).

Fate seems to deny Isabelle any possibility of becoming part of a 'relational, care-based system' in which she can provide and receive care (Schaffer 2021, p. 61). Lynch (2022, pp. 3-4) notes how 'the affective care domain gives people direction and purpose in their daily lives and is central to how they define themselves'. Isabelle and Stainville's other-centred, reciprocal relationship (a caring dynamic that mirrors the one between Camilla and Valentine) is the reason they are able to survive. As Isabelle explains,

> The Tenderness he felt for me, contributed also to the saving his Life; for as soon as I knew there were any Hopes of him […], I flew to his Chamber, and never left his Bed-side during his Illness; tho' my Grief for *Dumont* was so violent, that nothing less than my Care for my Brother's Life could have supported my Spirits under such an Affliction, or have hindered my following him to the Grave. (p. 228)

However, when Stainville decides 'to quit the World, and turn *Carthusian*', Isabelle abandons any 'Hope' of finding 'Happiness' in human connections (the same hope that impelled David to start his journey) (p. 229). Dejected, she retires to a convent.

David feels uneasy after hearing Isabelle's story. Nothing can be done to alleviate her sorrows and he finds himself utterly powerless: 'How unhappy am I to meet with a Person of so much Merit under a Sorrow, in which it is impossible for me to hope to afford her the least Consolation!' (p. 229). The group of friends does not attempt to change Isabelle's mind by offering her refuge within a new community of care. The narrator's observation that 'this whole Company were so sensible that *Isabelle* was in the right, in her Resolutions of retiring' from the world is tinged with overt pessimism that jars with the novel's optimistic ending (Reeves 2020, p. 132; Schellenberg 1996, pp. 31-32).

Daniel's story, on the other hand, is that of an atheist whose form of relationality is deeply self-referential, competitive, and profit-oriented. Reeves (2020) links Daniel's inability to integrate into wider community to his atheism. He observes that Fielding associates atheism with 'self-possessing individualism', while religious belief is presented as 'an affective orientation towards community' (Reeves 2020, p. 105). Undeniably, the novel's caring stance is intertwined with the concept of Christian charity and love (Johns 2003, p. 61). As Reeves (2020, p. 121) points out, 'Fielding's fictions follow Shaftesbury and his philosophical successors in presenting the deity as the basis of human sympathy and sociability, without defending a specific Christian confession or creed'.

As the ‘incarnation of a completely autonomous Lockean self’, Daniel is the opposite of David (Reeves 2020, p. 105). All the identities he assumes to establish relationships with others serve a very specific purpose, that of ‘laying some new Plot to get Money by’ (p. 266). Incapable of trust that friendships require, Daniel sees relational interdependence as a weakness to be eradicated. He never forms affectionate bonds with others and, as a consequence, is ‘never much disappointed by any Refusal from them’ (p. 264). Ironically, in his desire for autonomy, Daniel gets entangled in the same ‘Net’ he used to draw other people into (p. 266). By satirising and perverting the ‘value of real Friendship’, Daniel cuts himself off from human society and ultimately dies alone (Reeves 2020, p. 106). In the context of care ethics and its emphasis on ‘the primacy of self *with* others’, Daniel’s dream of a completely autonomous and power-driven individual is self-defeating (Reeves 2020 p. 119; Mochinski 2010, p. 48).

In ‘a world that seeks worth in market valuations rather than in the intrinsic worth of things’, care is undervalued (Reeves 2020, p. 127). As a consequence, the care-centric stance adopted by David, Camilla, Cynthia, and Valentine consigns them to a life on the margins of society. Camilla and Valentine’s genuinely loving relationship is exactly what make them susceptible to the accusation of incest. Their bonds of disinterested care and mutual obligation are paramount. When talking about his brother, Camilla says

> I have heard of Women’s living at home with their Fathers, and using all their Arts to make them hate their Brothers, in hopes by that means to better their own Fortunes; but to me it is surprizing, for I could never have forgiven myself, if I could once have reflected that I had ever done my dear Valentine any Injury, or omitted any Opportunity of serving him. (p. 125)

Crucially, their relationship is characterised by reciprocity. Their acts of service are directed towards their mutual well-being and nurturing. Valentine is highly attuned to the needs of his sister. When Camilla expresses her anguish at the uncaring way her father has been treating her, Valentine is able to shift the perspective from himself to Camilla and acknowledge her need to leave home:

> Valentine swore he would never forsake me, ‘that he would accompany me wherever I pleased, and be my Support and Guard to the utmost of his power; for that he valued his Life no longer that it conduced to that end; (p. 145)

According to Ruth Perry (2004, p. 148), ‘Valentine and Camilla stand out as an exemplary brother and sister’. Yet, their loving relationship based on ‘complementary reciprocity’ is suspicious to characters who espouse an idea of self as self-contained and self-sufficient.

Like David, Valentine and Camilla experience social marginalisation due to their 'unnatural affections' (Haggerty 1998). George E. Haggerty (1998, p. 31) observes that Camilla and Valentine are 'written into a discourse of "unnatural"', which includes 'all those who do not participate unthinkingly in the mechanisms of patriarchy' and, it could be added, capitalism. The accusation of incest expresses 'the loathing with which they [characters of sensibility] are held' in an uncaring social order obsessed with power and domination (Haggerty 1998, p. 30). Linda Bree (1996, p. 40) also argues that the misconstruction of Camilla and Valentine's 'close friendship' is intentional, a result of the denigration of care. To make her accusations credible it is sufficient for Livia to mention 'several little Instances' in which Valentine and Camilla have shown their 'reciprocal Love'. Ultimately, the 'remarkable Fondness' Camilla and Valentine have for each other becomes an unpardonable sin perverted by a 'care-harming ideology of competitiveness' (p. 147; Lynch 2022, p. 7).

CHAPTER THREE

Frangible outlines of a better world

> The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.
>
> George Bernard Shaw

3.1 Radical imagination: dreams of a better life

In a social order subordinate to the motive of profit and self-aggrandisement, David's hope of finding a loving friendship is subversive (Woodward 1992). As Rebecca Solnit (Wolf Humanities Center 2023) points out, hope gives 'a sense of possibility'. David's quest for mutually caring relations that eschew domination based on wealth and gender is premised on his belief in the possibility of finding individuals who can share his outlook on the world and human relations: 'his own Mind was a Proof to him, that Generosity, Good-nature, and a Capacity for real Friendship, were to be found in the World' (p. 41). David's hope is an act of defiance that attempts to resist the narrative that 'human Nature is a Sink of Iniquity' and that 'some have Art and Hypocrisy enough, to hide from undiscerning Eyes, the Blackness that is within' (p. 68). As Linda Bree (1996, p. 35) points out, 'David is genuinely both surprised and distressed at the wickedness of mankind'. His 'faith in human nature' motivates him to 'travel through the whole World, rather than not meet with a real Friend' (Bree 1996, p. 33; p. 8; p. 23).

The concept of 'radical imagination' can better clarify David's search for and his achievement of a small community of care. The idea of radical imagination has been developed and is employed in the context of social movements that seek to confront forms of systemic exploitation and oppression. It is based on the premise that, in order to achieve a better world, it is necessary to build and sustain alternative imaginary spaces. Imagination is thus conceived as a political force (Haiven and Khasnabish 2010; 2014). David's search for a care-centric paradigm to live by would be impossible without his ability to imagine and reimagine human connections in terms of vulnerability, interdependency, and mutual support. David's realisation that Daniel's love is only a pretence that hides self-interested calculation shakes him awake. Only when alienated from care can he realise its importance and move to action. Refusing to accept the social order as it has been given, David challenges the assumption that 'whatever is, is right' (Johns 2003, p. 89). Feeling at odds with

interpersonal relations defined by exploitation, abuse, and competition, he prefers to embrace the belief in just, loving forms of co-existence rather than becoming a cynic.

The novel raises an important question: Whose imagination are we living in? Dissatisfied with the way in which characters such as Spatter, Varnish, and Orgueil imagine and reproduce social relations, David resists the 'privatization of desire and imagination that tell us we are not each other's keeper', thus grounding his search for true friendship in his ability to conceive an alternative (Solnit 2009, p. 286). As the narrator observes, 'poor Mr. *Simple* looked on things in another light' (p. 86). David's ability to look on human nature and human relations differently represents the source of radical imagination. As Bree (1996, p. 34) points out, David 'meets people *with great hopes* that they are what they profess to be' (emphasis added). To a nightmarish 'vision of a world gone wrong' is opposed the idea that things could be different, and that life could be lived otherwise (Haiven 2014; Reeves 2020, p. 132).

It is important to stress, however, that radical imagination is not 'a personal act of 'thinking differently' (Haiven 2014). As Max Haiven (2014) points out, 'the imagination doesn't exist purely in the individual mind; it also exists between people, as the result of their attempts to work out how to live and work together'. Radical imagination is a 'shared landscape' that involves not only David but also Cynthia, Camilla, and Valentine. It is premised on the capacity of these characters to come together and form a community of common values (Haiven 2014).

David Simple is a novel that foregrounds community. Its communitarian tendencies have been noticed by several scholars (Woodward 1992; Hussey 2009; Schellenberg 1996; Skinner 1999; Van Sant 2001). Schellenberg (1996, p. 22) argues that 'the impulse to defeat isolation and change through community is the structural basis of Fielding's debut novel'. Despite several disappointments and fleeting reflections on becoming a hermit, David is able to achieve what he is looking for: a network of affinity and care. The community functions as a counter-narrative to a rapacious, profit-driven form of sociability. It becomes a space of 'imaginative experimentation, exploration and possibility' (Khasnabish and Haiven, 2014). Joined by the struggles they have experienced in a system of social fragmentation and competition, the four friends attempt to posit new ways of living that mobilise 'the imagination as a cooperative, compassionate […] force' (Haiven 2014). Imagination becomes a survival tool employed to co-create a community where to belong, an antidote to social marginalisation. As Keally D. Mcbride points out, 'communities are where we can

choose membership and have our selves reflected back or recognized in a favorable light' (p. 24).

David Simple's imagining of an alternative community positions the novel in the utopian tradition[13]. Lyman Tower Sargent (1994, p. 3) defines utopianism as 'social dreaming – the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live'. This definition only partially describes *David Simple*. While the novel does present a dream of different ways of living, it does not offer grand narratives. The absence of all-encompassing utopian images is the defining aspect of the novel, which is closely linked to the ethics of care it advocates. Rather than providing a totalising revision of sociopolitical reality, Fielding's novel reveals a 'utopian hope' by focusing on 'the microeconomy of personal relationships and everyday community interaction' (Johns 2003, pp. 16-20). The subversiveness of the novel's communal vision lies in its stress on care and caring relations, a too often 'overlooked aspect of human existence' that the novel invests with ethical and political value (Hamington 2011 pp. 1-2; Collins 2015, p. 6). As Johns (2003, p. 16) notes, 'the modifications [feminist utopists] imagined worked at the deep structures of everyday life. They sought a reorientation, not of political figures, ceremonies, and governments but of the places where emotional and material life met […] such as love, sexuality, family life, and domestic economy'. Such an approach that starts from the particular rather than from the totality can be seen as a product of Sarah Fielding's experience as a member of a community of like-minded women, the Bluestocking circle. As Gary Kelly (2000, pp. 169-170) notes, Bluestocking feminism proposed 'a rational and intellectual life for women, not in opposition to affective subjectivity and to domesticity but complementing and indeed reinforcing them […] The individual self-control and agency so constructed is to be the basis for limited but intense kinds of moral and ethical agency in the sphere of domestic and local life and society'.

