PERFORMING THE CASE: PROBLEMS OF THE CASE HISTORY IN ZOFLOYA, FRANKENSTEIN, AND MANSFIELD PARK.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I connect the emergence of the genre of the psychoanalytic case history in the early nineteenth century to the narratives of Charlotte Dacre’s Zofloya (1806), Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818), and Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park (1814). At the turn of the nineteenth century, the case history was quickly gaining prominence as both a new genre of writing and a new way of seeing the world. Exploring the connection between the novel and the case, I show how Dacre, Shelley, and Austen employ the methods of the case history while simultaneously deploying various strategies of resistance to the project of thinking in cases. While these challenges differ in each novel, a common thread running through each one is the exploration of performance as a disruption to the case history’s project. By exploring the matrix of commitments particular to the early nineteenth-century case historian, this thesis illuminates the earnest, playful, dissident, and sometimes shocking ways that these novels engage with the project of the case history. Reversing the direction of illumination, it also shows how exploring these three novels through the lens of the case history sheds a new light on the historical project of thinking in cases, a practice that was quickly accruing cultural authority at this particular moment. In essence, I examine Zofloya, Frankenstein, and Mansfield Park as cases—simultaneously anomalous and representative instances—that engage with the genre of the case history and elucidate the problems and commitments of the early nineteenth-century case historian’s project.
This thesis is dedicated to two people whose help has made its completion possible. I would like to thank my advisor, Patrick O’Malley, whose insight informed every stage of this project and whose marvelous support and feedback have pushed me to think expansively and write clearly. I also cannot thank enough my fiancé, Zachary Weingarten, whose unfailing encouragement and patient listening continue to ease my difficulties and illuminate my progress.

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Introduction: Thinking in Cases

The language of the case threads through the writing of early nineteenth-century women novelists with a subtle persistence. In Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya* (1806), the narrator aligns the seduced Laurina with her seducing daughter, Victoria. As the narrator explains, the “curse” of Laurina’s infidelity has passed down to Victoria “with the single exception that, in the case of the former, the heart and mind had been involuntarily seduced by a designing betrayer, while the other cherished and encouraged an increasing passion for one who attempted her not” (Dacre 143, italics in original). In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), the eponymous hero’s father advises him to moderate his “excessive sorrow” at his brother William’s death (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 111). Victor narrates, “This advice, although good, was totally inapplicable to my case; I should have been the first to hide my grief, and console my friends, if remorse had not mingled its bitterness with my other sensations” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 111-112). In Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), Sir Thomas discovers—just after Fanny has received a proposal from the wealthy Mr. Crawford—that his niece has never been allowed to have a fire in her sitting room. Upon learning that Mrs. Norris is the source of this deprivation, Sir Thomas pronounces, “Your aunt Norris has always been an advocate, and very judiciously, for young people's being brought up without unnecessary indulgences…The principle was good in itself, but it may have been, and I believe has been, carried too far in your case” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 244).

Victoria’s “case” is more severe than Laurina’s because the daughter’s seduction is deliberate while the mother’s was involuntary; Victor’s father’s advice is not applicable because he misunderstands the facts and feelings involved in his son’s “case”; and Sir Thomas determines that in Fanny’s “case,” the judicious Mrs. Norris has misjudged. Why do all three
novels present their main characters as “cases”? What did it mean, in the early nineteenth century, to refer to oneself or another person as a case? Or, to ask these questions in a different way, how are these novels engaging with early nineteenth-century practices of case writing? In this project, I will connect the emergence of the genre of the psychoanalytic case history in the early nineteenth century to the narratives of Zofloya, Frankenstein, and Mansfield Park. Exploring the connection between the novel and the case, I will show how Dacre, Shelley, and Austen employ the language of the case history while simultaneously deploying various strategies of resistance to the project of thinking in cases.¹

These three novels, written in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, are particularly interesting to read in relation to the case history because the time in which they were published marked a crucial turning point in the history of the case. During the early nineteenth century, the psychoanalytic case history emerged as a new genre of writing, a genre whose commitments I will explore in detail in the coming pages. In the process, I will trace the relationship of the psychoanalytic case history to three different historical case writing practices: religious casuistry, criminal case writing, and medical patient narratives. By exploring the matrix of commitments particular to the early nineteenth-century case historian, I will illuminate the earnest, playful, dissident, and sometimes shocking ways that these novels simultaneously engage with and challenge the project of the case history. Reversing the direction of illumination, I will show how exploring these three novels through the lens of the case history sheds a new light on the historical project of thinking in cases, a practice which, as the coming pages will show, was quickly accruing cultural authority at this historical moment.

¹ Andreas Gailus and John Forrester both use the phrase “thinking in cases” to describe the modern case history’s way of knowing.
The practice of religious case writing or “casuistry” goes back to sixth-century Europe, when the Catholic Church began to use personal confessions and stories of individual sin to regulate the moral lives of its members. These practices expanded until, as John Forrester notes, “by the 16th and early 17th centuries, textbooks for the training of priests included extensive discussion of the cases of conscience” (Forrester18). Around this time, however, Blaise Pascal and other opponents of the Church’s practices argued that casuistry undermined timeless morals and promoted reasoning for the sake of reasoning, an allegation that still haunts the word “casuistry” today. By the late seventeenth century, Protestants in England who had denigrated the old Catholic casuistry had created a new “purified” body of case literature concerned with applying moral injunctions to everyday modern life (Hunter 290-292). James Chandler writes, “This is a literature in which descriptions of circumstance provide hypothetical occasions for the exercise of judgment” (“On the Face of the Case” 838). This version of casuistry was concerned with circumstances; it asked readers to imagine themselves in a series of different situations, or it asked them to judge a sinner based on the circumstances under which the sin was committed. A number of critics have argued that this Protestant version of case writing had a formative effect on the rise of the British novel in the eighteenth century; in many ways, eighteenth-century novels are expanded, fictional versions of casuistic narratives.

The turn of the nineteenth century, however, marked a crucial shift for the conception of the case in Europe. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault argues that while the old casuistry

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2 See Hunter (290) and Forrester (18-19) on seventeenth-century critiques of casuistry. This haunting of the word casuistry with its earlier, Christian meanings has prompted me to avoid the word and instead refer to the early nineteenth-century practice as “thinking in cases” or “the case historian’s project.”

3 Forrester sums up these arguments, explaining, “Where casuistry addressed the individual conscience, the novel now addressed the individual character” (19). Chandler explains that scholars “mostly agree that the distinctive kind of narrative innovation that we associate with the fictional writings of Defoe has much to do with the case literature of the late seventeenth century” (“On the Face of the Case” 838). G. A. Starr’s *Defoe and Casuistry* makes this connection to Defoe at length. For a full account of the relationship between English Protestant casuistic literature and the rise of the British novel, see pages 288-293 of Paul Hunter’s *Before Novels*; Hunter argues that casuistry’s investment in individual difference informed the novel’s interest in subjectivity and “get[ing] down to cases” (293).
sought to modify punishment based on the sinner’s “circumstances” and “intention.” “what was now beginning to emerge was a modulation that referred to the defendant himself, to his nature, to his way of life and his attitude of mind, to his past, to the ‘quality’ and not the intention of his will” (98). In other words, the interior life of the aberrant individual moves to the center of the case history, replacing the old focus on circumstances surrounding sin. The case history begins to judge the “quality” of a person’s interior selfhood. Later in Discipline and Punish, Foucault points to writing as a crucial technology that works to recast an individual as a “case” in the new sense of the word: “The examination, surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a case…The case is no longer, as in casuistry or jurisprudence, a set of circumstances defining an act and capable of modifying the application of a rule; it is the individual as he may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality” (Discipline 191, italics in original). Forms of writing—the examination and other “documentary techniques”—are crucial tools for making a person into a case, and starting in the early nineteenth century, the “case” that these writings create is no longer a set of potentially extenuating circumstances but is instead a narrative that calls for the judgment of a person’s most private self, his or her “very individuality.”

Foucault’s discussion of the case as a historically situated form of writing suggests that the early nineteenth-century version of the case history emerged as a new genre; this genre both reflected and promoted a new way of understanding, describing, and judging individuals.

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4 Forrester argues that Foucault’s clear-cut distinction between the psychiatric case and the older form of casuistry needs to be complicated; Forrester finds instances of the old casuistry’s focus on “circumstances” in several forms of the case today. In particular, he argues, “it is from the arena of biopower, which Foucault was the first to delineate clearly, that the recent renewal of casuistry has come—from the new field of medical ethics and the epidemic of legal-moral debate surrounding networks of action” (19). For a full discussion of biopower as shaping the way we envision a contemporary “case,” see Lauren Berlant’s “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency).” Forrester’s argument for the survival of the old casuistry along with the new is compelling, but for the purpose of my argument I need only note that beginning in the early nineteenth century, “thinking in cases” acquired new implications of penetrating and judging the individual psyche.
Foucault suggests that the new case works as a disciplinary technology: “the child, the patient, the madman, the prisoner, were to become, with increasing ease from the eighteenth century and according to a curve which is that of the mechanisms of discipline, the object of individual descriptions and biographical accounts” (*Discipline* 192). As Foucault’s invocation of “patient,” “madman,” and “prisoner,” demonstrates, a crucial element of the new case history was its move away from the discourse of religious morality and into the discourses of criminal justice, medicine, and the newly created field of psychiatry.

The emergence of the new psychoanalytic case history owed much to the growth of psychiatry as an independent field of medicine. In one account of the case history’s connection to psychiatry, Andreas Gailus traces the emergence of “thinking in cases” to the *Magazin Zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, a German journal edited by Karl Philipp Moritz and published between 1783 and 1793. Moritz urged his readers to “record the behavior of neighbors, students, and friends, publish their earliest childhood memories, and write case histories of criminals, madmen, and other misfits” (Gailus 69). Gailus argues that the *Magazin* was “the birth place of the psychoanalytic case history” and that by publishing the *Magazin*, Moritz advanced the case history “as the model for psycho-pathological description” (69, 72). Whether or not we accept the claim that Moritz single-handedly invented the new genre of the case history, Gailus’s account provides a useful historical grounding for Foucault’s claims about the emergence of a new kind of case. Over the course of ten years at the end of the eighteenth century, Gailus explains, written accounts and biographies of aberrant individuals became exceedingly popular in Europe. While in 1782 there was only one major biography of deviants published in Germany,

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5 Gailus translates this as “*Magazine for Empirical Psychology*” (69).
6 Gailus acknowledges that his article is in many ways an illustration of Foucault’s analysis in *Discipline and Punish*, but he also argues that the *Magazin*’s focus on multiple, situated observations complicates Foucault’s argument that the case history is only a vehicle of discipline and control (69-70).
in 1797 “delinquency had become the single-most recurrent theme in narrative literature, and thousands of criminal stories had flooded the literary market in Germany” (Gailus 87). Gailus credits Moritz’s *Magazin* for this change and focuses on the proliferation of German publications, but other scholars have noted that the growing interest in case writing was a transnational phenomenon. For instance, V. A. C. Gatrell explains in *The Hanging Tree* that criminal biographies proliferated in England during the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth (114).

Feeding the urgency with which the public consumed these case writings was a medical metaphor of society as a body. Case histories strengthened the social body by making visible (and available for therapy) pathological abnormalities in individual lives. Gailus writes, “Telling the truth about oneself and others, this most private act, becomes in Moritz’s account a kind of public obligation, an opportunity for each citizen to participate in the caring and strengthening of the social body” (85). In other words, Gailus argues that the case became a powerful paradigm at the turn of the nineteenth century in part because individuals’ private lives were imagined as potential pathogens with the power to destroy the social body. The psychiatrist focuses on individual “irregularities” in order to ensure the health of the nation (Gailus 84). Through this metaphor of society as a body, the case history becomes a quest for transparency in the service of a regulatory therapy; as Gailus explains, the ultimate goal of “thinking in cases” is to make the social body “fully transparent to itself” (85). By thinking in cases, the case historian takes on the project of making the individual transparent in order to ensure the health of the social body.

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century readers’ voracious interest in criminal biography demonstrates how the commitment to psychological analysis that informed the new case history was immediately applied to the field of criminal justice. Indeed, Foucault argues that
its applicability to the criminal case is what allowed the psychoanalytic case to gain such cultural prominence. In “About the Concept of the ‘Dangerous Individual’ in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry,” Foucault explains that the turn of the nineteenth century saw a growing interest in the origin of crime in the individual psyche, an interest that continues to haunt us to this day. He argues that our need to understand criminals’ psychological motivations stems from a worldview in which the criminal represents a danger to society: “while, for a long time, the criminal had been no more than the person to whom a crime could be attributed and who could therefore be punished, today, the crime tends to be no more than the event which signals the existence of a dangerous element—that is, more or less dangerous—in the social body” (“Dangerous Individual” 2). Foucault and Gailus are thus in agreement that the early nineteenth century marked the beginning of a worldview in which both crime and psychological aberrations were symptoms of a kind of disease in the social body. Within this worldview, the reasons behind criminal actions became crucial: if a criminal is a dangerous disease affecting the social body, the punishment of the criminal needs to be not only punitive but also therapeutic, eradicating the criminal’s aberration at its source. For the punishment-therapy to be effective, authorities needed to pinpoint the “disease” at its origin: in the mind and motivations of the criminal. Foucault explains, “Beyond admission, there must be confession, self-examination, explanation of oneself, revelation of what one is” (“Dangerous Individual” 2). Beginning at the turn of the nineteenth century, then, punishment of a crime was possible only through an understanding of the criminal’s personal story; a case history was a necessary precursor of punishment. According to Foucault, this conception of crime and punishment promoted the rise of the field of psychiatry. He writes, “At the turn of the nineteenth century, psychiatry became an autonomous discipline and assumed such prestige precisely because it had been able to develop within the framework of
a medical discipline conceived of as a reaction to the dangers inherent in the social body”
(Foucault “Dangerous Individual” 7). In other words, psychiatry emerged as the medical field
that protected the social body by identifying the origins of individual aberrations and prescribing
appropriate punishment-therapy.

These recurrent metaphors of society as a body threatened by illness demonstrate how
strongly the psychoanalytic case history, as applied to the field of criminal justice, was connected
to the larger field of clinical medicine. Indeed, while thinking in cases has roots in the casuistry
of the Church, it also has a set of roots in the genre of the medical case history. Medical historian
Mary Fissell writes that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, British doctors relied heavily
on narratives that patients constructed from the physical symptoms of their illnesses (92).
Pointing to the fact that doctors often recorded their patients’ narratives verbatim, Fissell argues
that these medical case narratives “place[d] doctor and client on near-equal hermeneutic footing”
and “provided non-medical men and women with a distinctive framework for understanding
episodes of illness” (92). In other words, early modern medical case histories worked to
empower the patient as much as they worked to empower the doctor. The egalitarian, early
modern patient narratives that Fissell describes seem to have little relation to the regulatory,
nineteenth-century case histories that Foucault describes as “mechanisms of discipline”
(Discipline 192). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, Fissell notices a change in
the framing of patient narratives: “Early in the century, the patient’s and the doctor’s words are
one. It is easy to hear the patient’s voice in the doctor’s case report…But over the course of the
century, this symmetry fades. Doctors begin to sound like doctors, and patients’ voices
disappear” (99). For instance, one doctor in 1771 wrote of a young man who experienced, “as he
expressed it, a fluttering in the precordial region on the least motion” (Marmaduke Berdoe,
quoted in Fissell, 99). As Fissell points out, “Farm labourers did not refer to their chests as ‘precordial regions.’ The doctor has taken over, commandeered the patient’s own words, almost unconsciously interpreting them and replacing them with his own medical equivalents” (99). This preemption of the patient’s language, Fissell argues, was part of a process in which physicians tried to position themselves as “objective” narrators of the patient’s illness (101). Patients became “unreliable witnesses” of their own conditions, and patient words became useful only when divided into lists of reported symptoms and framed within a narrative of the physician’s observations (Fissell, 99-100). Within this new version of the medical case, the physician is the ultimate authority who names and describes the disease.7

Fissell’s account of “The Disappearance of the Patient’s Narrative” is a historically grounded illustration of Foucault’s argument about “the birth of modern medicine” in The Birth of the Clinic (198).8 Like Fissell, Foucault argues that at the end of the eighteenth century doctors stopped seeing the patient as a person with a story and instead focused the “medical gaze” onto the patient’s parts: “clinical experience sees a new space opening up before it: the tangible space of the body, which at the same time is that opaque mass in which secrets, invisible lesions, and the very mystery of origins lie hidden. The medicine of symptoms will gradually recede, until it finally disappears before the medicine of organs, sites, causes” (Clinic 122). Together, Fissell and Foucault show that at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the narrative of symptoms that the patient reports became less important than the physician’s observations of the signs of disease displayed in the patient’s body parts.

7 Jeanne Peterson makes a point similar to Fissell’s and also emphasizes that this shift is one of authority: She writes that in the early nineteenth century, “Less reliance was placed on the patient’s description of his own symptoms and more importance placed on the medical man’s evaluation of the physical signs of disease which he observed in the patient. In a subtle way, authority about the patient’s physical condition shifted from patient to doctor as the doctor became less dependent upon the patient for knowledge of the patient’s condition” (14).
8 Fissell acknowledges this connection on page 108, note 28.
In some ways, Foucault and Fissell’s descriptions of the new medical case history seem quite different from Foucault and Gailus’s accounts of the new psychoanalytic case history. The medical gaze divides the patient (into “organs, sites, causes,”) and places patient narratives into a framework of doctor-speak, while the psychoanalyst tells the story of a case as an individual, focusing on the patient’s interior whole. Indeed, both Foucault and Gailus acknowledge the psychoanalytic case history’s roots in the medical case history while insisting on this crucial distinction.  

When we delve further into scholarship exploring the two types of case history, however, the differences between the practices of clinical medicine and the practices of psychoanalysis largely fall away. By aligning previously disconnected work on medical and psychoanalytic case writing, I hope to illuminate how, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the medical case history and the psychoanalytic case history were moving in similar directions, were, in fact, becoming more alike than Foucault and Gailus allow. Indeed, Foucault’s description of the medical gaze uses the same metaphors that structure the psychoanalytic case historian’s project: the “opening up” of the “opaque” individual to search for the “origins” of illness and abnormality. Both the medical doctor and the psychoanalytic case historian seek to make the patient transparent in order to better pinpoint the origins of the aberration. The readings I pursue in what follows allow us to see that the case historian’s search for causes and origins, while it seems to be interested in the self of the “case” as a whole, is in fact as incisive—in the sense of cutting open—as the medical gaze that Foucault describes and Fissell illustrates.

