

## ABSTRACT

To Walk With You Through Vanity Fair:  
The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment in the Novels of Thackeray, Trollope,  
Gaskell, and Dickens

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My dissertation examines the interaction of the literary modes of satire and sentiment in four nineteenth-century British novels. I challenge dominant critical consensus which holds satire and sentiment to be contradictory modes, directly opposed to one another in aim and outlook. I argue that the modes of satire and sentiment are not contradictory, but compatible; they share important formal characteristics and work towards similar rhetorical ends. Though satiric and sentimental fiction arose out of differing conceptions of human nature, they are both inherently rhetorical modes that have as their goal the moral reformation of the reader. Though the satirist believes mankind to be predisposed to wickedness and the sentimentalist to goodness, they both endeavor to encourage the reader to turn from the vicious and act with virtue.

Central to my argument is the notion that both modes share a reliance on sympathy as the primary weapon to combat the vices of vanity and affectation that result in a world devoid of compassion.

The similarity of rhetorical purpose and conventions leads me to propose that nineteenth-century authors incorporate satire and sentiment together as a single rhetorical tool, what I call the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment. I adopt this term to denote a particular rhetorical and stylistic model available to writers that enables them to achieve a particular rhetorical end within a narrative text.

Drawing upon recent work in genre theory, I propose that the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment performs a social action by creating and shaping an understanding of the world off the page.

The authors my dissertation explores employs the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment in order to expose the viciousness of the morally treacherous social world, and encourage the reader to virtue by engendering compassionate identification. The world of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, for instance, is so morally bankrupt that the reader must look to the narrator for a moral standard. The narrator's combination of satiric ridicule and sincere compassion for his characters encourages the readers to form an extra-textual community of readers bound by a shared sympathy and longing for a better world.

To Walk With You Through Vanity Fair:  
The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment in the Novels of Thackeray, Trollope, Gaskell, and Dickens

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of English

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to love and made real to me the truth that the deepest, most enduring love is a union of both heart and mind.

Finally, I rest in the belief that all knowledge draws us closer to our God, who is the source of all knowledge. Through His grace, may our knowledge enable us to better appreciate beauty, discern what is right, and love unselfishly.



To my parents, who taught me to love stories.

And to Michael, the love of my life,  
who has made my own story infinitely more beautiful.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment

"There is a great deal of human nature in people."

-- Mark Twain

"The Man of Candor and of true Understanding is never hasty to condemn"

--Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*

Critical consensus has long held satire and sentiment to be conflicting literary modes. Sentimental fiction celebrates the excesses of the human heart; Satire seems to be in constant danger of discovering mankind has no heart. The only book-length study that examines both modes, literary critic Claude Rawson's *Satire and Sentiment, 1660-1830*, for instance, approaches these modes separately, as distinctly opposed to one another in aim and outlook. Such analyses fail to account for the startling similarities in rhetorical purpose and strategy between satiric and sentimental fiction, as well as their shared presence in many texts. Both the satirist and the sentimentalist declare their fiction to be instructive; they write to expose the wickedness of vice, to trace its far-reaching consequences, and to help their readers become more virtuous, sympathetic souls by the end of the novel than they were at the beginning. And while satire accomplishes this through laughter and sentimental fiction through tears, sincere

expressions of tender emotions betokening sympathy are integral to the success of both modes. Eighteenth-century author Henry Fielding may scoff at the cloying sentimentality of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, but in *Tom Jones* his own beloved Squire Allworthy proves deserving of his surname by his ability to manifest his goodness through physical displays of sympathetic feeling. The Victorian novelist William Makepeace Thackeray hits nearer the mark when he depicts a personified Satire and Sentiment walking hand-in-hand through the morally treacherous, carnivalesque world of *Vanity Fair*.

In this dissertation I argue that the literary modes of satire and sentiment are not contradictory, but compatible. Satire and sentiment share important formal characteristics and work toward similar rhetorical ends. Though satiric and sentimental fiction arose out of differing conceptions of human nature, they are both inherently rhetorical modes that have as their goal the moral reformation of the reader. Though the satirist believes mankind to be predisposed to wickedness and the sentimentalist to goodness, they both endeavor to encourage the reader to turn from the vicious and act with virtue. These literary modes share a reliance on sympathy as their primary weapon to combat the vices of vanity and affectation that result in a world devoid of compassion. The amity of the modes of satire and sentiment runs deeper still. I argue satire and sentiment, when employed together, are complementary modes.

When present in the same text, satire and sentiment mitigate the thematic and stylistic flaws, and heighten the strengths, of one another. Even at the height of their popularity, both satire and sentiment faced attacks on both their style and rhetorical efficacy for the narrowness of their social project. Nineteenth-century writer George Meredith, for example, criticizes both, dismissing satire as ill-natured intellectual “bile,” and sentimental fiction as “emotion untempered by sense” (64, 67). But I believe they work exceedingly well in tandem: sentimental fiction’s expression of sincere emotion provides moral clarity and sweetens the often bitter draught of satiric invective, and satire introduces a welcome dose of grim realism into sentimental fiction’s flights of emotional fancy. Together, they engage both the mind and the heart of the reader.

Arguing for the extension of our understanding of the literary modes of satire and sentiment constitutes only a portion of my project. I propose that in the nineteenth century, novelists intuitively recognized that these modes accomplish together what neither could apart and incorporated both together as a single rhetorical tool, what I will call the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment.

While I will offer a more extensive explanation of this term and its conventions below, I adopt this term to denote a particular rhetorical and stylistic model available to writers that enables them to achieve a particular rhetorical end within a narrative text. Though their work varies in style, structure, and theme,

each of the authors this dissertation explores declare a rhetorical purpose for their writing that echoes that of the modes of satire and sentiment. While this very declaration may itself be a rhetorical move to satisfy Victorian readers' demands for fiction that was morally edifying, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charles Dickens openly and repeatedly affirm that their fiction is instructive, and each conceived of their authorial duty as distinctly didactic. Thackeray considers author's moral authority coequal with the religious cleric, granting the author the title of "the week-day preacher" (Thackeray "Four Georges" 2). Trollope considers sermons to be too dour and lifeless to be effective, so the author must succeed where the preacher fails and "preach his sermons with the same purpose as the clergyman" (Trollope "Novel-Reading" 40). Trollope openly endows the novelist the same purpose and importance as sermons and the novel is given a significance equal to that of the sermon. Randi Koppen notes that in their fiction, Dickens and his protégé Elizabeth Gaskell "explicitly aim for social reform, inviting readers to complete the text through forms of social and political action" (248). The stated goal of all four authors, then, is the moral reformation of the reader; each approaches his audience of readers as impressionable minds and hearts that can be affected through the alchemy of narrative. They wish to kindle in their reader a more profound awareness of the consequences of vice and to encourage them to treat

their fellow man with sympathy and compassion, the virtues they consider to be paramount.<sup>1</sup> These authors, then, share the same rhetorical purpose as the generic modes of satire and sentiment. Choosing from among these modes might seem a natural aesthetic choice, then. And indeed, the traditions of both satiric and sentimental literature provide a rhetorical and stylistic vocabulary that grounds a text in moral concerns. But the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment is, I argue, a bold stylistic choice, not least because both modes had fallen out of favor in the nineteenth century.

A major reason I choose to explore the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as it functions in the novels of Victorian England is to examine how these authors continue to make viable two literary modes that had fallen out of popular and critical favor. There existed a distinct skepticism toward both genres in the generation characterized by what John Kucich calls the “Cult of Sincerity” that resulted in both satiric and sentimental fiction, which once dominated the literary landscape, being reduced to modes subsumed in other, more fashionable genres (13). Janet Todd explains that, although the nineteenth century viewed sentimental fiction with “criticism and ridicule,” the elements of the novel of

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<sup>1</sup> Laurén Wispe defines sympathy as “a way of relating,” while empathy is a “way of knowing” (318). Sympathy, Wispe implies, is relies a selfless expression of feeling for those around us.

sensibility linger as an attenuated “strain” in longer works. (141, 147).<sup>2</sup> Frank Palmeri similarly observes that during the Victorian period satire “appears in British narratives, not as a determining form, but in a subordinate role, in isolated episodes of works shaped primarily by other genres” (371). Yet far from signaling a weakening of the potency of these genres, as most critics suggest, I believe that satire and sentiment retain their efficacy and participate in the narrative and generic innovation that characterized the time period. Satire and sentiment are subsumed, but not dissolved, in other genres, and they remained important means by which Victorian writers engaged with and critiqued contemporary culture. Indeed, their ability to inhabit other genres gives satire and sentiment a unique flexibility. As modes they don’t determine the work as a whole, but these modes can shift the tone of a work and add a rhetorical significance to many genres. In this dissertation, we will encounter a mock-historic epic, a saga of local church politics, an industrial novel, and a murder mystery/legal drama. In each of these, the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment functions as a rudder, a steadying influence that guides the work toward questions of moral and social import. In a period characterized by massive economic, political, and social upheaval, these authors found the power to

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<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in his article “Victorian Realist Prose and Sentimentality,” Phillip Davis argues that Victorian sentimentality “at its most powerful, is a normalized form of implicit or displaced or re-immersed *thinking*. [...] Thinking *in* the spirit of human passions” (25).

address complex contemporary concerns by turning to modes that reached their height a century before.<sup>3</sup> Though this may decision may elicit little more than a frown and a dismissive witticism from Oscar Wilde and successive modernists who did not find much in the Victorian period they considered innovative, I argue the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment is indeed a generically inventive choice. The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment is flexible enough to retain its rhetorical power across many generic and modal traditions. This, I argue, is because the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment requires the creation of a particular relationship between author and reader that both accommodates and transcends genre. The particulars of the plot are secondary to the centrality of the narrative voice and his or her relationship with the reader.

Ultimately, my project is about stories: the way we tell them and the way we learn from them. These questions have captured my imagination since I was a child. The novels I consider in this dissertation capture my imagination as well; their wit, humor, and engaging narratives delight me, and they challenge me to be a better, more gracious reader and a better, more gracious person. This project

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<sup>3</sup> The Victorian Era is so synonymous with the notion of rapid progress and social upheaval that it is almost unnecessary to mention it. However, the novels I examine all address in one way or another the mechanization of English culture. Jerome Buckley notes that progress became nearly a religion, and during the period Thomas Carlyle's *Signs of the Times* and Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* register a fear that this mechanization will result in a gradual dehumanization of social relations. Social progress, technological innovation, and middle-class ambition for its own sake are ultimately negative forces. Sympathy, then, which forces individuals to recognize the humanity of others, is a tool to fight these inhumane impulses.



attempts to do justice to these novels that demonstrate a full awareness of the moral complexity of the world they depict and the culture out of which they arose. I explore the ways in which Thackeray, Trollope, Gaskell, and Dickens crafted their narratives in order to reach their reader. They create on the page a world that is morally treacherous and exceedingly difficult to navigate. But these authors act as guides who lead the reader through the world of the novel, often riddled with despair and deceit, toward a greater truth. As guides, these authors rely on neither scenes of maudlin emotion nor scenes of unyielding criticism, but rather reach for something greater that engages the both the reader's heart and head, earns both laughter and tears, and encourages us to love one another in spite of, nay, because of, our shared humanity.

### *Generic Mode as Rhetorical Action*

When I make the statement that the literary modes of satire and sentiment are distinctly rhetorical I do not merely mean that a specific rhetorical purpose is an essential convention of each mode. This is a true statement, of course, and its truth is central to my argument. But I also mean that generic modes themselves are inherently rhetorical. Like genres, literary modes are stylistic and aesthetic devices that provide a framework for understanding the conventions that govern the production and interpretation of a text. To understand literary modes as a taxonomical aid alone, a system of classification enumerating the fixed features

of various categories of texts, however, is to limit their substantial power (Frow 1627). If Tzvetan Todorov is correct and a generic mode is “nothing other than the codification of discursive properties” which furnishes authors with “models” for writing, then a mode is a static and definitive rather than dynamic and creative entity: its only significance lies in its relation to other generic modes (18-19).<sup>4</sup> More recently, however, genre theorists Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway call for an understanding of genre that is able to “connect a recognition of regularities in discourse types with a broader social and cultural understanding of language in use” (1). I draw on the recent work of these and other scholars of genre and discourse theory to expand the conception of literary modes. They serve not only a definitive, organizational function, but also a rhetorical one. I maintain that literary modes are creative; they perform a social action that both structures and produces meaning in a text.

In order to shift the conception of genre from a system of taxonomy to a rhetorical action, it is important to consider generic modes as they closely relate to current understandings of discourse<sup>5</sup>. In his 2002 book *Genre*, John Frow draws

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<sup>4</sup> Todorov is not alone in his approach to genre. Hans Robert Jauss claims genres are merely groups of “historical families,” and as such they resist any attempt to define apart from their function in a particular historical time and setting (80).

<sup>5</sup> As I explain later, I do not use genre and mode interchangeably. Modes are, according to Frow, closely related to genre. They are sub-genres, subject to the same rules as larger genres but do not govern the work as a whole (2002: 63-64). They inhabit but do not determine a literary text. They exist alongside and interact with other modes. Bakhtin agrees, and the ability of novels

a comparison between genre and Michel Foucault's definition of discourse.

According to Foucault, discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (49). Frow breaks down this definition thus, which becomes for him, and for this dissertation, an excellent template for understanding generic mode:

[Discourses] are *practices* in the sense that they carry out an action; they are *systematic* because they are relatively coherent in the way they work; they are *formative* of objects in the very act of speaking of them, not in the sense that they create objects out of nothing but in so far as they build a weight of meaning around the categories of the world. Discourses – by which Foucault here means something very close to what I call genres – are performative structures that shape the world in the very act of putting it into speech (2002: 18).

Taken as such, literary modes develop a complex relationship between author and reader and are integral to our understanding of contemporary culture. I find this understanding of genre particularly compelling and undeniably exciting.

The way in which an author chooses to tell a story, to craft a narrative, contributes to the way we interpret and navigate the world. M.A.K. Halliday explains genre as "the meaning potential that is accessible in a given social context" (111). Because genres comprise a set of formal, stylistic, and thematic features and constraints that help shape a text, they in turn act as a force that shapes and constrains meaning outside the text (Frow 2002: 73). Frow explains

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to accommodate several genres, sub-genres, and modes is a distinguishing feature of the form itself.

that genres shape and provide meaning by creating an epistemological domain, a “world” that functions according to its own rules and “produces effects of truth and authority that are specific to it” (2002, 73). This is a distinctly rhetorical act because the world created by the genre offers a set of “interpretations or ‘fixes’ on the world” (Frow 2005: 1633). Stories create a world governed by a set of rules that affect the ways in which we navigate our world.

Take, for example, the genre of detective fiction, of which Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* is said to be an early example. Even more than Dickens’s reader, we are inured to the common conventions of the genre. When we pick up a detective novel or tune in to one of the seemingly innumerable police procedurals that populate network television, we expect for there to occur a heinous murder or some other sinister crime that introduces impurity into the world of the story, or what literary critic Christopher Pittard calls a “contamination” that throws the existing social structure off balance (3). An individual detective, duo of detectives, or group of crime solvers will work through the necessarily complex and elusive details of the crime. Several individuals will emerge as viable suspects, but the real perpetrator will remain shrouded in mystery until the end of the story. In classic detective fiction, the detective will ingeniously fit all of the puzzle-like clues together, resolve all questions and complications, and bring the guilty party to justice, thereby

restoring safety and order. Though these narrative conventions are familiar to us, we may not be aware of the rhetorical work they're performing. We may not recognize, as theorist Stephen Knight does, that detective stories "not only create an idea (or a hope, or a dream) about controlling crime, but both realize and validate a whole view of the world, one shared by the people who become the central audience to buy, read, and find comfort in a particular variety of crime fiction" (57). Detective stories create a world in which the dark impulses of human nature are understandable, in which justice is served, and social order restored. This world colors the way in which we approach our own. We hold on to these conventions to provide us comfort in the face of the often brutal elements of human nature that aren't so easily explained.

To approach genre as constructive – as contributing to and shaping an understanding of the world – implies that genre is essentially dynamic rather than fixed and static. Rhetorician Carolyn R. Miller suggests that this is another way a purely taxonomical definition of genre is unsatisfactory. Classification of conventions is certainly an aspect of genre, but it is "a classification based in rhetorical practice and consequently open rather than closed" (Miller 27). Genre can be counted among the arsenal of rhetorical tools; its use is dependent upon the situation. In this way, "genre becomes more than a formal entity; it becomes pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention and effect, an

aspect of social action" (Miller 25). Genre isn't just a kind of text or a set of conventions for a writer to choose, but a tool that aids in achieving her rhetorical purpose. Thus, Frow encourages individuals to refrain from referring to texts as being "in" a particular genre. Rather, he advocates for a more "reflexive" model in which texts are considered "to use or perform the genres by which they are shaped" (2002: 25). Genres are open, ever evolving, and always actively engaged with the culture that surrounds them.

It is important to note again here that I do not use genre and mode interchangeably. But I consider, as Frow does, literary modes closely related to literary genre (2002: 63-64). Modes, in this conception, are essentially sub-genres, which are subject to the same rules as larger genres but do not govern the work as a whole (Fowler 110). They inhabit, but do not determine, a literary text. Additionally, they exist alongside and interact with other modes. The ability of a novel to participate in several generic modes is central to my argument. Indeed, though Frow's theory of genre doesn't concern only literary genres, the novel is a particularly rich site to examine the ways in which generic modes interact. The novel is itself a complex genre, able to incorporate multiple genres, sub-genres, and modes. Mikhail Bakhtin considers the unique ability of novels to accommodate several genres, sub-genres, and modes a distinguishing feature of the form itself (7). The discursive and dialogic relationship between the novel

and genre, then, is especially vibrant and ripe for investigation. How do literary modes function together in a single work when they are both rhetorical in nature? If, as Frow claims, genres create epistemological or “discursive worlds that map the world,” then how do these different modes both contribute to and alter the epistemological world created by the larger work (2005: 1633)? These form central questions for this dissertation. Despite their differences in convention and style, the epistemological “worlds” of satiric and sentimental fiction function in surprisingly similar ways and toward similar ends. The open, indeterminate nature of the novel allows satire and sentiment, so seemingly incompatible, to exist and work together toward a similar rhetorical end. And their ability to exist alongside one another amid a larger fictional text allows them the versatility to be adopted and adapted in many ways and still achieve their rhetorical purpose. Thus, I argue satire and sentiment remain successful tools for social change, even amid the Victorian Era of “earnestness.”