Despite the novel's focus on the daily and the practical, it still manages to engage in a larger reflection on ethical life. The novel's emphasis on caring practices as developed within a small, domestic community of friends is grounded in a larger social picture. The achievement of 'real Happiness', based on nurturing relational practices, rather than being a

[13] Christian influence on the novel's utopian vision, in particular the concept of Christian charity and love, is worth acknowledging. As Lyman Tower Sargent (1994 p. 21) points out, 'Christianity provided the basis for much Western utopianism'. See also Johns, A. (2003). *Women's Utopias of the Eighteenth Century*. University of Illinois Press (p. 74).

private matter, becomes a social imperative. As the narrator claims, 'it is in the Power of every Community to attain it' (p. 280). The readers are, therefore, directly involved in the utopian project by the narrator, who addresses them at the end of the story: 'In short, it is this Tenderness and Benevolence, which alone can give any real Pleasure, and which I most sincerely wish to all my Readers' (p. 282). As Reeves (2020, p. 130) notes, 'the novel ends by directly asserting the preeminence of this "little society" and the belief of which it is emblematic, urging readers to imitate David's theistic sensibility in the real world'. In its dream of social transformation, the novel thus binds the personal and the social.

Several scholars have deemed Sarah Fielding's work conservative (Spencer 1986; Schellenberg 1996; Todd 1986). According to London (2012, p. 145), 'Scott's alternative community of women […] may suggest vanguard feminism, but what finally animates these novels is the wish to conserve traditional orders'. Van Sant (2001, p. 73) captures the novel's ambiguity by pointing out that 'Fielding's sensibility-based social construction can thus look either deeply conservative, and limited to the exceptional few, or deeply radical, and continually applicable as a critique of social boundaries'.

The simile the narrator resorts to at the end of the novel, a rhetorical device used to compare human society to a machine in which each part (i.e., each individual) contributes (and is equally important) to its functioning, exemplifies the novel's ambiguity. The passage seems to reinforce hierarchical divisions, thus clashing with the small community's project to create a cooperative, non-hierarchical order (Woodward 1992, p. 66). Yet, a different interpretation is also possible. It could be argued that, by recommending adhering to 'the Part' allotted to individuals 'by *Nature*' or '*Station in Life*', the passage's main aim is not that of imposing fixity and immobility but, rather, to condemn a form of sociality founded upon excessive competition fuelled by 'the great Desire […] *of playing the Top-part*' (pp. 280-281). The passage links true happiness to a 'sincere Regard to the Interest and Pleasure of the whole' and to 'Care – Tenderness – and Benevolence to each other', thus reconceptualising affective bonds as moral paradigms that entail a duty to 'lessen, instead of aggravating' the plight of other fellow beings (pp. 280-282).

Rather than attempting to resolve the novel's ambiguities, or dismissing its conservative features scholars have pointed at, the approach adopted here seeks to illuminate how the novel's focus on the private sphere and its affective bonds presents some subversive aspects that complicate 'the domesticity idea'. This line of argument is influenced by scholars such as Donna Landry (2010) and Carolyn Woodward (1992), who consider Fielding's work radical.

In order to understand how the utopian community of friends envisioned in the novel functions as a space of resistance that offers a 'relational model of moral agency' (Keller 1997, p. 152), it is necessary to look into the features and practices that define it. First, the community is predicated upon redistribution of resources, where wealth is shared equally (Johns 2003, p. 62). When Camilla and Valentine are reunited with their repentant father, the latter divides 'his Fortune equally between them' (p. 292). The idea of communal sharing is also endorsed by David, who insists that 'what Fortune was amongst them might be shared in common' (p. 278).

Wealth redistribution grants each member equal access to resources. Since, in the novel, money often becomes a tool of manipulation and subjection, redistribution of property can be interpreted as a choice to give up the power that sustains the hierarchical division between haves and have-nots; to resolve dominance into interdependency. As Johns (2003, p. 60) notes, 'feminist utopists insisted that benevolence become part of the system of equivalent exchanges so everyone might be supplied and no one left a perpetual debtor'. In the novel's intimate network of friends, essential needs are met, and necessities are provided without expectation of return. Within a paradigm in which competition is replaced by generosity, there is no longer the risk of being degraded for bread and falling victim to 'slavish dependence' (Landry p. 156). As an alternative way of living, the community exposes 'the distance between abject dependence and a desirable, utopian condition of friendship' (Johns 2003, p. 76). The attempt to re-image equal social relations achieved through economic redistribution is radical if one considers that 'under 18th-century British law a wife had no identity separately from that of her husband: she had no access to money […]' (Johns 2003, p. 74; Bree 1996, p. 37). Donna Landry (p. 160), for instance, argues that 'Sarah Fielding's benevolence should be read as communist, or proto-communist in the light of nineteenth-century developments'.

'Sharing in common, without any Thought of separate Property' is a mutual practice inscribed in the domain of care ethics (p. 314). Within the community, caring embodies justice and inspires trust (Fisher and Tronto 1990, p. 40). As Fisher and Tronto (1990, p. 40) explain, 'caring is seen as just when it refers to a shared standard by which each gives and receives her "due". Trust results because these standards are shared, and one can count on other community members to maintain them'. The resources shared include not only material wealth but also care-giving. Being responsible for the well-being of others is a major tenet of the community, realised in a form of caring in which each member attends to the needs of all, 'endeavouring to make every thing contribute to the Happiness of the others'

(Noddings 2010, p. 22-23; Fielding 2002, p. 280). The vulnerable and the neediest, such as children and Camilla's elderly father, are the community's centre of gravity (Johns 2003 p. 74; Fielding 2002, p. 292; p. 303). Commenting on Peter's departure, the narrator observes that

> he quitted a Place of certain Improvement, for the Chance only of being where he barely might not learn less – more he could not learn; for the chief Study and Employment of our Society, was to improve the Understandings, and meliorate the Dispositions of their Children; and never was Labour (if such it might be styled) better rewarded. (pp. 302-303)

All parties, therefore, contribute to the caring relationship by engaging in cooperative and nurturing practices (p. 346). bell hooks (2000, p. 163), a prominent feminist theorist who advocates for an 'ethic of love' as a political practice, notes that 'generous sharing of all resources is one concrete way to express love. These resources can be time, attention, material objects, skills, money etc ... Once we embark on love's path we see how easy it is to give'. It is also worth noting that the community's attempt at self-sufficiency, realised in the form of a 'little Garden', is predicated upon the principles of nurturance and sharing. It can be read as an attempt to defy the 'competitive economic ethos' of the commercial society (Bellamy 1998, p. 132). The way in which David tends his 'little Piece of Ground' is caring and other-regarding:

> And *David* every Morning employed himself in cultivating his little Garden, the better to support his beloved Family: not one Spot of waste Ground was to be seen; Labour and Contrivance produced Plenty and Variety, in a space so small, it barely appeared at first View sufficient for the producing any one kind of Vegetable to support a moderate Family. And this little Piece of Ground had been long neglected, as barren and not worth improving: but the Industry of *David* could surmount Difficulties, which to others appeared insurmountable, *when attended with the Reward of seeing his Wife, his Children, or his Friends, enjoy the Fruits of his Labour*. He could walk, or rather turn about in his little Garden, *and feel more solid Happiness from the flourishing of a Cabbage, or the growing of a Turnip, than was ever received from the most ostentatious Shew the Vanity of Man could possible invent*. (p. 347) (emphasis added)

Second, the community is the result of a voluntary choice of each party to come together with a purpose to imagine and build an alternative way of living. Lyman Tower

Sargent's definition of 'intentional community'[14] is fitting here (Sargent 1994, pp.14-15). He describes such a community as 'a group of five or more adults and their children, if any, who come from more than one nuclear family and *who have chosen to live together to enhance their shared values* or from some other mutually agreed upon purpose' (emphasis added). The fact that the community formed at the end of the novel is not a given one but rather created is relevant. The status of the consanguineal family is problematised right from the start, when David and Daniel's fraternal Eden crumbles due to the latter's selfish motives (Pohl 2008, p. 228). In the course of the novel, both Camilla and Cynthia are estranged from their families of origin. Ties given by birth are thus opposed to mutually chosen bonds of friendship between David, Valentine, Cynthia, and Camilla.

The novel resists a straightforward association of values such as disinterestedness, mutuality, and generosity with the family unit. The fact that biological family ties cannot be chosen puts one at risk of coercion within the family unit and its defined duties (Friedman 1993, pp. 208-209). Cynthia's story exemplifies such a coercive quality of the patriarchal biological family. Underlying her father's domineering behaviour is 'the power nexus that lay at the heart of the 18th-century family' (Bree 1996, p. 38). The voluntariness of friendship, 'grounded on personal choice, commitment, or consent', is, instead, conducive to a relational sphere where lives can be reproduced 'on different grounds, perhaps more freely' (Haiven 2014; Friedman 1993, p. 212). Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of the small community of friends is that it abolishes the tyranny of the binding duty of gratitude (Johns 2003, p. 82). As Johns (2003, p. 85) points out, 'Fielding's ideal characters […] interpret benevolence as a sign of friendship, recognition, and good feeling rather than as the gratitude-demanding, obligation-creating, subjecting activity […]'. Moreover, the voluntariness of friendship is premised on the absence of hierarchical divisions, since, as Friedman (1993, p. 211) observes, 'domination and subordination in a relationship are conditions that override the consent of one or both parties and, thereby, undermine the voluntariness of the relationship'.

The radicality of friendship as a locus where social relations can be reimagined differently seems tempered by the novel's ending in double marriage. Linda Bree (2000, p. 186) observes that 'the community established at the end of David Simple is a heterosexual one, based on a large extent patriarchal and family ties'. Compared to explicitly feminist and separatist communal experiments, such as Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762), Fielding's

[14] Sargent identifies communal property holding as one of the key features of an intentional society (p. 14; p. 17). See Sargent L.T. (1994). The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited. Utopian Studies 5 (1) 1-37.

fictional community is dismissed on the grounds that it takes the form of a 'heterosexual alliance' that perpetrates oppressive social practices (D'Montè and Pohl, 2000, p. 8). For instance, Susan Moller Okin (1981, p. 65) stresses how the 'idealization of the sentimental domestic family' contributed to women's subordination. Yet, Linda Bree (1996, p. 42) urges the critics not to reduce the novel to its comic ending. She claims that 'despite the fact that the narrative moves towards the double wedding of David and Camilla and Valentine and Cynthia, *David Simple* is not primarily a courtship novel.'

To claim that the novel deals essentially with romantic love, marriage, and family would mean to obscure its ethical project, that is, the construction of 'equalizing relations of love and care' as practices 'with socially transformative potential' that can challenge the structures and relationships of patriarchal capitalism (Woodward 1992; Friedman 1993, pp. 5-6; Cantillon and Lynch 2017 p. 173). As Bree (p. 43) points out, the novel addresses the crucial question 'of what constitutes a workable and virtuous philosophy of live'. A care-centred form of sociability, realised in friendship relations, appears to be of primary importance to approach such a question.