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9 Gailus explains, “‘Thinking in cases’ clearly has its roots in the medical tradition of case-writing…But whereas medical case-reports, generally speaking, depict the patient as the individual manifestation of a more general disease history, the case-narratives of the Magazin by and large abstain from diagnostic terminology and instead endeavor to explain the patient’s disturbance in light of his particular life-history” (79). In other words, medical case histories focus on the disease, while psychoanalytic case histories focus on the entirety of the individual who has the disease. Foucault makes a similar point when he argues that the medical gaze does not look for “an organism in which pathological process and reactions are linked to together in a unique way to form a ‘case’….If one wishes to know the illness from which he is suffering, one must subtract the individual, with his particular qualities” (Clinic 14). Both writers imply that the psychoanalytic case engages the “individual, with his particular qualities” as a kind of whole.
Just as physicians at the turn of the century divided and framed the patient’s narrative of symptoms in a way that gave the physician authority over the patient’s body, psychoanalytic case historians used rhetorical devices to divide and frame the patient’s words in a way that gave the case historian interpretive authority over the patient’s story. In *Patient Tales: Case Histories and the Uses of Narrative in Psychiatry*, Carol Berkenkotter argues that the case history is characterized by a specific rhetorical structure: “As a genre the case history has acquired a conventional structure, style and lexicon that, over the last 250 years, has become the standard form of reporting in clinical medicine and psychiatry” (2). One of the most important rhetorical tactics that Berkenkotter identifies is the use of reported speech. She writes, “From a discursive perspective, the clinical case history is actually a double narrative. The patient’s ‘story,’ his or her narrative of personal experience, is subsumed into the narrative pattern and thought-style of clinical psychiatry” (2, italics in original). By containing the patient’s narrative within the enclosing language of the case historian, psychiatrists claim an interpretive authority over the patient narrative. The case historian corrals the patient’s words into an interpretive framework that the case historian controls.

Berkenkotter uses John Haslam’s *Illustrations of Madness: Exhibiting a Singular Case of Insanity* (1810) as an early example of the rhetorical structure she describes. She writes, “Psychiatrists’ representations of their patients’ speech can be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Bethlem Hospital’s apothecary-cum-physician, John Haslam, used inverted commas to represent the speech of James Tilly Matthews, a patient whose continued confinement Haslam sought to defend” (31). According to Berkenkotter, Haslam’s use of “inverted commas” (quotation marks) to quote the exact words of his patient was an important and much copied innovation, and Haslam’s was “the first book-length case history in English”
(31). Matthews, the patient, willingly provided Haslam with his notebooks in the belief that his written words would inevitably prove his sanity to readers (Berkenkotter 34). But instead of using Matthews’ words to convince readers Matthews was sane, Haslam used Matthews’s words to prove that he was insane and should remain in Bethlem Hospital (popularly known as Bedlam). Whether or not we accept the claim that Haslam’s was the first full-length psychoanalytic case history in English, Berkenkotter’s analysis of Haslam’s rhetorical strategies is enlightening: Haslam’s “inverted commas” serve both to divide Matthews’ own narrative and to separate the language of the madman from the language of the doctor. As the framer of Matthews’s narrative, Haslam positions Matthews’s words so that they perform the exact opposite of the function Matthews intended when he provided Haslam with his notebooks.

Most compellingly, Berkenkotter’s description of *Illustrations of Madness* echoes Fissell’s account of how early nineteenth-century physicians divided and circumscribed the patient’s self-narrative within a framework of the physician’s authoritative observations. Reading these two accounts together illuminates how, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the psychoanalytic case history and the medical case history actually promoted similar projects. Both genres sought to divide and frame the patient’s narrative in a way that established the case historian as an authoritative interpreter.

The overlap of Berkenkotter and Fissell’s claims suggests that the psychoanalytic case history not only has roots in the medical case but also developed in parallel to it, even as psychiatry worked to establish itself as an independent field of medical inquiry. Indeed, the rhetorical practices of the case historian are techniques that establish their users as legitimate professionals in any field, a goal that was important to both physicians and budding psychiatrists during the early nineteenth century. As Berkenkotter explains, “The genre of the case history
narrative was intrinsic to the development of psychiatry as a medical profession…a case history could serve the rhetorical purpose of the writer in using a patient’s utterances and writings to document the perturbations of an unsound mind” (51). As practitioners of a new field of medicine, psychiatrists were eager to cement their authority as professionals; the incisive rhetoric of the psychoanalytic case history reflects and enacts this professionalizing project. Although clinical medicine was a much older field, early nineteenth-century surgeons and physicians were also deeply invested in establishing and consolidating their professional authority.10 Describing clinical medicine instead of psychiatry, Meegan Kennedy nevertheless makes an argument almost identical to that of Berkenkotter: “because the borders of professional medicine remained fuzzy well into the nineteenth century, the case history, as the public face of medicine, became a crucial site in which to construct an ideal of clinical medicine against the onslaught of sectarian methods” (332). Physicians, like psychoanalysts, used the rhetorical techniques of the case history to assert their professional authority. When we put Berkenkotter’s work in conversation with the work of Fissell and Kennedy, we can see that that medical and psychoanalytic case histories began to do similar things at the turn of the nineteenth century because they enacted similar cultural goals: case historians in both fields divided and contained patients’ self-narratives in ways that worked to consolidate their own authority as medical professionals.

The rhetorical techniques of both the medical and the psychoanalytic case history drew from another procedure that was gaining prominence in early nineteenth-century medical culture:

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10 Ludmilla Jordanova and Jeanne Peterson both describe some of the changes in the field underlying this urge for professionalization. Jordanova writes that throughout the eighteenth century, “greater emphasis was given to first-hand anatomical study in medical education” (57); Peterson explains that in the early nineteenth century, surgeons were working to cement their claims to scientific status and physicians and surgeons began working together in new teaching hospitals, developing a sense of “group membership” that excluded other medical practitioners (10, 15).
the practice of dissection. In many ways, the dissecting surgeon embodies the “medical gaze” as Foucault describes it: he literally divides the body into pieces to identify the origin of disease. Fissell argues that dissection “represents the ultimate denial of the patient’s narrative” (100). Indeed, the dead patient’s body provides no self-narrative but gives up its signs of illness to the dissector, who frames them as evidence for a medical judgment. It seems, in fact, that the connection between dissection and thinking in cases goes further than this: the practice of cutting up bodies parallels the practice of dividing and framing the patient’s words.

George Fordyce, a physician writing in 1793, uses dissection as a metaphor to illustrate his proposal for revising the project of the medical case history. In a journal article entitled “An Attempt to Improve the Evidence of Medicine,” Fordyce presents a series of charts that he has made for each of his “cases.” The charts provide rows and columns in which the physician writes information relevant to the case. This information includes symptoms that the patient reports, such as “head-ache continues” (Fordyce “Case II”). Fordyce explains, “The following scheme is intended to make the evidence in cases more compleat [sic], by dissecting them, placing the progress of each particular symptom by itself, and shewing [sic] its connection with, and the relation it bears to, the other symptoms of disease” (243). Fordyce’s rows and columns are an illustration of Foucault and Fissell’s claim that at the turn of the nineteenth century, the “medical gaze” and the language of medicine began to incise the narrative of the medical “case” into a series of constituent parts. Fordyce’s rhetoric is striking, however, because he explicitly compares the physician’s division and organization of reported symptoms to the dissector’s division of the physical body. His language suggests that, at the turn of the nineteenth century,

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11 Jordanova writes that during the eighteenth century, “techniques of dissection became increasingly refined” (57). In Murdering to Dissect, Tim Marshall argues that dissection was increasingly the subject of public debate in the early nineteenth century in part because of the “Slippage between surgeon, dissector, and murderer” (12-13).
12 Foucault focuses on dissection as part of the epistemic change he is describing in The Birth of the Clinic in his chapter entitled “Open Up a Few Corpses” (124-148).
dissection was a useful metaphor for the larger project of thinking in cases. Though Fordyce and Haslam are invested in the professionalization of different fields, their practices are similar: one practitioner uses quotation marks and the other uses a medical chart, but they both dissect the patient’s language in ways that work to cement their authority as professional case historians.

The suggestion that dissection provided a metaphor for the practice of thinking in cases is productive in part because it helps reveal the gendered valences of the case historian’s project. Both the dissector and the case historian are interested in transparency, the peeling away of layers to reach a meaningful truth in the depths. In *Sexual Visions*, Ludmilla Jordanova argues that this practice of peeling away allowed the male dissector to assert a kind of control over the inert (and sexualized) female body. In late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century depictions of dissection, it is most often female bodies that lie on the dissecting table. For instance, William Hunter’s *The Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures* (1774) depicts “a careful peeling off of layer after layer of organic tissue to reach the foetus itself” (Jordanova 56-7). Jordanova shows that the female reproductive organs—or the fetus contained in them—were the ultimate secrets that the dissector sought to uncover.\(^\text{13}\) These gendered valences of dissection extend beyond the practices of dissecting female bodies; dissection becomes a metaphor for “a model of knowledge based on looking deeply into and thereby intellectually mastering nature—a model infused with assumptions about gender” (Jordanova 58). Jordanova argues that dissection was a metaphor for a masculinist knowledge practice that investigated a feminized object. If, as I have been suggesting, dissection was also a metaphor for thinking in cases, then we need to consider how the gendered valences of “looking deeply into…nature” that Jordanova describes

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\(^{13}\) Jordanova points out that many medical students learned about anatomy from female wax anatomical models—called “Venuses”—whose removable torsos eventually revealed their reproductive organs (44-5). She concludes that dissectors’ interest in organic depth promoted “the actual unveiling of women’s bodies to render visible the emblematic core of their sex in the organs of generation” (58).
apply to the project of the case historian. Like the dissector, the psychoanalytic case historian peels away an object’s layers in order to reveal the truth at its core. The case history works rhetorically to establish the case historian’s interpretive authority, and following Jordanova, I suggest that it is worth considering how this interpretive authority is a gendered phenomenon. My decision to examine the rhetoric of the case history in the work of women writers stems from a desire to explore this idea. By closely examining three cases—Zofloya, Frankenstein, and Mansfield Park—I hope to illuminate ways in which novels by women engage with nineteenth-century case history as a masculinist knowledge practice enacted on a feminized object.

As an exploration of the case history in relation to early nineteenth-century novels by women, this project fits into and extends work that has already been done on the novel and the case in several important ways. If, as scholars have argued, Protestant casuistry made its way into the work of early British novelists such as Richardson and Defoe, then what was the impact on the novel of the new case history, the focus on each person’s “very individuality” that makes “each individual a case”? How did novel writers engage with the new, culturally ubiquitous rhetorical techniques that worked to consolidate the case historian’s authority? As James Chandler has recently declared, “we should be pursuing into the nineteenth century and beyond the kind of work that has shown how and why the case form is so important to the novel of the early eighteenth century” (“On the Face of the Case” 861). Chandler and Gailus both pursue this work to some extent. Gailus suggests that German Romantic novellas share the commitments of the case history; like the case historian, he argues, the Romantic narrator “speaks the truth the text’s characters were too blind to see” (Gailus 105). Gailus focuses on German literature’s engagement with the cultural phenomenon of the case history, but as we

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have seen, the proliferation of case writing that Gailus traces in Germany was a trans-national phenomenon that informed cultural discourse throughout Europe. Indeed, Chandler discusses the influence of the case on British Romanticism in *England in 1819*, suggesting that British Romantic writers participated in “the historicization of the case” (*England* 244). As part of this historicization, writers such as Walter Scott, Jeremy Bentham, and Percy Bysshe Shelley reimagined the case as a historically situated indicator of “‘national’ or ‘general’ will” (Chandler *England* 251). Chandler and Gailus thus demonstrate from different angles how the case historian’s project took on particular importance as an articulation of the individual’s place in relation to the social or national body. Together, their work compellingly shows that early nineteenth-century literature took up the case history’s project of making the social body “fully transparent to itself” (Gailus 85). While Chandler, Gailus and Foucault all acknowledge that thinking in cases is a disciplinary project, however, these critics fail to discuss the case history as a gendered knowledge practice that works to reveal—and make available for therapy—aberrations at the core of a feminized object.

How did nineteenth-century women writers engage with the new and increasingly ubiquitous practice of thinking in cases? Did they reify the case historian’s gendered and authoritative way of knowing, or did they resist it? In the chapters that follow, I find evidence that they did both. Dacre, Shelley, and Austen all invoke in various ways the priorities, prerogatives, and interpretive practices of the early nineteenth-century case historian while also offering challenges to the case historian’s project. While these challenges differ in each novel, a common thread running through each one is the trope of performance. An insistence upon performance is a most effective way of resisting the case historian’s way of knowing; if the goal

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15 To make this claim, Chandler draws on André Jolles’s typology of the case form in *Einfache Formen* (1930). Chandler’s argument about “the historicization of the case” is part of his larger claim in *England in 1819* that British Romantic writers were aware of themselves as living in an important historical moment.
of the case historian is to enact transparency in the service of punishment-therapy, then from the perspective of the case historian performance can only be a pathology. The case historian engages performance as a layer to be removed or penetrated, and a performance that cannot or will not be removed offers a significant challenge.

Perhaps the form of the early nineteenth-century novel necessarily enacts some mixture of reification of and challenge to the case history. Each of the novels I will examine traces the development of an individual, narrating, like the case historian, the truth of a character’s most private self. But the object of analysis is a character, not a person, and these novels—unlike their early eighteenth-century predecessors—openly proclaim themselves as fictions. Emily Anderson argues that the novel, acknowledged as a fiction, creates a space for the author to perform: “the fictional text, which announces a discrepancy between its author and the sentiments it conveys, could function as an act of disguise; and authorship could become an act of performance” (Anderson 2). As announced, female performances that mobilize the language of the case history, then, these three novels suggest in various ways that the case history is always already infected with performance. It is a commonplace of postmodern performance theory that no utterance is ever free of an element of performance. Though Dacre, Shelley, and Austen wrote a hundred and fifty years before Derrida, their novels actually touch on this poststructuralist idea: they offer resistance to the case history by depicting performance as a disease that the case

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16 J. L. Austin, one of the first performance theorists, argued that words could not be performative if they were also theatrical performances—“I pronounce you husband and wife” is not successfully performing a marriage if the words are being performed on a stage. Austin called these aberrations “infelicities,” and he states that infelicity “is an ill to which all acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all conventional acts” (18-19, italics in original). In “Signature Event Context,” Jacques Derrida argued that no communications are exempt from Austin’s “infelicitous” category, that this “risk” is language’s “internal and positive condition of possibility…the very force and law of its emergence” (325). Pointing out that Austin calls an “infelicitous” performative an “ill,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker follow Derrida in arguing that “illness” can be understood “as intrinsic to and thus constitutive of the structure of performatives—a performative utterance is one, as it were, that always may get sick” (3). Parker and Sedgwick’s characterization of performatives as always already “ill” fits nicely with my argument that Dacre, Shelley, and Austen depict performance as an ill that the case historian already has—and one that it is impossible to cure.
historian cannot cure. In the following chapters, I explore each one of these novels as a kind of case—an anomalous but representative instance—that engages with the genre of the case history and sheds a new light on the problems and commitments of the case form.

In Chapter One, “Performing Violent Desire in Zofloya,” I trace the project of the case historian in Zofloya’s doctor-figure, Berenza, who seeks to “penetrate” Victoria’s performance in order to understand and control her. Echoing Berenza, Zofloya’s narrator also repeatedly invokes the case historian’s project of pinpointing the origin of Victoria’s violent desire. Just as Victoria mobilizes performance in a way that successfully fools Berenza, however, the novel as a whole continually frustrates the case historian’s project of diagnosis and therapy. Reading Zofloya as an explicitly failed case history of Victoria, I argue that the novel depicts the case historian as already infected with the violent desire that he would attempt to pinpoint and cure. The novel as a whole behaves much like Victoria, who poisons while pretending to heal: it ends up spreading the very aberrations that it claims therapeutically to punish and eliminate.

In Chapter Two, “Mending the Fragmented Surface of Frankenstein,” I explore how Frankenstein mirrors the case history’s investment in origins. Instead of naming the ultimate origin of life, however, Victor—and the novel—gets lost in a fragmented story of cause and effect. This fragmentation blurs the boundaries between Victor and the creature, making it difficult to discriminate the doctor from the madman or the case historian from the aberrant criminal. By refusing to demarcate these borders, Frankenstein mobilizes the case history’s tendency to fragment in a way that challenges the case historian’s prerogative of defining and separating aberration: in this novel, fragmentation makes everything look the same. Enacting what I call an “anti-dissection” or an “anti-case history,” Frankenstein insists on a kind of fragmentation whose goal is not to uncover a truth at the core but to locate truth on the sewn-
together surface. The anti-dissected surface of the creature and the narrative—the layer of performance that the case historian would penetrate—is the only meaningful truth we get in *Frankenstein*.

In Chapter Three, “Prescribing Disease and Cure for *Mansfield Park,*” I argue that *Mansfield Park* invokes the case history by dwelling on the importance of observation, judgment, and therapeutic pedagogy, values promulgated by Sir Thomas and Edmund Bertram. Rather than wholeheartedly accepting this project, however, the novel as a whole reiterates the pointed critiques that Mary Crawford levels at the case history’s way of knowing. Like Zofloya, *Mansfield Park* depicts the case history as infected by the forces of love and performance, and Austen’s novel mobilizes these infectious forces to posit, like *Frankenstein*, that the case history’s way of knowing is based on an untenable distinction between the case historian and the object of analysis. Love makes rational judgment and observation impossible, and “case historian,” like “audience,” ends up being a role that must be performed. Ultimately, *Mansfield Park* shows how the case historian’s project is the source of its own infection: in this novel, therapeutic interventions only end up creating the very aberrations that they seek to cure.