### *The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment*

Not only do the literary modes of satire and sentiment share a rhetorical purpose and many formal features, but this dissertation proposes that they often perform as allies, partners that accomplish together what neither could apart. To understand the way that satire and sentiment function together as modes in the nineteenth century novel, I suggest we must view these modes as elements of a

single rhetorical model, what I call the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment. The authors this dissertation explores – Thackeray, Trollope, Gaskell, and Dickens – employ these modes together in order to achieve the rhetorical purpose of encouraging readers to right action by engendering sympathetic identification. The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment functions by targeting the reader's emotions and intellect at once. The authors I examine employ satiric conventions (albeit to differing degrees) to paint an accurate, if broadly rendered, portrait of the vice inherent in human nature that infects social and political institutions. These vices usually come in the form of traditional satiric targets: vanity, ambition, greed, and an inhuman neglect of those less fortunate. To represent or expose this viciousness, authors employ the common satiric conventions of irony, parody, understatement, and absurdity. This satiric critique is meant to give the reader an understanding of vice that is both intellectual and visceral; we are convinced that the author's assessment of human nature is correct, and the awareness of it produces a deep anger at its injustice. But the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment seeks to affect the reader's heart as well. Righteous anger is not enough to convince an audience to mend their own actions, for it can too often devolve into an arrogant self-righteousness that places the reader in a position to judge the ills of society without being implicated himself. Authors employ conventions of sentimental conventions to introduce tenderness, humility, and most



significantly, sympathy into the text. These conventions urge us to engage our emotions and feel for the characters on the page. Scenes rendered in the sentimental mode can give a wider understanding of the costs of man's lack of virtue. In *Bleak House* the orphan Jo stands as representative of an entire class of the neglected, abused poor. Our sympathy for Jo is meant to lead us to a sympathy for the poverty-stricken individuals that surround us in everyday life. Likewise, authors often employ sentimental conventions to make us feel for characters who we would otherwise dismiss as wicked. In *Barchester Towers*, for instance, Trollope's masterfully satiric portrait of the evangelical minister Mr. Slope is tempered with elements of sentimental sympathy. This makes us identify with Slope, to see that his sins are not radically different from our own, and, though we eschew his selfish ambitions, to treat him with greater kindness. Thus, satire and sentiment work as partners, employing different conventions toward the same end – to rid the world of vice and to encourage virtue. In the paragraphs that follow, I offer a fuller expression of how the conventions of satire and sentiment work in tandem to form a single rhetorical tool. Understanding the way these authors engage with these modes to achieve their rhetorical ends ultimately leads us to a clearer perception of both the aesthetic complexity and cultural significance of these modes and the novels they inhabit.

Despite differences in tone, emotional register, and convention, both satire and sentiment wish to inculcate virtue in their readers and ward them away from vice. Though these literary modes espouse a wide system of ethics, the chief virtue championed by both is sympathy – a compassionate, universal benevolence for one's fellow man. For both the satirist and the sentimentalist, the earnest exercise of sympathy is the only hope to counter the inhumanity and injustice in the world. Implicit here is another similarity between the modes; satire and sentiment both share the belief that the world is a morally complex, treacherous place that is prone to viciousness and full of temptations, and that to navigate through this inscrutable moral landscape, individuals must be equipped with a strong moral compass directed by sympathy in order to act rightly. Because the world on the page is often morally ambiguous, a harsh landscape populated by villains and deceivers where vice appears to flourish undaunted, in both satire and sentiment decisive plot points and moments of moral clarity often come in the form of surprising moments of revelation. The timely exposure or revelation of something previously hidden is a convention central to both modes.

In his novel *Amelia*, Henry Fielding famously describes the satirist's task as that of holding "the glass to thousands in their closets, that they may contemplate their deformity, and endeavor to reduce it" (134). Fielding's description of his satire as a mirror suggests that satire reflects both the world

and the gazer as they truly are. This reflection is rarely flattering; it reveals an ugliness in ourselves and our world that we would prefer never to face. Implicit in Fielding's declaration is the indication that without the satirist the mirror would remain shrouded, and this harsh but necessary truth of the moral corruption extant in human nature would somehow remain unseen.<sup>6</sup> Dustin Griffin defines the satiric impulse as the urge to "unmask, to anatomize, to expose the unpalatable truth, or to penetrate the lady's dressing room and discover the dirty secrets of the hoary deep" (48).<sup>7</sup> Edward and Lillian Bloom claim that the successful satiric exposure of vice will inspire a "gradual moral reawakening, a reaffirmation of positive social values" (17). The important question remains, what exactly does satire expose? The vices that serve as traditional satiric targets, among which Jonathan Swift includes "vain human kind [...] self-love, ambition, envy, pride," have long been considered sins; they have hardly been hidden in the "hoary deep". It would seem that satire doesn't have much to expose about these vices that hasn't already long been excoriated by moralists of every flavor. What satire, often quite economically, exposes is not

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<sup>6</sup> In his oft-quoted "Preface" to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding again insists that the satirist's task is one of "discovery," of making known what is previously unknown (12).

<sup>7</sup> This, of course, is a reference to Jonathan Swift's poem "The Lady's Dressing Room." In his poem, "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," Swift addresses the role of the satirist, stating his duty is to "cure the Vices of Mankind/His vein, ironically grave/ Expos'd the Fool, and Lash'd the Knave" (Williams 571). Likewise, John Dryden claims his writing is like a physician administering a "bitter physick" to inoculate the patient against a worse illness (47).

the existence of, but the ubiquity of, vice, and the fact that vice so often masks itself as virtue. By applying a hearty dose of wit and ridicule, satire defamiliarizes vice in such a way that the reader is able to encounter it as if for the first time and recognize its insistent, persistent presence in human nature. When Gulliver, for example, gleefully describes the murderous possibilities of gunpowder to the Brobdingnagian king, the reader cannot but share the king's conclusion that mankind is the "most pernicious race of little odious vermin Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth" (Swift 167).

Sentimental fiction relies, like satire, on the surprising exposure of something hidden. What sentiment exposes, however, is not an intellectual understanding of a moral precept, but a deep emotional and physical understanding.<sup>8</sup> Ann Jessie Van Sant argues that the aim of sentimental fiction is to encourage a "delicate moral and aesthetic perception" from an arousal of "acute feeling, both emotional and physical" (1,4). Sentimental fiction wants to provoke an emotional response that corresponds to an individual's sensibility, or capacity for deep feeling, that many writers of the time associated with moral virtue. These deep feelings necessarily manifested themselves physically in characters on the page, and readers were encouraged to allow their physical

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<sup>8</sup> It is instructive to reiterate the fact that 'sentimental' resists a strict definition. Markman Ellis states that when sifting through contemporary attempts to define the term "one is struck most forcefully by its imprecision and repetitiveness" (7).

responses to match their emotional ones. Janet Todd explains that sentimental fictions relies on a system of meaning with both its own linguistic vocabulary and a unique collection of physical symptoms and responses (9)<sup>9</sup>. Ildiko Csengei agrees that sensibility “pertained to all aspects of [...] man” (6). Sentimental fiction seeks to provoke an emotional response, often manifested physically, that will prove the depth of the individual’s capacity for moral goodness.

“Sentiment,” agrees John Mullan, “lives at the edge of speech; it is felt most when words stop” (241). In his five-volume novel *The Fool of Quality*, Henry Brooke offers a long explanation of the understanding of sensibility as an indicator of moral goodness:

His blushing here demonstrates his sensibility; and his sensibility demonstrates some principle within him, that disapproved and reproached him for what he had committed. It is therefore from the fountain of virtue alone that this flush of shamefacedness can possibly flow; and a delicacy of compunction, on such occasions, is as a sensitive plant of divinity in the sould, that feels, shrinks, and is alarmed on the slightest apprehension of approaching evil (II.100-101).

What sentimental fiction exposes, then, is an individual’s moral nature, their capacity for virtue. If a reader does not meet the reversal of Clarissa’s fortunes

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<sup>9</sup> Much excellent critical work has been done tracing the physiological and scientific significance of the notion of “sensibility”. These include: Markman Ellis’s *The Politics of Sensibility*, G.S. Rousseau’s “Nerves, Spirits, Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility,” and Mullan’s *Sentiment and Sociability*.

and loss of moral virtue with an outpouring of their own tears, they may not possess the “fine feeling” that sentimental fiction promises to refine (Mullan 238).

Both the modes of satire and sentiment rely on a particular type of vision. The reader must *see* as the author *sees*. The reader must recognize and interpret the author’s moral vision correctly. We must, for instance, recognize that Becky Sharp is sympathetic despite her overt unscrupulousness in order for us to fully comprehend Thackeray’s moral agenda in *Vanity Fair*, which holds that, though she is accountable for her sins, Becky is a symptom indicative of a larger societal sickness. The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment, then relies on the development of a particular relationship between author and reader. For these novels, sympathetic identification is necessary to encourage readers to develop virtue in the world off the page. This identification is only developed by creating a community of readers who, led by the author, endeavor to change themselves and the world around them. Taken alone, each of these modes requires a particular identification between author and reader. Wanlin Li claims that generating “readerly sympathy” is absolutely central to the task of the writer of sentiment (195). And in his seminal work of criticism *The Rhetoric of Irony*, Wayne Booth claims that irony and satire<sup>10</sup> are such complex discourses that for any

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<sup>10</sup> For Booth, irony and satire are very closely related. The major difference between irony and satire is the presence of a target. Satire is irony with a “victim” (Booth 27). Northrop Frye makes a similar distinction by defining satire as “militant irony” (223).

reader to successfully decipher them a “precise and peculiar relationship” must develop between author and reader (Booth 11, 3). This relationship, according to Booth is singular and fascinating:

I see that [successful irony] completes a more astonishing communal achievement than most accounts have recognized. Its complexities are, after all, shared: the whole thing cannot work at all unless both parties to the exchange have confidence that they are moving together in identical patterns. [...] The building of amiable communities [between reader and author] is often far more important than the exclusion of naïve victims (13, 28).

Booth suggests that the relationship between author and reader created by the use of irony amounts to a community, a community founded on shared values and moral norms. The reader must interpret the moral system of the author and agree to find either irony or sentimental melodrama truly compelling. Recall the earlier discussion of this when defining the characteristics of the generic modes of satire and sentiment. But the synthesis of these two modes situates readers in a particularly unique position. Satire, which employs humor, relies on what Edward and Lillian Bloom label a “transfer of emotions” from author to reader as a necessary “antecedent to [the] reparation and redemption” of society from the vicious satiric targets (39). In other words, readers must inherit the satirist’s outrage and act as judge that condemns the vices the satire denounces. In her book *Eighteenth Century Sensibility and the Novel*, Ann Jessie Van Sant states that “sensibility is a fundamental responsiveness that must be activated if it to

function or be seen" (56). Sentimental fiction, then, requires that readers experience an outpouring of emotion from their capacity for deep feeling, from their sensibility. When these modes are combined, when readers encounter darkly humorous satire alongside sentimental depictions of romantic love or human suffering, the reader at once acts as both co-judge and co-sufferer with the author. This leads to what Northrop Frye labels a "comic catharsis," which is a purging of the emotions of "sympathy and ridicule" (43).

To encourage readers to identify with the author and form a community of sorts, the author must work to create distance between the reader and the characters on the page. As readers, we have been trained to identify with the characters in the stories we read, so to disrupt this the author must actively work against this natural inclination. Except for Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, the authors in this dissertation create distance between the reader and the character by creating distinctive narrative voices that insert themselves into their narratives. While omniscient narration is so common in Victorian novels that J. Hillis Miller calls it a "defining principle of form" for Victorian prose, the omniscient narrators in *Vanity Fair*, *Barchester Towers*, and *Bleak House* all serve as characters in their own right (72). They are intrusive, digressive, and overtly moralistic, often addressing the reader directly. The intrusions of the narrator highlight the fictive status of the text; the reader is continually reminded that she



is reading a story.<sup>11</sup> This awareness of the artificial nature of the text creates a distance between the characters and the reader and encourages the reader to shift her focus and identify with the omniscient narrator instead. The reader is unable to get caught up in the sweep of the narrative but always remains in a separate evaluative position similar to that of the narrator. In this way, the reader can join the narrator in interpreting the narrative events as they unfold. The reader may judge events and characters alongside the narrator. Moral truth, then, has its source outside the narrative, in the evaluative collusion between the narrator and reader. And though this separate, evaluative position has the danger of becoming purely judgmental, each narrator's insistence upon sympathy and compassion for man's flaws keeps the reader from slipping into smug self-righteousness.

Like Thackeray, Trollope, and Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, the only female writer in my dissertation, adopts an omniscient narrative voice as well. Her narrator, though, adheres to a more traditional style of narration – the narrative voice reports events and dialogue but refrains from intruding with moralistic or digressive asides. Yet *North and South*, too participates in the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment and relies on a distance between the reader and characters for her

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<sup>11</sup> H. Porter Abbott offers a helpful introductory discussion to the distinction between story and narration. Thackeray shares the “implicit presumption that a story is separate from its rendering” (39).

rhetorical agenda to succeed. Gaskell creates this distance by having her characters serve several symbolic functions. As I argue in Chapter Four, *North and South* is a novel of contrasts. The narrative follows a series of conflicts between the culture of the North and South of England, between masters of factories and their workers, between women and men, and between the spunky southern gentlewoman Margaret Hale and the rough northern mill owner John Thornton. Though the narrative ostensibly follows Margaret and John's rocky path to love, the resolution of their seemingly insurmountable opposition to one another bears greater significance. The union of Margaret and John carries with it the symbolic hope for the union of the North and the South and of masters and workers. Thus, though their love story itself is certainly engaging, Gaskell imbues it with such symbolic significance that the reader becomes aware that these characters' story serves a greater rhetorical purpose. In this way, as with Thackeray, Trollope, and Dickens, the reader is kept aware of the fictive status of the text and always remains at a remove from the characters on the page.

To see how the various elements of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment work at once, I will briefly discuss an example that doesn't appear in my subsequent analyses. By looking at the following scene from Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, I hope to give a better sense of how the conventions of satire and sentiment work alongside a moralistic, intrusive narrative voice. A novel of

ecclesiastical politics, *Barchester Towers* opens appropriately enough with the death of the Bishop of Barchester, old Dr. Grantly. Dr. Grantly, the bishop's son and the current Archdeacon, assumes the vacant position will fall to him. As Dr. Grantly sits by his father's deathbed, ambitious, mercenary thoughts intrude upon his mournful solace. "By no means easy were the emotions" of Dr. Grantly, who knows that his succession to the Deanship is precarious (Trollope 6). "He was already over fifty, and there was little chance that his friends who were now leaving office would soon return to it. [...] Thus he thought long and sadly, in deep silence [...] and then at last he dared to ask himself whether he really longed for his father's death" (Trollope 6). Dr. Grantly is in fact denied the post of bishop in favor of Dr. Proudie, whose accession starts the ecclesiastical war that rages through the remainder of the novel. "Thus terminated our unfortunate friend's chance of possessing the glories of a bishopric" (Trollope 10). Trollope sketches this early scene in the satiric register; the reader is presented with what clearly reads as a parody of a greedy, acquisitive priest, a character type that features in many novels and poems of the period. The first pages introduce a son anxious for the death of his own father so that he may gather more power. But Trollope's narrator adds an additional layer of complexity to this satiric critique that calls into question the reader's assumptions.

Indeed, the scene shifts into a subtle critique of the reader. "Many will think," the narrator states, "that [Dr. Grantly] was wicked to grieve for the loss of episcopal power, wicked to have coveted it, nay, wicked even to have thought about it, in the way and at the moments he had done so. With such censures I cannot profess that I completely agree" (Trollope 10). Here the narrator both refers to himself in the first person and indirectly acknowledges the presence of the reader. He intrudes upon the action of the narrative, the succession of Dr. Proudie to the bishopric, and moralizes on the nature of ambition. "A lawyer does not sin in seeking to be a judge, or in compassing his wishes by all honest means. [...] If we look to clergymen to be more than men, we shall probably teach ourselves to think they are less [...] Our archdeacon was worldly – who among us is not so?" (Trollope 11). The intrusions of the narrator alter the tone of the scene entirely. No longer is this scene merely concerned with a satiric critique of priestly ambition that allows the reader to sit in judgment upon Dr. Grantly's inhumane response to his father's death. The narrator, here directly addressing the reader, forces the reader to sympathize with Dr. Grantly and to recognize that the reader shares many of the same unflattering traits. The expectation we formed in the opening pages of the book (that we will follow a sinful priest as he tries to acquire more power) is overturned, and the reader's own preconceptions are directly called into question. Ambition is not itself a sin; it only becomes so

when a person is willing to stoop to dishonest means to achieve their goal. We are encouraged to consider the humanity of clergymen, who though devoted to a higher calling still retain their human desires. Ultimately, the reader is lead to treat Dr. Grantly (and others, for we all share the same human traits) with sympathy and understanding.

This scene is representative of Trollope's use of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment. In a single scene he fuses the conventions of both satire and sentiment into a challenge to the reader to treat even the less savory aspects of human nature with grace and charity. He achieves his rhetorical purpose by employing an intrusive narrative voice that insinuates himself in the story, distancing the reader from the narrative action on the page. Because of this distance, the narrator finds himself drawn to identify with the narrator, a fully-formed character in his own right, for guidance through the morally complicated world of the novel. Trollope's hope is that his fiction serves as a sermon of sorts: that the reader receives from it the tools to better themselves and work toward the betterment of others.