It could be argued that Fielding's communitarian project is daring in its way. While literary representations of all-female communities solve the problem of women's patriarchal subordination of by removing men from the picture, *David Simple* takes a path riddled with traps and pitfalls in its attempt to envision a utopian household that can be both heterosocial and egalitarian. The novel's subversive potential lies not in the success of this project but, rather, in its ability to imagine alternative affective paradigms (Johns 2003, p. 74). Moreover, Fielding's choice to resort to marriage can be interpreted as the only viable option dictated by the fact that the community is heterosocial: in the context of the eighteenth-century British society obsessed with 'female sexual conduct', only marriage could guarantee the fictional community's respectability (Dabhoiwala 1996, p. 202).

The fact that the novel develops its utopian project within the microeconomy of the family complicates its potentially subversive position as a work that can challenge oppressive patriarchal hierarchy. Karin Schonpflug (2008, pp. 124-127) points out how the metaphor of the family as 'a possible option for a utopian setting' has been met with ambivalence by feminist utopian thinkers. While traditional patriarchal family is harshly criticised for its oppressive practices, the utopian visions of mutual affection and mutual aid, which egalitarian family life can foster, continue to appeal to feminists.

Even though the community is reconfigured as a family through the institution of marriage, the bonds uniting Cynthia, Camilla, Valentine, and David are those of a platonic

friendship (Pohl 2008, p. 221). The 'little Family of Love' is the result of affiliation rather than biological kin, a small community from which potentially destructive passions, such as sexual desire or envy, are banished (p. 346). The novel manages to present a family network that does not align with the oppressive values of the patriarchal and capitalist order (Woodward 1992; Pohl 2008). Far from being a 'cruel stasis of family', the utopian community is a laboratory where caring, solidarity relations can be fashioned (Todd p. 102). To claim that the community is merely a limited nuclear family of 'brother and sister, husband and wife' would be reductive (Schellenberg 1996). It is also a space of strong friendship bonds, either homosocial (Cynthia and Camilla) or heterosocial (David and Cynthia). As Nicole Pohl (2008, p. 220) notes, '[…] Fielding devised a sentimental household model which transgressed the traditional 'contractual, domestic and occupational relationships' of eighteenth-century households'.

The equal sharing of resources is one way in which the community attempts to resolve inequalities inherent in the institution of marriage. It is also worth noting that the community's ability to function as a space 'defined by a whole network of human attachments that allow for emotional fulfilment and self-possession' and, therefore, resist the association with a traditional patriarchal family unit, is premised on the novel's wider project of refashioning masculinity (Pohl 2008, p. 220). As mentioned earlier, David, Valentine and Camilla's father are representatives of a new form of masculinity, i.e., 'caring masculinity' (Elliott 2015). David's problematic superiority in the patriarchal society is neutralised by portraying him as a man uninterested and ineffectual in the public sphere of economic affairs equated with 'materialistic and acquisitive values' (Bellamy 1998, p. 132). To make sure that the female identity can safely co-exist with the male one, men must be feminised (Bellamy 1998, p. 129).

As a feminist utopia, the novel attempts to reforge gender roles within the domain of care ethics by deconstructing hegemonic masculinity and its equation with dominance, power, and excessive wealth (Johns 2003, pp. 53-54; Lynch 2022, p. 56). David becomes the opposite of a patriarchal tyrant, a role made obsolete both by the principle of shared property and by David's own ethical code of behaviour. As Woodward (1992, p. 68) points out, David 'most clearly rejects patriarchal values when he and his friends establish their alternative community. In this utopia, both fortune and work are shared in common'. In a competitive society populated by Ratcliffs and Ogueils, in which nurturance is subordinated to the 'projects of conquest and domination', David embodies a form of relationality modelled on a caring attitude that prioritises attention to and concern for others (Benjamin

2013; Brugère 2019, p. 5). In his encounters with female characters, in which the power imbalance is most apparent, he appears reluctant to use any of his privileges to control, manipulate, or force women into doing anything they are unwilling to do. Cynthia, whose relations with men have been patterned with rigid patriarchal norms, finds David's other-centred behaviour anomalous:

> She knew too much of the World, to be easily persuaded that any Man could act as David did by her, from pure Friendship: nor was she indeed long left in doubt in this matter; for altho' he paid her all imaginable Respect, yet she plainly saw that he liked her. This perplexed her more than ever […] p. 113

Unlike his brother Daniel, David is free from aggressive desires, both sexual and economic (Woodward 2003, p. 70; Bree 1996, p. 33). Johns (2003, p. 74) observes that 'true friendship inevitably trumps sexual desire in Fielding's work. Even if heterosexual pairing prevails, the overwhelming impression is of a diffused love capable of fulfilling individual desire and furthering the attachment of others'. As the narrator points out, David is a man 'actuated by neither Avarice nor Ambition, his Mind moving on no other Axis but that of Love' (p. 291).

The novel's utopian exploration of gender relations is premised on the renunciation of power that derives from participation in the commercial system and patriarchal structures. By adopting a care-centric stance, the novel disrupts the association of private virtues such as nurturance, compassion, and affective sociability with female characters only (Woodward 2003, p. 78; Pohl 2008. p. 228). These values are, instead, universalised and extended to both genders, thus destabilising the patriarchal privileging of the public over the private (Thompson 1996, p. 187). Values traditionally ascribed to women become the bedrock of a fairer society (Woodward 2003, p. 74; p. 78; Pohl 2008, p. 221).

Yet, not all feminine virtues are conducive to a better way of living. Woodward (2003, p. 76; p. 78), for instance, distinguishes between 'true feminine virtues' that can lead to a restructuring of society (which she identifies with nurturance and non-hierarchical sharing) and oppressive, weakening virtues of innocence and passivity. She argues that in *David Simple* 'lady-like passivity and privacy are deadening weights that block creative responses to real troubles and thereby prevent feminine nurturance from the healing it could bring to a sick society' (Woodward 2003, p. 78).

The novel's attempt at redefining masculinity can be interpreted as serving a wider ethical project of transforming the notion of nurturance and care from 'particular and feminine' to universal and genderless (Benjamin 2013). Lynch (2022, p. 55) observes how

'the masculine/feminine binary, where hegemonic masculinity is equated with dominance and being in control while idealized femininity is identified with compliance and service, feeds into the devaluation of women and care'. By portraying David as a man who finds meaning in mutually caring relationships and condemning to solitary death aggressive and uncaring type of manhood embodied by Daniel, the novel recentres the relational and nurturing realms as places of moral agency relevant to public life. Its subversiveness lies in the acknowledgement that care should inform all human existence and be mutual and equally provided (Nussbaum 1999, p. 444). As Johns (2003, p. 51) point out, in *David Simple*

> friendship […] is linked directly with politics because it forms the basis of the state. A state cannot exist without the concord of friendship at its core, nor can friendship survive in a disorderly and contentious space. *The two are mutually constitutive*'. (emphasis added)

3.2 'entangled in the Snare of his Love for others': deadly vulnerability

At the beginning of *Volume the Last* the narrator tells the readers that,

> our happy Family, soon after their Marriage, agreed to leave *London*, and, together with the old Gentlemen, to settle themselves in some pleasant country Village, out of the Reach of that Hurry and Bustle, so very contrary to the Taste of our whole Society (p. 292)

The decision to spatially situate the utopian community on the periphery can be read as a metaphorical rejection of the market-based approach to human relations that characterises the metropolis. The group of friends' care-centred practices that show no 'aspirational desire for social advancement' cannot be realised in an urban space of atomised, competitive individuals (London 2012, p. 8). Unwilling to participate in the 'patriarchal-capitalist nexus' and its hierarchies of power that, 'diminishing the value of living actors', create the categories of "winners" and "losers", the small society of friends has to be built in a liminal space that can ensure its precarious existence (Hamington 2021, p. 4; Lynch 2022, p. 55). As Bree (p. 1996, 34) notes, 'it is no coincidence that David, the son of an industrious tradesman, himself opts out of a productive in favour of a leisured life. Commerce has no time for such non-productive qualities such as charity, generosity, and benevolence'.

Conceptualising human relations in terms of care in a public sphere ruled by personal and economic self-interest means adopting a position of social outsiders. Yet, this liminal space can be interpreted not only as a fruitless retreat but also as a site of resistance to the hegemony of profit interests where the community is free to imagine and co-create new

meanings outside market relations (Lynch 2022, p. 6). The household of friends thus becomes a 'spatial crack' that allows for a different way of doing and relating. The retreat is productive because it allows for a certain level of freedom. As John Holloway (2010 pp. 23-24) explains, a crack is a 'space or moment of negation-and-creation, of refusal and other doing' that results from 'a common rejection of the cohesive logic of capitalism'. By constructing bonds of mutual solidarity and support, the utopian community refuses the logic of money and its hierarchies of domination. Poverty is 'chearful' in a 'Society united by well directed Affections' (p. 285). As the narrator observes, 'some pecuniary Losses […] could not destroy Felicity so founded' (p. 291).

The newly founded community prioritises non-commodifiable values of care, solidarity, and cooperation. As Johns (2003, p. 73) points out, 'it does not understand market valuations'. Adhering to the maxim that 'Prosperity of one' is 'the Prosperity of all', the small society of friends is conceptualised as a form of a common characterised by 'a disjointed common-ing'. The community thus resists the ethos of capitalism, the latter understood as 'a movement of enclosure, a movement of converting that which is enjoyed in common into private property' (Holloway 2010, pp. 29-30). The passage in which David decides to ask Mr Nichols for a money loan can be read as an example of David's naivete and his tendency to take everything at face value. Yet, it also sheds light on how the community attempts to create a counternarrative to money-centred modes of thought. David's morality may be naïve, but it is also a form of refusal and resistance. He is unable, and unwilling, 'to speak the language of commerce and exchange' (Bellamy 1998, p. 137).