The arc of these three chapters reveals a trajectory that moves the project of interrogating the case history from narratives of gothic romance to narratives of realism, from the fifteenth-century Venetian palazzo to the nineteenth-century English country house. This arc mirrors the trajectory of the British novel, which moved as the nineteenth century advanced from exotic gothic settings into domesticated English spaces. I discuss the novels in non-chronological order because their trajectory from romance to realism does not follow a precisely chronological course. *Frankenstein* grapples with the relationship between gothic antecedents and realist claims, while *Mansfield Park*—though published four years earlier—points to the direction that
the mainstream nineteenth-century realist novel would take. By discussing *Frankenstein* before *Mansfield Park*, I am able to show how the case, which all three novels invoke and challenge, works its way back to England and thus comes closer and closer to home. Indeed, the three novels’ methods of troubling the case history mirror this pattern of decreasing distance: while *Zofloya* asks what happens when the case history is infected, and *Frankenstein* asks what happens when the case history’s techniques are used to promote an anti-case history, *Mansfield Park* asks what happens when the distance between the case historian, the object of analysis, and the reader disappears. As the nineteenth-century novel moves closer to home, then, these novels show how we all are increasingly implicated in an ongoing cycle of self-infection and self-doctoring.
Chapter 1: Performing Violent Desire in Zofloya

Charlotte Dacre’s Zofloya (1806) created a stir of fascination and horror among contemporary reviewers. A writer for the Annual Review declared, “there is an exhibition of wantonness and harlotry, which we should have hoped, that the delicacy of a female mind, would have been shocked to imagine” (262). Accounting for the fact that a female mind did imagine such “harlotry,” a reviewer for the Literary Journal suggested that Dacre’s brain was diseased: “That our fair authoress is afflicted with the dismal malady of maggots in the brain is, alas, but too apparent, from the whole of her production” (266). The word “production” reminds us that the novel is a literary performance, and this reviewer, at least, claims that as a performance Zofloya exhibits the signs of disease. Indeed, in this chapter I will suggest that the disgruntled Literary Journal reviewer has actually put his finger on one of the most interesting aspects of Zofloya: Dacre’s novel positions itself as a performance of contagious disease. Zofloya depicts a pathologically violent kind of desire that spreads among characters through the power of performance. Both the novel’s narrator and Victoria’s husband, Berenza, invoke the project of the case historian when they seek to pinpoint the origins of Victoria’s aberrant desire. But rather than presenting a narrative in which the case historian-hero saves the heroine from the irrational forces of a diseased desire, Zofloya continually undermines the case historian’s rational way of understanding and curing aberration. The “artful” Victoria is able to trick (and murder) Berenza precisely because of his tendency to think like a case historian; she pretends to be transparent in order to spread her malady of violent desire to her observer. In this way, Victoria resists the case historian’s way of knowing and instead uses performance to infect him with the malady that he would seek to cure. Going even further, the novel as a whole suggests that Victoria’s victims already contain the sparks of violent desire that her performance inflames. The malady is so
ubiquitous that by the end of Zofloya even the moralizing voice of the narrator shows signs of pathological incoherence. The novel’s artful performance for the reader mirrors Victoria’s artful performance for Berenza, corrupting us with a failure of coherence with which, the novel suggests, we may have always already been infected.

Zofloya’s narrator invokes the case historian’s project in the first lines of the first volume, positioning the forthcoming novel as a rational analysis of cause and effect: “The historian who would wish his lessons to sink deep into the heart, thereby essaying to render mankind virtuous and more happy, must not content himself with simply detailing a series of events—he must ascertain causes, and follow progressively their effects; he must draw deductions from incidents as they arise, and ever revert to the actuating principle” (Dacre 39). The purpose of Zofloya, the narrator insists, is therapeutic; the novel will “render mankind virtuous and more happy” through an analysis of cause and effect that leads to an identification of “the actuating principle.” In other words, the novel will enact a kind of moral therapy on readers that works by revealing the origins of characters’ behavior, behavior that—in a novel whose heroine murders and tortures her victims—is mostly criminal. Just as the case historian describes the object of observation in order to trace the origins of her abnormality, the narrator of the novel describes Victoria’s evil actions in order to trace the origins of her aberrant behavior. The ultimate goal of both novel and case history is therapeutic: we understand the origin of the pathology in order to treat it or prevent it in others.

The character in Zofloya who most clearly aligns himself with the narrator’s case historicizing project is Victoria’s husband, Berenza, the “reasoning philosopher,” who observes those around him with rational detachment (Dacre 92). After seducing Victoria’s mother, Laurina, Ardolph takes Laurina and Victoria to Monte Bello, where he “contrived to attract most
of the dissolute and many of the thoughtless inhabitants of Venice” (Dacre 58). In this place where “reflection appeared to be banished” (Dacre 58), Berenza enters as a thoughtful witness: “he came from an investigating spirit, to analyse [sic] its inhabitants” (Dacre 58). The narrator insists that Berenza appears in Monte Bello not to participate in Laurina and Ardolph’s deviant activities but to observe the evildoers in their own habitat. This “investigative spirit” leads Berenza not only to examine Laurina and Ardolph but also to try to diagnose the reasons behind their actions: “he came…to discover, if possible, from the result of his own observation, whether the mischief they had caused, and the conduct they pursued, arose from a selfish depravity of heart, or was induced by the force of inevitable circumstances” (Dacre 58). In other words, Berenza comes to Monte Bello to discover the origins of his hosts’ aberrant behavior. Aligning himself with the narrator who seeks to describe the “actuating principle” of events, Berenza asks the kind of question that drives the case historian’s project: What is the origin of individual aberration? Were Laurina and Ardolph born bad, or is their bad behavior the result of their circumstances? In this novel, then, the hero thinks in cases. Berenza, the rational seeker of origins, stands in stark contrast to Ardolph, whose evil desire “to scatter around him misery and devastation” (Dacre 44) aligns him with the traditional gothic villain. If Ardolph is drawn along the lines of Montoni in Ann Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho, Berenza is depicted as the enlightened hero who will save the heroine from the chaos that Ardolph has imposed. Indeed, at the start of the novel it seems likely that the case historian-hero will prevail; Berenza will rescue the unhappy daughter from the dissolute lifestyle of her seduced mother and Ardolph, taking Victoria away from Monte Bello to live rationally ever after.

If the opening of the novel suggests that Berenza will enact a successful therapeutic intervention, later scenes call into question the effectiveness and even the benevolence of his
intentions. At the outset, Berenza does not rescue Victoria from Monte Bello; instead, after a series of complications, Victoria successfully frees herself and finds her own way to Berenza’s palazzo. It is here that Berenza fully directs his case historicizing gaze onto Victoria. He thinks to himself, “Oh! could I but penetrate her thoughts; could I but discover her actual feelings, my mind would be at rest; were I only convinced of her love, I could easily new model her character” (Dacre 92). Berenza wants to penetrate the opacity of Victoria’s mind in order to establish control over her; he must “discover her real feelings”—which he hopes will be feelings of girlish love—in order to “new model her character.” Like a case historian, then, Berenza values transparency and seeks to unveil his object’s depths in a way that establishes his authority over her. Indeed, the novel’s description of Berenza’s project as a desire for transparency in the service of control is a bit disturbing; the hint of a forced penetration potentially aligns the case history with an act of sexual violence. This foreboding image of violence and control mixes with descriptions of Berenza as “noble” and “virtuous” (Dacre 89), giving readers an uneasy sense that we cannot tell if the case-historicizing Berenza is in fact a hero or just a new kind of gothic villain.

However ominously the novel describes Berenza’s tendency to think in cases, there is no doubt that the case he seeks to analyze is indeed an aberrant criminal. Over the course of the novel, Victoria displays an increasingly pathological form of violent desire, embarking on a series of crimes to satisfy her feelings for Berenza’s brother Henriquez.17 The narrator describes Victoria’s violent desire using the language of medical pathology: “To see [Henriquez], and to see him bestowing upon the envied Lilla marks of the tenderest attachment, made her wild with the furor of conflicting passions” (Dacre 144). As Adriana Craciun notes, the word “furor” here

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17 James Dunn argues, “for Dacre eros is always agonized because it is always characterized by the movements of desire into violence” (308). In Zofloya, Victoria is the embodiment of this pathological movement of desire.
invokes *furor uterinus*, an eighteenth-century medical term for nymphomania (Dacre 114). Indeed, Craciun argues that *Zofloya*’s descriptions of Victoria’s desire mimic the language that French doctor D.T. Bienville uses in his 1775 treatise on nymphomania. This association of “furor” with sexual pathology was not lost on early nineteenth-century readers; as one reviewer protested, “new words are introduced, such, for example, as *enhorred* and *furor*, the latter of which is certainly used in the language of medicine, but in a sense which delicacy will not permit us to explain” (*Monthly Literary Recreations* 261). After reading this review, we must imagine that some nineteenth-century readers promptly investigated the indelicate medical meaning of the word “furor.” The narrator’s use of such language invites us to read Victoria’s desire as pathological. Indeed, the novel continually connects Victoria’s violent desire to a pathological physicality. Craciun points out, “After embarking on a series of violent crimes, Victoria’s body actually begins to grow larger, stronger, and decidedly more masculine” (*Zofloya* 10). By referencing contemporary medical descriptions of nymphomania and depicting the transformation of Victoria’s body, the novel invokes a misogynist medical discourse that constructs women’s sexual desire as a kind of monstrous pathology.

Craciun suggests, however, that rather than simply depicting Victoria as sexually aberrant, *Zofloya* works in various ways to challenge the same misogynist medical discourse that it invokes. On one level, Victoria could represent a medicalized vision of the violent degeneration that results from women’s sexual desire, but because the story is focalized through her, she conveys the pleasure that comes from both the transformation of one’s own body and the infectious destruction of other bodies. In other words, the same behavior and physical signs that

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18 Bienville’s *Nymphomania or, a Dissertation Concerning the Furor Uterinus* was translated into English in 1775. Craciun finds evidence in *Zofloya* that Dacre had read Bienville (Craciun, “Introduction” 21).
19 In her introduction to *Zofloya*, Craciun argues, “because Dacre gives us complex characterizations of the women and their motives, her novels critique, and do not merely internalize, such medical representations of women’s
masculinist medical discourse would mark as pathological are also the sources of Victoria’s dissident power in Zofloya. This power, for Craciun, is connected to performance. Highlighting that Victoria’s essence is not “fixed,” her physical changes suggest the possibility that the sexualized body is nothing but a social construction that must continuously be performed (Craciun, Zofloya 21). The dissident implication of this suggestion, Craciun argues, is that Victoria’s violent desire is not any more or less natural than Lilla’s childlike passivity: “these portraits of destructive women leave neither vice nor virtue intact, but show how both categories, not just the ‘unnatural’ one, are socially constructed and similarly destroyed” (Zofloya 23).

Craciun compellingly shows that though Zofloya illustrates the conservative lesson that women’s sexual desires are destructive, it more forcefully depicts the dissident lesson that the ideal of Lilla, “the naturally asexual and domestic woman,” is as unnatural as Victoria, “her ‘degenerate’ double” (Zofloya 24). Victoria’s “furor,” her body’s mutability, and her successful destruction of Lilla can thus be read as a critique of the masculinist ideal of “proper womanhood.”

Craciun’s argument—that the novel invokes and then performatively resists the idea of the proper woman put forward by misogynist medical discourse—is a helpful starting point for exploring how Zofloya engages more specifically with the language and ideology of the case. Victoria, I would like to suggest, actively mobilizes performance in a way that troubles the practice of thinking in cases that both Berenza and the narrator invoke. As I discussed in the introduction to this project, persistent performance is an effective tool for challenging the case history’s way of knowing. If the goal of the case history is to cure the body politic by making

sexuality and subjectivity” (Craciun, “Introduction” 22). In Fatal Women of Romanticism Craciun further emphasizes this point, arguing, “Dacre’s literary reworking of such misogynist medical discourse offers an instructive example of how women’s imaginative representations of bodies can transcend the passionless or reticence often ascribed to them by modern critics” (121)

20 Craciun writes, “Dacre’s most important contribution to the critique of the proper woman of her time is not in creating a new version of female subjectivity…but in destroying the possibility of a stable subject identity, and even of a natural corporeal identity” (Fatal Women of Romanticism 153).
transparent the origins of individual pathology, the case history must find a way to rupture the opacity of the individual’s performance. Within this paradigm, performance is a barrier through which the case historian must break, and a persistent performance that refuses penetration offers a significant challenge. Tracing the discourses of disease and performance in *Zofloya*, I will show how, in this novel, performance not only thwarts the case historian’s project but also works to spread the very pathology that the case historian seeks to cure. If desire in *Zofloya* is a destructive malady, Victoria both has the desire and spreads desire through the power of her performance.

Victoria uses performance to elude and manipulate Berenza’s rational tendencies; instead of being penetrated and controlled, the object of the case history ends up controlling the case historian. Recognizing Berenza’s urge to “penetrate” her feelings, Victoria immediately decides to manipulate him: “She saw only that it would be necessary and politic to answer his sincere and honourable love at least with an appearance equally ardent and sincere” (Dacre 97, italics in original). Not only does Victoria act as though she is innocently in love, but she also performs as the proper object of a case history; she makes Berenza believe that she is “ardent and sincere” by “appearing” as though she has a secret that he must probe and discover. Noticing that “Berenza’s disposition was in reality melancholy, somber, and reflective,” Victoria resolves, “she then must become melancholy, retired, and abstracted. Berenza would hence be induced to scrutinize the cause. Artifice on her side, and natural self-love on his, would easily make him attribute it to the effects of a violent and concealed love: thus would an explanation be the result; and the reserve, the doubts, the hesitations of Berenza at an end” (Dacre 97-8). Victoria uses Berenza’s case historicizing impulse to make him believe that he is discovering her secret truth. She knows that, like a good case historian, his first response to her melancholy will be “to scrutinize the cause,”
and she guesses that his “self love” will make him think that the cause of her melancholy is love for him. In other words, Victoria predicts that the case historian’s emotions will infect his powers of rational analysis. Understanding the case historian better than he understands himself, Victoria’s performance successfully fools Berenza not in spite of but precisely because of his desire to penetrate inner secrets, that is, his tendency to think in cases.  

Not only does Victoria’s performance fool Berenza but it also infects him with her own brand of violent desire. After Victoria declares her love in a feigned fit of sleep talking, the narrator explains, “The violent emotion of Berenza was such, that for some moments he was deprived of the power of speech. The blood rushed from his heart to his head; his senses became confused, when, seizing wildly in his arms the artful Victoria, he exclaimed, in hurried accents---‘Thou art mine!---Yes, I now know that thou art mine’ (Dacre 98-9). Victoria’s performance has created in Berenza a kind of emotion that overrides his physical functions, overpowering both his senses and his normal powers of speech. This response is strikingly different from Berenza’s attitude when Victoria first arrived at his palazzo. On that night, the narrator tells us, Berenza’s “reasoning mind” is “placid and unruffled…Can I, he asked himself, be rationally happy, with a being as imperfect as she now is?” (Dacre 90, italics in original). The result of this reflection is Berenza’s case-historicizing resolution to “penetrate her thoughts” in order to “new model her character” (Dacre 92). Meanwhile, as Victoria prepares for bed in a separate room, “delight and pleasure had such complete possession of her, that scarce could her trembling hands perform the office of disrobing herself” (90). Victoria is “possessed” by pleasure; she embodies a kind of

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21 Ranita Chatterjee suggests that Victoria models herself after the rakish Ardolph (83-4). Indeed, Ardolph is the first person in the novel to use performance to destroy his victims. The novel is clear that Ardolph has very strong feelings for Laurina, but he makes her love him by performing his own love in a way that encourages her to “enquire into causes”: “he appeared before her, pale, haggard, and with an expression of wretchedness on his countenance deeper than any he had yet worn. Involuntarily she stopped; and, looking with kindness in his face, asked, in a soothing voice, if he were ill. An enquiry into the cause of his complaint was all he had anxiously desired” (Dacre 45). Victoria’s performance for Berenza is thus a mirror of Ardolph’s earlier performance for Laurina.
desire that overtakes her physical functions. Throughout the novel Victoria’s desire is characterized by this frenzy; it is these descriptions that prompt Craciun to argue that Victoria’s desire echoes medical descriptions of nymphomania. Victoria, I would like to suggest, is not the only character in Zofloya to contract this pathological brand of violent desire; Berenza, fooled by Victoria’s performance, shows similar symptoms. Just as, on that first night, Victoria’s desire for Berenza possessed her so that she could not properly use her hands, after Victoria’s performance Berenza’s desire for her possesses him so that he cannot properly hear, speak or see.

The narrator reinforces the idea that Victoria’s performance helps to spread aberrant love by characterizing Berenza’s delusion as a kind of disease: “Proud of her achievement, it was Victoria’s care that her lover should not recover from his delusion: well did she support the character she had assumed; and the tender refined Berenza became convinced, that he possessed the first pure and genuine affections of an innocent and lovely girl!” Victoria’s performance as an innocent girl in love is figured here as a kind of pathogen—it creates a delusion from which Berenza indeed does not “recover,” even when Victoria slowly murders him. Berenza is unable successfully to penetrate performance to get at the secret truth of Victoria’s self; instead he is tricked by Victoria’s performance into catching the very disease that he attempts to observe. In Zofloya, then, performance is never successfully penetrated. Instead, it spreads a brand of violent desire that is both contagious and fatal. When Berenza decides to marry Victoria, the narrator observes, “So complete and powerful a dominion had the act of Victoria obtained over his mind, that his proud and dignified attachment, softened into a doating [sic] and idolatrous love. He was no longer the refined, the calculating philosopher, but the yielding devoted lover!” (Dacre 137-8). Victoria’s performance has “softened” Berenza’s analytic abilities, and the language of penetration and control is now reversed. Rather than breaking through performance to the source
of Victoria’s aberration, Berenza himself catches the aberration and yields to the “dominion” of Victoria’s performance.

This dominion is so complete that Victoria manages to murder Berenza while successfully performing the role of a medical caregiver. Five years after marrying Berenza, Victoria finds herself desiring his brother, Henriquez. With the help of Zofloya, Victoria enacts a plan to get Berenza out of the way by mixing a slow poison into his drinks. Berenza, oblivious to this plan, at one point declares, “Oh, my love, whither have you been? I have been wishing for my tender nurse to make me a glass of lemonade” (Dacre 174). It is Victoria’s performance of the role of “tender nurse” that allows her to administer the poison that kills her husband. The narrator explains, “In vain did Henriquez entreat of his infatuated brother to receive advice, to explain his sensations, only to hear the opinion of a physician: no, he steadily refused; Victoria was all-sufficient, and on her tender care would he alone depend” (Dacre 176). Victoria’s performance has eradicated Berenza’s powers of rational analysis and allowed her to usurp the authority associated with the medical professional. Using her power as the “all-sufficient” caregiver, the therapy that Victoria prescribes is actually the agent of her husband’s malady. By this point in the novel, Victoria’s performance has turned the case historian’s project on its head: the doctor has become the patient, and the patient has become a doctor who dispenses poison instead of medicine. Berenza, the novel’s resident case historian, dies as the result of Victoria’s performance as “tender nurse” and “all-sufficient” physician.

I have been suggesting that Victoria’s murder of Berenza is a significant challenge to the case historian’s project, but it is also possible to read it as a reiteration of the need for rational objectivity. If Berenza had been a better case historian, one might argue, he would not have succumbed to Victoria’s performance or allowed emotion to get in the way of his reasoning.
powers. Perhaps, then, the novel is not subverting the case historian’s rational way of knowing but is instead critiquing the ostensible case historian who fails to live up to his rational project. After the death of Berenza, however, the novel obstructs this interpretation by suggesting that Victoria’s victims are already infected with desire before she gets to them. I would like to suggest, then, that it is not possible in this novel to be a good case historian: the case historian’s powers of observation and reason are always already infected with violent emotions.