The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment is a sophisticated narrative and rhetorical technique that succeeds only by a carefully constructed relationship between author and reader. When employed together as a single rhetorical tool, then, satire and sentiment build a rich and complex epistemological world for the

novels they inhabit. They create a world where the reader is granted the ability to interpret the narrative events as they unfold. The conventions of satire and sentiment provide a moral framework that guides the reader toward the correct assessment of the virtues and vices depicted in the novel; these conventions successfully establish the parameters of the moral world of the text. In turn, this moral world should bear resemblance to the world off the page, for, as Henry Fielding reminds us, the author's duty is to hold a mirror to society. The novelist's hope is that the world of the novel, which provides a guide for interpreting moral action, maps onto the real world. The reader should emerge from the novel better equipped to delineate and define virtue and to employ sympathy and compassion to combat vice. In this way, the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment not only sets the rhetorical agenda for the narrative but for the purpose of the novel as a whole. Though the real world may (thankfully) not be populated with the same ruthless grotesques as Charles Dickens's novels, Dickens's London, because we view it through the lens of satire and sentiment and interpret events accordingly, should help us navigate the real world with greater sensitivity and humanity. The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment assumes a great power exists in stories, that fiction itself can inform the way we approach the world around us and the way we treat our fellow men.

### *A Brief History of Satire and Sentiment*

The fact that literary genres as seemingly opposed as satire and sentiment could reach their ascendancy in England within a few decades of one another speaks to the cultural and philosophical complexity of the eighteenth century. During the Age of Enlightenment, conflicting theories of moral and political philosophy led to vastly differing conceptions of human nature. Chris Jones succinctly catalogs the clashing ideological forces that formed the basis for much philosophical debate:

Reason versus passion, universal benevolence versus partial affection or enlightenment selfishness, individual judgment versus the opinions and customs of society, the artistic imagination versus just moral and social ideas: while these issues had been debated within the philosophical and fictional writings of the century, their clash was now [widely debated]: its promise to mankind, and its threat to unreformed Britain (23).

As Jones suggests, eighteenth-century moral and political thinkers concerned themselves with investigating man's capacity for moral action, the nature of his duty to his fellow man, and the function and purposes of art. Satiric and sentimental fiction emerge as important vehicles for exploring these complex issues, with each mode founded on a differing understanding of man's essential nature. Though books can and have been written on the subject, it is useful to

trace, though in broad strokes, how the conventions of the modes of satire and sentiment developed in eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>12</sup>

The concepts of sensibility and sentimentality, as they came to be understood, have their origin in the writings of the moral philosophers of the early eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The most consequential of these, perhaps, was Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, whose major work *Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit* (1711) founded the “moral-sense school” of philosophy. According to Shaftesbury, mankind possesses an inborn moral sense akin to man’s five perceptive senses that enables her to distinguish goodness and take virtuous action. While this sense is equivalent to the powers of sight and taste, it must be carefully cultivated in order to function properly. When refined and exercised often, this moral sense breeds virtue. Virtue, Shaftesbury explains, is “founded in Love, Complacency, Goodwill, and in a Sympathy with the Kind or Species” (Ellis 10). For Shaftesbury, human nature is essentially untarnished. Mankind is naturally inclined toward goodness rather than sinfulness; the desire and capacity for virtue are a part of man’s very makeup. Shaftesbury’s near contemporary Frances Hutcheson, expanded and refined Shaftesbury’s concept

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<sup>12</sup> Frederick Bogel, Edward and Lillian Bloom, P.K. Elkin and others have examined the development of Augustan satire. Margaret Cohen, Ildiko Csengei, Fred Kaplan, and Chris Jones have published book-length studies of eighteenth-century sentimental fiction.

<sup>13</sup> Markman Ellis states that most critics adopt a “history of ideas” approach to tracing the origins of sentimentality. He labels this the “Enlightenment account” (12).



of the moral sense, arguing in his *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) that the moral sense is the source of virtuous thought and action and is responsible for the distinct feeling of pleasure an individual feels after acting virtuously (Ellis 11). For Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, the true exercise of sincere virtue, though it has its genesis in the interior, moral sense of man, must be directed outward, manifested as benevolence and affectionate sympathy towards one's fellow man. Indeed, this sympathy for mankind is the necessary foundation for the development of all successive virtues. Jones notes that "universal benevolence," and not reason or rationality, was the only successful "discipline for the passions" (Jones 111).

The privileging of sympathy and the moral sense over the faculty of reason is integral to the philosophy of sensibility. Later in the century philosopher David Hume drew a further distinction between the moral sense and reason. Moral judgments, claims Hume, are not governed by reason because "reason can never move us to action, while the whole point and purpose of moral judgments is to guide our actions. Reason is concerned either with relation of ideas, as in mathematics, or with matters of fact" (Ellis 13). Instead of Reason guiding men's actions towards the good, it is the natural sympathies that determine each individual's capacity for benevolent generosity (Csengei ). These natural sympathies manifest themselves physically in the sentiments, which

came to denote a “deepened range of emotions and feelings [...]: fainting, weeping, sighing, hand-holding, mute gestures, the beat of the pulse, blushing – and so on” (Ellis 19).<sup>14</sup> The unknown author the sentimental novel *Matilda, or the Efforts of Virtue* (1785) explained sentiment this way:

*Sentiment* is a refinement of moral feeling, which animates us in performing the dictates of Reason, and introduces many graces and decorums to the great duties of Morality, which are plainly felt by the Sentimental mind, though not easily defined. It adorns our actions with a certain delicacy, which not only makes them just, but bright” (87).

Again implicit here is Hume’s notions of the moral sense and sentimentality, which dictate that truly moral action is always directed outward: the moral sentiments are manifested in outward, physical displays of emotion, and are meant to develop the mind and heart of the individual so that he may work toward the good of society. The passage above also underscores the idea that the internal sentimental feelings of man must not only be directed outward, but must be displayed externally as well. For emotion to be true there must be the physical evidence of tears, sighs, and blushes.

The importance of the connection between the manifest emotions and feelings of individuals and moral action that forms the foundation for the “moral

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<sup>14</sup> The concept of “good nature” becomes extremely important in the literary vocabulary of the period. Henry Fielding, for instance used the term to denote a character with the capacity for goodness. This is how the reader know that the cold-hearted Blifil will never reform, while the Tom Jone’s “good nature” means he will, if he can develop prudence and discretion, become a good man. This notion lingers into the nineteenth century. In *Bleak House*, Esther’s essential good-nature cannot be hidden and everyone is drawn to her.

sense” school would suggest that the interior self of the individual would be the primary focus.<sup>15</sup> This is not quite the case, however. Indeed, sympathy – compassion, love, and “fellow-feeling” for mankind – remains “the principle by which sentiments were communicated, and hence it provided an analytic model by which the operations of sentimentalism could be described” (Ellis 13). Adam Smith, the eighteenth-century philosopher, hints at the performative nature of moral virtue. “Pity and compassion,” Smith insists, “are legible in emotions such as tears” (30). Though it did not present a threat to the popularity of the philosophy of sensibility, there existed a distinct tension between the performative aspect – the necessary (often excessive) physical displays of emotion – and the focus on the sincerity of the moral sentiments.

Intriguing, too, is the fact that, more than requiring a performance of emotion, sympathy was considered almost impossible to engage without the exercise of the imagination. David Marshall claims that, “in an act of sympathy we must represent to ourselves in our imagination the sentiments of the other person (whose feelings we cannot really know or share)” (20). This has obvious implications for the importance of the novel of sentiment. Because sympathy requires the engagement of the imagination, fiction could potentially play an important role in helping the individual develop sympathy (Jones 29). Writing in

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<sup>15</sup> Also, the new focus on individual subjectivity that characterized the eighteenth century.

1785, Clara Reeve argued that the “Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend. [...] to deceive us into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses, of the persons in the story, as if they were our own (111). Reeve agrees with Smith’s notion of a sympathy defined by the expression of emotional feeling, and for her the novel possesses the ability to engender sympathy by eliciting outpourings of real emotions from its readers. “Reading sentimental fiction, then,” remarks Ellis, “was to be an improving experience, refining the manners by exercising the ability to feel for others” (17). The imagination and external displays of powerful emotion are indelibly linked. And the literature of sensibility relies heavily on this connection.

The external display of sympathy encouraged a focus on aesthetic judgment. During the century the tenets of sensibility greatly influenced aesthetic theory (Jones 54). Hugh Blair’s 1783 work *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* is credited with offering the fullest expression of an aesthetic theory of the sentiments. Blair stresses “moral virtue as the common foundation of the powers of production and appreciation of art” (Jones 55). Good taste and an appreciation for beauty are innate natural inclinations which contribute to one’s capacity for deep feeling, or sensibility. This contribution to aesthetic theory is odd when we

consider how greatly the novel of sentiment came to be criticized for its weaknesses in style and story.

The social and cultural roots of eighteenth-century satire are decidedly more difficult to trace.<sup>16</sup> Most scholarly histories of the genre begin with an apology and an admission that satire is hard to pin down conceptually. Satire has appropriately been stamped with the epithet “that most protean something” (Gill ix). Satire as a genre originated in the Roman poetry of Lucilius, Horace, Persius, and Juvenal (Quintero 7). Dustin Griffin observes that the eighteenth century’s newfound interest in neoclassical forms of art as well as the rise of divisive partisan politics ushered in the golden age of satire in English letters (16). The genres of narrative satire and verse satire reached their height in the first half of the eighteenth century in the writings of John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Henry Fielding, and Samuel Johnson (Marshall 12). But by no means were these writers penning satire alone. Between 1686 and 1716 alone, more than twelve hundred verse satires were published in a single literary journal (Marshall 14). This ubiquity led to increased scrutiny. Eighteenth-century satire faced escalating attacks on its motives and morals. A growing number of critics, P.K. Elkin notes, decried satire as “nasty and abusive” (47). “Critics denounced

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<sup>16</sup> Ashley Marshall claims that writings on satire are so varied and imprecise, resembling one another only in large abstractions, suggests satire, though popular, did not enter into the major philosophical debates of the period (43).

satire as malevolent and destructive,” Dustin Griffin observes, “an affront to the dignity of human nature and a threat to the commonwealth. [... Satire’s] hostile critics saw only spite, envy, and sadistic delight” (24). Satirists responded by insisting satire is “a highly moral art” with a clear rhetorical function of encouraging virtue and discouraging vice (Griffin 24).

Indeed, a secondary purpose of John Dryden’s “Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire,” the eighteenth century’s most significant work of satiric theory, is the attempt to recover satire as a respectable literary form. In his “Discourse,” Dryden emphasizes satire’s obligation to encourage goodness as well as ridicule iniquity. Dryden’s satiric poetics has an undisguised rhetorical intent: “The Poet is bound [...] to give his reader some one Precept of Moral Virtue; and to caution him against some one Vice or Folly” (Dryden 80). In his 1738 *Epilogue to the Satires* Alexander Pope adopts similar language, claiming that the satirist is society’s moral custodian and stands as the “sole Dread of Folly, Vice, and Insolence” (II.1.213). To escape the impression that satire is used merely to libelously ridicule prominent figures, Richard Steele in *The Tatler*, no. 92 insists that satire’s target must be human nature itself and its extant flaws and vices that are common to men and institutions. “The Satyrist and the Libeller differ as much as the Magistrate and the Murderer. In the Consideration of human Life, the Satyrist never falls upon Persons who are not glaringly faulty. [...] Satire

never attacks the Character or Reputation of any Man" (2:74). Above all else, satire seeks justice and reform, never embarrassment alone.

The passages above suggest that satire arises from a different conception of human nature than does the fiction of sensibility. Satire assumes that man's nature is fundamentally flawed, that both he and society are prone to stain themselves with vices of all kinds. This conception of human nature draws satire close to the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, who in his masterwork *Leviathan* (1651) argues that, freed of any constraints, mankind is governed by base passions. For Hobbes, human society is an arbitrary construct that exists to restrain the natural vices of men. Hobbes's view parallels the satirists' insistence upon identifying deviations from societal norms. But satire's exposure of these vices is both cathartic and optimistic. Because satire is not meant to be merely critical, but is, as Marshall notes "purposive," it must assume that man's nature, however flawed, can be mended (34). Elkin notes that eighteenth-century satirists held tenaciously to Horace's famous declaration that literature should delight and instruct (71-72). Satire's preferred method of instruction, of course, characterized by burlesque and irony, could be a bitter pill to swallow. But this very bitterness is, according to satiric poet Thomas Randolph, a necessary component of the genre. Punitive exposure of vice is effective precisely because it

stings. In Randolph's 1706 work *The Muses Looking-Glass* a personified "Satyre" describes himself

As one whose Whip of Steel can with a Lash  
Imprint the Characters of Shame so Deep,  
Even in the brazen Forehead of proud Sin,  
That not Eternity shall wear it out.  
[...] each Blow doth leave  
A lasting Scar, that with a Poyson eats  
Into the Marrow of their Fames and Lives;  
Th' eternal Ulcer to their Memories! (Marshall 135).

In Randolph's rather forceful depiction, the shame and humility of satiric critique is a lasting and distinctly public check on an individual's past sinful behavior. It lingers long after the words and rebukes themselves have faded, a painful reminder to avoid future indiscretions.

Though early verse satires, especially hastily written screeds decrying the misdeeds of particular individuals (often politicians), are scurrilous and unyielding, near mid-century there is a shift in satiric fiction toward the sympathetic (Marshall 196). The satiric output of the period, of which Henry Fielding's fiction is the prime example, settles somewhere between "Swiftian outrage and Addisonian benevolence" (Marshall 226).<sup>17</sup> Fielding and his ilk distribute satiric critiques liberally; even their heroes aren't safe from ridicule.

Tom Jones's lusty, impulsive foolishness results in many a sticky situation

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<sup>17</sup> James Miller's *A Man of Taste* (1735), Robert Dodsley's *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* (1737), and William Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress* are other popular examples of narrative satires of this period.



(including a case of presumed incest!), and *Joseph Andrews*'s Parson Adams, while delightful and humane, is often bumbling and ineffectual. But Fielding treats his imperfect characters with tender indulgence and encourages the same from his audience. Fielding assumes a hierarchy of sin; Tom Jones's imprudence and youthful dalliances are less vicious than Blifil's sadistic manipulations. Malice and a cruel disregard for the suffering of those around you are sins which earn Fielding's particular scorn. Sympathy, a benevolent compassion for mankind, is the true goal of Fielding's fiction and of other satiric writers of the period. It is a love for one's fellow man that has the potential to overcome the vicious greed, vanity, and affectation that runs rampant through society. In much satiric fiction, characters gifted with "good nature," a natural propensity for goodness not unlike the faculty of sensibility, are rewarded for their virtue with the traditional gifts of marriage and financial solvency. Satiric fiction relies on an outpouring of compassion. Thus, satire shares many conventions with the fiction of sensibility, that assumes man's moral sense will be made manifest through expressions of sympathy, compassion, and benevolence. Satire, too, is unafraid to reward goodness with physical, romantic, and financial remuneration or to depict scenes of excessive emotion. In sum, though critics continue to regard them as distinct and incompatible, satiric and sentimental fiction share similar

rhetorical purposes and conventions. Satire and sentiment both work toward the betterment of mankind.

Though my individual chapters provide a much deeper analysis of the conventions of satire and sentiment, I will briefly sketch the most salient features of each. This will provide a working understanding and basic vocabulary as we move forward. Satiric fiction is a literary art that attacks a target with varying degrees of humor and ridicule. The targets can be either general sins common to human nature or the particular misdeeds of an individual or institution. There is an obligation, though, for the satirists' targets to be *real*, to depict what Edward W. Rosenheim calls "discernable historical particulars" (31). In this way, satire is a fundamentally representative mode; it depends on the connection between what the author describes and the referents that we know in the real world (Matz 5). The humor often derives from ironic incongruity. Recall that Wayne Booth calls satire "irony with a victim" (37). The irony is meant to force into sudden contact two dissociate objects: the real and the ideal, the momentous and the trivial, and so on. Satire often works to undermine reader's expectations by adopting burlesque or parody of well-known genres, exaggeration, understatement, and zeugma. Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, for example, famously mimics the conventions of classical epic to expose the triviality of upper classes. Though satire often relies on exaggeration, it is meant to be, in some senses, a

realistic mode. Here Ian Watt draws a distinction between a “realism of presentation” and a “realism of assessment” (290-291). Satire may depict ridiculous events, or exaggerate the traits and conventions of characters and genres, but it does so in order to offer a true assessment of a human or social reality. Typical satiric targets include vanity and affectation, which Fielding in his famous preface to *Joseph Andrews* identifies as the sins out of which all other follies have their being. Greed, ambition, selfishness, and neglect of those less fortunate, all of which fall under satire’s purview, have their origin in either excessive vanity or affectation. More generally, though, satire takes as its target human folly in all of its possible manifestations. By making vice ridiculous, by encouraging the reader to recognize and laugh at our own follies, satire works for “the amendment of vices by correction” (Fielding 13).

The fiction of sensibility, though it shares the goal of encouraging the reader to right action, does so by targeting the reader’s tender emotions rather than the reader’s sense of rueful irony. Sentimental fiction is a literature of feeling that requires an emotional response from the reader to be successful. Janet Todd characterizes the goal of sentimentality as “the arousal of pathos through conventional situations, stock characters and rhetorical devices” (2). Edmund Burke notes that by depicting traditional characters that include tender-hearted romantic, longsuffering heroines, dashing heroes, cold-hearted rogues,

and pitiful orphans, sentimental fiction “affects by sympathy rather than by imitation, to display rather than to present the ideas themselves” (177).

Characters on the page, then, are not only written in a way that elicits emotion from the reader, but are extremely emotive themselves. Characters cry, weep, bemoan their pitiful state, and express deep affection for other characters in the novel. Sentimental fiction, then, depends upon both representing sympathy and encouraging the reader to develop sympathy themselves. By evoking emotional responses, the literature of sensibility teaches readers how to behave, how to order their affections, and how to correctly engage their emotions. The world of the literature of sensibility is no more real than the world of satiric fiction; it relies on a similar exaggeration of real situations in order to lead the reader to an understanding of their own real emotions. Stephen Ahern observes that, like satire, sentiment often plays with the gap between the real and the ideal; it paints a stylized, idealized world that underscores the real world’s selfishness and lack of sympathy (12). The reader must take the lessons from sentimental stories and use them to develop greater sympathy, which in turn produces greater social harmony.