The 'very uncommon Dialogue' between David and Mr Nichols exemplifies the opposition between the latter's entrepreneurial spirit and the former's 'very different ethical principles' informed by care (Bellamy 1998, p. 134; Bree 1996, p. 88). It is the opposition between *homo economicus* and *homo curans* (Lynch 2022, p. 37). Mr Nichols' job, as a money lender, is to filter human relations through the lens of market transactions. Each individual thus becomes materially measurable:

> This Mr. *Nichols* had taken an exact Measure of all the Lands, and knew, within twenty Shillings, what every Man was worth in all the Country round him' […] For Mr. Nichols had a Pair of Compasses, by which he could take as true a Measure of every Man's Disposition concerning Monies, as of his Lands. (p. 342; p. 345)

When he asks David to provide a 'Bond, or Note' as a material proof of *Valentine*'s liquidity, David's response shows his inability to impose 'an alien market logic on affective relations' (Lynch 2022, p. 15): 'I have no Bond, or Note, Sir; Valentine is my Brother, my Wife's

Brother, and that's the same thing […] We have always lived as one Family, and considered no separate Property' (p. 342). While David considers relational interdependence a source of mutual trust and support, for Mr Nichols interdependency is dangerous since it can lead to treachery and deceit. He therefore exclaims,

> A Brother, indeed! I have sent Officers with Executions into many a Man's House, whose Brothers might have prevented it, and even with very inconsiderable Loss to themselves […] If this Mr. *Valentine* is a wise Man, he may think it most prudent to keep separately what he hath separately gotten. (p. 342)

Much like Livia, Mr Nichols glorifies self-sufficiency as the ideal human state in the economy of scarcity premised on perpetual competitiveness for resources. Self-sufficiency is seen as the only way of maximising one's profits without risking being cheated by an economic competitor (Stern 2012, p. 638; Lynch 2022, p. 20). As the narrator points out,

> The Trust and Confidence *David* expressed in *Valentine*'s Friendship, sounded as nonsensical in his Ears, as if he had affirmed he could safely trust a Fox with the Care of his Poultry. For Mr. *Nichols* was fully satisfied that *Valentine*'s Friendship was mere Pretence, and had been hitherto counterfeited, in order to make an Advantage of *David*'s Credulity; and he doubted not but that as soon as *Valentine* found the desperate State of his Circumstances, he would wisely cast him off, and avoid the Expense of endeavouring to prove himself what such a Fool as *David* would call a real Friend. (p. 344)

What follows is Mr Nichols' attempt to reinstate a hierarchical order based on dependence and subordination that David's other-centred morality, and its 'unintelligible Gibberish' on 'the Pleasure of serving Friends' and 'sharing Fortunes', has been trying to displace:

> But, for Curiosity sake, pray, Sir, answer me one Question, in this sharing and living as one Family, that you talk so much about, has it been most in Mr. *Valentine*'s Power to serve you, or your's to serve him? in short, which has conferred the most Obligations? […] Which of you two had the most Substance? Which was the best Man? (p. 343)

David's answer 'You don't talk our Language, Sir' stresses the community's otherness, its refusal to view individuals as essentially detached, 'a means to the end of making profit' (it is noteworthy that David employs the adjective "our" instead of "my") (p. 343; Holloway 2010, p. 75). The community's 'rebellious negation' of a competitive form of relationality for survival and success is epitomised by David's refusal to let 'his Son [Peter] be educated under the Tuition of such a Man as Mr. Ratcliff' (p. 357; Holloway 2010, p. 20). David is horrified at the idea that

> […] the young Mind of his Son should be warped and byassed by wrong Principles, and his Heart should be corrupted by Treachery […] With all his fatherly Affection he would have made it his Choice to have beheld his Son in *Job*'s Condition, whilst he preserved his Integrity, rather than have seen him revelling in all the Luxuries of the Earth, by treacherous and dishonest Means. (p. 357)

To resort to 'treacherous and dishonest Means' in order to acquire wealth and prestige would be antithetical to the ethics of care the utopian community foregrounds. Peter Ratcliff's principles are wrong because they are care-less. As Schaffer (2021, p. 38) points out, 'the opposite of care is simply to use the other for our own selfish purposes […]'. Ratcliff condemns partiality towards others as a form of weakness (p. 361). Bonds of friendship are valued as long as they are instrumental and exploitable. In his pursuit of profit, by 'repeatedly advising, and almost forcing [David] to carry on his Law-Suit', Ratcliff exacerbates the community's impoverishment (p. 362). As Bree (1996, p. 83) observes, 'his actions aim to divide, rather than reinforce the coherence of, David's family'. Once David becomes unusable, Ratcliff abandons him, since 'what he really enjoys is not being benevolent but having a dependent', that is someone to exploit (Bree 1996, p. 84; Woodward 1992, p. 69).

As a window into the possibility of a different way of living that does not aspire to be included 'at the rich Man's Table', the utopian community is a threat to a hierarchical social order characters such as Ratcliffs and Orgueils benefit from (p. 345). It is no coincidence that these characters, who have embraced the principles of the 'aggressive, acquisitive commercial world', constantly attempt to reinscribe the community's relational dynamics and intentions into the logic of competition and individualism (Bellamy 1998, p. 137). As Johns (2003, p. 75) observes, 'wishing to determine value on its own, wanting to diffuse emotional and other forms of capital it possesses, it [the utopian group] is constantly forced to confront the market's value-finding mechanism'. Mrs Orgueil, for instance, spends all her energies on endeavouring to 'seduce any of this Society from the Friendship of the rest' (p. 351; p. 308). She undermines the group's struggle to build alternative structures of mutual support by pulling it back into a system that devalues care and relationality. When she finds out that Betty, the daughter of the farmers Dunsters, has become an active participant in the community's alternative patterns of social relations that escape the logic of profit (Cynthia teaches Betty to write and read), she promptly takes action. In order to maintain her status quo, she denigrates the community's way of relating that yields neither wealth nor power:

> Mrs. *Orgueil* began to be very uneasy at *Betty Dunster*'s being so much in *David*'s Family and therefore told her Mother, that she wondered a Woman of her Prudence would suffer her Daughter to be ruined by being accustomed to nothing but Sloth and Idleness, as must be the case while she threw away her Time amongst such a Set of lazy extravagant People. (p. 305)

Since David and his friends abide by a different set of rules that are not oriented towards personal aggrandisement or defined by exploitation of others, they are accused of being 'a set of lazy extravagant People'. In the 'cut-throat world of Hobbesian competition' the non-oppressive and cooperative relational practices are extravagant because they do not result in personal advancement (Barker-Benfield, p. 216). Much like Valentine and Camilla who are subjected to the accusations of incest because of their caring relationship, the community has to fend off external pressures that aim to marginalise its deviant (misaligned with the competitive economic order) ways of living.

Critics have focused on the community's voluntary separatist retreat (Schellenberg 1996; Johns 2003). However, much less attention has been given to how its peripheral existence is also externally imposed by individual representatives of an uncaring hierarchical system. Ratcliffs and Orgueils' 'instinct for divisiveness' pushes the group of friends to the margins (Bree 1996, p. 85; Woodward 1992, p. 71). In *Volume the Last* the structural hostility of 'patriarchal capitalism' is most evident (Woodward 1992). Johns (2003, p. 75) observes that '*Volume the Last* becomes the story of how commercial society and its practices – supported by the avarice of Ratcliffe, the stoicism of Orgueil, or the jealousy of his wife – thwart the group's ability to determine worth and distribute value'. The misfortunes the community experiences are the outcome of the dominant ethic of individualism that positions the other as either a threat or an exploitable dependent. Since the utopian space is not imagined on a distant, exotic location, it is never safe, as it exists within a social order that constantly threatens its existence (Woodward 1992, p. 76; Bree 2000, p. 186).

After discrediting the community's non-commodifiable practices, Mrs Orgueil ensures the maintenance of hierarchical structures by separating Betty from the 'happy Society' and making her a maidservant at her house (Woodward 1992, p. 69):

> I tell you (says Mrs. *Orgueil*) that Reading is not a proper Employment for a Farmer's Daughter; and although you are so infatuated, as not to see what will be the Ruin of your own Child, I myself have such a Love for the Girl, that I am resolved to save her from Destitution, by taking her into my own Family: and, is he can be made to forget all the Stuff Cynthia has taught her, and behaves well, I will keep her as my Woman. Or, if Miss *Cassy* should like her,

she may be her Maid. And she will find some Difference between living in my House in any Station, and herding with a Parcel of beggarly Wits. (p. 305)

It is crucial that Betty forgets all the absurd notions Cynthia might have told or taught her, so that she will not become a threat to the dominant order by internalising the utopian hope of an alternative way of living. As soon as she enters Mrs Orgueil's house, she is 'strictly ordered by Mrs. *Orgueil* never again to set her foot within *David Simple*'s Doors' (p. 306). The 'nonsensical Stories' that circulate within the community are poison to the realm of 'purely instrumental social relations' (p. 308; Thompson 1996, p. 198). The form of communication that characterises the utopian household is conducive to care, since each member has 'an equal right to express themselves and to be heard' (Schaffer 2021, p. 55). As Schaffer (2021, p. 140) points out, 'discourse is the core of a care relationship'. It ensures 'mutual attunement', so that relationships do not become a space of subordination and manipulation. The novel opposes exploitative relations of dependence that silence the dependent subject (Cynthia's experience as a toadeater is the most representative example), and a caring community of friends where freedom of expression is not tied to the possession of material resources.

Ratcliff is another character who exemplifies 'the powerful workings of the dominant discourse' that trample the community's ability to imagine and practice alternative ways of relating (Schonpflug 2008, p. 130; Bellamy 1998, p. 130). Once again, control is exercised by delegitimising and condemning the utopian group's attempt to escape a system in which 'values are transported to commodities' (Woodward 1992, p. 72). Hence, community's 'reduced Circumstances' deserve not compassion but hate and indignation, because they are a direct consequence of the imprudent decision to prioritise cooperation over competition (p. 358; p. 363). Like Mrs Orgueil, Ratcliff reestablishes the strict boundaries between the haves and the have-nots on which the competitive economy of scarcity depends (Woodward 1992, p. 69). In a letter to David, he advises that Miss Camilla abandons occupations such as reading and painting, which are reserved for those advanced on the hierarchy, and become profitable by learning the practical skill of needlework so that she can be employed (and exploited) by those who have access to money and power:

Mrs. *Ratcliff* desires me to tell you, she hopes Miss Camilla does not neglect her Needle: she read, with friendly Concern, the Pleasure your Wife expressed on Miss's Genius for Music and Painting; such things may be encouraged in young Ladies born to a Fortune; but – no longer ago than last Week, a Person was recommended to wait on Mrs. *Ratcliff* – she was a younger Daughter to a Baronet, who, dying abroad, left a Family of eleven Children, all unprovided

> for. […] her own natural Genius for Music had made her, without any Master, a great Proficient that Way; and her Sketches in Drawing shewed, that, had she applied herself to that Science, she might have equalled, if not excelled, the greatest Masters in that Art: but when my Wife came to ask her about working at her Needle (the chief Employment Mrs. *Ratcliff* delights in, or confines her Women to) the Girl answered, that she knew, indeed, all sorts of Work, and believed no body could find Fault with the Neatness of her Performance; but, for want of Use of her Needle (as she confessed she never much delighted in it) she had so slow a Hand at Work, that she could not promise to make a fine Holland Shirt under a Week, or five Days at the least: upon which Mrs. *Ratcliff*, having heard enough, soon dismissed her; *and advised her to stick more to her Needle, and leave off her Pen and her Pencil; and she might then not have the Misfortune to lose so good a Place as her's would have been to her. I know you and your Wife have Sense enough to make the proper Use of this Story* […] (emphasis added) (pp. 323-324)

The critique of social hierarchy upheld by characters who insist on 'policing the boundaries of social rank' resurfaces again, this time more explicitly, in a hypothetical scenario described by the narrator in which the young Camilla is placed under Mrs Orgueil's care (Kim 2010, p. 498):

> If she [young Camilla] had endeavoured to gain any Instruction, she would have been continually told that it was impertinent in her to grasp at Knowledge; and she ought to content herself with learning to perform menial Offices. And if she employed herself ever so industriously to finish what she was set about, yet would she not have been the least the forwarder*; for Mrs. Orgueil, being versed in the Art of keeping back a docile Capacity, would have given her an additional Task every Day, rather than she should have got any Opportunity of imprempoving her Mind; being firmly of Opinion, that Improvements of such a kind were only fit for young Ladies, who, like Miss Henrietta, were born to Fortunes*. (p. 389) (emphasis added)

