

Preface

The transformative development of Moral Sentimentalism in the Scottish Enlightenment was to a surprising extent the making of the sympathetic imagination. This concept emerged and had its greatest momentum in the Age of Sensibility, when it formed the pivot of ethics as well as poetics. Despite the many differences between works that, from antiquity to the early eighteenth century, have commented on sympathy, there is a noticeable continuity in the understanding of human sympathising and its cosmological, moral or aesthetic implications. This continuous historical line was disrupted by the philosophies of the Scottish empiricists, who came to regard sympathy more and more exclusively as a communication as well as evaluation of affects based on propositional imagination. By so doing, they defined what, in our time, we mean when we say that we sympathise with a certain cause or feel for our fictional other.

The concern of this book is with the history of sympathy's transformations, insofar as it bridges literature and moral philosophy, in the British eighteenth century. To point out the significance of this era for the making of the sympathetic imagination, I have treated the respective theories in their wider intellectual context and attempted to always keep in view the *longue durée* of ancient knowledge about sympathy and how writers transformatively engaged with this longstanding tradition. For the sake of clarity, this study deals, for the greatest part, with the more original and seminal eighteenth-century authors who considered sympathy as ethically and poetically relevant, rather than with lesser-known writers of the period who had a shorter-lived, although perhaps more immediate influence on the reading public in Britain. The authors in question, some of whom were connected by personal ties, shared strong philosophical interests in sympathy and on that account formed a specific intellectual network. My book does not however turn a blind eye to the impact of more popular genres altogether. Indeed, it claims that the sentimental novel in the latter half of the eighteenth century is an important site of negotiating the significance of the sympathetic imagination for art and morality. Very self-consciously, these tear-jerking narratives examine the conditions under which fiction can arouse the various human emotions and passions in its readers. At the same time, they critically assess mankind's ability to pass impartial moral judgment through the imagination of complex interrelations of fellow-feeling. Novelists such as Oliver Goldsmith, Henry Mackenzie or William Godwin thus contributed much to the concept's successive development as well as its eminence at the threshold of British Romanticism.

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ance of Verena Lobsien, the second head of our project. In the five years and more that this work has been in progress, my friend and colleague Thomas Micklich has shown me the most generous support and provided me with much food for thought. The memories of our joint readings, discussions and travels I hold close to my heart and thus this book stands dedicated to him. In this place, I would also like to acknowledge the help received from my friend and colleague Alexander Klaudies, with whom I have worked in close collaboration over nearly four years. Finally, my gratitude is due to the DFG for funding my participation in many international conferences as well as the publication of this book. I had full access to the resources of Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Bodleian Library Oxford, The British Library in London and have received much assistance by Richard Samways, the librarian at St. Giles House, the seat of the Earls of Shaftesbury in Dorset. The greatest debt I owe to my family and my best friend Hannes Puchta for inspiring me with cheerfulness during the darker hours of writing my thesis.

Some thoughts developed in chapter four of this book, together with some material from chapter five, originate in an article published in a volume co-edited by me and titled *Sympathy in Transformation: Dynamics between Rhetorics, Poetics and Ethics*. In addition, some claims made in chapter six have found their way into my contribution to the proceedings of the Shaftesbury Conference held at St. Giles House in the summer of 2015.

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