### *Summary of Chapters*

My chapters follow a thematic rather than chronological organization. In chapter two, I examine William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848). I

begin with Thackeray because I believe *Vanity Fair* best mines the narrative and stylistic possibilities of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment. Thackeray is aware that both modes are central to his rhetorical purpose, and he emphasizes the relation between satire and sentiment when he depicts a personified “Satire and Sentiment” waking “arm-in-arm together” through the booths of Vanity Fair (Thackeray 161). Thackeray’s narrative, I argue, weaves together satire and sentiment in order to critique both modes, which in turn leads him to offer the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as the technique that combines the most effective elements of each mode into an effective rhetorical strategy that can best reach the reader. In the novel, Amelia Sedley serves as an archetypal sentimental heroine; Becky Sharp, one of the most vibrant characters in English fiction, is the picaresque heroine of a mock-historic epic. Upon scrutiny, Amelia reveals the weaknesses of the excessively sentimental. She is supremely selfish, and far from being an indicator of sympathy, her emotional displays blind her to the needs of those around her. Our *pícaro* does not fare much better. Though the picaresque allows Thackeray to ridicule the latent injustice of England’s rigidly hierarchical social system, Becky’s unscrupulous mercenary endeavors and supreme selfishness expose the impotence of satiric invective. To use a villain to expose and denounce villainy results in moral indistinctness. Both Becky and Amelia’s stories end in moral and narrative ambiguity.

I argue that Thackeray's novel itself proves the efficacy of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment. Critics have long noted that Thackeray eschews the satirist's obligation of providing a moral precept to encourage virtue. There are simply too few examples of virtue in the novel for the author to reward. It is the novel's narrative persona, the intrusive Manager of the Performance, whose narration succeeds in reconciling satire and sentiment, incorporating conventions of both modes in such a way to expose the vices in both his characters and the world at large and to combat them with compassion and sympathy. It is Thackeray's humane, sympathetic treatment of Becky that redeems her for the reader. The narrator's sentimental sympathy becomes the moral norm the novel lacks. Though goodness is rarely found on the page, Thackeray gestures toward his readers for the fulfillment of his enticements to virtue. Thackeray thus engages moral sense of his readers, encouraging them to join him and form an extra-textual community united by a common sympathy, so that they may together, "with hope," yearn for a better world (Harden 228).

In chapter three I turn to Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857). Trollope's novel of ecclesiastic politics provides an instructive comparison to Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. In *Vanity Fair* Thackeray, declaring the satirist to be the "week-day preacher," employs the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment in the figure of his narrative persona in order to gesture toward a community of sympathetic

readers who, alongside the narrator, treat the flaws of others with compassion while working to amend their own. Trollope extends Thackeray's conception of the writer's obligation even further. Trollope's novel draws an unmistakable connection between the novelist and the preacher of sermons, and between novels and religious sermons. Early in *Barchester Towers* Trollope laments to the reader that there exists "no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilized and free countries than the necessity of listening to sermons" (Trollope 49). Sermons earn Trollope's displeasure because their dour, didactic, unimaginative rhetoric has made them ineffective tools for instilling virtue. I claim that Trollope uses the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to posit the novel form as a viable replacement for the sermon because of its unique capacity to engage and stimulate the earnest emotions, imagination, and sympathy of the reader, thereby encouraging them to right action. This view of the novel as a more effective sermon corresponds to Trollope's aesthetic theory, which finds full expression in his 1877 essay "Novel-Reading." Sermons, though instructive, are dull and lifeless, sins which cause them to fail to produce a lasting effect on their hearers.

The novel succeeds where the sermon fails by engaging the reader's sympathetic imagination; by creating characters and narratives with which the reader can identify, the novel is able to realistically and affectively demonstrate

the painful cost of vice and the benefits of virtue (Trollope, "Novel-Reading" 36). This is worked out practically in the pages of *Barchester Towers* in the figure of the narrative voice. In a novel populated by preachers, the most powerful and truest preaching derives from two sources far outside the pulpit: the figure of the narrator and the character of Madeleine Stanhope. As in *Vanity Fair*, moral truth is dispensed by the narrator, who relies on the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to establish with rueful humor the vices and flaws common to mankind that find hope of amendment in the virtues of love and compassion espoused by the novel's sentimental elements. The narrator functions as a moral preacher to both his audience and characters. With delicate balance, Trollope both enacts and illustrates sympathy. By weaving together satire and sentiment, Trollope's narrator guides the reader as a faithful truth-teller, honest friend, and extra-ecclesial preacher, thereby fulfilling the novelist's proper function as an encourager to right moral action.

I examine Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novel *North and South* (1855) in chapter four. While Thackeray and Trollope view the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as central to their strategy to encourage the reader toward virtuous action, Gaskell adopts the technique as a way to combat the inhumanity inherent in industrial capitalism and to highlight the importance of women's active participation in this social endeavor. In the pages of the novel, Gaskell pursues



the lofty narrative goal of bringing about the reconciliation between working-class factory laborers and their bourgeois masters; between the South of England and the industrial North, between men and women. She does this by employing a unique, metonymic narrative structure. As in Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, in *North and South* a sentimental love plot develops amid a political drama. These two narratives are interwoven so that the development and resolution of one carries significance for the other. Gaskell highlights this symbolic significance by framing her novel around a series of conflicts between opposed forces: the North and the South; the rural and the industrial; lower class and upper class; masters and workers. This framing device broadens the scope of the novel so that Gaskell's characters serve a symbolic, nearly allegorical function. Margaret Hale, the novel's heroine, represents all women, the bourgeois South, and the traditional hierarchical class system. John Thornton, Gaskell's hero, symbolizes all men, the industrial North, and the new breed of English gentlemen – the self-made tradesman. The end of the novel, which ends with the union of John and Margaret symbolically unites all of these opposed forces, providing definite hope that all conflicts can find a similarly auspicious resolution off the page as well.

Gaskell adopts the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as yet another of these opposing forces, which allows her to use both modes to establish the parameters of her moral critique, argue for the importance of sympathy, compassion, and

community, and ultimately sue for the compatibility of satire and sentiment as rhetorical partners. In *North and South*, Gaskell punctuates the narrative at several key points with strongly satirical scenes. These scenes mainly target the idle luxury of London and the vain self-indulgence which characterize bourgeois women. Gaskell contrasts these scenes with a narrative composed of traditional sentimental elements. Sympathy is the virtue espoused by Gaskell that alone can reverse the mechanization of human relations and the dehumanization of laborers brought about by the newly industrialized, capitalist economy. With the promise of Margaret Hale's marriage to John Thornton, the reader has hope for the symbolic resolution of all the novel's many conflicts.

*North and South's* urban setting, wide cast of characters from all social classes, and politically focused narrative makes it a fitting prelude to my examination of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, which comprises chapter five of my dissertation. In this chapter I argue Dickens adopts the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as the central feature of his narrative aesthetic and rhetorical purpose. The novel is governed by a unique dual-narrative structure that has earned the most scrutiny from critics. Two distinct narrative voices – the first-person narration of the novel's central female character, Esther Summerson, and an omniscient third-person narrator – share the duties of narrating *Bleak House's* exceedingly complex plot. I argue that, adopting the conventions of satire and

sentiment, Dickens establishes his two narrators as tonal and modal inverses of one another. The omniscient narrator is an overtly bitter, satiric presence who underscores much of his narration with a dark, persistent irony. His portion of the narration presents a darkly funny but unflinching look at the inhumanity of England's social and political institutions. Esther Summerson's portion of the narrative adheres more closely to the conventions of sentimental fiction, emphasizing compassion, sympathy, and community as the highest social goods. Each narrator's excesses are occasionally, but significantly, tempered by adopting the primary tactic of the other. Amid the omniscient narrator's satiric condemnation of the inhumanity of the wealthy is an inescapable outpouring of sympathy for the indigent poor. And behind Esther's frank, sincere, and unceasing descriptions of characters and situations exists a blatant satiric critique of false piety and disordered philanthropy. Thus, in his third-person narrator Dickens provides a guide for the reader. Esther, on the other hand, serves as a model for the reader – she is Dickens's moral ideal whose actions the reader should emulate.

While Dickens's particular use of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sympathy allows him to craft a narrative of greater nuance and complexity, it also reinforces *Bleak House's* larger rhetorical purpose. The thematic and narrative structure of the novel impresses upon its reader the interconnectedness of all

men, which underlies our moral obligation to act toward all with mercy and compassion. This rhetorical agenda is made possible by satire and sentiment's existence alongside the novel's larger governing genre – detective fiction. Both mystery stories and satire and sentiment rely upon the tropes and themes of detection and revelation. *Bleak House* is a novel of many mysteries, all of which become increasingly interconnected as the narrative progresses. Both factual and moral truth are equally obscured, hidden behind corruptions and deception. The reader must play detective and work alongside the two narrators to uncover both. In this way, the reader is encouraged to uncover and enact the sympathy embedded in the novel so that the injustices of the narrative may not be repeated.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “To Walk Arm-in-Arm through Vanity Fair”: William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*

In his 1867 series of lectures on the English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century, William Makepeace Thackeray asserts that it is the responsibility of the writer of satire to be the “week-day preacher” (2). His art should “awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness – your scorn for untruth, pretension, [and] imposture” (Thackeray, *English Humorists* 2). Thackeray’s statement affirms traditional notions of satire that regard humor and laughter as effective social correctives. The suggestion, however, that the satirist writes under the obligation not only to nurture his reader’s disdain for vice, but to arouse and cultivate his affections and tender emotions draws Thackeray astonishingly close to the declared purpose of the writer of sentiment; he assumes the same extant connection between the capacity for deep feeling and moral response that governs sentimental fiction. I suggest Thackeray is aware he is invoking two seemingly contradictory literary modes. The conventions and aims of both satire and sentiment, I claim, are central to his narrative aesthetic, rhetorical purpose, and authorial ethic in his greatest literary work, *Vanity Fair* (1848).

In this chapter I argue Thackeray's novel proves the efficacy of satire and sentiment when they work in tandem. Though both modes had largely fallen out of critical favor by the nineteenth century, Thackeray continues to recognize their rhetorical viability. Near the beginning of *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray depicts a personified "Satire and Sentiment" walking "arm-in-arm together" surveying the booths of Vanity Fair (161).<sup>1</sup> The close physical proximity and intimacy of the two figures indicates they are not adversaries, but allies; their confederacy better prepares them to encounter Vanity Fair, which Thackeray warns is "not a moral place certainly; nor a merry one, though very noisy" (xxxvii). According to Thackeray, these generic modes are not antithetical, but complementary. This coupling of Satire and Sentiment is not bound by the confines of Thackeray's framing metaphor of Vanity Fair but rather permeates every level of the sprawling narrative. The multi-layered structure of the novel – the central plot embedded in a framing metaphor superintended by an often unreliable omniscient narrator – results in a narrative of great generic ingenuity, which affords Thackeray the opportunity to survey the full range of thematic and rhetorical possibilities of the two modes. I argue that Thackeray's novel engages the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment in order to critically analyze both modes and prove their viability as a single rhetorical tool. The structure and content of the

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter cited by page number only

narrative explores the limitations and capacities of these modes as vehicles to “awaken and direct” the moral sense of the reader (Thackeray, *English Humorists* 2).

Containing elements of the mock-historic epic, sentimental romance, and picaresque satire, *Vanity Fair* offers a potent critique of the affectation, hypocrisy, and ruthless ambition of the English bourgeoisie. By Thackeray’s express design, the bleak worldview of the novel is largely undisturbed by the virtues of compassion, selflessness, or humility. In a response to the literary reviewer of *Fraser’s Magazine*, who felt the novel offered the reader too little “fresh air” as a respite from its decided misanthropy, Thackeray confessed that his object in writing was to “indicate, in cheerful terms, that we are for the most part an abominably foolish and selfish people ‘desperately wicked’ and all eager after vanities. [...] I want to leave every body dissatisfied and unhappy at the end of the story” (Harden 228). The desire to impress upon his audience the reality of the inescapable ubiquity of vice would appear to identify Thackeray as a disciple of Jonathan Swift, who expressed a similar intention to “vex the world rather than divert it” (Clark 35). At times *Vanity Fair* does achieve Swiftian levels of cynicism and tenaciously eschews satire’s traditional obligation of providing a moral precept to encourage virtue. There are simply too few examples of virtue in the novel for the author to reward. This threatens to render Thackeray’s

rhetorical purpose in the novel indistinct at best, unrelentingly cynical at worst. Indeed, many critics have found it difficult to reconcile the objects and objectives of Thackeray's satire. Robert Loughy observes that the targets of Thackeray's satiric ridicule – greed, hypocrisy, social ambition, lack of moral awareness – are standard ones, but he admits that “we are never quite sure of the objectives of satire in *Vanity Fair*. Few of its characters move from ignorance to knowledge, and even if they seem to, such a move does not produce any permanent change in their values or actions” (257). Failing to provide any character who functions as a moral exemplar, *Vanity Fair* stays true to the promise of its subtitle, “A Novel without a Hero.”

I wish to suggest that interpretations like Loughy's overlook the deep vein of compassion that flows beneath the surface of the novel. If Thackeray's prose is reminiscent of Swift's biting social critique, Thackeray owes an even greater debt to the more humane Henry Fielding, whom E.D.H. Johnson notes Thackeray adopted as his literary model (100). In his 1742 novel *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding professes that the satirist's task is to “hold a glass to thousands in their closets, that they may contemplate their deformity, and endeavor to reduce it” (46). The picture of the writer here is of a compassionate friend, who doesn't dispense harsh moral judgment with self-righteous indignation, but kindly supplies the implement by which the reader may discover his own flaws so that he may



privately correct them and avoid a humiliating public exposure. Later in his response to *Fraser's Magazine*, Thackeray employs a similar metaphor. "Good God don't I see (in that may-be cracked & warped looking glass in w<sup>h</sup> I am always looking) my own weaknesses wickednesses lusts follies shortcomings? – in company let us hope with better qualities about w<sup>h</sup> we will pretermit discourse" (Harden 228). Here the writer implicates himself by confessing his own need for such a revealing looking glass. Thackeray also gestures towards a larger community of sinners, united by their shared imperfection, humility, and longing for a kinder world. Sympathy, compassion, and community are morally redemptive and are the only antidotes to the poison of vanity and affectation. So, when *Vanity Fair's* narrator declares that "The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face. Frown at it, and it will in turn look sourly upon you; laugh at it and with it, and it is a jolly, kind companion" we can determine the author is both holding the mirror for the reader and gazing into it himself (17). Though he cannot change the ugliness of the world, holding the looking glass that reveals its true nature is itself an act of philanthropy; urging the reader to gaze in the mirror and alter his own reflection is a powerful sermon by the "week-day preacher."

Accordingly, in his "Novel without a Hero," I argue that it is in the figure of the narrator that Thackeray weaves together the discourse and conventions of

satire and sentiment and locates the moral norm the novel lacks (2). In this chapter I first explore the ways in which the narrative of *Vanity Fair* participates in the generic modes of satire and sentiment. The novel's two (for lack of a better term) heroines exemplify the archetypal protagonists of these modes. Amelia Sedley in many ways epitomizes the traditional sentimental heroine – she is characterized by her tenderness, her capacity for deep feeling, and her ill treatment and abandonment by a heartless rogue. Becky Sharp, one of the most vibrant characters in English fiction, is the picaresque hero, the *pícaro*, of the mock-historic epic – she is a scheming parvenu whose deceitful mercenary machinations serve as the vehicle for much of Thackeray's satiric ridicule. I examine how Thackeray scrutinizes and exposes the limitations of both modes. Upon scrutiny, Amelia reveals the weaknesses of the excessively sentimental. She is supremely selfish, and far from being an indicator of deep sympathy, her emotional displays blind her to the needs of those around her. Becky Sharp ultimately exposes the impotence of satire. Becky's selfish schemes increasingly try the reader's devotion, and Thackeray ends her story in moral and narrative ambiguity. Though the world may treat Becky with hypocrisy and inhumanity, she responds in kind, which succeeds in nothing but rendering the world more nasty. For her sins she is unrepentant, and for her crimes she goes largely unpunished. I suggest Thackeray agrees with George Meredith's assertion that

the satirist who lacks sympathy is a “scavenger, working on a storage of bile” (64).<sup>2</sup>

Second, I turn to Thackeray’s notoriously complex narrative persona and show how the narrative voice reconciles satire and sentiment, employing both elements as rhetorical tools to reveal the viciousness of the world and combat it with sincere compassion and sympathy. I contend that the figure of the narrator, the self-styled “Manager of the Performance,” with his continual digressive, moralizing, and editorializing intrusions foregrounds the novel’s status as text. The reader is constantly reminded by the narrative voice that he is indeed reading a novel. The effects of this are twofold. The foregrounding of the storytelling process disrupts the reader’s identification with the characters. This distance in turn forces the reader to identify more closely with the narrator, who often addresses the reader directly. The reader and the narrator must work in community with one another to correctly interpret events as they unfold. It is the narrator’s sentimental compassion and distaste for vanity and affectation that offer the only significant alternative to the misanthropy of the novel. The narrator advocates for sympathy for the characters and for the world at large,

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<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Meredith has this to say regarding sentimental fiction. “The sentimentalist is as averse [to the virtues of good Comedy] as the Puritan and as the Bacchanalian” (72). Though they differ in their choice of terminology, Meredith, Thackeray, and the other authors in this dissertation are in agreement about both the conventions and the rhetorical function of “comedy”. Both pure satire and pure sentimentality are inadequate and suffer aesthetically.

and neither the moral condemnation of satiric invective nor sentimental excess alone allows him to succeed. But by embodying the better parts of both – his humorously rueful critique of the worst parts of human nature is mitigated with a good measure of sentimental sympathy for his imperfect characters –

Thackeray engages the reader's sympathy, draws him into communion with him, so that they may together yearn for a different world. Ultimately, I claim, *Vanity Fair* is a novel about stories – the ways we tell them, the ways we hear them, and the ways we learn from them.