The utopian belief that human happiness and well-being cannot be measured by material wealth cannot find room in a social order 'organized around the disciplinary power of money' (Haiven 2014; Nussbaum 1999). In the passage in which Mrs Orgueil and Mrs Dunster discuss Mr Tilson's loss of fortune as a result of his attempt to help a friend, the clash between a care-centred and a power-centred outlook on human relations becomes once again apparent. According to Mrs Orgueil, 'being reduced from Forty thousand Pounds to Six, is certainly being utterly ruined', for only 'an insensible Brute' would not despair about no longer being able to live in 'a House like a Palace' and drive a 'Coach and six' (pp. 377-379). While Mrs Orgueil's view of happiness is self-regarding and based on a sense of

entitlement to power, Mrs Dunster's perspective reveals a relational concept of social life. She shows how the family finds happiness in nurturing and loving relationships:

> by a Story I heard t'other Day she [Mrs Bromly] was as lucky in missing my Lord – , as in meeting with her present Spouse; for they do say, that he uses his Lady, who is as good a Lady as ever lived, in a most cruel and inhuman Manner, and is so ill-natured and tyrannical to all his Servants and Tenants that he is hated all the Country round. But I am told there is not a better nature Man upon Earth than Mr. *Broomly*; and as to old Madame *Tilson*, and Miss *Nanny*, they be the goodest natured People in all the Country, and by the kind and charitable Actions they be always doing to relieve their poor Neighbours, one should think en so far from ruined, that they must be worth a Mint of Money (p. 379)

Uncapable of imagining non-hierarchical human relations, Mrs Orgueil cannot but interpret charitable actions as detrimental to the person who performs them (Bree 1996, p. 86). Sharing is not a financially sound move because it means diminishing one's resources. She thus claims that 'it is a sad thing […] for a Man, under the Pretence of Friendship and Generosity, to ruin his Wife and Family' (p. 379).

The opposition between 'Friendship' and 'Wife and Family' is relevant as it draws attention to two opposing understandings of affective relations: those tied to consanguineal family and kin, and those that extend 'beyond consanguinity and kinship ties' (Pohl 2008, p. 220). It has been already noted how the intentional community in *David Simple* is better understood as a society of friends who form 'voluntary communal attachments based on principles of sentimental comradeship and affection' (Pohl 2008, p. 229; Nussbaum 1999, pp. 441-442). There are, however, some critics who point out that the fictional community is 'achieved at the price of exclusion' (Schellenberg 1996, p. 5; Genovese 2012). Schellenberg (1996, p. 5) detects 'defensive exclusivity' and 'rigid boundedness' in the novel's focus on a harmonious social circle. In the same vein, Michael Genovese (2012) argues that David lacks toleration in his way of relating to others, especially when the other person manifests an interest in profit seeking. He claims that 'David experiences the self-interest of others as an obstacle setting the limits of both his sympathy and his willingness to embrace a stranger as a friend' (Genovese 2019). He therefore concludes that David is 'a flawed exemplar whose failure to connect with those he meets is not meant to be imitated' (Genovese 2019).

Both critics touch upon the paradox of inclusion/exclusion that is inherent in utopian visions (Stein 2013, p. 116). While it is true that the community is envisioned as geographically separated from the metropolis and its capitalistic practices (thus suggesting

that care-led forms of sociability cannot exist within capitalist hierarchies), it is not, however, predicated upon social segregation. It banishes the individualist ethos of the commercial world, but it does not shun social connections. In fact, it could be argued that it is the community's openness and the care-centred values it embraces that lead to its dissolution.

While David may take leave of people who do not share his ethical code, thus refusing to sit with discomfort, he does not 'escape as far as possible from others' (Todd 1986, p. 96). His faith in fellow humans and his 'Goodness of Heart' make him unable to suspect 'any body without the strongest Proofs' (p. 129; p. 158). He cannot but agree with Camilla when she asserts:

> I shall never loon on young People, who are apt to be suspicious, especially of their Friends, as Persons that can have no real Goodness in them […] I cannot help imputing it more to the Badness of their Hearts, than the Goodness of their Heads. (p. 129)

Even when taken advantage of, David's care ethical orientation, that is his conceptualisation of self as based on interpersonal relatedness and his prioritisation of values such as trust and openness, makes him unable to hate those who did him wrong (Bowden 1997, p. 17). As the narrator points out, 'Hatred and Indignation found in David's Breast a barren Soil, in which they could take no Root' (p. 363). Paradoxically, it is Ratcliff who ends up hating David, while David experiences a sense of melancholy:

> Genuine Love can never be so entirely extinguished, but that some Sparks of it will remain, and the Idea of Mr. *Ratcliff*'s treacherous Behaviour would sometimes force its Way into *David*'s Mind; when he could not help admitting a transitory melancholy Reflection at such an additional Instance of Deceit.
>
> But on the contrary, whenever the least Image of *David*, or his Misfortunes, arose in the Mind of Mr. *Ratcliff*, it constantly produced the highest Indignation; an Indignation that encreased on every Consideration: for Hatred formed in the manner Mr. *Ratcliff*'s was, is more unconquerable than all the Monsters the Poets feign to have been overcome by Hercules. (p. 363)

According to Pohl (2008, p. 221), 'the extension of sympathy and benevolence to fellow men beyond family and household is the foundation of Sarah Scott's and Sarah Fielding's utopian discourse' (Pohl 2008, p. 221). David's generosity extends beyond the immediate family unit as he continues to assist others despite his reduced material circumstances:

> Nay, *David* had yet the Power of pursuing, in some degree, his favourite Pleasure, of relieving his distressed Fellow-creatures, and of preventing any of his Neighbourhood from suffering extreme Indigence. (p. 294)

His actions thus run counter to Mrs Orgueil's belief that 'Charity begins at Home, and that it is incumbent on every Man to take Care of his own, and not ruin himself and his Family for the sake of a romantic Friendship' (p. 377). According to Janet Todd (1986, p. 96), in *David Simple* the community of friends is 'in flight from the world'. Yet, in his desire for nurturing relationships, David appears too willing to embrace strangers as friends. Hussey (2009, p. 231) observes how 'David cannot keep from feeling and from desiring a friend […] His desire for a friend forces him to admit people into his life he would rather not'. From the onset, David is presented as a relational being whose sense of self is realised in the sphere of affective bonds. As Brugerè (2019, p. 67) points out, '[…] the ethics of care promotes the reality of an embodied self, defined through its relational practices'. By subscribing to care ethics' imperative to respond to need, David cannot forsake sociality.

David's refusal to subscribe to the idea of 'individuality stripped bare of its relationship with and need for others' and his understanding of interpersonal connections as defined by mutual obligations and responsibility result in his decision to renew the friendship with Orgueil (Benjamin 2013). Initial aversion 'to the Thought of renewing an Acquaintance with a Man, of whose Principles he had so just an Abhorrence' gives way to the hope that '*Orgueil* might not be so bad a Man as he had been represented' (p. 297). Orgueil's 'Civility and obliging Behaviour' is seen as an opportunity to establish a mutually beneficial friendship, and the group of friends cannot avoid being drawn into the relationship:

> Mr. *Orgueil* seemed very assiduous to renew their former Friendship; and, by his particular Civility and obliging Behaviour to the old Gentleman, who was greatly pleased with his polite Address, he, in a manner, before they were aware, drew them into a much greater Intimacy than they at first intended.
>
> This Intimacy was now almost unavoidably encreased by Mrs. *Orgueil*'s being brought to-bed of a Daughter, whom she called *Henrietta-Cassandra*; and, during her lying-in, she affected such a Fondness for *Cynthia* and *Camilla*, that she would hardly ever be without the Company of one, if not of both; and, as it was the Characteristic of this Society, to suffer an Inconvenience themselves, rather than to decline giving Pleasure to those, for whom they professed an Esteem, they could not refuse staying with Mrs. *Orgueil*, at all such times as their Convenience would possibly admit, till she was again able to go abroad. (p. 298)

Far from being self-enclosed, the community's care ethics' values of other-centredness, trust, and attentiveness make it a welcoming space for anyone who desires to join it. As Tronto (1995, p. 145) points out, 'care requires that humans pay attention to one another, take responsibility of one another'. In such a utopian space attention and affection are given indiscriminately, for better and for worse.

The community's tendency to think and act 'other-wise' is productive of mutually nurturing social attachments when it is met with recognition and reciprocation, as in the case of the Dunsters who take David's family in after their house is destroyed by fire (Cantillon and Lynch 2017, p. 181). However, tragedy ensues when the community's alternative vision 'of the foundation of human society derived from nurturance, caring attachment, and mutual interestedness' has to confront individualistic and competitive characters who act in accordance with an 'instrumental conception of social relationships' (Friedman 1989, p. 276). While the community refuses to engage with the exploitative practices of the capitalist system, no walls are erected, so that every character can penetrate the utopian space with little to no struggle. The misalignment between the Ratcliffs and the Orgueils' 'acquisitive fantasies' and the community's relational conception of human autonomy results inevitably in the destruction of the latter (Hussey 2009, p. 223).

David's way of being that prioritises interdependence and 'social togetherness' allows him to connect with like-minded individuals in non-oppressive and cooperative ways. Yet, it also exposes him and his friends to the abuses of a competitive system designed to marginalise those who refuse to compete for a place at the 'Top of the Pinnacle' (pp. 231-232). The community's 'relationship-oriented values' exist in perpetual tension with 'a model of autonomy that conceives the self as free and independent, bound only by those rules one has given himself' (Keller 1997, pp. 154-156). Orgueil is the quintessential autonomous agent who relies on his 'Rule of Rectitude' to the exclusion of affect (p. 339; Keller 1997, p. 154). As he tells David,

> I look upon Compassion, Sir, to be a very great Weakness; I have no Superstition to fright me into my Duty, but I do what I think just by all the World, for the real Love of Rectitude is the Motive of all my Actions. If I could be moved by a Compassion in my Temper to relieve another, the Merit of it would be entirely lost, because it would be done chiefly to please myself […] (p. 65)

In *Volume the Last*, the narrator explicitly opposes Orgueil's uncaring love of rectitude that 'makes no Allowance for any Frailties' and David's attunement to his loved ones' needs based on a sense of responsibility and care:

> Perhaps the essential Difference between Mr. *Orgueil* and *David* did not so much arise from their differing in Judgments, as from the Disagreement of their Inclinations; for whenever *David* thought of worldly Affairs, or talked to Mr. *Orgueil* of them, his Childrens and his *Camilla*'s Wants, were present to his Mind; his Wishes were all centered in their Relief, and his Thoughts fixed on the most probable Method for that Purpose: whilst, on the contrary, Mr. *Orgueil*'s Wishes were all centered in keeping up to his Rule of Rectitude, in giving such Advice as might preserve and increase his Admiration of his own Wisdom, and still retain the Man he called his Friend in Slavery and Dependance. No Wonder, then, that two Men, setting out with such opposite Views, should never join in their Opinions. (p. 338)