Previous infection is a crucial element of Victoria’s successful seduction of Henriquez. After murdering Berenza and chaining the delicate Lilla in a remote cave, Victoria finds that Henriquez shuns her. She turns again to Zofloya, who gives her a drug that will make Henriquez believe that Victoria is actually Lilla. Craciun reads this scene as Zofloya’s ultimate depiction of the sexualized body as a performance: “That a degenerate and ‘unwieldy’ woman such as Victoria can resemble and become the fragile Lilla suggests the primacy of performance over fixed essence” (Craciun, Zofloya 21). Indeed, Victoria successfully performs the role of the proper woman and tricks Henriquez into consummating a marriage with “Lilla.” Again, Victoria’s performance is lethal for its audience: Henriquez kills himself after he realizes that he has actually had sex with Victoria. This instance of performance is particularly interesting, however, because Victoria does not simply infect Henriquez with desire for the wrong person; instead, her performance succeeds because Henriquez is already infected with violent desire. When Zofloya gives Victoria the drug that will make her appear to be Lilla, he declares that it works by causing “a partial mania as it were, as many that are termed mad may be perfectly sane upon every subject but the individual one which caused their madness. This drug has a singular power of confusing the mind, and of so far deluding it, that those who take it must inevitably believe that which it is desired to convey to their minds” (Dacre 212). In other words, this drug
works only on minds that are already infected with desire. It provides a “partial mania” whose corresponding part already exists in the object’s mind. The drug makes Henriquez believe that Victoria is Lilla not by imposing an external madness but by working with a part of Henriquez’s mind that is already mad: the part that is violently in love with Lilla. Zofloya further explains, “Thus, those who go mad for love, imagine that in every female they see her who caused their madness, involuntarily pursuing and indulging the conceit which is uppermost in their diseased fancies” (Dacre 212). This description of love as the product of a “diseased fancy” that pursues its own “conceit” epitomizes the novel’s preoccupation with violent desire as a pathology that is spread through performance. The novel highlights here, however, that both “conceit” and “madness” already live in the mind of Victoria’s audience. The implication of Victoria’s successful performance of Lilla is that Henriquez always already contained the seeds of this novel’s deadly disease. Indeed, as Zofloya suggests, perhaps we all already hold the kind of violent desire that, fed by performance, ends in madness and dissolution.

If Victoria’s performance works only because Henriquez is already infected with violent desire, then is it possible that her first victim, Berenza, was also already infected? When Berenza first sees Victoria at Monte Bello, he does indeed show signs of an infected rationality. The narrator explains, “Upon consideration, but not certainly impartial consideration, the enamoured philosopher concluded that it would not be an act of baseness or guilt to withdraw Victoria from her present dangerous and ineligible situation” (Dacre 60). Even before Victoria’s successful performance of love infects him, then, Berenza demonstrates that within the rational philosopher lives an “enamoured philosopher,” someone who makes decisions based not on “impartial consideration” but motivated instead by his desires. After the seduction of Henriquez, Berenza’s previous question, “Can I…be rationally happy, with a being as imperfect as she now is?” seems
less like the question of a good case historian and more like an attempt to shore up a rationality that is already infected with emotion. Perhaps, the novel suggests, Victoria’s performance works by intensifying a pathologically violent desire that is always already present. Henriquez’s consummation with Victoria-performing-as-Lilla raises the possibility that the case historian—and indeed, all people—always already contains the sparks of the disease that performance enflames.

This possibility is disconcerting to readers because we, like Berenza and Henriquez, are also the audience of a performance: that of the novel. In many ways Zofloya is just as “artful” as the performing Victoria; indeed, the reviewer who objected to Dacre’s use of “furor” also accused the novel’s language of performing. He wrote, “Here the language in general is bombastical… Here the sentences are often constructed in an affected, artificial manner, as to render the sense obscure” (Monthly Literary Recreations 261). The language of the novel is not only “artificial,” but also “affected”; in other words, its sentences revel in their own, studied artifice. Like a case historian, then, this reviewer condemned performance as a kind of artificiality that covers over the truth; his frustration reflects the idea that Zofloya fails to provide a meaningful reality outside of performance. Instead, the very sentences of the novel seem to be acting in a way that “render[s] the sense obscure.” Other reviewers shared this criticism. The reviewer from the Literary Journal who suggested that Dacre had maggots in her brain commented, “how, alas, could the afflicted patient be expected to talk or write rationally? …We must wonder at the power of the maggoty disease in applying extravagant language to common things, and in overwhelming all meaning in a multitude of words” (Literary Journal 266). For this reviewer, Dacre’s diseased imagination results in a kind of extravagantly diseased diction, a language whose artificiality obscures the truth because it “overwhelms all meaning.”
The “meaning” of Zofloya, I would like to argue, actually rests in the very artificiality that these reviewers denigrate. By highlighting its own performance, Dacre’s language enacts the kind of extravagant degeneration that continually frustrates the reader’s search for a stable, therapeutic moral. Like Berenza, then, the readers of the novel come to inhabit the role of the failed case historian who is unable to penetrate performance. And, like Berenza, we may find that we too have caught the disease that the novel’s language performs. The reviewer for the Literary Journal is clearly concerned about this possibility when he declares, “But this malady of maggots in the brain is rendered still more dreadful by its being infectious. The ravings of persons under its influence, whenever they are heard or read, have a sensible effect upon brains of a weak construction, which themselves either putrify or breed maggots, or suffer a derangement of some kind” (Literary Journal 267). By “brains of weak construction” this reviewer almost certainly means “women”; perhaps his censure is so virulent, however, because in this novel those who “catch” the disease of violent desire are men. In this novel, nobody is exempt from the “weakness” that “breed[s] maggots,” because the victims of performance have always already contained a pathological desire.

The degeneration of the narrator’s moralizing voice strikingly embodies the possibility that Zofloya, as a performance, is both infected and might further infect an already diseased reader. The novel begins with the case historian-like profession that this novel will “ascertain causes, and follow progressively their effects” (Dacre 39), and Diane Hoeveler argues that

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22 In “Studies on Hysteria: Case Histories and the Case Against History,” Deborah White argues that nineteenth-century case studies of hysterical women were designed to enact a sort of therapy by connecting the threads of the woman’s disconnected story into a causally connected, historical narrative (1037-8). White argues that this process is necessarily violent and incomplete; the unruly figurativeness and symbolism of language continually undermines the arc of the rational, causal narrative (1045-6). White is discussing Freudian case histories, which of course occurred much later in the nineteenth century. As Gailus shows, however, the values of the psychoanalytic case history (cause and effect, linear narrative, penetration of performance) in fact emerged at the turn of the century, just before Zofloya was published.
*Zofloya*’s narrator follows through on this claim: Victoria’s bad behavior is the result of Laurina’s bad example, and the moral of the story is that the evils of the child stem from a failures of the mother (Hoeveler 191, 197). I would like to suggest, however, in line with *Zofloya*’s nineteenth-century reviewers, that the novel’s narrator performs nothing like a clear analysis of cause and effect. Instead, the narrative voice degenerates into a pathologically unclear account that leaves room for neither rational analysis nor therapeutic intervention. While invoking Laurina’s mothering as the explanation for Victoria’s aberrations, the narrator simultaneously undermines this reading by offering other, conflicting morals and explanations. For instance, in one passage ostensibly blaming Laurina for Victoria’s behavior, the narrator declares that Victoria has “a corrupt nature” (Dacre 49). This declaration seems clear at first but is confusing on a second reading; the word “nature” implies that Victoria’s evil tendencies are inherent, but the word “corrupt” implies some process of corruption. How can one be born with a nature that has already been corrupted? With statements such as this one, the narrator toggles between the idea of evil tendencies as inherent and the idea of evil tendencies as learned, an unsteady oscillation makes it impossible for readers to answer the crucial question at the heart of the case history. Are aberrant people born that way, or did bad parenting or other circumstances make them that way? The narrator of *Zofloya* liberally blames both nature and education but does so using language that muddies instead of clarifying the difference between the two causes.

Several other critics have noticed this confusion. Craciun argues, “though the bad example set by her mother is repeatedly cited by the narrator as the cause of Victoria’s ‘love of evil,’ the narrator contradicts herself repeatedly by also offering competing explanations” (Dacre 16). Gary Kelly similarly argues that *Zofloya* is “hopelessly self-contradictory on the causes of the evil, both individual and social, it depicts” (106). These readings point out the narrator’s
contradictions in order to argue that the novel’s professions of morality are merely gestural and are therefore somehow subordinate to the immoral dissidence of the novel’s action. For instance, James Dunn argues, “The degree to which Dacre allows scenes of violence to overwrite the conventional moral markers that she is also careful to construct implies a kind of dual subjectivity, both inside and outside the normative rules of polite society” (22). I would like to suggest, however, that the narrator’s “hopelessly self-contradictory” statements are not merely poorly executed moral gestures; neither are they simply a kind of weak opposition to Victoria’s violent pursuit of her desires. Instead, the narrative voice in *Zofloya* represents a therapeutic project that has already contracted the disease it seeks to cure. Rather than creating a “dual subjectivity” between moralizing narrator and violently desiring character, this novel provides a narrative voice that mirrors the incoherent destruction that Victoria enacts. In this way, *Zofloya*’s thematic content and narrative voice work together to show that the case historian’s project is infected with incoherence.

The parallel between the *Zofloya*’s violent content and its degenerating narrative voice culminates in the final scene of the novel. Pushing Victoria off of a cliff, Zofloya both punishes Victoria’s unruly body and casts her out of society. In a way, this is a conventional therapeutic gesture: the villain, like a diseased limb, is cut off and cast out in order to restore the social body to health. In this novel, however, Victoria is not only the villain but also the heroine; and while she is effectually destroyed, so is everybody else. There is no remaining social body to be cured by Victoria’s death, because she has successfully destroyed every other meaningful character in the novel. *Zofloya* further muddies the moral behind Victoria’s demise by depicting her death in a way that parallels her murder of Lilla. The proper, submissive Lilla, like the murderous Victoria, is thrown off of a cliff: “Victoria, no longer mistress of her actions, nor desiring to be
so, seized by her streaming tresses the fragile Lilla, and held her back…she covered her fair body with innumerable wounds, then dashed her headlong over the edge of the steep.—Her fairy form bounded as it fell against the projecting crags of the mountain” (Dacre 220). The description of Victoria as “no longer mistress of her actions nor desiring to be so” depicts a kind of triumphant frenzy; Victoria’s desire here trumps all rational discourses of control, and she engages in a surprisingly satisfying act of violence against Lilla, the proper woman.  

23 By echoing this earlier, frenzied act of murder, Victoria’s conventional-seeming death actually works to remind us of her dissident power over Lilla. The narrator writes that Zofloya “grasped more firmly the neck of the wretched Victoria---with one push he whirled her headlong down the dreadful abyss!---as she fell, his loud demoniac laugh, his yells of triumph, echoed in her ears, and a mangled corse, she was received into the foaming waters below!” (254). The body of the violent, desiring woman is eliminated in the same way as the body of the quintessentially childlike and proper woman. Of course, we could read this as a kind of eye-for-an-eye morality: Victoria’s death matches that of her poor victim. As some scholars have argued, however, Victoria’s murder of Lilla is a much more satisfying event than Zofloya’s murder of Victoria, and Victoria’s death is colored by the dissident pleasure of that earlier, more vivid scene. Indeed, it is difficult to read Victoria’s end as a therapeutic elimination because no reconstituted social body emerges from the rubble. Even in her conventional death scene, then, Victoria manages to invoke for the reader her successful destruction of the novel’s social body.

23 Dunn argues that Victoria’s murder of Lilla is a symbolic destruction of the false ideal of feminine passivity. He writes, “Victoria here ritually enacts male penetration by stabbing Lilla repeatedly; the remains of the lifeless corpse may be disposed of at will, tossed into the abyss. In a mythic sense, the scene clearly reveals the destiny of feminine passivity in the scheme of masculine eroticism…Yet through the medium of Victoria, Dacre seems uninterested in lamenting female victimization, indicating rather that such should be the destiny of feminine passivity” (314).

24 Dunn finds that in contrast to Victoria’s murder of Lilla, Zofloya’s murder of Victoria is “flat and conventional” (313). I argue, on the contrary, that Victoria’s death gains significance precisely because it is colored by her earlier, more vivid murder of Lilla.
In commenting on this final scene, the narrative voice mirrors the novel’s action: it seems to wrap up the case of Victoria successfully, but instead it ends up invoking the destruction of all therapeutic possibilities. A conventional moral at the end of a novel like this one might align it with the project of the case history by showing that the social world of the novel is cured after the removal of the aberrant villain. Zofloya’s moral demonstrates, however, that the social world of Zofloya remains incurably diseased. The novel’s final moral, to use the language of nineteenth-century reviewers, is “constructed…as to render the sense obscure” (Monthly Literary Recreations 261), “overwhelming all meaning in a multitude of words” (Literary Journal 266). The voice of the narrator begins by claiming, in line with the novel’s introduction, that this work is meant to be instructive: “Reader—consider not this as a romance merely.—Over their passions and their weaknesses, mortals cannot keep a curb too strong” (Literary Journal 225). This claim to moral instruction, however, is grammatically ambiguous. Is the narrator saying that we can in fact curb our weaknesses and must do so as strongly as possible, or is the narrator saying that we are not capable of curbing our weaknesses? While we may originally accept the first reading because it provides a more coherent moral, as we read the next sentences, we might be tempted to think that perhaps we cannot curb our weaknesses. Our doubt grows as the narrator confuses the difference between nature and education, leaving less and less room for us to believe in the power of the subject’s will. The narrator first declares, “the arch enemy ever waits to take advantage of the failings of mankind, whose destruction is his glory!” (Dacre 225). This statement gives subjects some agency to change our behavior: if we let any weakness in, Satan will take advantage of it. The narrator’s next sentence, however, attributes possibly unlimited power to Satan: “That his seductions may prevail, we dare not doubt; for can we otherwise account for those crimes, dreadful and repugnant to nature, which human beings are sometimes
tempted to commit?” (Dacre 225). Suddenly Satan is to blame for the very human weakness that would let Satan in. Perhaps neither “education” nor “nature” is to blame at all, and human crimes are simply Satan’s fault? The narrator then performs a burlesque of a rational analysis of the source of aberration and the role of human agency: “Either we must suppose that the love of evil is born with us (which would be an insult to the Deity), or we must attribute them (as appears more consonant with reason) to the suggestions of infernal influence” (Dacre 255). Reason here is invoked but the reader will pause in vain to discover what, exactly, reason has determined. If we are born with these tendencies, then perhaps there is no God; if we are not born with them, then they must come from Satan. Reason has eliminated either God, human agency, or both, and the moral that we started with—“Over their passions and their weaknesses, mortals cannot keep a curb too strong”—no longer makes any sense. The coherent voice of the case historian that introduced the novel has devolved into an explanatory confusion that forces us, as readers, to question our own power as subjective agents.

Performance is a force of degeneration in this novel that not only results in the death of every major character but also successfully ravages the novel’s narrative voice. Through its “affected” language, Zofloya, like Victoria herself, embodies and spreads the disease that it claims therapeutically to eradicate. The result is the destruction of the moral of the story and, indeed, the body politic that the case historian seeks to protect. Just as Victoria’s artful performance infects the “infatuated” Berenza with a violent desire that was always already inside him, the novel’s artful performance infects both narrator and reader with a failure of coherence whose seed, the novel suggests, we readers may also have always already contained.
Chapter 2: Mending the Fragmented Surface of *Frankenstein*

In her introduction to *The Last Man* (1826), Mary Shelley describes a fictional excursion to a cave near Naples that has purportedly belonged to a Sibyl. In this cave, the explorers find “piles of leaves” and “fragments of bark” that they soon identify as fragments of the Sibyl’s writing (Shelley, *The Last Man* 5). By introducing her third novel with the story of the Sibyl’s cave, Shelley classifies *The Last Man* as an amalgamation of fragments: “I present the public with my latest discoveries in the slight Sibylline pages. Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form” (Shelley, *The Last Man* 6). Shelley’s definition in this introduction of her authorship as the linking together of “scattered and unconnected” fragments resonates in important ways with her first novel, *Frankenstein.* Like the narrative that links together the Sibylline leaves, Victor Frankenstein’s creature is modeled together from scattered fragments. Indeed, *Frankenstein* openly demonstrates its own sewn-together status, presenting the amalgamation of fragments as a crucial part of its project. In this chapter, I examine *Frankenstein* to argue that in performing authorship as the act of sewing fragments into a “consistent form,” Shelley engages with, interrogates, and ultimately turns on its head the project of the case history. In many ways *Frankenstein* mirrors the structure of the case history, tracing cause and effect and investigating the origins of individual aberration. In this novel, however, the ultimate origin that the case history seeks to uncover gets lost in a fragmented tangle of cause and effect. The result is the

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25 There are more than thematic connections between Shelley’s introduction to *The Last Man* and her description of the creature in *Frankenstein.* In the introduction she sets her fictional excursion in 1818, the year that *Frankenstein* was published. In the introduction, Shelley speaks of “my toils” and describes her project as “giving form and substance to the frail and attenuated Leaves of the Sibyl” (Shelley, *The Last Man* 7). Similar language of “forming” a body through “toils” also appears in the first sentences that Shelley wrote of *Frankenstein,* which begin, “It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils…How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form?” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 83).
blurring of the difference between creature and creator, doctor and madman, case historian and aberrant criminal. In blurring these differences, Shelley uses fragmentation in a radical way: case histories and dissections remove and restructure fragments in order to identify meaningful differences at the core, but *Frankenstein* (like Victor) amalgamates fragments in a way that emphasizes sameness on the surface. In a kind of anti-dissection or anti-case history, the novel emphasizes the “scattered and unconnected” nature of fragments while simultaneously insisting on the “consistent form” of the whole. Rather than locating meaning in some truth to be uncovered in the depths, then, *Frankenstein* insists on a meaning that lies on the sewn-together tissue of its surface.

*Frankenstein* engages with the genre of the case history through its exploration of the problem of origins. The novel’s epigraph, a quotation from *Paradise Lost*, is a question about the origin of Adam’s life: “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/ To mould me man? Did I solicit thee/ From darkness to promote me?—” (Milton 341; 10.743-5). We could read this as an oppositional statement of the “I-never-asked-to-be-born” variety, but we can also read it as a serious question that Adam asks God: Why did you make me? Was I an active agent in the story of my own origins? By beginning *Frankenstein* with this epigraph, Shelley signals the importance that questions of origins will play in the forthcoming narrative. Both Victor and his creature ask in different ways the questions about origins that Adam asks God in *Paradise Lost*. Questions about origins, causes and effects are the force behind Victor’s studies at the University of Ingolstadt, as he obsessively works to discover the origin of life. He explains to Walton,

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26 Other critics have pointed out the novel’s interest in origins. Anne Mellor writes that *Frankenstein* insistently raises the question, “what *is* nature, both the external world and human nature?” (127), and Hogle also points out that all three narrators—Frankenstein, Walton, and the creature—“try to find the origins of things” (207).