*“Thus the world began for these two young ladies”: Amelia, Becky, and the Rhetoric of Genre*

Thackeray combines the modes of satire and sentiment by creating two antipodal heroines that epitomize each. *Vanity Fair*'s central narrative follows the exploits of Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp. Amelia's tender nature, her great capacity for the external display of her internal emotions, and her unfortunate, doomed romance with a self-absorbed rake who abandons her to a life of poverty and pining situate Amelia in the tradition of the sentimental novel. Her low birth, vast social ambitions, penchant for employing manipulation and deceit to attain her ends, and her ultimate alienation from acceptable society place Becky Sharp firmly in the role of the classic *pícaro* from the tradition of picaresque, satirical mock epic. Theorist John Frow writes that genres perform symbolic

action by creating a “set of interpretations, of ‘frames’, or ‘fixes’ on the world” (“Reproducibles” 1633). Participation in a genre allows a writer to represent and explore the world according to a particular interpretive framework. By introducing characters that represent two different generic pathways, Thackeray is able to expand the interpretive framework of his novel to include both modes. He is able to explore the “meanings, values, and affects” of the worlds of both satiric and sentimental fiction (Frow, “Reproducibles” 1634). Further, exploring these genres through characters that are morally suspect and whose respective stories end in troubling ambiguity enables Thackeray to expose the limitations of these generic modes. Individually, both of these literary modes seek to reform the reader by castigating vice and encouraging virtue. But finding both Becky and Amelia to be insufficient moral guides, the reader, by extension, is left searching for moral truth elsewhere in the narrative. If not carefully tempered by genuine human sympathy and connection, Thackeray maintains, each mode has the tendency to end in alienation, isolation, selfishness, and moral chaos.

Understanding Becky and Amelia to be representative of differing generic and rhetorical trajectories grants the relationship between them greater significance than if they were merely thematic foils. Though the relationship between the two female characters, which constitutes what JT Klein calls a “dual centered narrative,” is of such obvious significance that it rarely goes

unremarked upon by critics, there is significant variation among critical interpretations of that relationship (123). Some scholars agree with Kit Dobson that Becky and Amelia embody two antithetical conceptions of Victorian femininity, “the angel and the monster,” with Amelia serving as a “vindication of the Victorian feminine ideal” (9).<sup>3</sup> Other critics, James Phelan among them, believe that both Becky and Amelia lack the virtue to serve as Thackeray’s ideal. Indeed, Phelan insists that both characters are permanent residents of Vanity Fair, and that Thackeray uses Amelia to examine the workings of vanity in the domestic sphere and Rebecca to examine the workings of vanity in the public, professional sphere (137).<sup>4</sup> Though critics seem aware that Becky and Amelia operate according to different understandings of the world, few critics have analyzed their narratives according to the differing generic conventions that govern each. They neglect the obvious fact that Becky and Amelia typify the archetypal heroines of the two apparently contrasting literary modes – the satiric mock-epic and the sentimental romance. By approaching these heroines as

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<sup>3</sup> Though it doesn’t play a major role in my argument, it is worth noting that “the angel and the monster” are common terms for Victorian troubled conceptions of femininity. These were explored most famously, of course, in Gilbert and Gubar’s critical masterpiece *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

<sup>4</sup> Dobson and Phelan represent the two main camps of critical interpretations of Becky and Amelia’s relationship. E.D.H. Johnson (and others I will mention) make a plea for Amelia’s goodness, believing that in the end of the novel she learns to “love unselfishly” (Johnson 102). Frank Palmeri (and others) agree with Phelan that neither serves as a model of behavior or virtue (771).

representatives of these differing literary modes, we gain greater insight into how the characters function in the novel and how their individual narratives cleverly test the virtues and weaknesses of each.

Though several critics offhandedly label Rebecca Sharp a *pícaro*, scholars have yet to offer a thorough analysis of Thackeray's obvious participation in the tradition of picaresque satire.<sup>5</sup> Originating in Spain in the sixteenth century with the anonymously authored comedy *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), the picaresque is a literary genre that episodically traces the exploits of a rogue, a *pícaro*, making his way in a hostile world (Wicks 230; Winton 79).<sup>6</sup> The *pícaro* survives by his cunning, swaggering bravado, and less than savory criminal acts, but it is the uncharitable social system – hierarchical, stratified, and unbreachable – that emerges as the true villain. Picaresque fiction nearly always entails a satiric critique of acquisitive bourgeois social ambition. This critique lends an air of pathos, even of tragedy, to the figure of the *pícaro*. Lars Hartveit believes that the lasting appeal of the picaresque is in its “emotional core of the protagonist's response to the environment” (12). The *pícaro* is a marginalized figure, shut out from the community into which he seeks entrance. There is something

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<sup>5</sup> Wicks, Kaler, Hartveit, et al.

<sup>6</sup> Though most scholars of the picaresque identify the comic, episodic *Lazarillo de Tormes* to be the first major picaresque work, that consensus has recently been challenged. Anne K. Kaler and others have suggested that the roots of the genre lie farther back.

undeniably satisfying, something perhaps akin to justice, then, in the *pícaro's* manipulation and exploitation of a system that first manipulated, exploited, and excluded.

Eighteenth-century novelists Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollet are credited with popularizing and “domesticating” the picaresque in the English comic novel. The more shocking criminal elements were toned down and incorporated into the comic novel (Winton 91). The criminal autobiography that became the model for many English picaresque works was altered and adapted into the adventures of scheming social climbers and adventurous rogues.<sup>7</sup>

Thackeray was familiar with both the Spanish picaresque through his affection for Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and with English adaptations of the mode (Hartveit 81). Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon* (1844) is often cited as a masterful English adaptation of the picaresque formula (Wicks 101).

Depicted by Thackeray as both Clytemnestra and Napoleon Bonaparte, Rebecca Sharp functions rhetorically as a classic *pícaro*.<sup>8</sup> She is an orphan of low

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<sup>7</sup> Though it had its genesis in sixteenth century Spain, the picaresque quickly found its way to England in the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, Calhoun Winton explains, the picaresque was an immensely popular genre of fiction. Fictional criminal biographies were all the rage among the English reading public (81). As time passed, however, the picaresque devolved into a mode subsumed within larger fictional works. Winton labels the English picaresque a “modal” form (Winton 79).

<sup>8</sup> Female picaresque heroines are not uncommon in picaresque fiction. Anne K. Kaler chronicles the history of the female picaresque in *The Picara: From Hera to Fantasy Heroine*. In the



birth, daughter of an impecunious painter and a French mother. With no recourse to inherited wealth or family respectability, Becky undauntedly marches forth into an unwelcoming world, determined to exercise her considerable wits and feminine wiles to gain the social position and financial security she seeks.

‘I am alone in the world,’ said the friendless girl. ‘I have nothing to look for but what my own labor can bring me; and while that little pink-faced chit Amelia, with not half my sense, has ten thousand pounds and an establishment secure, poor Rebecca (and my figure is far better than hers) has only herself and her own wits to trust to. Well, let us see if my wits cannot provide me with an honorable maintenance, and if some day or the other I cannot show Miss Amelia my real superiority over her (86).

Like the paradigmatic *pícaro*, Becky feels slighted by her exclusion from the upper echelons of the hierarchical social world. And in many senses, of course, possessed of neither independent means, family connections, nor the ability to pursue a lucrative profession, she is indeed ensnared in a precarious situation. But this passage suggests that Becky’s genuine need for security is subordinate to less defensible desires. She is motivated less by the need to survive than by an unabashedly vindictive desire to exact some kind of revenge on those who have excluded her. Ambition and vanity are the forces that drive her, not a basic need for security and comfort. She is eager to flaunt her “superiority” over Amelia,

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book, she traces the origins and characteristics of the *pícaro*. Sexuality, usually deceptive and transgressive plays a larger role in the female-lead picaresque, as it does here (Kaler 88-110).

who, through no merit of her own, comfortably inhabits the social sphere Rebecca so desperately seeks (86). Since the world of Vanity Fair rewards neither true virtue, merit, nor wit, so Becky willingly uses her wits for less scrupulous purposes: to manipulate, deceive, and seduce her way to financial security and bourgeois respectability. From the beginning this is characterized as an act of rebellion. Upon departing her finishing school, whose headmistress never let Becky forget her poverty and low status, Becky famously throws her (rather grudgingly bestowed) gift of Johnson's Dictionary out the carriage window, a clear declaration of independence from the tyranny of Miss Pinkerton and her ilk (10).

In keeping with his literary forebears, Thackeray grants his *pícaro* keen insight into human nature so that she might serve a particular rhetorical function. Becky's position as marginalized outsider and her formidable arsenal of intellectual gifts gives her the power to accurately evaluate the moral weaknesses of others. Though Becky is more than willing to use her figure (which she assures the reader is much finer than Amelia's) to aid in her schemes, it is her intellect that is her most powerful weapon. This combination of intellectual and sexual manipulation is a hallmark of the female *pícaro*. Edward Friedman claims that although the picaresque antiheroine's "sexuality is [her] major weapon against society, her schemes depend on wit as well" (ix). Anne Kaler concurs that "the

*pícaro* lives by her wit and her [...] natural ability to survive" (47). Becky's wit gives her keen insight. Significantly, she is greatly adept at reading situations and people. Unlike Amelia Sedley, who proves to be a miserably poor judge of character, Becky quickly assesses George Osborne's deficiencies of character.

"'There's not a finer fellow in the service [than Dobbin],' Osborne said, 'nor a better officer, though he is not an Adonis, certainly.' And he looked towards the glass himself with much *naïveté*; and in so doing, caught Miss Sharp's eye fixed keenly upon him, at which he blushed a little, and, Rebecca thought in her heart, 'Ah, *mon beau monsieur*! I think I have *your* gauge' – the little artful minx" (45-46).

In little more than an instant, Becky penetrates George Osborne's sheen of respectability and gallantry to the vain, petty man beneath. It is consequential, I think, that in this passage Thackeray uses the image of the mirror. As he does throughout the text and in his letter to *Fraser's Magazine*, Thackeray employs the image of the mirror as an instrument revelatory of much more than physical appearance; it reflects a truth that might otherwise remain hidden. Becky's great failing, however, is that her ability to glean the truth from the mirror's reflection doesn't result in a greater moral awareness or a more compassionate understanding of man's foibles.

Instead, her shrewd perceptiveness merely becomes Becky's greatest ally in her manipulations. Her ability to quickly assess the weaknesses of individuals

enables Becky to more successfully exploit them. For Thackeray, Becky continues to be a useful rhetorical tool; though far from perfect herself, the *pícaro* exposes the vanity, affectation, and hypocrisy of the social system. At Queen's Crawley, she sets about making herself agreeable to everyone. With the pious Mr. Crawley, "she was respectful and obedient;" with Sir Pitt she "rendered herself [...] indispensable. [...] Before she had been a year at Queen's Crawley she had quite won the baronet's confidence" (87; 89-90). Becky likewise ingratiate herself to the aging, cantankerous Miss Crawley, rightly perceiving Miss Crawley's power over the family's purse strings. "Miss Crawley had not long been established at the Hall before Rebecca's fascinations had won the heart of that good-natured London rake. [...] Rebecca had made a conquest of her; having made her laugh four times, and amused her during the whole of the little journey" (103). With the sadistic Lord Steyne, Becky employs good old-fashioned sexual manipulation. She wears a revealing gown, accepts his trite flattery and favors, and flirts shamelessly. "As he bowed over her he smiled, and quoted the hackneyed and beautiful lines, from *The Rape of the Lock*, about Belinda's diamonds, 'which Jews might kiss and infidels adore.' 'But I hope your lordship is orthodox,' said the little lady, with a toss of her head. And many ladies round about whispered and talked, and many gentlemen nodded and whispered, as they saw what marked attention the great nobleman was paying to the little

adventuress" (469-470). Becky's play for the favor of Lord Steyne is a bold gambit, to be sure, but one she attempts only after correctly guessing the true nature of the powerful, unprincipled nobleman.

By employing artifice and deception to infiltrate its exclusive environs, the successful *pícaro* has the ability to satirically undermine the English social system. Dobson sees these performances as "potentially liberating" insofar as they "enable the disruption" of social norms (16). And indeed, Thackeray utilizes Becky's schemes to satirically mock the inhumanity, hypocrisy, and vanity of the English social system. For a time Becky's machinations are fruitful. She earns the affection of Miss Crawley, the heart of Sir Pitt, and the lustful attentions of Lord Steyne. Becky's success reveals the inherent vanity of each. Miss Crawley, for instance, spouts democratic ideals when speaking to her new favorite companion, yet in practice holds assiduously to her more rigid class distinctions.

'What is birth, my dear?' she would say to Rebecca. [Are] any one of [my relations] equal to you in intelligence or breeding? [...] You have more brains than half the shire – if merit had its reward, you ought to be a duchess – no there ought to be no duchesses at all – but you ought to have no superior, and I consider you, my love, as my equal in every respect; and will you put some coals on the fire, my dear?' So this old philanthropist used to make her equal run her errands, execute her millinery, and read her to sleep with French novels every night (104).

Miss Crawley advocates for a classless social system that rewards merit and intellect; she vainly fancies herself a politically progressive iconoclast. But, as

Thackeray's deft irony reveals, her actions belie her words. In truth, Miss Crawley is a hypocrite, and her affection for Becky extends only so far as Becky remains useful, subservient, and harmless. When Miss Crawley discovers Becky's secret marriage to Rawdon Crawley, she is rather displeased. "'Rawdon married – Rebecca – governess – nobod – Get out of my house [...]' Miss Crawley gave a final scream, and fell back in a faint" (160). When Becky Sharp, daughter of an artist and a French opera singer, marries Miss Crawley's nephew Rawdon she becomes entitled to the Crawley fortune. Unable to face this, Miss Crawley abandons her democratic notions and disinherits Rawdon and Rebecca. Even the *pícaro's* failed schemes uncover the inhumanity of the hierarchical social system, which has the power to exclude all others from its confines. "The *pícaro*," argues Lars Hartveit, "exposes a society which, paradoxically, is fluid and mobile and riddled with corruption, but which also presents a curiously fossilized façade to the upstart climber" (17). Thackeray's use of the conventions of the picaresque effectively critiques this closed community, which denies entry to the *pícaro*, but he is careful to critique the limits of the picaresque as well, highlighting its inadequacies as a means of encouraging virtue or sympathy.

Becky's ability to clearly perceive the character of others paradoxically results in the de-centering of her own identity. The *pícaro* has long been compared to the classical figure of the "trickster," but Becky takes this role even

further (Kaler 9). She is a consummate shape-shifter, easily altering her identity to best suit each individual victim of her schemes. As *pícaro*, Becky performs various identities with aplomb, embodying different feminine roles: the love-struck innocent for Joss Sedley, the angel in the house for Mr. Crawley, the saucy lass for Sir Pitt, the witty misanthrope for Miss Crawley, the dutiful wife for her husband Rawdon Crawley, and the seductress for Lord Steyne. Her machinations result in an entirely performed identity composed of artifice, making true human connection impossible. Rawdon becomes increasingly cognizant of the impassible barrier standing between he and Becky, and her airs, charms, and performances at social events “seemed to separate his wife farther than ever from him somehow. He thought with a feeling very like pain how immeasurably she was his superior” (509). Lord Steyne, who is himself more perceptive than Becky realizes, sees through her artifice and labels her a “splendid actress and manager” (515).

The picaresque, Thackeray suggests, stops short of offering any alternative to the inhumanity of the society it critiques. For though the *pícaro* exposes the hypocrisy of the social order, she herself remains an unrepentant hypocrite. And though the picaresque laments a society that thrives on the exclusion of many, the ambition and callous self-interest of the *pícaro* keep her alienated from her fellow man. Unable to unite with any community or truly connect to another

individual, she remains unwilling to attend the needs of others. Though the character of Becky Sharp is rich and deep enough to resist being reduced merely to her rhetorical function, Thackeray uses her narrative to highlight the flaws in picaresque satires. Becky's narrative is highly satiric, allowing Thackeray to expose, ridicule, and chastise the moral failings of the English bourgeoisie. But her story lacks moral resolution, it fails to provide any glimmer of hope for redemption, and it fails to equip the reader to make her own world better. Alone, satire may effectively expose mankind's sins, but for Thackeray, that is inadequate. For the reader is left with nothing but impotent rage; there is no constructive outlet for his anger. Thackeray, therefore, seeks a way that we might "in company hope" for a better world.

Amelia Sedley functions in the text as a traditional sentimental heroine, a modal and thematic foil for Becky Sharp's *pícaro*. Unlike most sentimental heroines, however, Amelia is herself an avid consumer of sentimental romances. She enters young womanhood having been nurtured on a steady diet of melodramatic romance that has transformed fictional romantic fantasies into expectations. Thackeray creates a world in which Samuel Richardson's Pamela Andrews has grown up reading *Clarissa*. This allows Thackeray to explore both sentimental stories and the values they espouse. As he does with the satiric mock-epic, Thackeray presents a complex assessment of the conventions of



sentimental fiction. He finds much of value in the sentimental tradition's connection between the emotions and the moral sense. Throughout the novel the narrator will rely on this connection as he employs pathos to kindle sympathy in his readers. But with the character of Amelia, Thackeray exposes the hazards of unmoored sensibility, of an excessive capacity for feeling ungoverned by reason, wisdom, or discernment.

From the earliest pages of the novel Amelia is presented in terms of her sentimental characteristics. Amelia and Becky's headmistress Miss Pinkerton's glowing letter to Amelia's parents praise her many "virtues," not least among which are her "industry and obedience," "sweetness of temper," and "morality" (4-5). The narrator himself admits that his treatment of Amelia is "ultra-sentimental" (7). He describes Amelia as "a dear little creature," whose

face blushed with rosy health, and her lips with the freshest of smiles, and she had a pair of eyes, which sparkled with the brightest and honestest good-humor, except indeed when they filled with tears and that was a great deal too often; for the silly thing would cry of a dead canary bird; or over a mouse, that the cat haply had seized upon; or over the end of a novel, were it ever so stupid [...] Even Miss Pinkerton, that austere and god-like woman, ceased scolding her after the first time, and though she no more comprehended sensibility than she did algebra, gave all masters and teachers particular orders to treat Miss Sedley with the utmost gentleness, as harsh treatment was injurious to her (6-7).

This passage demonstrates Thackeray's technique of offering both criticism and praise for his characters. Sincere admiration and gentle censure combine to

sketch a portrait of a young girl endowed with an artless nature and a tender heart. She is possessed of sensibility, the capacity for deep feeling that constitutes the primary characteristic of sentimental heroines. But Amelia is indiscriminating with the objects of her emotions; she reacts to any sad event, no matter how trivial or mundane with the same excessive outpouring of emotion. She regulates her affections with neither Reason nor knowledge. Indeed the only guidance Amelia receives seems to come from the sentimental novels she and Becky devour. This lack of wisdom leads the narrator to charge Amelia with silliness. This is a gentle critique of a deep and dangerous problem. With his own characteristic sympathy, the narrator laments that Amelia possesses a good nature but lacks good sense.