By comparing David's and Orgueil's 'inclinations' the novel draws attention to two antithetical views of vulnerability that these characters embody. David and his friends position openness and vulnerability toward the other, understood as a state of mutual interdependence that requires attending to others in their needfulness, at the centre of their relational ethics (Petherbridge 2016, p. 10). To them vulnerability calls for an ethical response to care for others, which the narrator defines as 'the Power of affording some friendly Protection to one of their Species' (p. 369). Sandra Laugier (2016, p. 212) observes how 'the perspective of care' calls attention to the 'general situation of dependence […]; it develops an analysis of social relations organized around dependence and vulnerability'. It is worth noting that David's caring attitude, based on responsibility to attend and respond to dependency, bears religious overtones. Recognition of human dependency as 'leaning on another' is premised on the acknowledgment of 'Dependence on his Maker' (p. 310; p. 391; Miller 2020, p. 3)

Yet, vulnerability is a double-edged sword; it implies exposure to nurturance and love, but also to harm and exploitation. As Petherbridge (2016, p. 3) points out, 'vulnerability is characterized by ambivalence in the sense that it designates neither positive nor negative states of being or forms of relationality but contains the capacity for either or both'. The community's utopian vision informed by care cannot find reciprocation in characters whose subjectivity is based on the 'ideal of separation and denial of dependency' (Benjamin 2013). As Tronto (1993, p. 134) points out, 'caring is by its very nature a challenge to the notion that individuals are entirely autonomous and self-supporting'. When Spatter reveals Orgueil's true nature, David exclaims:

> I never was so startled (continued he) in my Life, as at his saying, he looked upon Compassion as a Weakness. Is it possible that the most amiable Quality human Nature can be possessed of, should be treated with Contempt by a Man of his Understanding! Or is it all delusion, and am I as much deceived in his *Sense* as in his *Goodness*! For surely nothing but the greatest Folly

could make *a Creature, who must every day, nay, every hour in the day, be conscious of a thousand Failings, and feel a thousand Infirmities, fancy himself a Deity, and contemplate his own Perfections*. (p. 67) (emphasis added)

Orgueil represents 'a form of masculinity that fetishizes and fantasizes invulnerability' (Hamington 2021, p. 6). He views affective bonds as constraining chains, and, even on his deathbed, he prides himself on his 'Self-dependance' (p. 391). As the narrator notes, 'Mr. *Orgueil* was too much attached to the Thoughts of his own Dignity, and too full of Self-admiration, to pay much Regard to any other Attachment whatever' (p. 392). As an atomised, independent self, unencumbered by nurturing intersubjective relations, Orgueil cannot but deride David's 'needful openness to others' (Petherbridge 2016, p. 10):

Mr. *Orgueil* was above being pitied himself, but was rather advising David how to bear the Loss of his *Camilla* […] Mr. *Orgueil* also constantly entertained him with a Discourse on the Beauty of human Reason, and the Infallibility of the Rule of Rectitude, to support a Man through all Misfortunes: adding, that it was below the Dignity of human Nature, and a Shame for a Man to be conquered by any Affliction whatever. But *David* told him, that if he had no other Comfort in his Heart, but what could arise from the admiring the Beauties of human Reason, exulting in the Dignity of his Nature, and worshipping the Strength of his own Wisdom, he would weep at the Grave of his *Camilla*, till, like Niobe, he was dissolved into Tears. (p. 391)

Friedman (1993) has highlighted the dangers of embracing a care ethical stance in abusive dynamics of power imbalance. Her analysis is concerned with women's position in patriarchal society, but it can be applied to the feminised hero of *David Simple* too. She claims that 'appearing to endorse the overridingness of the moral duty to care, nurture, and maintain relationship with anyone whom one comes into intimate contact', a care-centred approach can result in the inability to 'resist violence by others' (Friedman 1993, p. 152). In *Volume the Last*, David finds himself confronting uncaring characters, unwavering until the end in his belief that, as he never failed to oblige others, others will oblige him (Bree 1996, pp. 82-83):

But he was entangled in the Snare of his Love for others, and his Inclination blinded his Judgement, till he in a manner forced himself to fancy he believed *Ratcliff* and *Orgueil* would be his Friends, against that almost infallible Proof to the contrary, that the true Words of Kindness never fell from their Lips. (p. 327)

Volume the Last provides a commentary on David's hopeful 'inclination' to regard human connections as a source of mutual support by drawing attention to structural injustices that eventually lead to the dissolution of the utopian community. As Bree (1996, p. 83) observes,

> Fielding's target, in fact, in *Volume the Last*, is nothing less than the structure of society itself – a society in which many members can only prosper through a system of patronage and dependence but in which true benevolence is replaced by selfishness and consequent cruelty to others.

The care-centred ethical code adopted by the community causes its undoing not because of internal shortcomings, but, rather, because it exists within the capitalist logic of individualism and fierce competition that prevents mutually cooperative relations from being achieved. The values that the group of friends epitomise, such as cooperation and mutual assistance, cannot exist in a social order upheld by the 'fantasy of omnipotence' (Benjamin 2013). By casting David into poverty, the novel thus sheds light on the inherent carelessness of the capitalist system of social relations. David's economic precarity is the result of 'capitalist forms of individualism, competition, and accumulation' that disregard moral responsibility to respond to others (Wood 2013). Ratcliff, Orgueil, and Mrs Orgueil, all secure their social standing by disenfranchising David and his family. As Woodward (1992, p. 67) points out, 'worldly men use their skill at law and finance to take advantage of David and his friends, finally rendering them destitute'.

The novel also illustrates how the lack of material resources has a direct impact on the ability to build affective relations as 'sites of love, care, and solidarity' (Lynch 2022, p. 110). As Kathleen Lynch (2022, p. 110) points out, 'affective inequality is especially exacerbated by economic inequalities […] leading to anxieties and insecurities'. No longer able to take care of his family, David has no other option but to appeal to the very characters who caused his financial precarity. He is thus drawn into oppressive dynamics of abject dependence in which the ones who own material resources dictate community's survival:

> as slight as was his Support by the Hopes of Mr. *Ratcliff*'s Friendship, yet he dared not let go his Hold, being then sure of falling to the Ground, and pulling with him his beloved Camilla, and their common Care, their tender Infants. (p. 326)

Financial distress negatively impacts David's judgement, as 'Fears and Apprehensions of [his] Friends Miseries, and ardent Wishes for their Happiness' plunge him into a state of constant worrying (p. 336). As the narrator observes, 'his Mind was so far weakened and conquered by the Distress of his Family, that he could in some Measure be imposed on by

the Appearance of friendly Colours' (p. 327). Yet, despite the acknowledgement that 'a life of independence and equality requires money', the novel's uneasiness towards the symbolic meaning of money as a tool of power that can be easily abused precludes the possibility of a financial reward or a reverse of fortune that would rescue the community from distress (Stewart 2010, p. 110).

The structural injustices of an economy of scarcity in which the privileged exist and prosper at the expense of the subjected and the disadvantaged prove fatal to the community. Its utopian dream of a generous world where there is no such thing as property and where people are willing 'to part with what they think they have a right to, only for the pleasure of helping others' is perceived as a quixotic project in a social order in which 'the sustenance of the needy depends on the vainglorious, whimsical passions of the rich' (p. 173; Kim 2010, p. 498). David's dependency and reliance on others is considered a weakness. Ironically, Ratcliff and Orgueil, whose predatory actions, and the subsequent withdrawal of support, cause David's precarity, are the ones who condemn David for his poverty and unjudicial choices. Orgueil urges David to follow Ratcliff's advice and continue the lawsuit, claiming that

> a Man of his peculiar way of thinking, ought always, in worldly Affairs, to be directed by Men of Prudence and Experience; hinting, at the same time, how liable he had been, in the former part of his Life, to be imposed on and deceived. (p. 301)

The Orgueils and the Ratcliffs represent 'the passive violences of letting people die through neglect and indifference' (Lynch 2022, pp. 9-10). David, in their opinion, deserves his misery because he blindly chooses to embrace openness in a social order predicated upon 'fierce competition for possession and status' (Hussey 2009, p. 222). In a letter to David, Ratcliff claims that his 'reduced Circumstances […] are too much the Effects of [his] own Imprudence, to deserve any Compassion' (p. 358).

Volume the Last thus sheds light on the coercive quality of the capitalist system. David has to act in certain ways to retain his position within the system, the loss of which results in deprivation and dissolution of the utopian household. It is noteworthy that the community starts falling apart when it is pulled back into the capitalist logic of profit making, that is when Valentine is offered a job on a plantation in Jamaica. The chapter's title is telling: 'A Distress arising from the Prospect of an Advancement in Fortune' (p. 311). Separated from each other, the friends are 'forced into unwanted patterns of valuations and subjections' that aim to delegitimise their attempts at other ways of living, thus preserving inequalities of privilege and power (Johns 2003, p. 86). The fact that the acceptance of the job leads to

Valentine's death, while Cynthia falls victim to a rich lawyer's abuse of power, seems to suggest that a social order premised on hierarchical divisions and an unequitable distribution of wealth and power cannot constitute a workable, life-sustaining relational ethic. As Schellenberg (1996, p. 121) points out, 'the experience of Cynthia and Valentine in Jamaica serves not as an escape to a newer, more sociable world […] but rather as proof that social evil is everywhere the same'.

The community's attempt to realise 'an economy of plenitude' is undermined by individual representatives of the capitalist system in which 'recognition and care for others' needs is impossible' (Benjamin 2013; Stern 2012, pp. 623-624). As noted earlier, characters such as Mr Nichols and Mr and Mrs Orgueil, systematically trivialise and misrepresent the community's practices and values, thus hindering its ability to sustain an alternative space where other social relations can be developed.

Progressively, hope gives way to despair, and the interpersonal relationships David so highly valued as a potential source of happiness become cumbersome in a fundamentally antagonistic and uncaring environment that, instead of protecting the vulnerable, responds to vulnerability with scorn or further abuse. The structural relations of domination, hostile to networks of mutual support, expose the utopian community to violence, injury, and death. The cruelty of such an uncaring social context is deepened by the fact that most of its victims are highly vulnerable subjects, such as Camilla's and Cynthia's children (Oliver 2020, p. 112). If caring 'involves meeting needs', the dominant social order negates the ability to do so (Tronto 1993, p. 116). As a consequence, David's attentiveness to the needs of others becomes a source of mental anguish, his heart tormented by the suffering of his loved ones:

> I thought myself at home in this World, and attached my Heart to the Enjoyment of it, as strongly, though in a different Way, as does the Miser or Ambitious – but I found, even in my Days of Happiness, that, in obtaining my Wishes, I had multiplied my Cares; for, in the Persons of my Friends, I felt, at once, several Head−achs, and every other Infirmity of Body, and Affliction of Mind, to which human Nature is incident: Yet, as I felt, too, all their Pleasures, whilst they were checquered, I was well pleased; *but when Poverty broke in upon us, I found, that to bear the Poverty of many, was almost insupportable. – Then, indeed, my Mind began to be seized with Fear – I was no longer my former Self – Pictures of the Distress of my Family began to succeed each other in my Mind, and Terror and Timidity conquered my better Judgment.* The Necessity I found for a Friend, made me admit, as such, Persons more properly called Persecutors; and my staggering Mind catched hold of every rotten Plank, in Hopes of a Support. Thus my fancied Friends became my Plagues, and my real ones, by their Sufferings, tore up my Heart by the Roots, and frightened me into the bearing the insolent Persecutions of

> the others – I found my Mind in such Chains as are much worse than any Slavery of the Body […] (pp. 401-402) (emphasis added)

In a highly competitive and individualistic social framework, vulnerability is equated with 'susceptibility to harm' (Miller 2020, p. 3). Instead of 'tender Care', it generates 'dreadful Tyranny' (p. 322).