27 The obvious parallel is to the creature, who both reads *Paradise Lost* and spends a great deal of time wondering about his origins. When he describes his reading of *Paradise Lost*, the creature explains, “I often referred the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 143). As I will argue, if Adam’s question about his origins is one that the creature might ask Victor, it is also one that Victor repeatedly asks of his own self-narrative.
“Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed?” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 78). Inevitably, this question about origins leads Victor to a question about causes: “I paused, examining and analyzing all the minutia of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 78-9). Origins and causes are inextricably connected mysteries that drive the action in *Frankenstein*, and like his creator, Victor’s creature is obsessed with these questions. When telling his tale to Victor, the creature repeatedly comes back to the question of how he came into being. He declares, “What was I? The question again recurred, to be answered only with groans” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 137). The creature asks the same questions that Victor asks, but in a more personal register. His agonized version of the investigation further illuminates the relationship of origins, causes and effects in this novel: “Who was I? what was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 143). “Who and what am I?,” for the creature, can be meaningfully answered only by asking “whence did I come?” and “what is my destination?” In *Frankenstein*, the meaning of life is investigatable only through a train of causes that leads towards a moment of origin and a train of effects that leads away from it.

The novel as a whole positions this problem of origins, causes and effects as a crucial one. As several critics have pointed out, *Frankenstein’s* interest in origins is related to the scientific undertaking. Victor’s professor, M. Waldman, reformulates the question of origins as a scientific enterprise when he explains to Victor that modern scientists “penetrate into the recesses of nature and shew [sic] how she works in her hiding places” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 28). As Peter Brooks argues, “The question of origins has been of utmost importance to the Monster since his initiation into language” (215). Of course, the creature is himself the embodiment of Frankenstein’s search for an origin. Arguing that the origin that the novel’s characters seek is in fact an empty core, Jerrold Hogle writes, “The monster, as a case in point, is a metaphor for the origin in the most radical sense. He condenses in his own visage a panoply of metaphors that are themselves alluding to metaphors of the origin” (216). My argument will build upon and further explore Hogle’s insight.
While there is a clear connection between the scientific enterprise and the search for origins, I would like to suggest that there is more going on here: in *Frankenstein*, the desire to “penetrate the recesses of nature” is crucially related to the project of the psychoanalytic case history. *Frankenstein*, like the case history, raises questions about the origins of individual aberration and, in exploring these questions, invokes a narrative of cause and effect.

Making cases of both Victor and his creature, *Frankenstein*, like Zofloya, asks questions that are central to the case history’s project: do people (or creatures) act badly because they are born that way, or are their aberrations the result of bad parenting and other circumstances? The creature famously makes an argument for failed parenting as the origin of both his misery and his crimes. He claims that his crimes are the result of his circumstances, and he sees these circumstances as the direct result of Victor’s neglect: “my vices are the children of a forced solitude I abhor” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 158). By calling his vices the “children” of his solitude, the creature reminds Victor that parents are to blame for the vices of their children. As the creature’s “parent,” Victor is at least partly responsible for the creature’s crimes. Begging Victor to make him a female companion, the creature cries, “I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 119). If Victor behaves like a good parent, the creature argues, then his “child’s” bad behavior will cease. Many critics—including Percy Shelley—have located the moral of the novel in the creature’s

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29 Anne Mellor, Mary Favret, and Emma Liggins all discuss the misogynist nature of science, making arguments that implicitly engage with the scientific search for origins. Mellor reads the novel as a critique of the scientific, rationalist enterprise that seeks to “penetrate” a passive, feminized nature (111); Favret argues, “The novel directs our bodies to react in fear of scientific techniques” (57); and Liggins finds that “female sexuality doubles as the ultimate object of scientific inquiry” (130).

30 Macdonald and Scherf point out that Shelley’s interest in the dangers of parental negligence mirror those of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 120). In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft declares, “A great proportion of the misery that wanders, in hideous forms, around the world, is allowed to rise from the negligence of parents” (273; Ch. 11). Of course, Wollstonecraft’s image of misery as a wandering, hideous form anticipates her daughter’s famously neglected creature.
declaration of inherent goodness and his claim that both Victor and society have failed him.\footnote{In a review that Percy Shelley wrote in 1818 (posthumously published in the \textit{Athenaeum} in 1832), he writes, “Nor are the crimes and malevolence of the single Being, though indeed withering and tremendous, the offspring of any unaccountable propensity to evil, but flow irresistibly from certain causes fully adequate to their production...In this the direct moral of the book consists; and it is perhaps the most important, and of the most universal application, of any moral that can be enforced by example. Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked” (Shelley, \textit{Frankenstein} 282). Anne Mellor argues that “the absence of a mothering love, as \textit{Frankenstein} everywhere shows, can and does make monsters” (140). Alan Rauch argues that the novel is an indictment of Frankenstein’s “isolationist and exclusionary” tendencies” (229).}

I would like to suggest, however, that the creature’s view is not the last word in the novel. Instead, his declarations that his crimes are partly the result of bad parenting serve to shine a new light on the already-crucial problem of origins, causes, and effects in \textit{Frankenstein}, putting the novel in conversation with the genre of the case history. The creature’s self-explanation foregrounds the question at the heart of the case history’s project: what is the origin of individual aberration?\footnote{Mellor gestures towards this reading when she writes, “Clearly, this being has the capacity to do good; equally clearly, it has the capacity to do evil. But whether it was born good and corrupted by society or born evil and justly subjected to the condemnation of society, or neither, the novel does not tell us” (136)}

Like a good case historian, Victor sets up his narrative as an attempt to answer this question. He declares to Walton, “But, in drawing the picture of my early days, I must not omit to record those events which led, by insensible steps to my after tale of misery” (Shelley, \textit{Frankenstein} 68). Victor wants to trace the chain of causes that has led to his current, unhappy state. This is not a simple project, because in \textit{Frankenstein} an overwhelming array of causes and effects leads both towards and away from an inscrutable moment of origin. As Victor explains, “when I would account to myself for the birth of that passion which afterwards ruled my destiny I find it arise, like a mountain river, from ignoble and almost forgotten sources; but, swelling as it proceeded, it became the torrent which, in its course, has swept away all my hopes and joys” (Shelley, \textit{Frankenstein} 68). The moment of birth is preceded by an invisible stream of causes and followed by a bewildering torrent of effects. Despite the difficulty of such a project, Victor here presents his story as a detailed case history of the causes and consequences of the birth of his
obsession. This obsession, of course, is with finding the origin of life; in telling his case history, then, Victor purports to trace the origins and causes of his fascination with origins and causes.

If we expect a clear account of the sources of Victor’s obsession, however, his narrative will disappoint. In the original 1818 edition of the novel, at least, Victor attributes his passion for finding the origins of life to a variety of sources without successfully tracing those causes to any one “moment of birth.” At one point he blames his father for not recognizing the dangers of his young son’s interest in the writings of the sixteenth-century alchemist Cornelius Agrippa: “If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded…It is even possible that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin” (Shelley, Frankenstein 68). Victor suggests here that his father could have derailed the train of causes leading to his son’s “fatal impulse.” From this we might gather that a combination of dangerous reading and lax parenting is the cause of Victor’s troubles. Just a few pages later, however, we learn that Victor gives up his interest in alchemy without his father’s interference. After describing “the overthrow of Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, who had so long reigned lords of my imagination,” Victor declares, “But by some fatality I did not feel inclined to commence the study of any modern system” (Shelley, Frankenstein 70). Suddenly the culprit is not Victor’s knowledge of Agrippa but his dearth of knowledge about modern science. This theory loses its explanatory power, however, when we hear that Victor decides to create the creature only after spending considerable time learning modern scientific theories. After M. Waldman introduces him to modern chemistry, Victor declares, “thus ended a day memorable to me; it decided my

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33 Hogle points out that Victor here mobilizes “leaps of rhetoric” in an attempt to equate “chance impressions” with “a primordial Fall” (216). He continues, “Though he ascribes his downfall to a ruined education much of the time, Victor never speaks of his greatest secret as a mistaken association. It is always as ‘impenetrable’ as the mysteries of heaven” (216). My argument builds on Hogle’s idea that Victor’s valorization of a “truth” that never appears opens up his tale “to a reading of its fabrications as empty reinscriptions” (216).
future destiny (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 77). Perhaps, then, the cause of Victor’s obsession is the study of modern science? Or perhaps, as the reference to “destiny” suggests, Victor is a casualty of an already-decided fate? The origin of Victor’s obsession with origins is a murky mixture of old reading, new scientific study, careless parenting, and fate. Instead of pinpointing any determining cause, then, Victor’s narration of the “insensible steps” that led to his creation of the creature works to further highlight the difficulty of the case history’s project of tracing tangled chains of causes.

As Victor’s failure to diagnose an origin suggests, this novel is less interested in solving the questions case historians raise than it is in exploring the ways case histories function. Much of this exploration occurs through Frankenstein and his creature’s continual invocation of linear, connected self-narratives. For instance, Victor repeatedly refers to his life story as a series of connected events. When introducing his tale to Walton, Victor explains, “You will hear of powers and occurrences, such as you have been accustomed to believe impossible: but I do not doubt that my tale conveys in its series internal evidence of the truth of the events of which it is composed” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 62). The “internal evidence” in the novel will be convincing, Victor implies, because it will occur in a well-ordered “series.” Later in his narrative when he details how he “succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life,” Victor proves the truth of his assertion not by disclosing the crucial origin—that origin remains a mystery—but by invoking an ordered chain of cause and effect. He admonishes Walton, “Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. The sun does not more certainly shine in the heavens than that

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34 In the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley emphasizes the role of destiny over all other factors in Frankenstein’s life. Mellor writes that by 1831, Shelley was convinced “that human events are decided not by personal choice or free will but by material forces beyond our control” (170). This change is striking. For instance, in the 1831 edition Frankenstein declares, “Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction” (Shelley, “Appendix H” 323). In the 1831 edition Frankenstein also blames his sorrows on “fate” and “The Angel of Destruction” who has “omnipotent sway” (Shelley, “Appendix H” 325).
which I now affirm is true. Some miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the discovery were distinct and probable” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 79). Again, Victor avers that the truth of his tale is evident in its “distinct and probable” stages. In Victor’s formulation, the orderly relation of these stages is what distinguishes the story of Frankenstein—the authoritatively sane case historian—from “the vision of a madman.”

Mirroring Victor’s concerns, again in a more personal and plaintive register, the creature is similarly invested in connecting events into an orderly series. When he describes to Victor the benefits that will accrue from the creation of a female creature he declares, “I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 158). It is crucial here that the creature wants to be linked not only to other creatures but also to a meaningfully ordered series of life events. As Peter Brooks points out, the creature’s desire is fundamentally connected to the use of language: the ordered symbols of language mirror the linked “chain of existence” that the creature seeks to join. A connection with others will allow the creature to live in the style of an ordered case history, self-narrating his place in a chain of connected events.

Victor shares his creature’s desire for self-narration, retelling events—in order, of course—when coping with the disorder and tragedy that the creature’s existence effects. Not only does Victor relate the “distinct and probable” stages of his life story to Walton, but he also repeatedly narrates them to himself in moments of crisis. After the death of William, Victor tells Walton, “I revolved in my mind the events which I had until now sought to forget: the whole train of my progress towards the creation; the appearance of the work of my own hands alive at

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35 *Frankenstein* critics have long noted the creature’s desire to exist in relation to other beings without focusing on his related desire to be connected to a chain of events; for instance see the work of Alan Rauch (252).
36 Brooks writes, “Only through those linked signs whose rules he has mastered can the Monster hope to enter ‘the change of existence and events,’ to signify” (208).
my bed side; its departure” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 99). Like the creature who wishes to “become linked to the chain of existence and events,” Victor seeks to make meaning within misery and chaos by re-narrating his life as a series—“the whole train”—of connected events. After the creature has murdered Clerval, Victor again makes use of this tactic: “I repassed, in my memory, my whole life” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 188).

This time, however, when Victor gets to the creation of the creature, the orderly train of events gets derailed: “I called to mind the night during which he first lived. I was unable to pursue the train of thought; a thousand feelings pressed upon me, and I wept bitterly” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 188). However inconclusive it is as a case history, Victor’s narrative does trace the tangled chains of causes that led to his creation of the creature. He repeatedly fails, however, to narrate to himself the chain of effects that occurs after the creature’s birth. Since the creature seems to Victor to be a horrible aberration, we might expect him, as a case historian, to analyze the creature’s behavior. Even in his narrative to Walton, however, Victor’s emotions about the creature interfere with his ability to think about or describe him: “How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form?” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 83). Instead, we learn the most about the creature when his own voice interrupts Victor’s narrative, further fragmenting Victor’s tale by breaking it into two parts. Both structurally and thematically, the eruption of the creature into Victor’s narrative fragments and disrupts the case history’s orderly way of knowing.

This pattern continues over the course of the novel, as Victor finds himself unable to narrate the series of effects that flows in a torrent from the creature’s murky origin. After the creature starts committing crimes, the act of remembering events stops being therapeutic for Victor and starts being malignant. On his return to Geneva after the murder of Clerval, Victor
confesses, “Memory brought madness with it; and when I thought on what had passed, a real insanity possessed me” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 193). Memory, the ability to narrate one’s own story, is not only unhelpful or impossible here but actually leads to madness. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a variant meaning of the word “remember” is “re-member,” that is, “to put together again, reverse the dismembering of” (“re-member,” Entry 1).\(^3\) When Victor explains that “memory brought madness with it,” his problem with memory is also an inability to re-member, a failure to connect the pieces of his story into a coherent, linear narrative. Just as the monster’s story breaks Victor’s story into pieces, Victor’s ability to construct a narrative of cause-and-effect is disturbed—infected, even—by his strong feelings about the creature’s crimes. Victor invokes this infection with madness repeatedly in the second half of the novel. He declares, “I was possessed by a maddening rage when I thought of him” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 200) and asks, “Can you wonder that sometimes a kind of insanity possessed me…” (Shelley *Frankenstein* 160). The coherent narration of cause and effect that once stood as proof of Victor’s sanity becomes impossible; it is replaced by an incoherent narrative that is both an agent and a sign of his insanity. After Clerval’s murder, Victor confesses, “The whole series of my life appeared to me as a dream; I sometimes doubted if indeed it were all true” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 184). The same “series” that testified to the truth of Victor’s narrative now testifies only to a dreamlike uncertainty, and instead of proving his sanity, Victor’s case history begins to narrate his descent into insanity.

Fragmented by the creature’s existence, Victor’s narrative has transformed into a sign of his madness. His awareness that his story could be interpreted as the incoherent ravings of a

\(^3\) The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s first instance of this usage is in a psychoanalytic treatise written nearly forty years after *Frankenstein*, in 1855 (“re-member”). Nevertheless, *Frankenstein*’s exploration of memory as a connected narrative and its interest in dismemberment and fragmentation activate this definition of “remember.” And, after all, “re-member” is visible and audible within the word itself.
madman leads him to withhold information from legal and medical officials. After William’s death, when Justine is falsely accused of the murder, Victor tells Walton, “My first thought was to discover what I knew of the murderer, and cause instant pursuit to be made. But I paused when I reflected on the story that I had to tell” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 100). In this moment of reflection, Victor retells his tale to himself and hears it as an insane narrative: “I remembered also the nervous fever with which I had been seized just at the time that I dated my creation, and which would give an air of delirium to a tale otherwise so utterly improbable. I well knew that if any other had communicated such a relation to me, I should have looked upon it as the ravings of insanity” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 100). Here Victor’s narrative becomes both a symptom and a sign of madness; Victor occupies a double role, positioning himself as both the raving madman and the doctor who would diagnose his own tale as a sign of insanity.

Victor’s fear that his tale will have “an air of delirium” for the magistrate raises a question for us as readers: is Victor’s narrative to Walton (and to us) really as connected and clear as he has claimed at its inception? Or is it closer to the fragmented ravings of a madman? Despite its great popularity, some of *Frankenstein*’s early readers read the novel as just that. In an 1818 review of *Frankenstein* John Wilson Croker complains, “The dreams of insanity are embedded in the strong and striking language of the insane, and the author, notwithstanding the rationality of his preface, often leaves us in doubt whether he is not as mad as his hero” (280). For Croker, the novel as a whole is as insanely dreamlike as Victor’s narrative appears to him after the death of Clerval. Indeed, Croker goes further to suggest that the “language of the insane” that the novel employs indicates that the novel’s author is infected with madness as well. In a stringent denial of the narrative’s claims of sanity and truth, Croker declares, “the style which [the author] has adopted in the present publication merely tends to defeat his own purpose,
if he really had any other object in view than that of leaving the wearied reader, after a struggle between laughter and loathing, in doubt whether the head or the heart of the author be the most diseased” (281). Just as Victor fears the magistrate will hear his narrative and think he is insane, Croker reads the novel’s style as a sign of its author’s madness. And, I would argue, in many ways Croker is right: Victor’s narrative devolves into a kind of disorder in which the differences between sanity and insanity disappear.

As Victor’s case history becomes a sign of his madness, the differences between Victor and his creature blur. By the end of the novel, it is not clear who is the doctor or case historian and who is the mad criminal. When Victor finally does tell his story to a magistrate, the magistrate, not surprisingly, thinks Victor is insane. He explains to Walton, “But to a Genevan magistrate…this elevation of mind had much the appearance of madness. He endeavored to soothe me as a nurse does a child, and reverted to my tale as the effects of delirium” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 202). Just as Victor has feared, the legal official—who in his officialdom doubles here as a medical professional—interprets the tale of the creature as the narrative of a madman. As readers we might agree with Croker and the Genevan magistrate that at some points it is not the creature but Victor who seems like the aberrant one. Walton, our stand-in, writes, “his eyes have generally an expression of wildness, and even madness” (59). Not only does Victor repeatedly refer to feelings of insanity, but he also begins to believe that he is guilty of the creature’s crimes. After Justine’s death Frankenstein declares, “I had committed deeds of mischief beyond description horrible…Yet my heart overflowed with kindness and love of virtue” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 111). Victor’s declaration could just as easily belong to his creature; his sense of himself as a case historian is replaced by his sense of himself as a good

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38 As Mellor writes, “By the end of the novel, we cannot separate the wretched, solitary Frankenstein from the wretched, solitary monster” (135).
person who has nevertheless become a madman and a criminal. Croker slides easily between calling the “hero” of the novel insane and calling its author insane, a slippage that mirrors the kind of mutual infection that occurs between Victor and the creature. Indeed, the slippage occurs in both directions; just as Victor takes on the creature’s criminality, the creature takes on Victor’s case historicizing. For instance, he tells Frankenstein that he has spent his time “endeavouring to discover the motives which influenced [the De Laceys’] actions” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 127).

