NINETEENTH-CENTURY MAJOR LIVES AND LETTERS

POPULISM, GENDER, AND SYMPATHY IN THE ROMANTIC NOVEL

JAMES P. CARSON

Populism, Gender, and Sympathy in the Romantic Novel

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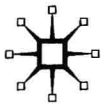

First published in 2010 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN: 978–0–230–62110–7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Carson, James Patrick, 1955–
Populism, gender, and sympathy in the romantic novel / James P. Carson.
p. cm. — (Nineteenth-century major lives and letters)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978–0–230–62110–7 (alk. paper)
1. English fiction—19th century—History and criticism. 2. Crowds in literature. 3. Riots in literature. 4. Populism in literature. 5. Women in literature. 6. Disguise in literature. 7. Sympathy in literature. I. Title.

PR868.C75C37 2010
823'.709355—dc22 2009032664

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: April 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

For Deborah

Acknowledgments

This book grew by extensive research and accumulation of materials over many years, during which time I have incurred many debts to libraries and funding agencies, as well as to teachers, colleagues, and friends. I am grateful to the staff who provided me access to the collections of the Huntington Library, the British Library, the University of Exeter library, and the Olin and Chalmers libraries at Kenyon College. Mr. Richard Ovenden, the Keeper of Special Collections and Associate Director of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, has kindly given me permission to quote a passage from the Abinger papers. Part of chapter 6 was originally published in *Iconoclastic Departures: Mary Shelley after* Frankenstein. *Essays in Honor of the Bicentenary of Mary Shelley's Birth,* ed. Syndy M. Conger, Frederick S. Frank, and Gregory O'Dea (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1997). I am grateful to the Associated University Presses for permission to republish a revised version of that essay. For financial support at various times I would like to thank the Killam Trusts, as well as the Huntington Library for an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation fellowship and a Huntington/British Academy fellowship. I am grateful to Kenyon College for sabbatical leaves and for continuing to attract the students who make Gambier, Ohio, a place to have a rewarding teaching career.

Among my mentors, G. A. Starr, Stephen Greenblatt, and Thomas Laqueur have been especially important in shaping my scholarly work. Many colleagues and friends have read parts of the manuscript and provided helpful comments and criticism, as well as encouragement. I would like to thank Jennifer Clarvoe, Syndy Conger, Frances Ferguson, Frederick S. Frank, Ivonne Garcia, George Haggerty, and John Richetti for their comments, conversation, and support. Participants in the faculty work-in-progress reading group (the Kenyon Seminars), when I presented a chapter in 2003 and more generally over the years, have provided advice and the pleasures of intellectual engagement. Jeff Bowman, Bianca Calabresi, Jane Cowles, Laurie Finke, Jerry Harp, Lewis Hyde, Bruce Kinzer, Jesse

Matz, and Linda Metzler deserve particular mention. My colleague Sarah Heidt, who read the entire manuscript, has been the best of readers for urging me to focus my arguments instead of following my inclination to interpret, annotate, and indiscriminately accumulate (in the manner of the crowd). For help in obtaining images, I owe a considerable debt to Eugene Dwyer, Julia Glynn, and Ethan Henderson. It has been a pleasure to work with Lee Norton, Brigitte Shull, and Rachel Tekula, my editors at Palgrave Macmillan, and in the production process with Rohini Krishnan at Newgen Imaging Systems. This book would never have been written without my intellectual and domestic partnership with Deborah Laycock, who has followed the book through all its incarnations, from vague ideas to several complete drafts. With Deborah, I have enjoyed the pleasure that Godwin's Casimir Fleetwood claims "may...be derived from reading with a woman of refined understanding," and it is to her that this book is dedicated.

Abbreviations

A	Maturin, Charles Robert. *The Albigenses, a Romance.*
CW	Godwin, William. *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams.* Ed. Maurice Hindle.
Fl	Godwin, William. *Fleetwood; or, The New Man of Feeling.*
FN	*The Fortunes of Nigel.* Ed. Frank Jordan.
FR	Maturin, Charles Robert. *Fatal Revenge.*
G&M	*Godwin & Mary: Letters of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.* Ed. Ralph M. Wardle.
HM	Scott, Walter. *The Heart of Mid-Lothian.* Ed. David Hewitt and Alison Lumsden.
J	Lewis, Matthew. *Journal of a West India Proprietor.* Ed. Judith Terry.
L	Shelley, Mary. *Lodore.* Ed. Lisa Vargo.
LN	Scott, Walter. *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte.*
M	Lewis, Matthew. *The Monk.* Ed. Howard Anderson.
MC	Maturin, Charles Robert. *The Milesian Chief.*
MW	Maturin, Charles Robert. *Melmoth the Wanderer.* Ed. Douglas Grant.
PJ	*An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.* Ed. Mark Philp. Vols. 3 and 4 of *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin.*
S	Maturin, Charles Robert. *Sermons.*
SL	Godwin, William. *St. Leon.* Ed. Pamela Clemit.
TMS	Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.* Ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie.
V	Shelley, Mary W. *Valperga.* London, 1823.
W	Maturin, Charles Robert. *Women; or, Pour et Contre.*