Death becomes a welcome refuge from the injury of uncaring characters. When Peter dies, David is comforted by the fact that 'his Son had escaped all Possibility of having his young Mind corrupted by being formed under' Ratcliff's authority (p. 363). Likewise, the narrator comments on Camilla's death claiming that 'she was out of the Reach of feeling the Effects of Hardness of Heart' (p. 386). Ultimately, worldly hope that initiated David's search for a small community of friends is replaced by otherworldly 'Christian hope' and 'patient Resignation' (p. 387). Death becomes the only friend David longs to be reunited with (Oliver 2020, p. 82). Like Job, he 'loses interest in the world and his own existence', and his earthly connections (his friend Cynthia and his daughter Camilla) no longer bring him comfort and strength to struggle on (Halbertal 2015, p. 40). Separation (in death) from the loved ones is no longer experienced with anguish, but rather with calm resignation. After entrusting the responsibility to care for Camilla to Cynthia, he dies.

By welcoming death David abandons the care ethical imperative to help and attend to others. Interpersonal relatedness is no longer perceived as offering liberating possibilities but becomes a source of disappointment and suffering in uncaring surroundings in which human connections assume injurious forms of domination and exploitation. As Reeves (2020, p. 136) points out, in *Volume the Last* 'David can only look to heaven for happiness, and an "attachment" to other human beings […] is no longer commensurate with an attachment to God'. Rendered powerless by characters who focus solely on 'gaining profit regardless of others', David feels frustrated by his inability to provide for and protect his loved ones (Schaffer 2021, p. 135). His disillusionment with the dream of mutually caring social relations points towards the necessity to recentre care as a public issue that cannot be constrained to the private domain. As Johns (2003, p. 184) observes, Fielding's 'persistent concern with the question of coexistence reveals its importance to her; the apparently removed community is, by the logic of reproductive utopianism, intended to affect the world at large'. Likewise, Woodward (1992, p. 78) argues that 'through failure of her utopian community, Fielding speaks to the need for a restructuring of society'.

Volume the Last can be read as a tragedy of the normative that silences the alternative. However, while David's death may indicate the loss of *his* ability to envisage a life outside

of hierarchical structures of capitalism, radical imagination, understood as shared visions of alternative human relationships, lives on in the female characters of Cynthia and young Camilla who remain future oriented. Kathleen Oliver (2020, pp. 98-99) notes how, in the novel, female characters are more resilient than their male counterparts. Their resilience makes them also more effective "repositories" of utopian dreams. Unlike David, who is immobilised by grief, Cynthia's feelings of care and concern towards her friends prompt her to travel to Bath in hopes that a kind family can become, for her and Camilla, a space of help, support, and enjoyment. The tone is optimistic:

> *Cynthia* was the farthest in the World from being of a bold or intruding Disposition; and nothing but the Necessity of her Friends could have urged her on to take a Step which she feared she had not Acquaintance enough with that Gentleman to entitle her to. When *Valentine* died, it was reported that *Cynthia* also was dead, and therefore on her Arrival at his Seat, when she sent in her Name, they were greatly surprized to hear it. But the Reception she met with from all the Family, would have paid her for the Passage of Death itself. *It was indeed rising again to Felicity from those bitter Sensations to which she had been long accustomed. It inspired her with a Joy that she could hardly contain*, without venting it in Acknowledgments that might give Offence. The Words of Kindness are more healing to a drooping Heart, than Balm or Honey: and if ever Gratitude fully possessed the human Breast, it might at that Instant be said to possess the Breast of *Cynthia*. (p. 399) (emphasis added)

While David imagines the future as a constant replication of the present and flees from such a prospect, Cynthia displays a future thinking informed by an optimistic hope that a care-centric framework for understanding social interconnectedness as a source of concern and generosity can still be achieved. Cynthia's survival is not premised on her conforming to the divisive rules of the market but, rather, on her ability to preserve the hope in alternative ways of living and relating, as she seeks new friends with whom she could 'create common imaginaries of the way the world might be' (Haiven and Khasnabish 2010, p. xviii). The novel's open-endedness leaves the readers suspended between two paths, that of hope and disillusionment. Will the 'kind Promise, that [Cynthia] and her Niece Camilla should be taken Care of' draw the two women back into oppressive dynamics of capitalism or will it result in 'new modes of being […] together' beyond the 'selfish and possessive ethic of wealth'? (p. 399; Haiven and Khasnabish 2010, p. xxv; Wood 2013, p. 127; Woodward 1992, p. 77). Ultimately, the readers are left to face the important task of deciding whether to keep pursuing or to abandon the glimpses of utopian hope the two novels have sparked off.

CONCLUSION

Fielding's vision of social existence as premised on mutuality and nurturance permeates her works (Johns 2003, p. 67; Johnson 1994, p. 31). In the Preface to *The Governess* (1749), she states that 'Love and Affection for each other make the Happiness of all Societies; and therefore Love and Affection […] are what we should chiefly encourage and cherish in our Minds' (Ward 2005, p. 48). Such a statement can be read as either personal advice that 'targets not matters of state, but states of mind' or as an ethical and political project that aims at reimagining society (Johnson 2017, p. 7). By examining Sarah Fielding's two novels, *The Adventures of David Simpl*e and *The Adventures of David Simple, Volume the Last*, through the lens of care ethics and radical imagination, this thesis has attempted to lend validity to the latter perspective.

Sensible of the tensions of the eighteenth-century emerging commercial culture, the novels stage a bankruptcy of cooperative social ties while foregrounding virtues of friendship, compassion, and love. It has been here argued that these novels' chief theme is that of love/care understood not merely as a private sentiment that binds two people together but rather as a praxis that strives to undermine the private/public divide by conceptualising the social realm as an 'intersubjective space' (Benjamin 2013). Translated through the ethical model of care, the quest for friendship that characterises *David Simple* functions as a political statement that reclaims the centrality of the 'affective care domain of life' (Lynch 2022, p. 4).

The exploration of the care-centred ideals in *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* has been carried out by focusing on the communitarian project these narratives present. Conceived against the backdrop of a social order dominated by 'scenes of coldheartedness' and pursuit of power, the novels' communal vision stems from the desire to enact alternative ways of relating that stress human relationality (Ahern 2007, p. 128). As Friedman (1989, p. 277) notes, the conception of the individual 'as constituted by its social relationships and communal ties' is a specifically communitarian view.

It has been stressed how the community's ability to build alternative relationship networks is primarily an imaginative and, therefore, utopian process that redefines the meaning of sociability within an acquisitive commercial world. As a utopian enterprise, the community is a space where practices of thinking otherwise and desiring that things be otherwise take place (Ingram 2016, p. xx). What motivates the characters to create a community of mutuality is the dissatisfaction with interpersonal relationships perverted by the supreme value of money, which 'breeds domination and subjection' (Johns 2003, p. 67).

Indeed, the problematic equation of money with power (and its abuse) is addressed by redistributing material resources.

It has also been shown how the novels' care ethical stance epitomised by the utopian community denies dreams of power realised at the expense of others. By advocating the essential relationality and interconnectedness of human beings, the members of the community embrace a sense of self that demands to feel responsible for the well-being of others. Because all are interdependent, all have the moral obligation to relieve those in need or to reduce another's suffering. Such an other-centred outlook clashes with the pervasive logic of competitiveness that characterises the market society presented in the novels and functions as a critique of the purely instrumental way of viewing human relations. It has been noted here how the ideals of love and care upheld by the group of friends challenge an uncaring social system premised on oppression and exploitation. Characters who derive their sense of being from the domination of others are presented as atomised agents who are unable, because of their constant suspicion and fear of being cheated, to build meaningful and nurturing connections.

Yet, it is these aggressively acquisitive characters that seem to triumph at the end. The quixotism associated with David's quest for friendship and the ridicule with which his desire for caring relationships is met, indicate the difficulty with which the communitarian project can be sustained in a social order that persistently devalues care-centred attitudes. It has been the argument of this thesis that the community's dissolution in *Volume the Last* does not indicate the novels' ineffectual utopian vision; instead, it calls for a wider engagement in utopian imagining (Johns 2003, p. 86; p. 160). The success of the utopian community should not be reduced to its survival. As Sara Ahmed (2010, p. 163) aptly observes, 'the utopian form might not make the alternative possible, but it aims to make impossible the belief that there is no alternative'. The community's importance lies in its ability to create 'some measure of happiness', no matter how fleeting or fragile (Johnson 2017, p. 13). By allowing individual representatives of the acquisitive commercial ideology to undermine the community's project of establishing more equitable ways of living, it is suggested that care ethical values of openness, interdependency, and responsiveness cannot be envisaged as private matters but should inform the entire structure of human social relations, instead. As Tompkins (1986, p. 146) has pointed out, 'the enterprise of sentimental fiction […] is anything but domestic, in the sense of being limited to purely personal concerns'.

The community's reintegration into society is impossible if society itself is not transformed. By making David 'watch helplessly […] his loved ones suffer and die', *Volume the Last* indicts the injustices of a social order that stigmatises human vulnerability and other-regarding behaviour and demands the universalisation of the ethical imperative to care for others as a way to achieve fairer social system (Fielding [1749] 2005, p. 23). In order to become truly viable, the utopian vision has to be shared by all, readers included. As Johnson (2017, p. 11) notes, 'in the background of her story, the reader discovers an outline of a better world […] This better world is political to the degree that it posits a path for reform and causes the reader to question the values of those with power'. Johnson is commenting on Fielding's fictionalised biography of Anna Boleyn. However, his observation can also be applied to *David Simple* and *Volume the Last*.

The conceptualisation of the community in terms of bonds of friendship is relevant to the novels' ethical project of imagining and building non-oppressive forms of relationality premised on collective care. This thesis has attempted to promote an understanding of the utopian group as an 'intentional community' that moves beyond the constraints of biological ties of the restricted nuclear family (Sargent 1994, pp. 14-15). *David Simple*'s ending in marriage and the heterosocial nature of the community should not obscure the way in which it is the voluntariness of friendship that brings the characters together. In the two novels, true friendship functions as a utopian state that fosters mutual aid and mutual affection. As a consequence, the community has been interpreted here as the embodiment of the 'ethics of friendship', due to its desire to extend to the public sphere the ideals of voluntariness, mutuality, and trust that are commonly associated with friendship (Knight 2017).

The articulation of a care-centred societal vision in *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* is intertwined with the novels' focus on gender identity and the relations between the two sexes. It has been here argued that Fielding's ability to portray a coed, heterosexual community instead of resorting to a women-only separatist utopia depends on the reconceptualization of manhood in terms of care ethics. The decision to present a sentimental hero who progressively becomes feminised and assumes a marginal position alongside other female characters is consistent with the novels' care-ethical project. Not only does David embody a form of masculinity that prioritises nurturance and compassion, but he also renounces his position of power as a man with material resources in patriarchal capitalism by endorsing communal sharing and refusing to use his privileges for his personal benefit, especially in his relationship with female characters.