A crucial way that the novel works to elide the differences between Victor and the creature is by deploying images of fragmentation that permeate both their bodies and their narratives. We have already seen this process at work in the creature’s fragmentation of Victor’s narration: Victor’s madness is tied to his inability to re-member his story, to trace connected effects that stem from the creature’s existence. His language of madness makes it hard to distinguish the case historian from the criminal creature. In *Frankenstein*, this fragmentation of narrative is mirrored by the fragmentation of bodies. The creature, of course, is an amalgamation of fragmented body parts sourced by Victor from “[t]he dissecting room and the slaughterhouse” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 81). Victor’s assembly of the creature, as scholars have noted, invokes the increasing practice of dissection in the early nineteenth century. While dissection is the act of fragmenting a body, however, the creature is in fact a kind of anti-dissection; he is a re-memberment, not a dismemberment, of fragmented of body parts. Nonetheless, the creature is as horrifying as a dissected cadaver. Frankenstein exclaims, “I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 81). The visible “work” of muscle and arteries horrifies Victor because it reminds him of his performance of piecing together the creature. As an anti-dissection the body of the monster frighteningly narrates the story of its own fragmentation and

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amalgamation: the sewn-together body highlights the original fragmentation of its component parts. Mirroring the creature’s body, Frankenstein’s body threatens to fragment while sewing together the parts: “my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 81). Victor’s act of anti-dissection leads to a mutual fragmentation in which the bodies of Victor and the creature begin to tell the same story.

This pattern of mutual fragmentation reaches its climax when Frankenstein creates and destroys the female creature.40 Victor explains, “I now also began to collect the materials necessary for my new creation, and this was to me like the torture of single drops of water continually falling on the head. Every thought that was devoted to it was an extreme anguish, and every word that I spoke in allusion to it caused my lips to quiver, and my heart to palpitate” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 168). The collection of the pieces that will compose the female creature works to fragment both Frankenstein’s narrative and his body. Madness, as we have seen, deploys fragmentation: instead following a train of thought or a collection of words, Victor experiences singular thoughts and words that torture his body like “single drops of water.” Victor’s tortured body, quivering lips and palpitating heart mirror his madness and presage a body about to fly to pieces. He violently reinserts this fragmentation on the partially-constructed female creature: “I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and, trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged. The wretch saw me destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, and, with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 174-5). Rememberment becomes dismemberment here as Victor violently re-dissects the female creature whom he has partially amalgamated. This act of violence, as other critics have noted, aligns

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40 The destruction of the female creature is a much-discussed scene in *Frankenstein* criticism. Mellor reads it as a kind of rape scene (120), and Rauch uses the work of Jordanova to remind us that “the dismemberment of the female…has a long history in medical conceptions of women’s bodies” (232).
Victor with the creature by mirroring the violent murders that the creature has already committed. In his own narrative, the creature describes the act of murder as a kind of fragmenting torture similar to the torture Victor experiences when he puts together the female creature. The creature asks, “Think ye that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears? My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy; and, when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture such as you cannot even imagine” (218). The creature experiences the act of murdering as a violent, almost physical, wrenching. The creature’s acts of murder and Victor’s acts of creation are parallel here: both acts fragment another’s body and simultaneously fragment the body of the actor. The alignment of Victor with the creature goes further, however, as Victor’s “murder” of the female creature enacts a fragmentation that affects all three bodies at the scene. Victor’s madness becomes a physical trembling that leads him to tear the already-fragmented female body to shreds, and the creature’s howling response to this destruction makes it seem as though his own body, itself put together by Frankenstein, has also been violently torn apart. In this moment Frankenstein and creature are strangely united, sharing a moment of anguished madness and fragmentation over the divided body of the female creature.

Like the failure of linear self-narrative, the mutual fragmentation that I have been tracing in Frankenstein is crucial to the novel’s engagement with the genre of the case history. Case histories work through a specific kind of dismembering and re-membering: they fragment and reorganize the patient’s language in order to identify a medical or psychological “truth” at the patient’s core; as M. Waldman puts it, they “penetrate into the recesses of nature and shew [sic] how she works in her hiding places” (Shelley, Frankenstein 75). The case historian’s cutting up

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41 Liggins reads the scene as a moment of murderous medical experimentation (139). Marshall suggests that Victor is characterized as a dissector and a murderer, explaining, “In the anatomy literature there is much slippage between the surgeon, the dissector, the murderer” (13).
of the patient’s words in order to formulate this inner “truth” mirrors the doctor’s dissection of a cadaver in order to expose the female reproductive organs. In both the dissection and the case history, the enactment of fragmentation is an assertion of interpretive authority. Frankenstein and the creature engage in a struggle for this kind of power, and they do so in a manner that further unites them. When the creature attempts to fragment Frankenstein’s narrative by inserting his own narrative (“listen to me”), Frankenstein attempts to cut him off, responding, “Why do you call to my remembrance…circumstances of which I shudder to reflect, that I have been the miserable origin and author?” (Shelley Frankenstein 119). The cutting off of the creature’s narrative is crucial to Victor’s claim for authorship, just as the interruption of Victor’s narrative is crucial to the creature’s. Despite Victor’s difficulty reflecting and re-remembering, he still invokes himself as the “author” of both his own and the creature’s circumstances. A page later, however, the creature threatens Victor, declaring that he can become “the author of your own speedy ruin” (Shelley, Frankenstein 120). Later in the creature’s narrative he tells Victor that just before killing William he thinks to himself, “I too can create desolation; my enemy is not impregnable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him” (Shelley, Frankenstein 155). As we have seen, the creature’s crimes do successful “impregnate” Frankenstein’s narrative with madness, making the creature in many ways the author of Victor’s ruin. Neither Victor nor the creature emerges as the victorious re-memberer—the incisor and re-shaper—of the other’s story. Instead, as they fragment each other, the narratives of the Victor and the creature integrate so that it is unclear who is authoring whom; they author each other in increasingly indistinguishable narratives of insanity and violence.

The inability to determine who is authoring whom is crucial for a novel that, as I have been arguing, is exploring the project of the case history. When Frankenstein was published,

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42 In the 1832 edition, Shelley changed “impregnable” to “invulnerable.”
case historians were working hard to distinguish between the voice of the doctor and the voice of the patient. As Carol Berkenkotter and Mary Fissell show, practitioners such as John Haslam reported patient speech in a way that divided the patient’s words from their context. This reported speech separated the language of the object from the language of the case historian, fragmenting and reordering the object’s words. This reordering, of course, was designed to mark the case historian’s voice as authoritative and the object’s voice as pathological. *Frankenstein* uses the case history’s technique of fragmentation, but it achieves the opposite objective; instead of defining clear boundaries between the words of the creature and those of his creator, Victor’s narrative of the creature infects his own self-narrative with madness. Refusing to mark a clear distinction between the analytic voice and the pathological voice, *Frankenstein* uses fragmentation to obscure the distinction between the doctor’s and the patient’s words.

This reversal is even more striking because *Frankenstein*, like the case history, uses the device of reported speech. Beth Newman explains that reported speech within the kind of frame narratives that structure *Frankenstein* usually works “in order to provide multiple points of view, each of which expresses the unique psychology of the character who tells a given story” (143). This way of working is of course in line with the case history’s project of demarcating the difference between pathological and analytic speech. *Frankenstein* uses reported speech to achieve an opposite effect, however. Although Walton reports Victor’s speech and Victor reports the creature’s speech in supposedly word-for-word acts of “extended ventriloquism,” the distinction between the “voices” of the different characters is blurred (Newman 146). Rather than noticing psychological differences among the narrator’s voices, Newman points out that “We are more apt to be struck by the similarities in the way the Monster and Frankenstein express
themselves…The novel fails to provide significant differences in tone, diction and sentence structure” (Newman 146).

What Newman describes as the novel’s blurring of the differences between narrator and reported speaker can be read as a revision of the case history’s project. The dividing of the novel into three different voices results in an aggregation of similar parts that is, much like the creature’s body, surprisingly whole. The ever-insightful Croker calls this novel “a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity” (280), and in many ways he is right. “A tissue,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is “a woven fabric, as being produced by the intertwining of separate elements; an intricate mass or interwoven series” (“tissue,” Entry 4, fig.). In creating the “tissue” of *Frankenstein*, Shelley performs an anti-dissection much like that of the creature’s body. She sews together fragments in a way that highlights their fragmentation while simultaneously insisting on their inextricable interweaving. In this way, the novel uses the language and techniques of the case history to enact an anti-case history, rejecting the truth of the individual origin and instead interweaving causes and blending voices. In *Frankenstein*, then, Shelley models a new kind of re-membering, a fragmentation that works to enact an amalgamation.

If the project of both the case history and the dissection is to peel away fragments of in order to reach a meaningful core, the project of *Frankenstein* is to amalgamate fragments in order to create a tissue—to find meaning in the kind of surface that comprises amalgamated fragments. As part of this project, the novel rejects the kind of meaningful core usually found at the end of a novel: an ending or consummation that points to a clear moral.⁴³ At Victor’s death

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⁴³ My reading of *Frankenstein* as a novel without a truth at its core is greatly indebted to the work of Peter Brooks and Jerrold Hogle. Brooks concludes that *Frankenstein* rejects the notion of a meaning that transcends language: “the chain established has no privileged limits, no mode of reference, but signifies purely as a chain, a system or series in which everything is mutually interrelated and interdependent but without any transcendent signified…the
he thinks about his life with disbelief: “When I call over the frightful catalogue of my deeds, I cannot believe that I am he whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 219). Victor cannot connect his earlier self with his present self; he ends the novel unable to believe in the case history’s way of knowing. Without this way of knowing, Frankenstein is unable to direct Walton to kill the creature. He tells Walton, “my judgment and ideas are already disturbed by the near approach of death. I dare not ask you to do what I think right, for I may still be misled by passion” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 216). The madness of Victor’s feelings for the creature prevent him from ensuring the creature’s death, an event he has positioned as the consummation of his tale. And without ensuring the consummatory ending, Victor is unable to articulate a proper moral. He tells Walton, “Seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 216). Victor starts to articulate a moral for his story only to recant it. The moral—the therapeutic gesture of the case history and the key that helps us to read a novel as a coherent whole—becomes, for Victor, a contradictory uncertainty.

Compounding Walton’s inability to glean a clear moral from this story, after Victor’s death the creature comes on the scene and calls into question the entire narrative we have been reading. He says to Walton, “You, who call Frankenstein your friend, seem to have a knowledge of my crimes and his misfortunes. But, in the detail which he gave you of them, he could not sum up the hours and months of misery which I endured, wasting in impotent passions” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 216). The search for the origin is put off in new chains of language that supplement previous chains…What the reader finally gets is an errant packet from a confused navigator, a group of letters cut off from a source already adrift on a surface of signs, that repeats a mélange of rhetorical acts within its own act of rhetoric” (207).
Frankenstein 220). The creature reminds us that the narrative we have read, an amalgamation of Walton’s, Victor’s and the creature’s voices, is in fact just one narrative among many. Indeed, the last lines of the novel make room for an infinite number of future narratives. In a replication of Victor’s death scene, the creature invokes the linear narrative of his life, declaring, “the miserable series of my being is wound to its close” (Shelley, Frankenstein 217). He declares his intention “to consummate the series of my being” by killing himself (Shelley, Frankenstein 220). But as critics point out, the consummation of the creature’s series never occurs in this novel; instead, we are left with uncertainty. Walton tells us, “He sprung from the cabin-window, as he said this, upon the ice-raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance” (Shelley, Frankenstein 221).

Frankenstein refuses to end with the creature’s death because such a consummatory ending and the moral that accompanies it would suggest a core of meaning for the novel. Instead, Frankenstein insists on a meaning that rests in the tissue of its surface. As Croker rightly observes, “[Frankenstein] inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers” (281). Perhaps Frankenstein infuriates Croker because of how it repurposes the idea of “mending.” The meaning of the novel rests not in a core moral that will “mend” its readers but in the author’s performance of mending; the “link[ing] together” of “scattered and unconnected” fragments that Shelley describes as the work of authorship (Shelley, The Last Man 6). In her construction of Frankenstein, Shelley performs a new kind of remembering, an anti-dissection that creates a visibly fragmented whole. Like the creature’s body,

44 Brooks notes the creature’s repeated invocation of “the series of my being” and connects this phrase to the novel’s interest in “the movement ever forward that can reach no point of arrest and no ultimate structuring relationship. It is a textual movement that can never cover over and fill in its central lack, that can reach an end only in extinction” (218). Hogle concludes, “Whether it is called an ‘origin,’ a ‘cause,’ or a ‘moral truth,’ the underlying presence in Frankenstein is nothing but a pretension within writing on top of writing, an absent objective lost from the start ‘in darkness and distance’” (207).
which makes visible the labor that built it, *Frankenstein* is a fragmented and mended surface. This surface both invokes the layer of performance that the case historian would penetrate and emphasizes the author’s performance of mending it. Upon the fragmented surface of this novel, the differences between creature and creator, madman and case historian blur. If the case historian divides and re-members in a way that cements the case historian’s authority and privileges a truth to be found in the depths, then, *Frankenstein* performs a new kind of fragmentation and re-membrance in which boundaries between doctor and patient blur, inviting us to find meaning not within some exposed core but upon the innumerable links that amalgamate its fragmented surface.
Chapter 3: Prescribing Disease and Cure for Mansfield Park

Jane Austen’s fragment Sanditon, left unfinished at her death in 1817, explores a hilarious and hopeless cycle of wrongheaded therapeutic intervention. The fragment’s most outrageous hypochondriacs are Susan and Diana Parker, both of whom engage in an endless circuit of self-induced illness and self-prescription.45 Diana Parker explains of her sister, “She has been suffering much from the headache and six leaches a day for ten days together relieved her so little that we thought it right to change our measures…She has accordingly had three teeth drawn, and is decidedly better, but her nerves are a good deal deranged” (Austen, Sanditon 175-6). If the treatment has fixed the headache, it has also deranged the nerves. Indeed, the reader must think along with Charlotte that “those three teeth of your sister Susan’s are more distressing than all the rest” (Austen, Sanditon 176). In Sanditon, the self-doctoring patient’s prescription is only the cause of additional illness; by collapsing the distinction between doctor and patient, the fragment depicts therapeutic intervention as just another vehicle for disease. Although it is very different in tone from Sanditon, in this chapter I will argue that Mansfield Park (1814) is also a critical exploration of the closing space between doctor and patient and the problematic nature of therapeutic intervention. Like Zofloya, Mansfield Park depicts love and performance as pathologically infectious; and like Frankenstein, Austen’s novel explores the impossibility of differentiating between the case historian and the object of analysis. The case historian who is in love must assume a rationality that is in fact impossible, and so Mansfield Park reveals “case historian” and “audience,” like “object of analysis” and “actor” as roles that must be performed.

45 Diana Parker explains that she and her sister have decided to be their own doctors: “We have entirely done with the whole medical tribe…we are convinced that they can do nothing for us and that we must trust to our own knowledge of our own wretched constitutions for any relief” (Austen, Sanditon 175). D. A. Miller describes the “morbidity culture” of Sanditon as one in which “The desire for the doctor…is eventually explicated as a desire to be one—one’s own” (“The Late Jane Austen” 72).
In this way, Austen goes even further than Dacre and Shelley to suggest that the illness of the object of analysis is actually indistinguishable from the therapeutic cure that the case historian promulgates. By embracing performance, Mansfield Park’s case historians (like Sanditon’s self-doctoring hypochondriacs) necessarily enact the very symptoms that they are trying to eradicate. Love and performance work in this novel to reveal a dangerous circularity inherent in the project of thinking in cases: the case historian’s performance of objectivity creates the same faults that it therapeutically punishes. The conclusion of the novel insists on the reader’s place in this circular process, reminding us that, as the novel’s audience, we are not objective observers but actors, subjectively performing both the novel’s infection and its cure.46

Mansfield Park’s engagement with the genre of the case history appears most clearly in its rhetoric of observation and judgment, two crucial accomplishments that the novel’s characters strive to attain. The two characters who most value these skills are Sir Thomas and Edmund, both of whom are constantly observing others for the purpose of judging them. When Sir Thomas encourages Fanny’s brother William to talk about his life in the navy, the narrator explains, “His recitals were amusing in themselves to Sir Thomas, but the chief object in seeking them, was to understand the recitor, to know the young man by his histories” (Austen, Mansfield Park 184). For Sir Thomas, the task of observing and judging his nephew is of primary importance. As the phrase “to know the young man by his histories” implies, this commitment to observation and judgment aligns Sir Thomas with the project of the case historian. Sir Thomas’s goal, like that of the case historian, is objectively to evaluate William’s self-narrative in order to make a judgment about his character. The heir of Sir Thomas’s case-historicizing project is his son, Edmund, who is also the family’s most acute observer and judge of Fanny. The narrator

46 There is much disagreement about whether Mansfield Park is a progressive or a conservative novel. In arguing that Mansfield Park reveals the false logic of the case history, I align myself with critics like Claudia Johnson and Joseph Litvak who argue that the novel engages with conservative ideology in ways that challenge its power.
reports that after Fanny’s arrival at Mansfield Park, “her cousin began to find her an interesting object. He talked to her more, and, from all that she said, was convinced of her having an affectionate heart, and a strong desire of doing right” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 13-14). Like Sir Thomas, Edmund moves from listening and watching the “object” of his observation to making a judgment about her character. When Sir Thomas leaves for Antigua, he departs with confidence that “Edmund’s judgment” will protect Maria and Julia from wrongdoing (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 26). As the family’s official observer and judge in his father’s absence, Edmund disapproves when his brother and sisters decide to produce a private theatrical performance. He declares to his brother, “as we are circumstances I must think it would be injudicious, and more than injudicious, to attempt any thing of the kind” (Austen *Mansfield Park* 99). Here, Edmund exercises the head of household’s prerogative to judge and prevent “injudicious” behavior. In resisting Edmund’s appeal, Tom questions the source of his younger brother’s authority: “Don’t imagine that nobody in this house can see or judge but yourself. —don’t act yourself, if you do not like it, but don’t expect to govern every body else” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 101). With this rebuke, Tom questions Edmund’s role as the family’s resident case historian—the one who sees and judges. Tom also highlights, here, how closely the role of the case historian is associated with the role of supreme authority: in *Mansfield Park*, those who see and judge best are also those who “govern.”

The authority that the case historian wields is that of medical prescription: in *Mansfield Park*, observation and judgment are consistently aligned with the language of diagnosis and cure. For instance, Edmund’s observation and judgment of Fanny regularly slides from concern for her moral and emotional wellbeing into concern for her physical wellbeing—from the province of
the psychoanalytic case history to that of the medical case history. After looking at her attentively,” Edmund declares that Fanny must have a headache. When she denies that her headache is bad, he insists, “I know your looks too well. How long have you had it?” (Austen, Mansfield Park 57). This kind of doctor-patient exchange is repeated several times between the two cousins, as Edmund’s observation and judgment of Fanny’s physical health mirrors his observation and judgment of her character. In conversations about both physical and moral ailments, observation and judgment (or diagnosis) lead to a prescription. For Fanny’s headache Edmund prescribes Madeira wine, but the curing of character calls for a more potent prescription, a kind of therapeutic pedagogy. The project of the case historian is inseparable in Mansfield Park from the attempt to educate in order to cure character flaws. The chief educators, as might be expected, are Sir Thomas and Edmund, and their first pupil is Fanny. Before Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas declares, “We shall probably see much to wish altered in her, and must prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner; but these are not incurable faults; nor, I trust, can they be dangerous for her associates” (Austen, Mansfield Park 9). Sir Thomas here imagines the young Fanny’s “faults” as a potentially contagious disease that might be “dangerous” for her female cousins. Within this figuration, the education he will provide is a therapeutic intervention that will “cure” the faults (assuming that they aren’t of the “incurable” sort, or course).