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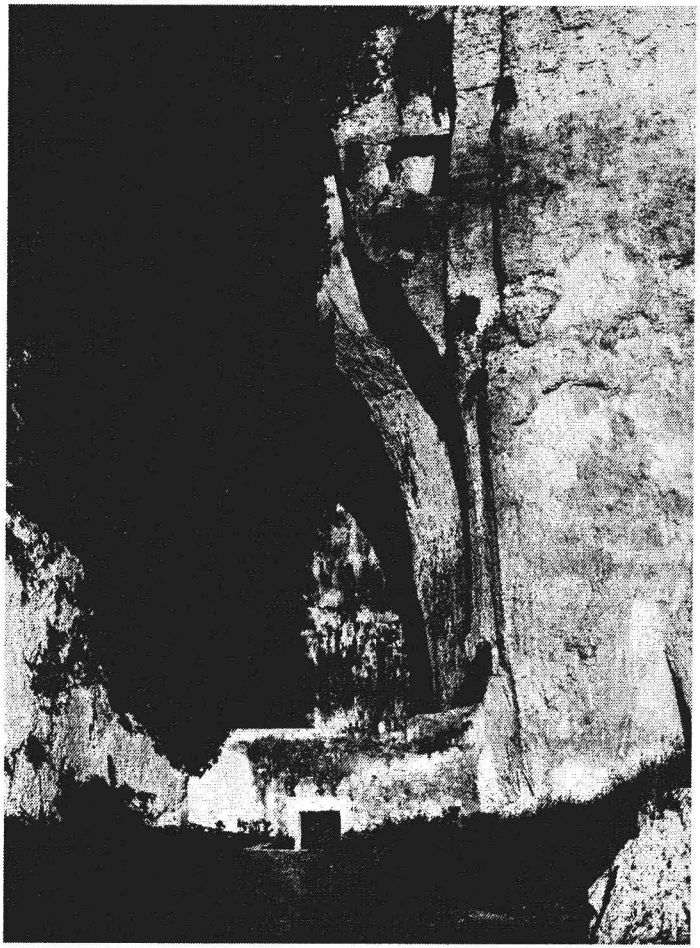

Figure 1 Giorgio Sommer (1834–1914). Photograph (c. 1875) of the cave called "The Ear of Dionysius" in Syracuse, Sicily (Kenyon College collection).

In his widely read travels through Sicily and Malta, first published in 1773, Patrick Brydone describes in detail, even down to measurements in feet, a curious ancient construction at Syracuse:

> The ear of Dionysius is no less a monument of the ingenuity and magnificence, than of the cruelty of that tyrant. It is a huge cavern cut out of the hard rock, exactly in the form of the human ear. The perpendicular height of it is about 80 feet, and the length of this enormous ear is not less than 250. The cavern was said to be so contrived, that every sound made in it, was collected and united into one point, as into a focus; this was called the Tympanum; and exactly opposite to it the tyrant had made a small hole, which communicated with a little apartment where he used to conceal himself. He applied his own ear to this hole, and is said to have heard distinctly every word that was spoken in the cavern below. This apartment was no sooner finished, and a proof of it made, than he put to death all the workmen that had been employed in it. He then confined all that he suspected were his enemies; and by overhearing their conversation, judged of their guilt, and condemned and acquitted accordingly. (1: 270–71)

Since Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish,* much has been written on the techniques of surveillance that were devised in the late eighteenth century; but most of these studies have concentrated on the enhancement of visibility and on metaphors of transparency. Brydone's fascination with the ear of Dionysius redirects attention specifically to the possibilities of eavesdropping for producing the knowledge that both serves despotic power and facilitates modern psychological influence.

Long before Jeremy Bentham imagined the Panopticon that would position the eye of an observer at the focal point of an ideal structure of confinement, the tyrant Dionysius constructed on the model of the human body, magnified to gigantic size, a prison in which voices would be contained, amplified, and brought to a focus at a point to be occupied by none but the king. The tyrant gains knowledge of his subjects' dispositions by creating a machine for situating inside his own sovereign head, as it were, the voices of those under suspicion. In the sentimental culture of the late eighteenth century, the privileging of the voice as the bearer of truth, in its connection with both consciousness and conscience, may well make the ear of Dionysius an equally important instrument of knowledge and power as the frequently discussed Panopticon.