Any chance Amelia has to cultivate good sense is squandered by reading overly sentimental novels that celebrate emotional excesses and flights of romantic fancy that bear little relation to the quotidian phenomenon of real love. In their letters to one another, Becky and Amelia use a shorthand parlance derived from their shared knowledge of romances. Fanny Burney's *Cecilia* and *Evelina*, and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* populate their correspondence (71, 73, 87). These stories, though they claim to impart good morals to their young female readers, leave Amelia ill-equipped to choose a romantic partner worthy of her affections. She enters the world and the marriage

market harboring many lovely, but dangerously misguided romantic illusions. And indeed she does bestow her tender affections on a most undeserving man. George Osborne, the bourgeois son of a wealthy merchant, is vain, dissolute, selfish, and unfaithful. The way Amelia speaks of him reveals her startling lack of wisdom and prudence. George Osborne was “her Europe: her emperor: her allied monarchs and prince regent. He was her sun and moon [...] Not amongst all the beaux at the Opera [...] was there any one to equal him. He was only good enough to be a fairy prince; and oh, what magnanimity to stoop to such a humble Cinderella!” (112-113). Amelia exercises her sensibility blindly. George is writ on her heart in the romanticized language of fairy tales. She clings to an idealized vision of George Osborne and loves him with an unhealthy, obsessive devotion, however little the ideal matches the real man. Amelia routinely refers to George as her “noble hero,” but George is incapable of fulfilling that role (238). Amelia’s misguided love for George Osborne allows Thackeray to criticize uncritical, unfiltered sentimental virtues. But it also allows him to criticize the bad novels that peddle these irresponsible values to impressionable young women. Falling in love with a scoundrel, as Amelia does, is a convention central to sentimental fiction, and Amelia’s doomed romance helps cement her position as a heroine in the sentimental tradition. But Amelia so willingly gives her heart away to this scoundrel precisely because she has absorbed and internalized the

uncritical values of her beloved sentimental novels. When they are expended only in service of telling a love story, Thackeray suggests, the values of sympathy and deep feeling lead to dangerous, unhealthy outcomes.

Likewise, the emotional excesses and romantic ideals Amelia has internalized severs her from the valuable, laudable principles of the philosophy of sensibility, which encourage individuals to let the sensible exercise of their emotions cultivate a moral sense that develops sympathy, compassion, and a selfless love for one's fellow man. Amelia's unregulated affections, tender as they are, result in a distinct self-centeredness. Amelia's selfishness is best seen in her treatment of Dobbin, the good man who loves her from afar. Amelia's sensibility does not grant her insight into human nature, for she always "had a rather mean opinion of her husband's friend, Captain Dobbin. He lisped – he was very plain and homely-looking, and exceedingly awkward and ungainly" (231). Dobbin does not match the romantic fantasy Amelia has constructed in her mind; his physical attributes and shy demeanor do not raise him to consideration as a beaux to be her "fairy prince" (113). Dobbin, of course, is twice the man George Osborne is, and is much more worthy of Amelia's affections. He is characterized by his humility, tenderness, and self-sacrificial love for both Amelia and George.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dobbin's loyalty to George and his self-sacrificial love for Amelia are not always presented as an ideal. Thackeray complicates Dobbin's innate goodness, presenting him as a character who sacrifices his own happiness to those who do not deserve it.

These qualities distinguish him as a sentimental hero who is more than worthy of the hand of our misguided Amelia. When Amelia's father loses his fortune, George Osborne breaks his engagement to Amelia, essentially abandoning her to poverty and loneliness. While Amelia's destitution is another trope that aligns her with the conventions of sentimental fiction, it does little to endear George to the reader. In his compassion, Dobbin attends the Sedley's estate auction and wins back Amelia's piano. When she receives it, she assumes it is from George. In her final letter to George she writes, "I am sure you had no share in [our present misery], or in the cruel suspicions of Mr. Osborne, which are the hardest of all our griefs to bear. Farewell. Farewell. I pray God to strengthen me to bear this and other calamities, and to bless you always. –A. I shall play often on the piano – your piano. It was like you to send it" (177). For his part, "Captain Dobbin does not correct this error," but lets Amelia persist in her idealization of George (177). Amelia's lack of insight into the gift reveals a troubling lack of charity; Amelia's sensibility is so powerful and unfettered that it blinds her to the needs of others. She sees nothing outside her own painful, overwhelming emotions. This is a type of selfishness Thackeray finds especially pernicious because it is antithetical to the true tenets of sensibility. The capacity for deep feeling should result in a sympathy and compassion for others; it should develop an empathy whereby our own struggles are minimized in the face of the

struggles of others. But Amelia has received these values from sources devoid of this communal focus; when sentimentality is only dispensed to increase the suspense or melodrama of a love story, it degrades and perverts these values into a self-love that smacks of narcissism, masochism, and performativity.

As with the picaresque, the excessively sentimental does not offer a viable humane alternative to the inhumanity much of the novel critiques. Though our sentimental heroine may feel deeply, these emotions are not directed toward a socially constructive end. Just as the greed and ambition of our parvenu Becky Sharp alienates her from her fellow man, so an obsession with the sentimental results in isolation and alienation for Amelia Sedley. For the sentimental, unrestrained by reason or discernment, encourages young women to construct romantic fantasies, impossible ideals the pursuit of which ruins the chance for true human connection. Amelia becomes obsessed with the displays of her own emotions and never develops the sympathy, compassion, and philanthropic spirit that the moral sentiments mean to cultivate. Thackeray lays much of the blame for the perversion of sentimentality at the feet of immoderately sentimental novels, which Thackeray suggests are closer to tragedies. During the serialization of *Vanity Fair*, a fan approached Thackeray and implored: "'Oh, Mr. Thackeray, you must let Dobbin marry Amelia.' 'Well,'

[Thackeray] replied, 'he shall, and when he has got her, he will not find her worth having'" (Whibley 92).

A moral ideal cannot be found in either of the novel's female protagonists. Indeed, the reader finds herself bereft and distanced from the characters in the main narrative. This is intentional on Thackeray's part, for it places the reader in the position of having to rely on a figure outside the narrative for guidance through the morally treacherous world of *Vanity Fair*. The Manager of the Performance, the theatrical, intrusive narrator, exploits the distance his intrusions create; he encourages the reader to satirically critique the foibles of human nature and at the same time uses the narrative distance to enact the true sentimental sympathy and compassion the characters lack.

*"Your Humble Servant": Vanity Fair's Narrative Voice*

It is in the figure of the narrator, cunning showman though he is, that Thackeray provides the moral norm absent from the central narrative. As I've argued above, a moral exemplar, a requisite for both satiric and sentimental fiction is not to be found in the narrative world of *Vanity Fair*. In his heroines, Thackeray highlights the impotence of both modes to successfully combat vice and encourage virtue. Satire alone is unable to employ compassion when faced with the vices of humanity and ultimately lacks moral resolution. Despite its claims to the contrary, the emotional excesses of sentimental romance result in an

inward focused self-love which results in the emotions themselves becoming more important than the virtues of which they're meant to be indicative. The omniscient narrator – a liminal figure, located within the confines of the novel, but situated outside the moral universe of the story – is the only guide present for the reader. The liminality of Thackeray's narrator creates a distance between the reader and the characters. The narrator's constant intrusions, digressions, and direct addresses to the reader highlight the novel's status as text and force the reader into a position outside the main story. At his behest, we assume an evaluative position alongside the narrator. But the Manager of the Performance never allows his reader to find easy comfort in passing self-righteous judgment on the characters. Instead, Thackeray cultivates in the reader both a hatred for vice and a sympathetic understanding of the vicious. He achieves this by adopting the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment, proving that the two modes are not only compatible, but complementary. Over the course of the novel, Thackeray's narrator employs the conventions of satire and sentiment separately. Thackeray has an undeniably caustic wit able to eviscerate characters with surprising narrative economy. At the same time, he often allows his innate compassion to overflow in scenes of powerful sympathy and pathos. The great achievement of the narrator, however, is his ability to merge the conventions of both modes to craft scenes and characters that at once repulse and engage the



reader. Though we may revile the actions of a character, the narrator's sympathy turns the mirror more assuredly on the reader. By approaching the characters humanely and viewing their sins with both disgust and sympathy, we are encouraged to confront the reality of our own sins. Being kept at a distance from the characters encourages the reader to identify with the narrator and, importantly, with other readers, of whom Thackeray makes constant mention. The story never remains confined to the page. Rather, Thackeray insists that readers in unity exercise *caritas* and humbly act together to escape Vanity Fair.

An opinionated, instructive narrator is a common characteristic of Victorian fiction, but early in the text *Vanity Fair*'s narrator insinuates himself as a character in his own right. Making his introduction in the prefatory "Before the Curtain," the narrator assumes for himself the role of "Manager of the Performance" who will lead the reader through the bawdy, raucous, immoral mass of humanity that is Vanity Fair (xxxvii). Over the course of the novel, the narrator's commentary so far exceeds the simple task of relating the story that he becomes a character in his own right. Omniscient narrators that insinuate themselves in the world of the text are a common feature of eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction. Going so far as to call omniscient narration the "defining principle of form" for Victorian prose, J. Hillis Miller observes that, generally speaking, the Victorian narrator "is immanent rather than

transcendent, possessed of an omniscience that moves within the community of the narrated story" (72). Thackeray's narrator presents more challenges than most, however. I want to avoid diluting the narrator's characteristic caustic wit by attributing to him too much forbearance. While I maintain that Thackeray never disregards his conviction that the "great ends of our profession" are "truth & justice and kindness," the relationships he develops with both characters and reader are exceedingly complex (Johnson). Indeed, many critics have difficulty reconciling the strong shifts in the narrator's tone. The narrative voice vacillates wildly between expressing affection and scorn for the characters, between encouraging the reader to treat with compassion the foibles and moral failings of Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley, and implicating the reader in his castigation of their viciousness. This apparent tension is not a failing but perhaps the central component of Thackeray's rhetorical purpose.

A large contingent of critics, however, consider the narrator Thackeray's bold aesthetic experiment gone awry. Robert Loughy speculates that over the course of the novel's serialization the role of the narrator as Showman of Vanity Fair becomes a persona Thackeray found himself increasingly unable to sustain. The narrator's attempt to act as both intercessor for and moral adjudicator of his characters, Loughy claims, quickly lapses into contradiction and paradox. The treatment of characters "quickly gets out of hand" as Thackeray gradually

becomes incapable of “maintain[ing] the worldview he espouses” (Loughy 256). The result is that Thackeray undermines his original scheme of affirming faith in society and the power of laughter as a means to rid society of its moral vices (Loughy 263).<sup>10</sup>

My understanding of the role of Thackeray’s narrator is partly informed by two critics, James Phelan and Wolfgang Iser. Phelan approaches *Vanity Fair*’s narrator primarily as a rhetorical construct. Although his article mainly focuses on the novel’s engagement with issues of gender, James Phelan offers a valuable examination of how Thackeray’s narrative voice contributes to the larger rhetorical purpose of *Vanity Fair*. While the narrator must be understood to be distinct from the author, Phelan suggests that the distance between the narrator and Thackeray is negligible. “I see the showman as Thackeray’s mouthpiece; the only distance between author and narrator is created by the author’s knowledge that the narrator is created. On this reading, the showman is the knowing source of the numerous ironies of the narrative discourse” (Phelan 138). Rather than the “Manager of the Performance” constituting a completely distinct character, the

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<sup>10</sup> J.A. Sutherland, though more forgiving, likewise views Thackeray’s narrative as increasingly chaotic. Sutherland attributes these adjustments to Thackeray’s developing notion of aesthetics, which evolved over the two years Thackeray spent writing *Vanity Fair*. The figure of the narrator is the greatest evidence of this aesthetic evolution (256-263). Critics less bothered by the tonal shifts they observe in the narrative voice attempt to impose on the narrative a governing structural scheme that resolves any conceptual difficulties. J.T. Klein suggests that the novel is best viewed as a series of “fusions,” or, intersections between Becky and Amelia’s respective plots (127).

narrator is Thackeray's rhetorical performance of his own moral concerns. The showman persona affords Thackeray the liberty to construct and evaluate the elaborate social world of the novel.<sup>11</sup> Thackeray "does not communicate to his audience behind the showman's back but rather uses the protean showman as the orchestrator of virtually all the narrative's effects" (Phelan 138). Phelan's incisive analysis establishes a helpful foundation from which to craft a rhetorical reading of *Vanity Fair's* narrative voice. If we can rightly consider the narrator to be the primary agent for the author's moral concerns, then we can assume Thackeray's rhetorical purpose is achieved through the communication of the narrator with the reader.

Wolfgang Iser's theoretical work *The Implied Reader* examines the complicated relationship between the author and the reader. Iser breaks down this relationship into categories that help clarify how Thackeray's decision to adopt a mercurial narrative persona is an effective method to achieve his rhetorical purpose of cultivating virtue in his reader. "The novel as a form," Iser explains, "is shaped by the dialogue that the author wishes to conduct with his reader. This simulated relationship gives the reader the impression that he and

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<sup>11</sup> Edgar Harden argues convincingly that despite his suspension of chronological development, *Vanity Fair* is carefully structured by "similar but contrasting actions between the characters" (532). Thackeray's structure encourages the reader to recognize the differences between characters, which contributes to his moral purpose of "combating and exposing folly and evil while approving goodness" (533). This parallelism is achieved by distorting the chronology of the narrative.

the author are partners in discovering the reality of human experience" (764).

Like Phelan, Iser draws a careful distinction between the implied author, the individual in control of constructing the plot, and the narrator, who presents and commentates on the plot.<sup>12</sup>

The effect [of the novel] is gained by the interplay between the implied author who arranges events, and the narrator who comments on them. The reader can only gain real access to the social reality presented by the implied author, when he follows the adjustments of perspective made by the narrator in viewing the events described. In order to ensure that the reader participates in the way desired, the narrator is set up as a kind of authority between him and the events, conveying the impression that understanding can only be achieved through this medium (Iser 766).

The narrator becomes the most important ally for the reader, appearing to have both the story and the reader well in hand, though in *Vanity Fair* he often proves to be an unreliable guide. His dependability is called into question by his penchant for altering his own attitude toward the characters. Subsequently, fulfillment of Thackeray's rhetorical purpose, to expose the vanity of the world by holding a mirror up to it, requires a great deal of insight and judgment from the reader. He must struggle through and work out for himself "potential alternatives" to the morally bankrupt world of the novel (Iser 772). The

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<sup>12</sup> Iser here uses Wayne Booth's categories of author (the individual who writes the book), implied author (individual whose attitudes shapes the book), and narrator (the individual who communicates directly with the author) (765). These categories must be considered distinct from one another. He draws a further distinction between the implied author, the author we glean from the text, and the real author, the human being who actually wrote the text. These two cannot be assumed to be identical.

intellectual demands on the reader's interpretive faculties result in a narrative of greater realism than many works that laid claim to that title in the nineteenth century. In *Vanity Fair*, "it is not the slice of life, but the means of observing it that constitute the reality, and as these means of observation remain as valid today as they were in the nineteenth century, the novel remains as 'real' now as it was then" (Iser 776). Thackeray's unflinching portrayal of human frailty and his refusal to tack on a tidy moral at the end is one of the novel's greatest strengths. Iser's reading of Thackeray and his discussion of the implied reader is compelling. Although I attribute more mercy to the narrator than he does, his conception of how the relationship between reader, implied author, and narrator relates to the larger rhetorical purpose of the novel is helpful in establishing a framework for understanding how Thackeray employs multiple discourses to fashion a novel of great rhetorical power.

Though the narrator is the only moral guide provided for the reader, his guidance is neither simple nor overly didactic. Instead, his guidance is abstruse, theatrical, and seemingly contradictory. In a letter to George Henry Lewes, Thackeray extols the role of the satirist, explaining that he should function as a moral pedagogue and boasting that the profession is as "serious as the parson's own" (Harden *Letters* II. 282). While we must exercise caution and refrain from attaching too much weight to an author's extra-textual statements about his own

work, the comparison between author and cleric is a common one in Thackeray's writing. But from *Vanity Fair*'s earliest pages, the narrator proves to be a decidedly disingenuous moral guide for the reader. In the prefatory "Before the Curtain," in fact, the narrator proclaims he writes this story with no moral; his only task is to show the world as it is and to encourage the reader to reflect upon this stark reality. "I have no other moral than this to tag to the present story of *Vanity Fair*. [...] When you come home, you sit down, in a sober, contemplative, not uncharitable frame of mind, and apply yourself to your books or your business. [...] What more has the Manager of the Performance to say?" (xxxvii). Only a few chapters later, however, the narrator explicitly labels himself a moralist and compares himself to a clergyman. "And while the moralist, who is holding forth on the cover (an accurate portrayal of your humble servant), professes to wear neither gown nor bands [... he] is bound to speak the truth as far as one knows it" (78). If we take the narrator at his word, the reader must accept for his guide an apparently amoral moralist, a lay preacher showman, commandeering a circus of villains. Perhaps to expect anything more conventional would be foolish, for *Vanity Fair* is a carnivalesque world, populated by thieves and rogues disguised as lords and ladies. By addressing the reader directly, the Manager of the Performance welcomes us to join him and witness the tragic-comic theatrical unfold. The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment is

his preferred tool to teach the reader to gaze into the mirror properly and see, not the sins of others, but his own sins reflected.

Though the narrator can indeed be frustratingly mercurial and “protean”, he is also possessed of the satirist’s eviscerating wit and well-developed sense of irony, which he uses to great effect to brutally lay bare his characters’ flaws.

When describing the profane, lecherous Sir Pitt Crawley, the narrator spares no expense.

Vanity Fair – Vanity Fair! Here was a man who could not spell, and did not care to read – who had the habits and cunning of a boor: whose aim in life was pettifogging: who never had a taste, or emotion, or enjoyment but what was sordid and foul; and yet he had rank, and honors, and power, somehow: and was a dignitary of the land, and a pillar of the state. [...] Great ministers and statesmen courted him; and in Vanity Fair he had a higher place than the most brilliant genius or spotless virtue (84).