In a curiously circular formulation, the character faults that Sir Thomas and Edmund most want to cure are faults of observation and judgment. In other words, education is a

47 D. A. Miller points out this kind of slippage, arguing that in Austen’s novels, “the body in sickness and health is thus heaped high…with moral and psychological meanings” (“The Late Jane Austen” 57).
48 In “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick decries Austen criticism for “its unresting exaction of the spectacle of a Girl Being Taught a Lesson” (833). “A Girl Being Taught a Lesson” is of course an excellent way of characterizing the case historicizing project that I am tracing in Mansfield Park. My hope is that rather than reinscribing this spectacle, my argument will highlight how Austen engages with and resists the therapeutic pedagogy of the case history.
therapeutic intervention that those who are already skilled in observation and judgment enact on those who do not yet observe and judge properly. When Sir Thomas suggests that Fanny visit her parents’ house in Portsmouth, the narrator informs us, “It was a medicinal project upon his niece’s understanding, which he must consider as at present diseased. A residence of eight or nine years in the abode of wealth and plenty had a little disordered her powers of comparing and judging” (Austen, Mansfield Park 289). Like Berenza’s desire to “penetrate” and “new model” Victoria, Sir Thomas’s “medicinal project” has a sinister ring to it; because Fanny has rejected Henry Crawford against Sir Thomas’s advice, Sir Thomas makes her into the object of a medical experiment.\footnote{Indeed Sir Thomas explicitly thinks of this “medicinal project” as an experiment: “he trusted that she would be the wiser and happier woman, all her life, for the experiment he had devised” (Austen, Mansfield Park 289).} What is interesting here, however, is that Sir Thomas’s “medicinal project” is aimed at Fanny’s “powers of comparing and judging.” The case historian, who possesses superior powers of observation and judgment, intervenes to correct the disordered judgment of the object of observation.

This kind of educational project in fact occurs continuously throughout the novel, as Edmund therapeutically intervenes in order to remedy Fanny’s powers of observation and judgment. After Edmund first observes and judges the ten-year-old Fanny, we learn that he “encouraged her taste and corrected her judgment” in reading (Austen, Mansfield Park 18). Again in a curiously circular therapeutic pedagogy, the case historian educates the object of his observation and judgment in the very skills that he has been using to assess her. Edmund’s relative success in “correct[ing] her judgment” is evident in Fanny’s role as his partner in the observation and judgment of Mary Crawford; as Edmund says to Fanny, “How many a time have we talked over her little errors!” (Austen, Mansfield Park 211). These sessions have a didactic tone, as Edmund the case historian quizzes Fanny on how to judge the aberrations of their mutual
Edmund asks, “But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you, Fanny, as not quite right?” Like a good case historian, Fanny replies, “Oh yes! she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did” (Austen, Mansfield Park 50). Fanny then asks, “Do not you think that this impropriety is a reflection itself upon Mrs. Crawford, as her niece has been entirely brought up by her?” And Edmund replies, “That is a fair remark. Yes, we must suppose the faults of the niece to have been those of the aunt” (Austen, Mansfield Park 51). Just as Zofloya’s narrator blames Laurina for Victoria’s faults and Frankenstein’s creature blames Victor for his own faults, the cousins conclude that the parent-figure is to blame for the child’s aberrant behavior. Indeed, they come to this conclusion multiple times: “‘The effect of education,’ said Fanny gently. Edmund could not but agree to it. ‘Yes, that uncle and aunt! They have injured the finest mind…’” (Austen, Mansfield Park 211). Although these sessions lack the sinister quality of Sir Thomas’s “medicinal project,” the narrator slyly points out that Edmund is in effect training Fanny to be a version of himself: “Having formed her mind and gained her affections, he had a good chance of her thinking like him” (Austen, Mansfield Park 50). Fanny’s judgment has been so successfully corrected that she ends up ventriloquizing the voice of the case historian, promoting the project of rationally observing and judging those around her.

Edmund also tries, though less successfully, to cure the diseased judgment of Mary Crawford. Deploying his therapeutic pedagogy, he corrects Mary’s judgment of people as confidently as he corrects the ten-year-old Fanny’s judgment of books. When Mary declares that

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50 Miller writes that these conversations between Edmund and Fanny create an interpretation of Mary that is incommensurable with her way of being. Edmund and Fanny are “reviewing her character and revising it on the basis of moral principles that she does not intrinsically share” (Narrative 78). Miller’s discussion of Edmund and Fanny as invested in creating a kind of narrative closure that Mary continually resists is in line with my reading of Mary as both the object of and objecting to the case history’s way of knowing.

51 Ellen Gardiner makes a similar point: “[Austen] casts soon-to-be-ordained clergyman Edmund Bertram in the role of Fanny’s primary instructor and socially sanctioned critic for the novel’s society” (156). While I trace the case historian’s prerogatives in Edmund’s education of Fanny, Gardiner argues that Edmund represents (and passes on to Fanny) the authoritative voice of the literary critic.
most clergymen are “slovenly and selfish,” Edmund replies, “I suspect that...you are not judging from yourself, but from prejudiced persons, whose opinions you have been in the habit of hearing. It is impossible that your own observation can have given you much knowledge of the clergy” (Austen, Mansfield Park 87). Edmund here instructs Mary that proper judgment is based on proper (and objective) observation; Mary is wrong because she judges the clergy not from her “own observation” but from the hearsay of “prejudiced persons.” Just as Sir Thomas’s “medicinal project” is aimed at curing Fanny’s judgment, Edmund hopes that by pointing out Mary’s errors he can convince her to observe and judge more objectively. Mrs. Grant also suggests the possibility that Mary’s failures can be cured by timely educational intervention. In a discussion of marriage Mary declares, “I consider that it is, of all transactions, the one in which people expect most from others, and are least honest themselves...from my own observation, it is a maneuvering business” (Austen, Mansfield Park 37). Like Edmund, Mrs. Grant questions Mary’s “own observation,” her ability to observe and judge objectively: “those evil-minded observers, dearest Mary, who make much of a little, are more taken in and deceived than the parties themselves” (Austen, Mansfield Park 37). Not only does Mrs. Grant diagnose Mary’s problem as the kind of “evil-minded” observation that leads to the wrong judgment, but she also proposes a prescription for this character flaw. She declares, “You are as bad as your brother, Mary; but we will cure you both. Mansfield shall cure you both, and without any taking in. Stay with us, and we will cure you” (Austen, Mansfield Park 37). Using the word “cure” three times in as many sentences, Mrs. Grant is a spokeswoman for a project that—as I have been arguing—is a major preoccupation of this novel: the curing of those who do not observe and judge properly by the therapeutic intervention of those who do. Although Mrs. Grant is a woman, what she invokes here is the masculinist knowledge practice of the case history and the therapeutic
pedagogy that, in this novel, inevitably follows the case historian’s practice of observation and judgment.\textsuperscript{52}

As we have seen, the novel’s most vocal mouthpieces of the case historian’s project are Edmund and Sir Thomas; rather than unequivocally siding with these indefatigable case historians, however, \textit{Mansfield Park} presents significant challenges to their project of observation, judgment, and therapeutic pedagogy. Sir Thomas and Edmund are continually thwarted: none of Edmund’s siblings listens to his judgment against producing the private theatrical performance, Fanny refuses to follow Sir Thomas’s advice to marry Mr. Crawford, all of Sir Thomas’s children end up behaving contrary to his direction, and Mary Crawford playfully but repeatedly repels Edmund’s attempts at therapeutic education. Indeed, Mary represents the novel’s most pointed challenge to the case historian’s project because she vocally resists the kind of therapeutic correction that Fanny so readily accepts and redeploy. For instance, the narrator explicitly points out that Mary refuses Mrs. Grant’s prescription: “The Crawfords, without wanting to be cured, were very willing to stay” (Austen, \textit{Mansfield Park} 37).

Many critics have argued that Mary’s language and attitudes challenge the dominant moral imperatives of \textit{Mansfield Park}.\textsuperscript{53} I would like to suggest that one important way Mary undermines the values that Sir Thomas, Edmund, and the newly trained Fanny all champion is by challenging the case history’s investment in rational observation. When Mary tells Edmund, “we must have walked at least a mile in this wood,” she refuses to reassess her judgment based on

\textsuperscript{52} Mrs. Grant’s phrase, “Mansfield shall cure you,” could simply be proposing that the cure will come from living away from London and with a sister whose marriage is happy. “Mansfield” also brings “Mansfield Park” into the foreground, however, suggesting that perhaps Mary’s cure will come from marriage with an eligible Bertram and, by extension, from the patriarchal, masculinist values of Mansfield Park.

\textsuperscript{53} Stuart Tave argues that Mary fails to give things their proper names (25-28), a failure that is unforgivable in an Austen novel in which “Meaning is the first fact” (33). Miller extends this point, arguing, “as an ideologue, Jane Austen puts the highest value on transparent communication” (\textit{Narrative} 40). For Miller, Mary disrupts this value by “staying unknown, impermeable to the categories of right knowledge. Her assumption of irony coincides with her refusal of knowledge, as a stable and fixed truth” (Miller, \textit{Narrative} 31). Miller’s reading of Mary as resistant to stable knowledge has informed my reading of her resistance to the case history’s objective way of knowing.
observable landmarks: “He still reasoned with her, but in vain. She would not calculate, she would not compare. She would only smile and assert. The greatest degree of rational consistency could not have been more engaging” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 76). Mary wins this argument by refusing Edmund’s rational worldview and insisting on using her own, subjective terms. Her tendency to “smile and assert” in opposition to evidence of proper observation and judgment is especially dangerous because it is attractive to Edmund.

But Mary goes further than simply refusing the case history’s rational way of knowing; she peppers the novel’s narrative with challenges to the basic tenets of the case historian’s project. When Mary monopolizes Fanny’s horse, her “apology” is an assertion that she will already be forgiven: “Selfishness must always be forgiven, you know, because there is no hope of a cure” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 54). With this quip, Mary simultaneously rejects both therapy and punishment: her selfishness is incurable and so it must be forgiven. Her witticism highlights a crack in the edifice of the case historian’s way of knowing. As I discuss in this project’s introduction, the new practice of thinking in cases refi gured punishment as a kind of therapeutic intervention that would eradicate the criminal’s aberration at its source. Mary pushes this logic to the extreme in a way that reveals its speciousness: if punishment is a kind of cure, then incurable aberrations cannot be punished. Though expressed with levity, Mary’s assertion that forgiveness is the only possible response to an incurable fault is a serious challenge to the case historian’s project. Not only does Mary challenge the assumptions behind punishment-therapy, but she also figures education as a force of disease rather than of cure. When Mr. Crawford declares his intention to marry Fanny, Mary exclaims, “My dearest Henry, the advantage to you of getting away from the Admiral before your manners are hurt by the contagion of his, before you have contracted any of his foolish opinions, or learnt to sit over your dinner, as if it were the best
“Contagion” and “contracted” are words that Edmund and Sir Thomas might use to diagnose an object’s character flaws. Mary, however, aligns the word “contracted” with the word “learnt,” reminding us that education is not always therapeutic; people learn foolish opinions from heads-of-household just like Sir Thomas. Her comment again highlights a problem in the logic of the case history: if the case historian traces the causes of aberration to “the effect of education,” and the cure for such bad education is therapeutic education, then how does one determine the difference between education that is contagious in a bad way and education that is contagious in a therapeutic way? As Mary points out, the method of contraction and the method of cure are the same.

Despite the fact that Mary is ejected from the story to allow for the marriage plot’s compulsory happy ending, the novel as a whole in fact reiterates the critiques that Mary levels at the case history. Like Mary, Mansfield Park shows how the case historian’s project promulgates the very principles that undermine it. The novel enacts this challenge through its depiction of love and performance as inextricably bound up in the work of the case history. Like Zofloya, Mansfield Park depicts love and performance as forces that infect the case historian’s way of knowing, and the novel mobilizes these depictions to posit, like Frankenstein, the impossibility of differentiating between the subject and the object of analysis. Going even further, Mansfield Park’s depiction of love and performance ultimately reveals the way the case historian’s project works cyclically to undermine its own objectives: the novel shows how the case historian’s therapeutic interventions in fact create the very aberrations that they seek to cure.

Just as Mary refuses to measure distance rationally, the novel depicts love as a force that successfully overcomes the case historian’s logic. Indeed, instead of being the object of rational

54 Jillian Heydt-Stevenson suggests that the Admiral’s “contagion” from which the virginal Fanny will save the dissolute Henry is associated with venereal disease (“Slipping into the Ha-Ha” 328).
observation and judgment, love infects the very processes of observation and judgment that would try to pin it down. Like proper case historians, Fanny and Edmund both try to figure love as the kind of aberration that can be observed, judged, and cured. When discussing Mr. Crawford’s character with Fanny, Edmund claims, “Mrs. Grant, I believe, suspects him of a preference for Julia; I have never seen much symptom of it” (92). By describing love as a visible symptom, Edmund brings it within the purview of a case historian’s observation and judgment. Seconding Edmund’s formulation of love as a kind of illness that the case historian can diagnose and therefore control, Fanny tries to believe that reason can be applied as a cure for inappropriate love. She thinks of Julia, “Henry Crawford had trifled with her feelings; but she had very long allowed and even sought his attentions, with a jealousy of her sister so reasonable as ought to have been their cure” (125). Fanny posits that Julia’s love ought to have been “cured” once her “reasonable” jealousy had alerted her to the fact that her love was inappropriate. Using a similar formulation, Fanny tries to prescribe a cure for Mr. Crawford’s unreasonable love: “She would not, could not believe that Mr. Crawford’s affection for her could distress him long; his mind was not of that sort. London would soon bring its cure. In London he would soon learn to wonder at his infatuation, and be thankful for the right reason in her which had saved him from its evil consequences” (254). Again, Fanny opposes “right reason” to love, imagining that with a proper and reasonable therapeutic intervention, inappropriate love can be cured.

In this novel, however, love is not as easily cured by reason as Fanny could wish. Instead, it infects the powers of reason, disturbing the structure of observation and judgment that makes the case historian’s analysis possible. The novel’s language hints at this problem by figuring romantic feeling as a moving target: love becomes a contagious disease that spreads unpredictably from person to person. Mrs. Norris predicts Julia’s marriage to Henry by telling
Mrs. Rushworth, “such things are very catching” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 93). Henry takes up the metaphor when he falls in love with Fanny, referring to his feeling as “the pleasing plague” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 229). A plague is the epitome of a contagious disease; the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “Any infectious disease which spreads rapidly and has a high mortality rate; an epidemic of such a disease” (“plague,” Entry 3b). The characterization of love as contagious raises the possibility that it is impossible to control; if love is as “catching” as a plague, it can pass from object to object without any warning. Even more disturbing, a rapidly spreading epidemic of love might infect the very case historian who attempts rationally to observe, judge, and, if necessary, cure the unruly emotion in others.

If love is an epidemic in *Mansfield Park* then so is performance; indeed, the two concepts are connected thematically through a shared language of contagious infection. After Sir Thomas puts an ignominious end to the episode of the private theatrical performance, Tom explains to his father, “My friend Yates brought the infection from Ecclesford, and it spread, as those things always spread you know, Sir” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 144). Just as the novel’s language of contagious love marks that emotion as a difficulty for the case history, Tom’s description of theatrical performance as an infection that always “spreads” reminds us that performance challenges the case historian’s therapeutic project of penetrating to its object’s core. Performance is dangerous because it does not appear to be a problem; it spreads aberration because it makes aberrant people look perfectly well. While love infects the case historian’s power of objective

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55 In the Oxford edition of *Mansfield Park*, James Kinsley and Jane Stabler note that “how the pleasing plague stole on me” is a quotation from William Whitehead’s “The Je Ne Sais Quoi: A Song” (Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 412 n.229). Henry also continues the metaphor of love as an illness when he justifies his attempts at “making a small hole in Fanny Price’s heart” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 179): “‘It can be but for a fortnight,’ said Henry, ‘and if a fortnight can kill her, she must have a constitution which nothing could save’” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 180).

56 Tom’s characterization of performance as contagious echoes the language of eighteenth-century conduct-book writers like Thomas Gisborne, who deprecates the theater and warns young women of the “infecting influence of a vicious character, adorned with polished manners, wit, fortitude, and generosity” (179). Litvak provides a lucid reading of the relation of Gisborne’s language to Tom’s (6-7).
analysis, then, performance thwarts the case historian by making the object of that analysis opaque. As the novel’s resident case historians, it is not surprising that Edmund and Sir Thomas proclaim that acting in private theatricals is, at best, “injudicious.” Although Sir Thomas stops the play and eradicates all signs of the theater at Mansfield Park, however, performance turns out to be impossible to eradicate. Like love, it is both contagious and ubiquitous.57

The ability of love and performance to interfere with the project of the case historian is evident in the case of Edmund’s love for Mary Crawford. When Fanny and Edmund are discussing Mary’s faults, the narrator explicitly points out that Edmund’s love is changing his case historicizing habits of mind: “Having formed her mind and gained her affections, he had a good chance of her thinking like him; though at this period, and on this subject, there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration of Miss Crawford, which might lead him where Fanny could not follow” (Austen, Mansfield Park 50). Edmund’s feelings for Mary move him away from the case historian’s project, a way of thinking that he has successfully taught Fanny but no longer fully shares with her. Infecting his ability to observe and judge Mary with rational objectivity, Edmund’s feelings also drive him to the expedient of acting with Mary in the family’s “injudicious” theatrical performance.58 Edmund’s acceptance of the role of Anhalt—the lover of the character that Mary plays—demonstrates that in Mansfield Park, the infection of performance always accompanies the infection of love. Edmund’s feelings for Mary transform him from an audience member—a role aligned with the observational project of the case historian—into an actor who will himself be observed and judged.