That same culture, moreover, regarded the ruins of classical antiquity and medieval Europe not only as evidence for struggles between

despotism and liberty but also as occasions for aesthetic experience. When Richard Payne Knight visited Syracuse in 1777, he encountered the sublime in the ear of Dionysius: "These tremendous Palaces of Vengeance, on[c]e the Receptacles of crimes and misery...the gloomy Caves, where so many Wretches have linger'd away their Lives in horror and despair, now form the most pleasing and romantic retreats" (qtd. in Clarke and Penny 26). The dwarfing of humanity in a tremendous and gloomy cave, itself conceived of as the superhuman sense organ of an inhuman tyrant, creates a present aesthetic experience in the form of the congealed politics of the past. The pleasure in this romantic retreat is complicated by an awareness of suffering under tyranny, even if there is confidence in the progress of liberty.

The ear of Dionysius appears in two novels by one of the Romantic writers I discuss in this book. In *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), Walter Scott introduces this construction of a classical tyrant through comparison to a female collector of scandal and keeper of love secrets. In a motto that he attributes to a poem (or play?) entitled *The Conspiracy*, but which he himself probably wrote," Scott implicitly compares to the tyrant of Syracuse Dame Ursula Suddlechop, who seeks to manage the love-life of the heroine, Margaret Ramsay:

> I've call'd her like the ear of Dionysius;
> I mean that ear-form'd vault built o'er his dungeon,
> To catch the groans and discontented murmurs
> Of his poor bondsmen. (*FN* 92)[1]

Toward the end of the novel, Scott marks one more chapter by another epigraph about aural surveillance—this time by the Shakespearean tyrant, Richard III: "I'll play the eaves-dropper" (367). In this chapter, James I informs his councilors about how, "in imitation of...Dionysius," he has had his workmen "make a *lugg* up at the state-prison of the Tower...where we may sit and privily hear the discourse of such prisoners as are put up there for state offences, and so creep into the very secrets of our enemies" (368–69). In this lugg (Scottish dialect for "ear"), James debases himself by eavesdropping on the conversations of the imprisoned Nigel Olifaunt and his visitors, including Margaret Ramsay, who is disguised as a male page, a dress that she formerly "wore...at a Christmas mumming" (332). In *The Fortunes of Nigel,* then, Scott conjoins aural surveillance on the classical model of the ear of Dionysius with a heroine who unsexes herself through cross-dressing deriving from popular cultural sources. A decade later, in *Count Robert of Paris* (1831)—a

novel in which the hero's wife, Brenhilda, is one of Scott's numerous Amazonian women—the commander of the imperial guard at Constantinople, who is planning an insurrection against the Holy Roman Emperor, whispers to his fellow-conspirator: "Stone walls can hear.... Dionysius the tyrant, I have read, had an Ear which conveyed to him the secrets spoken within his state-prison at Syracuse" (Scott, *Count Robert* 180).

In this book, I study sentimental phonocentrism, the ideal of wordless communication that one book reviewer termed the *"moral telegraph"* (Rev. of *Melmoth* 307, emphasis in the original), and the exploitation for punishment or individuation of the intimate connection between sounds and the conscience or the heart. Romantic authors use similar strategies to come to terms with the mysterious capacity of sympathy and with the crowd: seeking metaphors in scientific discoveries and magical or deceptive practices on the margins of science, or seeking new technological modes of communication or representation. If the telegraph is a symbol for sympathetic communication from heart to heart, the same image will later illustrate for Charles Dickens how the resentments of a violent revolutionary woman are spread "with marvellous quickness, at a distance" when agile men act "as a telegraph between her and the crowd" (233).

My book takes its origin from an examination of the male use of female disguise in traditional popular protest. Such disguise was adopted for purposes of anonymity and in order to appeal to the carnivalesque motif of the "world-upside-down." Men in female dress in popular protest may even have intended to imply that they had been "unmanned" by unjust authorities and were thus in a liminal condition between the sexes until they reclaimed their rights. After discussing the explicit representation of a cross-dressed man in popular protest in Walter Scott's account of the Porteous Riots in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian,* I turn to the metaphor of cross-dressing in the use of the female narrative voice by male authors. I examine crowd scenes in novels by other authors as well: Matthew Lewis, Charles Maturin, William Godwin, and Mary Shelley. Owing to an inheritance from the genre of romance, these novelists have frequent recourse to the motif of transvestite disguise, as men dress in women's clothing and women in men's in order to evade prohibitions against their romantic attachments. Throughout, I show that these novels are ambivalent or self-contradictory in their support for, or criticism of, traditional gender roles, crowd violence, popular culture, and the reformation or remaking of individuals that depends in part on the inner voice. Ultimately, my attention to narrative voice leads me to consider the