In a brief, perfectly constructed paragraph, Thackeray paints a portrait of the moral corruption of the English gentility. As the best satire does, this description serves as a brutal critique of an entire class lost to privilege, leisure, and entitlement. Becky Sharp likewise suffers the sting of the narrator’s harsh judgment. After Rawdon Crawley leaves his wife upon discovering her liaison with Lord Steyne, the narrator comments, “What *had* happened? Was she guilty or not? She said not; but who could tell what was truth which came from those lips; or if that corrupt heart was in this case pure? All her lies and her schemes, all her selfishness and wiles, all her wit and genius had come to this bankruptcy”



(526). Becky devoted her life and energies to the pursuit of her own wellbeing, and her perpetual scheming and social climbing results in her utter moral destitution. It is notable that the narrator refuses to assign clear guilt to Becky's action; he leaves the question of her specific sins unanswered. His refusal to reveal the extent of Becky's guilt is a prime example of the narrator refusing to provide a tidy moral precept in the central story. Thackeray's use of the word "bankruptcy" is intentionally ambiguous; does it refer to Becky's moral or financial ruin? For Becky, the latter is the more distasteful prospect. The vague language here suggests that in the environs of *Vanity Fair* ethical culpability is less calamitous than the fact that her gambit for Lord Steyne proves a failure.

Along with instances of caustic satirical invective, the narrator often operates by satiric irony, employing incongruity and understatement to humorously strip away the masks of vanity that obscure the characters' true nature. Ironic understatement exposes Becky's lack of deep feeling for her husband. As Rawdon marches off to battle, "Rebecca [...] wisely determined not to give way to unavailing sentimentality on her husband's departure. [...] she resumed honest Rawdon's calculations of the night previous, and surveyed her position. Should the worst befall, all things considered, she was pretty well-to-do" (288). This statement is amusing, of course, because Becky has no tender sentiments for her husband to give way to. Becky's primary concern is not for

Rawdon's safety, but for her own financial position should he not return from war. Her performance of the role of devoted, dutiful wife is easily tossed aside upon Rawdon's departure. Thackeray's description of women's unkind appraisal of their female rivals is another entertaining example of his subtly incisive irony.

"Has the beloved reader, in his experience of society, never heard similar remarks by good-natured female friends; who always wonder what you *can* see in Miss Smith that is so fascinating; or what *could* induce Major Jones to propose for that silly significant simpering Miss Thompson [...] It is quite edifying to hear women speculate upon the worthlessness and the duration of beauty" (107).

Here, the reader understands the women mentioned are neither good-natured nor friendly, their conversation is far from edifying, and they most likely consider their own beauty to bear a much longer shelf life. The incongruity in the narrator's ironic description matches the falsity we observe in the ladies' gossip.

Irony is, of course, a fundamental convention of satiric literature. Ronald Paulson, in fact, defines satire as the "literature of incongruity" that brings two dissociated objects suddenly together, in this case the false and the true (36).

Despite irony's characteristic subtlety and opacity, Thackeray's irony has the power to strip bare pretense, exposing the callousness and hypocrisy that masquerades as solicitous affection. At the same time, irony is a device that demands much of the reader; the reader must exercise considerable insight to

distinguish the incongruity at play and identify the narrator's true satiric target. Irony then becomes another tool Thackeray uses to train his reader to see and avoid the viciousness of *Vanity Fair*.

Alongside the narrator's irony exist moments of startling pathos that seem better suited to a sentimental romance than this often bitingly satiric work. Absent is the caustic wit and the savage condemnation of vice. In their place, the narrator describes scenes that reveal a true depth of feeling. The financial ruin and subsequent social decline of the Sedley family is rendered with sincere pity, free from any trace of irony.

As [John Sedley] spoke, he trembled in every limb, and almost fell. He thought the news would have overpowered his wife [...] But it was he that was the most moved, sudden as the shock was to her. When he sank back into his seat, it was the wife that took the office of consoler. She took his trembling hand, and kissed it, and put it round her neck; she called him her John – her dear John – her old man – her kind old man; she poured out a hundred words of incoherent love and tenderness. In the month of March, Anno Domini 1815, Napoleon landed at Cannes, and Louis XVIII fled, and all Europe was in alarm, and the funds fell, and old John Sedley was ruined (170-171).

Momentous international affairs pale in importance to this quotidian domestic scene of feminine sympathy. The ruthless inhumanity of the male-dominated sphere of business is given a human face; this passage shows the victims of *Vanity Fair*. The syntax of the prose, Mrs. Sedley's simple, increasingly tender diminutives separated by hyphens, lends a reality to the scene that keeps it from

lapsing into cloying melodrama. Like little else in the novel, this scene has no place in the ugliness of Thackeray's world. It is in these rare moments of pathos that Thackeray most clearly gestures towards a larger community outside the pages of the text that unites around their shared emotional response.

Thus far, the narrator has painted the world of *Vanity Fair* with the vivid colors of both satire and sentiment. Alongside the narrator, the reader has derided the avarice of Sir Pitt Crawley, the hypocrisy of Lady Crawley, and Becky's supreme selfishness. At the narrator's words, the reader has lamented Sedley's loss of fortune and felt the ache of Dobbin's hopeless longing for Amelia. But to what end? As Thackeray himself seeks to prove, neither sympathy nor censure alone can combat vice. The narrator goes further and models for the reader a way to merge both modes together, so that the reader might feel more deeply that he himself needs reform. Thackeray's narrative persona frequently expresses compassion for the questionable actions and moral imperfections of the characters. For instance, he makes apologies for Becky Sharp's unabashedly mercenary romantic pursuit of the porcine fop Jos Sedley and encourages the reader to look with kindness upon the insecurity of her social status. "If Miss Rebecca Sharp had determined in her heart upon making the conquest of this big beau, I don't think, ladies, we have any right to blame her; for [...] recollect that Miss Sharp had no kind parent to arrange these delicate matters for her" (21). For

a brief intrusion, this is a loaded statement that plays with the conventions of satire and sentiment. There is a satiric critique of *Vanity Fair*'s conception of marriage, which is purely mercenary. Interfering "mammias" supervise the socially sanctioned sport of "husband hunting" for reasons entirely devoid of romantic considerations. The passage also subtly skewers the sentimental convention that promises a happy, financially advantageous marriage to its virtuous female characters, to the extent that Amelia and Becky come to expect it for themselves. But most prominently, the narrator encourages us to sympathize with the fact that Becky Sharp's status as an impoverished orphan devoid of family connections undoubtedly places her in a precarious financial situation. Marriage is her only recourse to social and economic stability; Becky's methods may be dubious (and elsewhere they will earn the vituperative scorn of the narrator), but the narrator insists that they are understandable. Here, society is more at fault than Becky Sharp. By feeding young ladies with a steady diet of sentimental stories, *Vanity Fair* has managed to turn an instrument of female oppression into a romantic fantasy, a fantasy that Amelia has internalized to a dangerous degree.

The narrator is similarly apologetic when describing Amelia Sedley's misguided affection for the odious George Osborne. It is a masterful exercise in understatement that deserves to be quoted at length.

This was not the sort of love that finished Amelia's education; and in the course of a year turned a good young girl into a good young woman – to be a good wife presently, when the happy time should come. She had never seen a man so beautiful or so clever: such a figure on horseback: such a dancer: such a hero in general. This young person [...] loved, with all her heart, the young officer in His Majesty's service with whom we have made a brief acquaintance. [...] It is in the nature and instinct of some women. Some are made to scheme, and some to love [...] Alas, alas! I fear poor Emmy had not a well-regulated mind (113-114).

Though deep, selfless love is a virtue, Amelia's fawning affection is built on a foundation of romantic fantasy and illusion. Her blind, unfailing devotion to a most unworthy man reveals a weakness in her character and will be the cause of much sorrow for her and for the good man who loves her. Here again, the narrator treats her great moral failing with humane tenderness and not with critical scorn. And though Thackeray implicitly condemns the sentimental romantic notions that Amelia has internalized, which focus on her lover's physical appeal and ignores the failings of his character, the compassion which the author elicits from the reader is itself a convention of sentimental fiction; the arousal of sympathy, when divorced from the over-idealized melodrama of the typical sentimental novel, is a powerful rhetorical tool that leads the reader to contemplate and evaluate the complex ways in which English culture affects women. Though stained by different sins, Amelia and Becky are both products of a restrictive society that has forced them to, as Dobson states, perform the equally distasteful roles of "angel and monster" (9). The brilliance of the above

passages lies in Thackeray's unique ability to playfully employ the conventions of satire and sentiment even while he critiques them. He holds up a mirror to the very modes he references. This is a key strategy which Thackeray employs often.

Miss Crawley is another character whose moral imperfections earn the concomitant compassion and censure of the narrator. As he does with Amelia, Thackeray effectively critiques the excesses of sentimental fiction while simultaneously employing its strategies. Labeled several times by the narrator as "sentimental," Miss Crawley is a woman whose taste in fiction has not informed her moral character (91, 104, 131). A great reader of "French romantic novels," Miss Crawley is an aging spinster whose only human connections are founded on wealth and not sympathy (104). To Miss Crawley, all relationships are akin to economic transactions. "It crossed Miss Crawley's mind that nobody does anything for nothing [...]" and perhaps she reflected, that it is the ordinary lot of people to have no friends if they themselves care for nobody" (135). Her tenure as a reader of highly sentimental fiction has not refined Miss Crawley's emotions or enhanced her capacity for deep feeling. She exploits her inferiors, pays for their companionship, and treats them with scorn and condescension. Amused at first by the knowledge of Becky's imprudent, secret marriage, "Miss Crawley solaced herself with the most sentimental of novels in her library. Little Sharp, with her secret griefs, was the heroine of the day" (155). Her amusement in

imagining Rebecca as the heroine of one of her sentimental novels is short-lived, however. It quickly comes to an end when she learns that Becky's furtive liaison is with her nephew Rawdon Crawley. She callously disinherits the pair and in doing so, gleefully secures their penury. Though the narrator condemns Miss Crawley's actions, and critiques her hypocrisy and lack of feeling, he also urges the readers to look upon Miss Crawley's sins with pity. "Picture to yourself, O fair young reader, a worldly, selfish, graceless, thankless, religionless old woman, writhing in pain and fear, and without her wig. Picture her to yourself, and ere you be old, learn to love and pray!" (132). Here the narrator directly addresses the reader and urges him to learn the lesson that sentimental fiction failed to teach Miss Crawley. In the hands of the narrator, the old woman shifts from an object of scorn to an object of pity. Sympathy for the lonely misery of Miss Crawley urges the reader to practice love and sympathy in their own life and avoid such loneliness.

The narrative voice may be a complex figure, but he offers the reader the only statements of moral doctrine in the novel. The central plot itself ends in a dissatisfying irresolution. This ambiguous ending is not unusual in satirical works. Brian Connery explains that "closure, in most cases, would turn a narrative satire into either comedy or tragedy and thus contradict the satirist's representation of evil as a present and continuing danger" (5). And indeed, the



characters exit the novel still bound by the shackles of vanity – Becky still schemes, Amelia still selfishly pines. “Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?” (680). The main narrative ends in ambiguity because the world of Vanity Fair offers no happy endings. The passage suggests that in the world off the page, happy endings are in similarly short supply. Does Thackeray prove to be an unrepentant misanthrope? In the end, if darkness and wickedness are all the narrative has to offer us, does the rhetorical objective of Thackeray’s novel become obscured and ultimately fail? No. Thackeray refrains from sliding into total misanthropy by offering a glimmer of hope – that the readers of his novel may together exercise the sympathy missing from Vanity Fair.

My analysis focuses on the way Thackeray blends together the modes of satire and sentiment as a tool to lead the reader into a relationship that will cultivate in her a desire for goodness, kindness, and virtue that will linger long after he returns the book to the shelf. After proving in his heroines the deficiencies of both modes to successfully cultivate true sympathy, Thackeray uses the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to encourage the reader to view vice with disgust, to recognize her own complicity in the system that allows these vices to flourish, and to join in a community of readers united by their shared compassion and desire for a better, kinder world. Thackeray believes, notes Fred

Kaplan, as did the majority of Victorians, that the “human community was one of shared moral feelings” (57). I believe the act of drawing his reader into this community that shares a humble self-awareness of his own and society’s flaws is the ultimate goal of the narrator. But how exactly does the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment allow Thackeray to create a community of readers that exists off the page? To do this, Thackeray (and by extension, my argument) assumes a discursive connection between narrative and form – between the way a story is told and the way the reader interprets the story. For him to succeed in drawing the reader into a sympathetic community that is characterized by the compassion lacking in the narrative itself, Thackeray must situate his reader very carefully in his text. I’ve already demonstrated how the intrusive narrative persona achieves this, but the Manager of the Performance has more tactics at play.

*“Jones at his club”: Thackeray’s Imaginative Community*

Thackeray’s use of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment takes the form of the narrator’s many digressions, intrusions, and direct addresses to the reader. This allows him to adopt the conventions of both modes without disrupting the central narrative. However, it also has the secondary function of disrupting the reader’s engagement with the characters and of highlighting the novel’s status as text. The reader is continually reminded of the novel’s status as a work of fiction, and he is continually reminded of his role and obligations as a reader of fiction.

Nor does the narrator allow the reader to forget him. He refuses to fade into the background and act as mere expositor. Indeed, the storyteller insists upon being as prominent as his story.

This delicately crafted, elaborate narrative persona requires that readers adjust their expectations of the role of the author. The reader must accept that *Vanity Fair* functions differently than many other novels – she must adjust her expectations and read accordingly. But in addition to reimagining the function of the narrator, Thackeray's reader must completely readjust his conception of her own role as well. Critic Walter Ong has helpfully argued that centuries of literary tradition have "trained" readers how to be, well, readers (15). While reading fiction may illumine and enrich elements of one's experience, individuals must recognize that his role as reader "seldom coincides with his role in the rest of actual life. [...] They have to know how to play the game of being a member of an audience that 'really' does not exist" (Ong 12). Many works of fiction strive to create a world that draws the reader in, and the reader's role entails allowing himself to be subsumed in the fictional environment of the novel. In *Vanity Fair*, however, Thackeray assures this cannot happen; he preserves a distance between character and reader. Iser observes that the text seems "bent on breaking any direct contact with the characters, and the narrator frequently goes out of his way to prevent the reader from putting himself in their place (768). When the

narrative threatens to become too intimate, when the reader is granted access to the innermost thoughts of the characters, the narrator cannily reasserts his presence and breaks the spell. For instance, during the contemplative scene following Sir Pitt Crawley's spectacularly unsuccessful proposal of marriage which forced Becky to reveal her marriage to Rawdon Crawley, the narrator intrudes on the intimacy of the scene by reminding readers of his role as author and their obligations as reader.

And now she was left alone to think over the sudden and wonderful events of the day, and of what had been and what might have been. What think you were the private feelings of Miss, no (begging your pardon), of Mrs. Rebecca? If, a few pages back, the present writer claimed the privilege of peeping into Miss Amelia Sedley's bedroom, and understanding with the omniscience of the novelist all the gentle pains and passions which were tossing upon that innocent pillow, why should he not declare to be Rebecca's confidant too, master of her secrets, and seal-keeper of that young woman's conscience? [...] What well-bred young person is there in all Vanity Fair, who will not feel for a hard-working, ingenious, meritorious girl, who gets such an honorable, advantageous, provoking offer, just at the very moment when it is out of her power to accept it? I am sure our friend Becky's disappointment deserves and will command every sympathy (149).

This passage is an excellent example of the complicated forces at work in Thackeray's narrative persona. We see in this passage that Thackeray is again satirically referencing the conventions of sentimental fiction, which would only celebrate a proposal of marriage from a wealthy baronet. Here, it is an example only of Becky's selfish ambition. More significantly, however, Thackeray

destroys the illusion that we can see into Rebecca's private thoughts by directly addressing the reader. Instead of being allowed to be swept up in the narrative, we're asked directly to speculate on Becky's emotional mindset. The narrator then flaunts his own knowledge; he reminds us that any access granted is only by virtue of his authorial power of omniscience. Through this simple device Thackeray successfully widens the gulf between character and reader. The reader's expectations are subverted, and she is forced to position herself differently in relation to text and character. She may not share the narrator's omniscience, but the reader is placed in a similarly evaluative position. She exists outside the world of the narrative and is encouraged to make moral judgments on the character's emotions and actions. This is a heavy burden for the reader, for the world of the novel is not an easy one to evaluate.

But this realignment of the roles of narrator and reader must take place in order for Thackeray to achieve his rhetorical purpose. Indeed, Thackeray's rhetorical purpose hinges on this very realignment. The distance maintained between character and reader keeps the novel's sentimental elements from becoming cloying, or the emotion from feeling trite and manipulative. And by forcing the reader to navigate the moral quagmire, identify the social elements that Thackeray is critiquing, and form his own moral judgments, Thackeray renders the satire more powerful and complex. And it is in his reimagined role of

narrator and reader that Thackeray locates the novel's elusive moral norm.

Throughout the novel, Thackeray instructs the reader in his new function and forces him to recognize that he is a member of a community of readers who together must work to compassionately evaluate the moral failings of the characters. It is not the inhabitants of Vanity Fair with whom the reader must identify, but with the other surveyors of this treacherous carnival.

As we bring our characters forward, I will ask leave, as a man and a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform and talk about them [...] Otherwise you might fancy it was I who was sneering at the practice of devotion which Miss Sharp finds so ridiculous. [...] Such a people there are living and flourishing in the world – Faithless, Hopeless, Charityless; let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. [...] it was to combat and expose such as those, no doubt, that Laughter was made (79).

The narrator announces his intention to leave the pedestal of authorial power and react to his own story like a reader. He wishes occasionally to set aside the mantle of “showman” and join the reader as a “brother.” And he expresses his desire for his readers to respond to the ugly moral universe of the novel with laughter in unison, with rebellion.

For both reader and storyteller, Thackeray believes, stories have the power to unite. Having held up his mirror to both the reader and himself, he draws us together into an imagined community that Thackeray dreams can become an actual community of individuals who recognize and turn away from

the “faithless, hopeless, charityless.” Though Amelia may remain selfish and Becky unscrupulous, they are not where Thackeray’s story ends. We may close the curtain on their little drama and exit Vanity Fair for a world that Thackeray must believe is less hopelessly lost. About the world we may be able to lament, “Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum*,” but “in company” we have “hope” (680; Harden 228).