57 It is futile for the case historian to object to performance because performance necessarily infects every aspect of social life. Litvak demonstrates the inevitable performativity of social life at Mansfield Park in Chapter 1 of Caught in the Act (3-26).
58 Nachumi writes, “Nowhere is Edmund’s limited perspective more apparent than in his decision to play Anhalt, a choice occasioned by his need to fulfill his own desires” (163). Gardiner also identifies this as a moment when Edmund’s emotions interfere with his authority, but she reads this authority as that of the literary critic: “Edmund loses credibility as a critic because he fails to repress his emotions and instead allows his passions to interfere with his ability to author and to interpret texts properly” (158).
The primary observer of Edmund in love is Fanny, and what she notices is that Edmund’s observation and judgment are diseased. Upon hearing his decision to act in the play Fanny thinks to herself, “Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! it was all Miss Crawford's doing. She had seen her influence in every speech, and was miserable” (123). Mary is present in Edmund’s “every speech”; Fanny, who has herself learned to ventriloquize Edmund’s rational case historicizing voice, observes that Edmund has learned to ventriloquize Mary’s irrational self-justifying one. Indeed, Fanny notices that as Edmund’s admiration for Mary increases, he loses the ability to think, speak, and judge her like a case historian. When Fanny asks Edmund’s advice about the necklace that Mary has given her, the narrator explains, “It was some time before she could get his attention to her plan, or any answer to her demand of his opinion; he was in a reverie of fond reflection, uttering only now and then a few half-sentences of praise” (Austen, Mansfield Park 206). Like Berenza whose love for Victoria possesses him so that he cannot properly hear, speak or see, Edmund’s ability to form a judgment and proclaim it has been infected by love to such an extent that he can no longer voice a rational opinion—instead he can speak only in useless “half-sentences of praise.” Fanny poignantly articulates her sense of this change: “[Mary’s] faults were what they had ever been, but he saw them no longer” (207).

Instead of observing Fanny and directing her judgment, Edmund is here the object of Fanny’s observation and judgment; the case historian in love switches roles with the object of his former observation. In effecting this switch, love and performance do not interfere with the logic of the case history so much as they reveal a dangerous circularity already inherent in this logic. Edmund and Sir Thomas initiate a process in which they—skilled observers and judges—therapeutically educate Fanny in the skills of observation and judgment. The danger of such a circular formulation, of course, is that observation and judgment will come full circle to settle
back on their original promoters. *Mansfield Park* shows such a cycle in action: Fanny, who begins the novel as the pupil in need of therapy, becomes Edmund’s partner in observing and judging Mary and then turns her power of observation and judgment back onto Edmund. In this way, the project of the case history necessarily sows the seeds of its own reversal.

When Sir Thomas returns and disapproves of the play, Edmund must admit to his father that he has failed in exercising the judgment upon which Sir Thomas depended. Instead, he acknowledges that Fanny has filled this role: “Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout, who has been consistent” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 147). Indeed, as the play’s only audience member, Fanny has become an excellent case historian not only of Edmund and Mary but also of Henry Crawford, Julia and Maria: “she could never see Mr. Crawford with either sister without observation, and seldom without wonder or censure” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 92). The movement from observation to censure is the case historian’s prerogative, a progression that Fanny has learned from Edmund. While Fanny realizes that Henry is toying dangerously with both sisters’ feelings, however, Edmund is so caught up in performing with Mary that he is unable to come to this conclusion: “she only hazarded a hint, and the hint was lost” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 92). Love thus facilitates not only Fanny’s case-historicizing judgment of Edmund but also her usurpation of his role as both the play’s audience member and Mansfield Park’s resident case historian. Fanny’s ability to observe love in others even enables her case-historicizing judgment of her uncle: Sir Thomas wrongly insists that Fanny will eventually accept Mr. Crawford’s proposals, and the narrator explains, “when she considered how much of

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59 Gardiner also points out that Fanny’s role as powerless pupil is reversed: “Although her education is meant to teach Fanny her proper role and place as an upper middle-class female reader, it ultimately leads to her achieving a critical authority, and therefore a public power and status within the society of Mansfield Park that the literary culture of the period is reluctant to afford women” (152).

60 At the end of the novel, Fanny tells Edmund of this time period, “As a by-stander…perhaps I saw more than you did” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 274).
the truth was unknown to him, she believed she had no right to wonder at the line of conduct he pursued. He who had married a daughter to Mr. Rushworth. Romantic delicacy was certainly not to be expected from him” (Austen *Mansfield Park* 259). Fanny here not only acknowledges that she knows more than Sir Thomas about the romantic attachments of his family, but she also diagnoses in Sir Thomas a lack of judgment—romantic delicacy—in matters of love.

In dealing with the infection of love, student and teachers have switched places. In a striking moment of intertextuality, this same switch is dramatized in the scene of *Lovers’ Vows* that Mary and Edmund rehearse for Fanny. Referring to love, Amelia (played by Mary) says to Anhalt (played by Edmund), “And as you have for a long time instructed me, why should not I now begin to teach you?” (Kotzebue 40; 3.2). Rather than depicting Mary performing these lines with Edmund, the narrator describes Fanny’s “office of judge and critic” and her absorption in “watching them” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 33).\(^1\) By naming the scene Edmund and Mary are performing while focusing on Fanny’s experience as its audience, the narrator highlights Fanny’s role as the observer and judge of Edmund-in-love while slyly pointing to the crucial switch between teacher and student that such a role entails. By turning the case historicizing gaze onto her case historians, Fanny presents a challenge to the case history that comes inevitably from its cyclical structure: she readily accepts Edmund’s therapeutic correction only to turn it back on himself.\(^2\) In this way, love and performance work together to reveal the case history’s dichotomous structure as unstable; the boundary between case historian and object of analysis, between audience member and actor, turns out to be completely permeable.

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\(^1\) Nachumi points out that this scene focuses on Fanny’s reactions rather than depicting Mary and Edmund (169).

\(^2\) Perhaps, in this way, Fanny the proper heroine is even more dangerous to the project of the case history than Mary the femme fatale. Heydt-Stevenson suggests that Mary and Fanny inhabit these roles: “witty, amoral femme fatale and conversely, dour, moral, and modest paragon” (*Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions* 139).
The novel does not rest here in its critique of the case history’s therapeutic project, but goes further to leave no rationally observing audience member standing—not even Fanny. As the narrator explains, “although there doubtless are such unconquerable young ladies of eighteen (or one should not read about them) as are never to be persuaded into love against their judgment by all that talent, manner, attention, and flattery can do, I have no inclination to believe Fanny one of them” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 181). Indeed, Fanny constantly struggles to balance her love for Edmund with her case historian’s penchant for judgment. The best she can muster, however, is a mixture of love and judgment in which the dictates of one are inseparable from the dictates of the other: “Her heart and her judgment were equally against Edmund's decision…She was full of jealousy and agitation” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 125). Fanny is aware that her feelings for Edmund interfere with the project of observing him and Mary objectively: “She would endeavour to be rational, and to deserve the right of judging of Miss Crawford's character, and the privilege of true solicitude for him by a sound intellect and an honest heart” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 207). Judging Mary’s character is a “right” earned by rationality, and so Fanny tries to be rational. Her self-discipline lasts only for a moment, however, before she relapses and kisses a paper containing Edmund’s writing. The narrator archly points out this inconsistency: “Having regulated her thoughts and comforted her feelings by this happy mixture of reason and weakness, she was able in due time to go down and resume her usual employments near her aunt Bertram, and pay her the usual observances without any apparent want of spirits” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 208). Reason unalloyed by feeling is impossible for Fanny—she tries to prescribe rationality to herself, but the best she can manage is a “happy mixture” of regulated thought and ungovernable feeling.63

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63 Nachumi argues that this “happy mixture” of reason and emotion represents Austen’s ideal for how audience members should approach a theatrical performance. She writes, “Fanny’s capacity for sympathy has not impeded her
Like Edmund, Fanny also finds that her love necessitates performance. While Edmund literally performs a theatrical role, Fanny works to appear downstairs “without any apparent want of spirits.” In other words, love obliges her to perform the role of a person who is not in love. Although Fanny asserts, “I could not act anything if you were to give me the world. No, indeed, I cannot act” (Austen, Mansfield Park 115), she not only can but does act for much of the novel in order to hide her feelings: “she would rather die than own the truth” about her love for Edmund (Austen, Mansfield Park 247). In a way, then, Fanny’s assertion that “I cannot act,” her insistence on her position as a rationally observing audience member, is just another form of performance designed to hide her love. In other words, love and performance together reveal that the case historian’s rational stance of observation and judgment is in fact a fiction.

Perhaps Fanny most dramatically embodies Mansfield Park’s engagement with the problems of love and performance because she is aware that she simultaneously occupies the role of the case historian and the role of object of observation. As a case historian she wishes to reason away the love that clouds her judgment, but as an object of observation she wishes to perform the role of someone who is not in love. Thus while Fanny first struggles to be rational, as we have seen, she eventually settles for appearing rational. When Edmund tells Fanny of his final meeting with Mary, the narrator explains, “How Fanny listened, with what curiosity and concern, what pain and what delight, how the agitation of his voice was watched, and how carefully her own eyes were fixed on any object but himself, may be imagined” (356). Fanny’s emotions make her anything but an objective observer of Edmund’s “agitation” in this moment, but she is careful to avert her eyes so that he will not see her emotion. The case historian in love

ability to interpret the behavior of others; indeed, it is her ability to balance the two that make her the most perceptive spectator at Mansfield Park” (165). I argue, on the contrary, that Fanny is troubled by the need to mix emotion with reason, and that her response—performance—is a way of eradicating the appearance of emotion. Heydt-Stevenson points out “how spectacularly successful Fanny is at hiding the breach between her feelings and the self that she projects socially” (“Slipping Into the Ha-Ha” 330).
is aware that she is being observed, and her performance as a rational audience member is deployed as a necessity of having an audience. In her performance of objectivity, Fanny dramatizes how the case historian ultimately fosters in herself the very aberrations of inappropriate love and performance that her therapy is deployed to eradicate. The observer-judge maintains the prerogative of observation and judgment not by being more rational than the objects of his analysis but by being more skilled at hiding aberration. When Joseph Litvak and others convincingly argue that it is impossible for Fanny to avoid performance, they put this problem in theatrical terms: Fanny cannot be the audience to others’ performances without performing herself; “audience,” like “case historian,” is a role that must be performed.\(^6\)

In this novel then, love and performance are both infections that undermine the case history by revealing a blurred boundary between audience and actor, between the case historian and the object of analysis. While love and performance might seem like complementary challenges to the project of the case history—love clouds the judgment of the observer and performance hides the aberration of the object—\textit{Mansfield Park} shows us that both challenges are in fact aimed at the dichotomous structure that makes the case history possible. Love makes the case historian into an object of observation, and “case historian” is a performance that is the result of being observed. The novel thus critiques the logic of the case history by showing that it is based upon an impossible discrimination between the subject and object of observation. More than this, the novel demonstrates that this challenge comes not from without but from within the project of thinking in cases: the object of a successful case history turns her case historians into objects of analysis, and the case history’s objective stance facilitates the kind of performance that

\(^6\) Litvak argues, “Theatricality inhabits Mansfield Park before, during, and after the theatrical episode” (17). Nachumi writes, “Fanny may define herself as a spectator, but the narrative insists that Fanny’s interior conflict is as much of a spectacle as the scene she observes” (169). Daniel O’Quinn also touches on this point when he argues that “the audience for \textit{Lovers’ Vows} is composed precisely of those people who are destined to be in it” (381).
the case historian attempts to penetrate and cure. In *Mansfield Park*, then, it is the case history’s own knowledge practices that ultimately blur the boundaries on which the practice of thinking in cases based.

The narrator of *Mansfield Park* ends the novel by enacting the same challenges to the case history that the novel as a whole has been dramatizing. Scholars have long celebrated Austen’s mastery of free-indirect discourse, a technique in which the narrator presents a character’s words in a way that implicitly includes a commentary on those words. As this description reveals, Austen’s free-indirect discourse is in many ways analogous to the voice of the case historian: it presents the words or thoughts of an object in order to enable an observer’s more objective judgment. Indeed, in the final chapter of *Mansfield Park* the narrator sounds like somebody trained in Sir Thomas and Edmund’s project of observing and judging. In a proper case historian’s manner, the narrator lists the characters one by one and explains how each one’s upbringing and education has led to his or her ultimate fate. For instance, “Julia escaped better than Maria” because “education had not given her so very hurtful a degree of self-consequence,” and “Henry Crawford, ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of cold-blooded vanity a little too long” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 366-7). But the narrator prefaces this list of causes and outcomes by reminding us that the whole novel is nothing but an imaginative performance: “Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 362). The narrator points out here that her role as a case historian—which she goes on to fulfill by tracing

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66 In *Narrative and Its Discontents*, D. A. Miller explains, “The traditional practice of indirect discourse puts the narrator at a distance from a character’s thoughts and feelings….In this way it at once asserts the narrator’s superior claims to understanding and the character’s inferior ones” (29). He underlines this again in *Jane Austen and the Secret of Style*: “free indirect style gives a virtuoso performance, against all odds, of the narration’s persistence in detachment from character, no matter how intimate the one becomes with the other” (59).
the origins of her characters’ outcomes—is all a fiction, a performance that the narrator is “impatient” to finish. Both the characters’ faults and the punishments that follow them are nothing but performances of the narrator’s prescription.

The narrator highlights here what the novel has already revealed: the case historian’s stance is a performance, and as such it creates the same faults that it therapeutically punishes. Indeed, when the time comes to wrap up the strands of the novel’s marriage plot, the narrator implicates the reader as a fellow case-historicizing performer.67 “I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people” (Austen, Mansfield Park 369). While Zofloya perhaps hints at the reader’s involvement in its final outcome, Mansfield Park’s narrator will not let us escape our active role: the marriage plot is successfully enacted, but only if we admit that its conclusion is the joint performance of reader and narrator.68 We must admit this because the novel insists that its concluding cure depends upon our subjectivity. The ending of Mansfield Park is thus a reminder that the case historian’s cure is also the source of aberration; the novel’s audience and narrator subjectively perform both the infection and the “cure” of the characters’ inappropriate love. Like Mary, Austen’s narrator smiles and asserts that the audience must finish the performance of the case historian on our own subjective terms.

67 Miller points out, this ending is “the closure that has troubled readers of Jane Austen most” (Narrative 77). He explains that Austen’s novels generally seek to create a closure in which meaning is fixed; to do this, however, her novels must pass through a phase that “keeps meaning and desire in a state of suspense” (Narrative 76). The ending of Mansfield Park troubles readers, Miller argues, because “the incommensurability of the two orders is more pointed, and the loss involved in passing from one to the other more poignant” (Miller, Narrative 77). Miller’s discussion of “closure” is closely related to my discussion of the case historian’s desire for “judgment.” I would argue that what disconcerts readers is the narrator’s insistence that we, too, are case historians implicated in the performance of the novel’s judgments.

68 This undermining of the marriage plot could be a precursor to its further destruction in Sanditon; Miller argues that the morbidity culture of self-doctoring in Sanditon is one symptom of an “irreparable malfunction” in the unfinished novel’s marriage plot (“The Late Jane Austen” 79).
Conclusion: Mobilizing an Immanent Critique of the Case

In a final analysis, the project of the case history threads through and importantly shapes all three of the novels I have discussed. Berenza’s desire to “penetrate” Victoria’s thoughts and “new model” her character; Frankenstein and his creature’s obsessions with origins, causes, and effects; Edmund’s commitment to observation, judgment, and therapeutic pedagogy; all of these representations invoke and mirror the new genre of the case history that emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century. On a certain level this is not surprising. As I discussed in the introduction to this project, the turn of the nineteenth century saw the rise of the field of psychiatry and the practice of dissection, in addition to transformations in the criminal case and the medical case history. Together these changes mobilized a matrix of new knowledge practices and rhetorical techniques that I have called “thinking in cases,” a project that became increasingly ubiquitous during the twelve-year period in which these novels were published. While we might expect, then, that Zofloya, Frankenstein, and Mansfield Park would reflect the project of thinking in cases, what is perhaps more surprising is the creative and dissident ways in which they resist and challenge the new case history’s way of knowing.

This resistance has a gendered valence; while the case history is a masculinist knowledge practice that investigates a feminized object, these novels by women revise and challenge the power dynamic between the case historian and the object of analysis. Zofloya depicts the case historian and the novel itself as always already infected with Victoria’s violent desire. Frankenstein offers a revised version of the case history, creating a fragmented and mended surface that blurs the boundary between Victor and his creature. Mansfield Park presents the case historian’s project as the cyclical source of its own infection, as therapeutic interventions call into being the aberrations that they would seek to cure. In each of these critiques the object’s
performance—which the case historian seeks to penetrate or remove—is a crucial means of resisting the case historian’s authority.

These novels’ simultaneous invocations of and challenges to the case history’s way of knowing mobilize what cultural theorists call an immanent critique. Robert J. Antonio explains, “Immanent critique seeks, by revealing the contradictions of claim and context, to transform legitimations into emancipatory weapons” (338). In other words, the immanent critique attacks a dominant ideology not from without (if that is even possible) but from within; it challenges an ideology by depicting its workings in particular local and historical contexts. Dacre, Shelley and Austen resist the project of thinking in cases by depicting the challenges that come from the case historian’s specific “legitimations”; all three novels engage with the case history’s incisive rhetoric and its commitment to penetrating performance, and all three do so in ways that show case historians’ susceptibility to the very aberrations they would try to eradicate. In other words, these women writers mobilize a masculinist knowledge practice in a way that partially imm mobilizes it. By showing the case history at work in the lives of particular men and women, these novels use the incisive techniques of the case history on the case history in ways that reveal the aberrations at the heart of the practice of thinking in cases. Mansfield Park takes this type of circular resistance to the extreme by showing how the case historian enacts a cycle that challenges his own authority: Fanny, who begins the novel as the pupil in need of Edmund’s observation, judgment, and therapy, inevitably turns her power of observation and judgment back onto Edmund.

The notion of the immanent critique—the emancipatory challenge that deploys the tools of the dominant ideology it resists—is particularly useful once we recognize how much my analysis of these three novels has itself mobilized the case history’s rhetorical techniques of
legitimation. After all, I have demonstrated my argument by closely examining three “cases” of novels written by women; I have even incised the authors’ language and used quotation marks to separate their words from my own authoritative interpretations. Such rhetorical practices are crucial for any critic who seeks professional recognition in the fields of English and cultural studies.

The take-away, then, is not that we can somehow escape from the case history’s way of knowing; indeed, the practice of thinking in cases that arose at the turn of the nineteenth century is perhaps more powerful today than ever before. Instead, like Dacre, Shelley and Austen, I have been performing an immanent critique. Since I must be a case historian in order to marshal the critical authority to do this project, I have tried to perform the role in a way that reveals possibilities for resisting the case historian’s disciplinary project. In future work that examines the relationship of the novel to the genre of the case history—work that I hope will take up the novel in the late nineteenth century and beyond—I would like to suggest that we continue to emulate these women writers’ strategies. By performing the very techniques whose objectives they seek to undermine, Dacre, Shelly, and Austen together demonstrate that thinking in cases can have an emancipatory outcome: the practices of the case historian can work in ways that resist the case historian’s disciplinary project.
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