question of voice itself, in several different contexts: the phonocentrism of sentimental literature in which Romantic fiction participates, the theoretical opposition of speech and writing, the inner voice of conscience, voices from the dead in Gothic fiction, the bourgeois appropriation of the "oral literature" of the folk, modifications of the voice in ventriloquism and the echo, the polyphonic play of voices in the dialogic genre of the novel, the sublime sound of the crowd, and the transformation of the democratic formula *vox populi vox dei* into a satire on female garrulousness and women's public speech in *vox feminae vox diaboli.*

In the novels I examine in this book, serious political reflections can be located in what have often been dismissed as cheap narrative effects. In the novels of the period, moreover, surveillance is just as likely to be conducted with the ear as with the eye. For example, at the center of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) the monster spends his days in a low hovel adjacent to the De Laceys' cottage. Whereas his eye can barely penetrate into the domestic space through an "almost imperceptible chink" (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 85), the same crevice enables him to hear sufficiently well to acquire literacy and even to experience a simulacrum of sympathy and love for the family to which he, as monstrous spy, can never belong. Denied participation, the monster confuses the hierarchical knowledge of surveillance for the mutual knowledge of sympathy. The former mode of knowing resembles the activities of readers or audience members who view the world as fiction or theater. In *The Antiquary* (1816), Walter Scott describes at length a secret niche in the ruins of St. Ruth's Priory that "commanded a full view of the chancel in every direction, and was probably constructed...to be a convenient watch-tower from which the superior priest, himself unseen, could watch the behaviour of his monks" (168). While initially designed as a kind of Panopticon, "the prior's secret seat of observation" serves in 1794 as the site where an army officer and a licensed beggar overhear, in the dark, evidence of the fraud that a Rosicrucian, Herman Dousterswivel, has been perpetrating against the Tory baronet Sir Arthur Wardour (Scott, *Antiquary* 176). In the French Revolutionary context, the frauds of a German adept go beyond financial chicanery to suggest the politically subversive machinations of the Bavarian illuminati, a secret society thought by conspiracy theorists to have inspired the Jacobins. Political subversion is discovered aurally at a site of Gothic monastic surveillance.

While the ear of Dionysius was enough of a curiosity to appeal to the eighteenth-century travel-writer and to provide fruitful analogies for aural surveillance in novels, in certain respects it remains

a distinctly ancient construction. Even though he includes auditory surveillance in his model penitentiary house,[2] Bentham explicitly warns his critics against specious comparisons between Dionysius' ear and the Panopticon: "Detection is the object of the first: *prevention,* that of the latter. In the former case the ruling person is a spy; in the latter he is a monitor. The object of the first was to pry into the secret recesses of the heart; the latter, confining its attention to *overt* acts, leaves thoughts and fancies to their proper *ordinary,* the court *above*" (66). While Bentham has persuaded few modern readers that panopticism eschews spying, and while the Panopticon likewise takes the form of an "artificial body" (84), there are indeed differences between the tyrant's gigantic ear and the utilitarian's architectural model. However, the difference resides precisely in Bentham's unwillingness to leave "the secret recesses of the heart" to the jurisdiction of God—or God's representative, the ordinary or prison chaplain. The ancient tyrant sought knowledge about his subjects so that he could secure his own rule through condemnations and acquittals, whereas the modern regime seeks knowledge in order to reform and even to construct appropriate subjects. In addition to bringing together voices and accumulating information at a central point, the modern administrator or reformer seeks to install the inner voice of conscience in the individual. The modern regime requires not only a mechanism for collecting all sounds and uniting them at a focus, but also the calculations that will maximize the distribution of a central voice.

In the matter of attempting to create a conscience in the members of the Anglo-American crowd, the most important eighteenth-century phenomenon is the rise of Methodism. Elias Canetti notes that, at significant moments in his journals, John Wesley "worked out the numbers of those who were able to hear him." For Canetti, this impulse to maximize the audience is both a historically specific matter, related to urbanization and opposition to "the limiting ceremoniousness of the official temple," and evidence for the universal desire of crowds to achieve growth, the desire "to reach *all* men" (21, 22). The paradox of Methodism, however, is that even though the preaching may take place in the open air, outside confining institutional walls, and even though the ministers may address the lower orders who constitute the early modern crowd, this "popular" preaching aims at reaching discrete individuals and, by an appeal to the conscience, intends ultimately to expropriate and suppress traditional popular culture.