The issue of power imbalance in heterosexual relationships is therefore addressed by attempting to present a form of horizontal sharing in which men are no longer patriarchal rulers but adopt, instead, a partnership model of manhood that is relationally oriented and receptive to the struggles of women in the patriarchal order (such as financial dependence) (Johns 2003, p. 81; Almassi 2022, pp. 45-46). In the two novels, utopian manhood is feminised: it is purged from threatening forms of sexual desires and acquires features associated with women, such as nurturance and tenderness. As Sara Gadeken (1999, p. 526) observes, 'Fielding contends that certain virtues that the world calls "feminine" are actually universal and desirable human values that men have deliberately and wrongly attributed to women only'.

The novels' emphasis on the necessity to make values of care an integral part of manhood in order to achieve non-oppressive forms of heterosociality is somewhat reminiscent of bell hook's vision of feminist masculinity as constituted by reciprocity, interdependence, and mutuality (Almassi 2022, p. 4). In her book *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, bell hooks (2004, p. 109) articulates a non-dominating, feminist masculinity that 'rather than defining strength as "power over", […] defines strength as one's capacity to be responsible for self and others'. This strength, she argues, 'is a trait males and females need to possess'. In the same manner, the novels appear to advocate a model of the self, both male and female, that rejects the capacity to hold power over others. The condemnation of harmful behaviour centred on pride, envy, and the desire to be on top involves women, too (Bree 1996, p. 85). Female characters who appropriate the attributes of 'a male world of selfish capitalism' are presented as cruel and exploitative (Ahern 2007, p. 127). It is thus suggested that 'it would be a backward step should women aspire to equal men in the exercise of those vices which are the foundation of their political power' (Green 2014, p. 149). Conversely, utopian gender relations are envisioned as free from struggles for power. Based on mutuality and reciprocity, they are ideally non-hierarchical.

To twenty-first-century readers, the novels' view of femininity shaped by the moral paradigm of care may appear suspiciously constricting rather than liberatory. The novels' idealisation of the moral person as being helpful and 'fulfilling one's obligations and responsibilities towards others' seems to reinforce eighteenth-century expectations of female docility (Bree 1996, p. 114, p. 120; Brugère 2019, p. 10). For instance, Johnson (2017, pp. 14-15) argues that Fielding's 'support of the traditionally feminine virtue of obedience and selflessness complicates her understanding of gender'.

Undoubtedly, fictional representations of powerful women who are successful in becoming 'the guardians of the status quo' are more appealing than portrayals of female characters who, with their emphasis on care for others, often assume a self-sacrificial attitude (Relf 1991, p. 141). Dreams of power and invulnerability are seductive, especially to those who have always been vulnerable to threats of violence (such as women). Thus, in approaching Fielding's novel *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (1757), the modern readers, versed in popular forms of female-villain narratives in which women 'are no longer being portrayed as the helpless victims, but rather as the masterminds behind some of the most sinister plots', are far more likely to relate to the cunning and ambitious Cleopatra rather than to the loving Octavia (Robb 2023).

However, as this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, *David Simple* and its sequel *Volume the Last* resist the straightforward celebration of 'conservative domestic ideology' by presenting the ethical model of care as a domain of both genders (Ahern 2007, p. 31). Harshly criticising the unjustness of a social order that thrives on hierarchical divisions and inequitable distribution of resources, these narratives display the desire for a new form of caring masculinity that can renounce the fantasy of dominance and power. Only if caring practices are embraced both by men and women can non-oppressive forms of relationality flourish. In such heterosocial relationships, women would no longer be an exploitable, frail other. Vulnerability, rather than a weakness associated with femininity, would be acknowledged as a human state of interdependence that requires mutual attending and attention to other individuals. Fielding seems to suggest that an ideal model of womanhood should refuse the violent ethics of competition and individualism imposed by patriarchal power (Brugère 2019, p. 9). It should be demanded, instead, that society and men commit to building a care-centric, relational understanding of the self and the public sphere (Lynch 2022, p. 2). As Brugère (2019, p. 6) notes,

> the theories of care demand a new framework, which does not spontaneously coincide with the traditional divisions between the private and the public realms, nor with the (often patriarchal) society in which this division is grounded.

The novels' revolutionary societal vision where 'patterns of care can spread thanks to each individual's memories of the relationships in which they have been involved' is premised on the recognition that care, understood as economic and affective justice, should inform all human existence (Brugère 2019, p. 13).

While it has been the purpose of this work to uncover the subversive potentialities of the novels analysed here, it is important to take a cautious approach towards the

disruptiveness of these narratives. As already stated, the novels are deeply ambivalent. Conservative impulses intermingle with more radical ones. As Johnson (2017, pp.14-15) points out, 'ostensibly conservative undercurrents conflict with her [Fielding's] more radical critiques of private property and hyperindividuality, which further confuse her political views'. Thus, it is worth noting that, even though resources and affection circulate freely within the utopian community, women still bear primary responsibility for domestic work:

> *Cynthia* and *Camilla* embraced every Opportunity of directing their Family Affairs when they could not have the Pleasure of conversing with their Husbands. By the Order and Regularity of their Table, of their Servants, and every other domestic Concern, it might easily have been imagined, that their whole Time had been taken up in what is called the Business of Housewifry: yet *David*, *Valentine*, and the old Gentleman, enjoyed, so much of their amiable Conversation, that they could have almost imagined every thing to have been done by Enchantment, and that Household Management had never employed their Thoughts; for no Noise or Bustle was ever heard, but Peace, Calmness, Concord, and Harmony reigned throughout the House. (p. 293)

The care-ethical values of other-centeredness seem here to essentialise women's domestic role rather than undermine the patriarchal model. Within the private sphere of the home, female characters are happy to perform household labour because it promotes the 'common Welfare' of the family (p. 346). As the narrator observes, 'the Mother and the Wife turned every domestic Labour into a pleasing Enjoyment, by the Consideration that every Work of her Hands was for the Benefit of her indulgent Husband and his dear Infants' (p. 346). Such an idyllic depiction obscures the asymmetries of power based on gender. Shaped by the eighteenth-century sentimental discourse, Fielding's novels are inherently 'complex and ambivalent' (Ahern 2007, p. 126). As Joseph F. Bartolomeo (2007, p. 52) points out, *David Simple* is 'founded on self-contradictory dimensions of sensibility'.

The ending of *Volume the Last* is another source of ambiguity. The novel's conclusion is often interpreted as a tragedy in which David, likened to Job the mourner, succumbs to the cruelty and indifference of individuals who represent the exploitative structure of society (Bree 1996, p. 83). The publication of the gloomy sequel has also been attributed to Fielding's personal life, such as her increasing economic precarity and the death of her three sisters (Bartolomeo 2007, p. 40; Oliver 2020, p. 102). The tragic ending seems to adhere to the established critical perspective that 'the novel of sensibility is melancholic by nature' (Oliver 2020, p. 95). For Bartolomeo (2007, p. 40), 'the tragic sequel to a comic novel remains faithful to the sentimental ethos'. In the same vein, Schellenberg (1996, p.

129) argues that 'it is upon the final inner state of David Simple rather than upon the future of the community he established that the novel's conclusion rests'.

Yet, if one shifts the focus away from David and his death to the surviving members of the community, one notices how the text does not refuse all utopian hope. As Woodward (1992, p. 77) notes, 'Sarah Fielding's ending is ambiguous, its meaning dependent on where the reader places focus – the finality of David's death or the hope for new life in the persons of Cynthia and little Camilla'. Even though David's death signals a pessimistic negation of a better world (that is not otherworldly), he is not the sole bearer of utopian possibility. The concept of radical imagination this thesis has employed allows the readers to see how the ability to craft alternative ways of existing and relating is a shared project. The process of reimagining human relations in terms of care involves David, Cynthia, Camilla, Valentine, and their offspring.

The ambiguous ending of *Volume the Last* maintains 'the horizon of utopian possibility', which is distinctly feminocentric (Moylan 2000, p. 147). Cynthia and little Camilla, the only surviving members of the community, become the vessels of the utopian possibilities of not-yet, as their fate is projected into an unrepresented future beyond the pages of the story. The novels' 'utopia of love and friendship', far from being 'destined to remain nowhere', remains in the process of becoming (Bartolomeo 2007, p. 45; p. 52). Cynthia and little Camilla 'are neither one thing nor another, neither hope nor despair, but are open to possibility' (Woodward 1992, p. 77). As Jergenson (2020, p. 5) points out, if the conclusion of the narrative 'is open-ended enough to allow for the possibility that these alternatives may be realized in some unrepresented future, then it has a utopian dimension'.

Sarah Fielding should be considered a proto-feminist thinker in so far as her fiction, with its emphasis on 'an ethics of mutuality and interdependency', reveals an important intuition: that the experiences that characterise individual ethical lives must inform the whole social order (hooks 2000, p. 117; Collins 2015, p. 6). Once again, bell hooks is worth quoting since her feminist vision of gender relations, unshackled from the power to control and coerce, closely resembles the novels' caring stance:

> Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction (bell hooks 2000, p. x).

Underlying the decision to analyse *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* through the lens of care ethics and radical imagination is both the desire to show the subversive and feminist intent in Sarah Fielding's novels and the urge to stress how the practice of imagining

care-oriented possibilities is desperately needed in the context of contemporary capitalism. The quasi-dystopian version of a society ruled by the logic of money and personal profit depicted in the novels uncannily parallels the twenty-first-century reality of 'an inequitable, winner-take-all system of casino capitalism' (Shonkwiler and La Berge 2014, p. 6). The capitalist world system is generally accepted as a natural and inevitable order of things. Mark Fisher addressed the issue of the pervasive belief that capitalist order is the most realistic one in his 2009 book *Capitalist Realism*, in which he defines capitalist realism as 'the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it' (Fisher 2009, p. 2). Capitalism impoverishes our imagination by promoting a feeling of resignation (Shonkwiler and La Berge 2014, p. 16; p. 27). One must accept that 'neoliberalism can't be fought' and adapt to it to survive (Shonkwiler and La Berge 2014, p. 27). As Haiven (2014) points out, 'capitalism isn't just an economic system; it is a moral system, or, more accurately, an amoral system. It is a system for conscripting our imagination and our action'.

The novels analysed here, given their capacity to imagine experimental intimacies that challenge the capitalist logic of atomisation and competition, can (and should) be related to the pressing need to resist the reality capitalist realism continues to reinforce, i.e., that this is just the way things are and that there is no alternative. In their glimpses of a different way of living, premised on non-oppressive, care-centred practices that acknowledge human interdependency, *David Simple* and *Volume the Last* can show us that something important is missing in the way in which neoliberal capitalism defines human relations. They can help us expand our imaginative horizons and realise that

> broader fabric of cooperation, of which we are all both the products and the producers, remains the ultimate source of energy underneath society, and capitalism can be understood as a virus or pathology in this fabric, a self-replicating pattern or organism that seeks to transform each cell into a factory for its own endless, pointless reproduction. (Haiven 2014)

*Some of the listed works have been consulted in an epub format with no page numbers. For this reason, the in-text citations of these works do not provide page references.

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