Given the tension within Methodism between a broad popular, even democratic, appeal and authoritarian "moral espionage" (E. P. Thompson, *Making* 351, 46), it is not surprising that a striking

example of audience calculations should appear in Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. On the occasion of a George Whitefield sermon in Philadelphia, Franklin—happily immune to the address to his soul—exhibits a scientific fascination with the range of the human voice:

> Being among the hindmost in Market Street, I had the curiosity to learn how far he could be heard, by retiring backwards down the street towards the river; and I found his voice distinct till I came near Front Street, when some noise in that street obscured it. Imagining then a semi-circle, of which my distance should be the radius, and that it were filled with auditors, to each of whom I allowed two square feet, I computed that he might well be heard by more than thirty thousand. This reconciled me to the newspaper accounts of his having preached to twenty-five thousand people in the fields, and to the ancient histories of generals haranguing whole armies, of which I had sometimes doubted. (103)

More obsessed with measurement than even Patrick Brydone, Franklin seeks to test, by direct sensory experience, in typical Enlightenment fashion, both popular newspaper reports and classical historical accounts of audience size. The parallel he draws between modern Methodist audiences and ancient armies suggests that what is at stake, besides mere numbers, is the power of the collective body once its members have been exhorted, inspired, and disciplined by a charismatic leader. Franklin also has in mind the Federalist debate on the proper limits of the state, which for Aristotle ought to be determined by the range of the human voice. Ian Watt cites this Aristotelian precept in the course of arguing that, unlike the classical genres with their oral roots, the modern genre of the novel and "modern urban culture" both depend on print (196). If novel and nation are the products of print capitalism, they are nonetheless haunted by, or seek to incorporate the power of, the oral culture of the crowd.

George Whitefield stands within the *Autobiography* as an oral and religious epitome of Franklin's written and secular project. Franklin elaborates a project of self-discipline in his *Autobiography*, while in *Poor Richard's Almanac* he appropriates and transforms popular culture, changing the almanac from a form embodying popular attitudes toward time as holiday and the future as the space of astrological prognostication to an instrument of social control inculcating the view that time is money and the future should be the space of rational accumulation. Through a system of moral accounting, the use of a timetable, the self-surveillance of autobiography itself, the presentation of his own life as model for imitation, and "good management"

in general, Franklin seeks to correct the errata in himself and "greatly amend" other human beings (71). Through entrepreneurial and propagandistic use of the press, encouragement of circulating libraries, and advocacy of a network of societies directed centrally and secretly from an elite club behind the scenes, he aims to create a new American nation through the making of improved individuals.

Benjamin Franklin provides Max Weber with his central example of the spirit of capitalism—an ascetic ethic in which human beings and human happiness are subordinated to business and the accumulation of wealth. The human being is reduced to the status of a steward of his (or, rarely, her) possessions or to that of "an acquisitive machine" driven by an inner compulsion (Weber 170). According to Weber, the Calvinist ethic attempted to eliminate spontaneous emotions, traditional sports and festivities, and the periodic oscillation between sin and forgiveness, in the process of systematically transforming the human being into the unified, internally consistent entity termed in a "formal psychological sense...a personality" (119). Franklin's experimental calculations for distributing as widely as possible the human voice, or its reproduction in the form of writing, serve the larger goal of installing the inner voice that will transform the crowd—with its traditional festivity, alehouse culture, and indifference to calculable productivity and accumulation—into the disciplined, autonomous individuals who possess a unified personality, with the shape of an autobiography.

E. P. Thompson interprets Methodism, in the tradition of Weber's Calvinism, as a later manifestation of the religious reconstruction of character. Whereas Calvinism helped to create the independent, ascetic entrepreneur of early capitalism, Methodism helped to create the disciplined, sober, and submissive workers of early industrialism. For Thompson, even though it encouraged the rise of some dedicated leaders in working-class organizations, Methodism represents a decline in radical potential from the Protestant sects whose antiauthoritarian ideals fostered egalitarian tendencies at the time of the English Civil War. Thompson suggests, however, that the appeal of Puritanism was, in general, more bourgeois than the plebeian or working-class address of Methodism. If not John Wesley and George Whitefield themselves, certainly their early nineteenth-century heirs "fostered within the Methodist Church those elements most suited to make up the psychic component of the work-discipline of which the manufacturers stood most in need" (*Making* 355). Thompson maintains that the industrial entrepreneur was entirely conscious of the benefits of remaking human beings so that their work habits would mesh with the methodical regularity of the factory machines. The