### CHAPTER THREE

#### “Lessons in Favor of a Soft Heart”: Anthony Trollope’s *Barchester Towers*

“What I tell you is God’s own truth; and it is for you to use it as may be best for your own happiness” (Trollope 447).<sup>1</sup> Though the titular town in Anthony Trollope’s *Barchester Towers* (1857) is simply awash in clergymen, the previous assertion is delivered by a character far removed from the cloth: the beguiling, eccentric, one-legged heiress, Madeleine Stanhope. Madeleine, who prefers to be called by her self-styled title Signora Neroni, dispenses greater moral truths than the majority of the novel’s many clerics. Indeed, with the exception of Mr. Slope’s inaugural sermon, a divisive opening salvo in the ecclesiastical war he will wage, sermons, at least as they are usually understood, play a relatively small part in the action of the novel. Truth is rarely told from the pulpit, nor are the political, ecclesiastical, or romantic conflicts in the novel resolved within the architectural confines of the church. It is the resolution of the novel’s decidedly sentimental love story – the attractive widow Eleanor Bold’s public rejection of the “more than usually greasy” evangelical minister Obadiah Slope and marriage to Oxford-trained clergyman (and subsequently, the new Dean) Dr. Arabin – that restores social, religious, and political order to Barchester

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter cited by page number only



(48). In *Barchester Towers*, important matters of theology and politics are subordinated to seemingly trivial matters of the heart. But for Trollope, matters of the heart are anything but trivial. Indeed, the mingling of social satire and sentimental romance constitutes Trollope's primary aesthetic strategy and is essential to understanding the rhetorical function of the novel. Though we rarely see them speak from behind the pulpit, *Barchester Towers's* numerous clergymen inhabit a novel that itself serves as a kind of sermon. Employing the conventions of satire and sentiment, both inherently rhetorical and didactic discourses, Trollope crafts a novel that serves as an argument for the novel form as a powerful and effective tool for moral instruction, superseding even the traditional sermon.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I argue Trollope engages the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to prove the didactic power of the novel form in two important ways. First, he refigures the novel's ideological struggle as a romantic one, a stylistic choice that demonstrates his belief in the in the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as prime agents of social change. The equation of ecclesiastic politics and domestic romance provides the basis for much of Trollope's satiric critique, revealing the central contest over the vacant Deanship to be petty and insipid, its

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note here that Trollope is in no way calling for an abolition of sermons, nor is he antagonistic toward religion. On the contrary, Trollope was a decidedly religious individual, a man of "deep[spiritual] conscience" (*Autobiography* 102). His frustration with sermons, however, is sincere, as is his belief in the novel's effectiveness as a moral discourse.

major players self-interested and vain. However, the synthesis of these two plots – political drama and domestic romance – grants sympathy, the chief virtue championed with equal zeal by both satire and sentiment, the power to correct the vices extant in both political and ecclesiastical institutions and the human heart. For Thackeray, sympathy is distinct from his viciously, nearly misanthropic satire and must be wrenched from his fiction's more sentimental elements. Trollope's fiction reminds us that sympathy is indeed the primary goal for satire as well; indeed, sympathy is the factor that allows the conventions of satire and sentiment to blend so naturally together and function so effectively as a single rhetorical tool.

Second, having insisted early in *Barchester Towers* that there exists “no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilized and free countries than the necessity of listening to sermons,” I claim that Trollope uses the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to posit the novel form as a viable replacement for the sermon because of its keen ability to engage and arouse the deep, earnest emotions of the reader, thereby encouraging them to right action (49). For Trollope, intriguingly, satire's humorous critique of human foibles more successfully reveals human sin than harsh condemnation from the pulpit. Likewise, sympathy and its attendant moral virtues of compassion and humility are most effectively engendered not through religious sermons, which Trollope

finds too canned and lifeless to be effective, but through the undeniable power of a good story.

To demonstrate how Trollope employs the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to advance both an aesthetic and a social rhetorical agenda, I will first argue that *Barchester Towers* is a conscious implementation of Trollope's aesthetic theory of the novel; a theory which he developed over several decades. Like the other authors in this dissertation, Trollope believes that directing his readers toward virtue constitutes the novelist's greatest obligation. His extra-literary writings, particularly the 1877 essay "Novel-Reading," which provides the basis of my analysis, registers the traditional fear that the novel's affective power is "of its nature prone to do good or evil" (Novel-Reading 25). Trollope addresses this anxiety by suggesting the novel is not only a genre predisposed to inculcate virtue, but that it does so more effectively than any other moral discourse, including the sermon. Because of its unique ability to divert and enthrall its reader, Trollope claims, "it is from the pages of novels that men and women obtain guidance both as to honor and modesty" ("Novel-Reading" 26). The novel succeeds where the sermon fails because of its unique power to engage the reader's sympathetic imagination; by creating characters and narratives with which the reader imaginatively identifies, the novel is able to realistically

represent the painful costs of vice and the lovely fruits of virtue ("Novel-Reading" 36).

In light of the avowed distaste for sermons professed by the narrator and the relative absence of preaching in *Barchester Towers*, I will secondly argue the novel's most forceful, and in Trollope's opinion, truest preaching comes from two distinctly non-clerical sources, the figure of the narrator and the character of Madeleine Stanhope. Moral truth in *Barchester Towers* derives from the narrative, which relies on the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to establish with rueful humor the vices and flaws common to mankind that find hope of amendment in the virtues of love and compassion espoused by the novel's sentimental elements. The satirical and sentimental forces are directed by the novel's narrator, who, in addition to frequently assuming the tone and rhetoric of the pulpit preacher, functions as a moral preacher to both his audience and characters.<sup>3</sup> In order to imbue his narrative persona and narrative with the power and qualities of both preacher and sermon, Trollope shifts novelistic rhetoric in significant ways. Reminiscent of Thackeray's *Manager of the Performance*, Trollope's intrusive narrator employs the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to assert himself as a character in his own right, an omniscient observer of events who alone is able to make sense of the political posturing and

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<sup>3</sup> Many critics have explored the figure of Trollope's narrator. Among them Rafael Helling, Samuel Pickering, Alice Schreyer, and Paul Lyons.

deceptive machinations of Barchester's denizens. The narrator's commentary guides the reader through the intertwining political and domestic plots and provides thematic and rhetorical unity that effectively blends the conventions of satiric and sentimental fiction. Trollope finds freedom in the novel form to encourage virtue by fostering a relationship between the narrator, reader, and characters. His tone shifts between satiric ridicule and sentimental indulgence. Though Trollope is quick to identify and mine for humor those characters that serve as negative examples, Trollope treats all of his characters with humane understanding and urges his reader to do the same. Paul Lyons praises Trollope's delicate "syntactical balancing [act]," through which he both enacts and illustrates sympathy (41). Trollope's narrator serves as a faithful truth-teller, honest friend, and extra-ecclesial preacher, thereby fulfilling the novelist's proper function as an encourager to right moral action.

Finally, I will examine the ways in which Trollope uses the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment outside the narrative persona, particularly in the novel's other significant truth teller – Madeleine Stanhope. Madeleine is representative of Trollope's penchant for mining characters for both satiric ridicule and sympathy, but critics have failed to examine her in light of Trollope's own poetics. Perhaps more than any character in the novel, Trollope sketches Madeleine's character with both satiric ridicule and tender sympathy. Indolent,

vain, and often quite cruel, Madeleine nevertheless is one of the clearest sighted, most circumspect figures in the narrative. I claim Madeleine acts as an author-figure and exemplifies the novelist's temptation away from the right use of her powers to encourage sympathy. For much of the novel, Madeleine is a bad author who uses her preternatural insight for selfish purposes. Until the end of the novel, that is, when she embarks upon a series of masterful "sermons" that inspire various characters to right action and brings about the resolution of the novel's major conflicts. Madeleine ultimately fulfills the author's function of preaching truth to the benefit of her audience. She uses her satirical insight into human nature "to do a good-natured act for once in her life, and give up Mr. Arabin to the woman he loved" (420). For a brief moment, Madeleine uses her power as a figure to whom sympathy is owed for a moral end, thereby becoming a picture of Trollope's author. Together, Madeleine Stanhope and the Narrator provide proof that vice can be combated and virtue inspired. Trollope thus submits the novel as a form uniquely suited to morally benefit readers. Trollope places the novel, and the role of novelist, in a position of authority – he refigures the rhetoric of sermons so that moral truth is conveyed by the novelist through a tale than engages the imagination, heart, and intellect together. In his autobiography, Trollope declares, "I have ever thought of myself as a preacher of sermons, and my pulpit is one which I could make both salutary and agreeable

to my audience" (146). Thackeray described the novelist as the "week-day preacher"; Trollope suggests he should work Sunday mornings as well.

*"To preach as it were a sermon": The Novel as Sermon*

Both satiric and sentimental fiction often rely upon a central moral voice, a figure that drives and directs the characteristic humor and pathos toward particular moral targets. So, in many ways, the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment is a fitting tool to make Trollope's case for the novel as a more powerful sermon. The novel doesn't require the sacrifice of an authoritative moral voice; indeed Trollope's novels rely upon a powerful narrative guide who authoritatively dispenses wisdom. The novelist, he insists, is a type of preacher. But it is the very nature of fiction that allows this voice to engage the reader's moral sense in ways fundamentally different from sermonic discourse. I believe Trollope attributes this difference to the polyphonic character of the novel and its ability to accommodate several types of discourse. For Trollope, the interaction between satiric humor and sentimental melodrama is the alchemical concoction that succeeds where dour sermons fail, by engaging the reader's imagination the novelist can more thoroughly engage the both the reader's head and heart.

This notion is worked out practically in the pages of *Barchester Towers*, but it also embodies Trollope's theory of narrative fiction, which he developed over several decades. In an 1877 lecture later published as "Novel-Reading: The

Works of Charles Dickens and W. Makepeace Thackeray," Trollope offers the most comprehensive articulation of his ideas regarding the moral responsibilities of the novelist.<sup>4</sup> Ostensibly a review of the works of Thackeray and Dickens, whom Trollope believes share his aesthetic concerns, "Novel-Reading" is in reality Trollope's survey of the English novel from Defoe to the present moment in 1877. The essay poses the question whether or not the novel is naturally morally corrosive (25). This is a dilemma, of course, that writers of fiction struggled with since the genesis of the novel. Like Thackeray, Trollope equates the task of the novelist with that of the preacher: they share the didactic responsibility of imparting wisdom to their audiences. The essay draws a key analogy between the novel as sermon and the novelist as preacher. For Trollope, the sermon is significant as a morally shaping discourse but laments that its influence has waned in the present day. He writes

Sermons have been invented [...] in order that the violence of the active may be controlled by the prudence of the inactive and the thoughtlessness of the young by the thoughtfulness of the old. And

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<sup>4</sup> Normally one would need to be particularly wary in attempting to apply the theories set forth in a document to a novel written over twenty years before, since the author's aesthetic convictions could very possibly have changed in the interim in numerous substantial ways. However, in the case of Trollope, one can be fairly confident: as critic Samuel Pickering points out, "such an imposition [of a later work onto an earlier] is helpful in Trollope's case" because "[f]rom 1855 until his death in 1882, Trollope's views on the art of the novel remained constant" (132). John Hall agrees, stating that, "Trollope's norms for fiction were remarkably consistent over the years" (1023). Additionally, Trollope's thesis in "Novel-Reading" is one he returned to again and again. He published another paper to similar effect, 1870's "On English Prose Fiction as Rational Amusement." Indeed, I will set out to prove that the ideas set forth in "Novel-Reading" accord in nearly all respects with Trollope's practice in *Barchester Towers*.



sermons have been very efficacious for these purposes. There are now among us preachers influencing the conduct of many, and probably delighting the intellectual faculties of more. But it is, we think, felt that the sermon which is listened to with more or less of patience once or twice a week does not catch hold of the imagination as it used to do, so as to enable us to say that those who are growing up among us are formed as to their character by the discourses which they hear from the pulpit ("Novel-Reading" 26).

Trollope attributes supreme importance to the role of the imagination in the moral development of the individual. The faculty of the imagination is at once the pathway to the heart and the seat of the conscience. Any moral precept that fails to tickle the fancy is all too easy to ignore. For Trollope, then, the contemporary sermon is significant, and even necessary, but it is guilty of an unforgiveable crime against the imagination: it is dreary and boring. The sermon engages the intellect but it does not arouse the heart. Because of its tedium, the sermon has fallen out of favor and as a result has abdicated its effectiveness; as Trollope puts it, "[t]eaching to be efficacious must be popular" ("Novel-Reading" 26).

The novel, in Trollope's view, succeeds where the sermon fails. As a discourse, the novel, mimetic in nature, is particularly well suited to provide the reader a moral education by stirring the emotions while it depicts vice *as* vice and virtue in a positive light ("Novel-Reading" 29). "Sermons in themselves," Trollope explains, "are not thought to be agreeable; nor are disquisitions on

moral philosophy supposed to be pleasant reading for our idle hours. But the novelist, if he have a conscience, must preach his sermons with the same purpose as the clergyman, and must have his own system of ethics" ("Novel-Reading" 40). The novelist is thus explicitly linked, in purpose and importance, to the preacher of sermons, and the novel is granted a significance similar to that of the sermon. Art, for Trollope, shares equal importance with religious dogma, and a man's aesthetic nature requires the same careful development as his moral nature; if either are underdeveloped, the individual suffers. With his power of invention and the scope of his observation the novelist is able to engage the whole being of his reader, moral and aesthetic, and hopefully influence her to the true and the good. As Trollope says, it is the task of the novelist "to teach [a] lesson, to give [a] code of morals, to preach as it were a sermon from his pulpit, as the parson preaches his sermon," but to do so humanely and with grace ("Novel-Reading" 42). This analogy between clergyman and novelist, according to Rachel Hollander, reflects "Victorian claims for the growing seriousness and ethical relevance of the realist novel to larger social concerns, as a counter to the opposing view of narrative literature as mere entertainment or as morally suspect" (26). The Victorians, Hollander suggests, were aware that fiction had the unique ability to reflect upon contemporary issues. More than that, though,

placing value in the author's ability to speak to his fellow man implies a belief in the ethic of common sympathy.

Because the novelist necessarily teaches – even if he is unconscious of it – he “collects the floating ideas of the world around him, as to what is right and wrong in conduct, and reproduces them in his own coloring” – the only decision to be made is *what* and *how* the novelist shall teach (“Novel-Reading” 26). Samuel Pickering succinctly summarizes Trollope's convictions on this point when he notes that Trollope shared with the latitudinarians the conviction that the novel “should be a moral parable, teaching charity” (132). Trollope believes the novel ought to both excite powerful feelings and direct those feelings to virtuous ends by depicting vice *as* vice and virtue as appealing and beautiful (“Novel-Reading 27). The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment allows Trollope to castigate vice and encourage virtue without resorting to tedious, facile sermonizing. Using humor, irony, understatement, and pathos, Trollope can represent the ugliness of vice and the loveliness of virtue in ways that encourage the reader to engage emotionally and intellectually and work alongside the narrator in piecing together the novel's moral agenda. In this way, the novel can become a fuller form of sermon; whereas the sermon only engages the mind by exhorting its hearers to a mode of conduct, the novel can engage the heart as well by depicting the corrosive effects of immoral behavior and the fruits of virtue.

Like his close contemporary William Makepeace Thackeray, for Trollope it is the arousal of sympathetic feelings with characters in novels which represents the true function of the novelist as preacher. The reader must be made to sympathize with a morally upright character as well as kept from sympathizing with a morally questionable one. It was, for instance, John Gay's failure as a writer that he "did injury to morality when he persuaded all the town to sympathize with his thief" in his *Beggar's Opera* ("Novel-Reading" 29). Likewise, the Gothic novelists failed to arouse any "passions [or...] beliefs" because their characters were not depicted with adequate moral clarity ("Novel-Reading" 30). This, too, is what makes the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment so appealing to Trollope. In its rush to critique the flaws of society, satire alone may lead an audience to sympathize with the villain who exposes society's flaws. The union of satiric and sentimental conventions ensures that the reader's sympathies lie with those deserving of it. As a contrast to Gay Trollope cites Dickens, who I argue also adopts the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment. Although Trollope admits "it was his delight to portray" the grotesque and melodramatic, nevertheless fulfilled the novelist's function as a preacher by presenting his virtuous characters attractively and vice-filled characters as deserving of reproach, darkly entertaining though they may be ("Novel-Reading" 32). In Trollope's formulation, a moral writer like Dickens encourages his reader to

virtue: "Let the mind be induced to sympathize warmly with that which is good and true, or be moved to hatred against that which is vile, and then an impression will have been made, certainly serviceable, and probably ineradicable" ("Novel-Reading" 34-35). The lessons that novels teach form lasting impressions upon the minds of readers.

In sum, Trollope's aesthetic theory of the novel depends in large part on the important distinction he draws between the novelist and the preacher of sermons. Both figures are moral guides imparting wisdom to their hearers, but that is where the similarities end. In Trollope's view, the novelist is first and foremost a storyteller; a well-crafted, engaging narrative that captivates both the reader's heart and intellect is the most powerful rhetorical tool with which he can advance a moral agenda. The preacher's discourse is more restricted; his only power is in engaging his congregation's intellectual understanding of right and wrong through more broadly didactic, expository arguments. The preacher is constrained by the sermon's elevated tone and syntax, and his position as an authoritarian forces him to literally talk down to his audience from the perch of his pulpit. Trollope, as author, adopts an intimate, conversational tone and language, addressing the reader as his equal. To teach his audience, the author seeks to incite sympathy by creating a narrative populated with characters that demonstrate the morally and socially corrosive effects of vice and sin. The

preacher only denounces the sin itself, largely validating theological ideas the reader already knows intellectually. The author, then, primarily seeks to encourage his reader to act with sympathy – to treat the moral failings, common and human, of the characters with mercy, but to endeavor to avoid them in their own life. The preacher of sermons, for Trollope, trades mainly in fear – he wards his congregants away from sinful behavior because of fear of the consequences. This results in a vastly different relationship between the author and the preacher and their respective audiences. The preacher's congregation sits passively and receives the sermon, then walks out of the doors of the church and back to their old lives. The author requires that his reader actively participates in the narrative; the reader must interpret events, locate the novel's moral agenda, adjust his sympathies correctly, and allow the outpouring of sympathetic feeling to create in him a lasting love of virtue and hatred of vice. Ideally, the effects of the story should linger long after the reader has closed the book.

Trollope's dislike of sermons, and his belief in the morally reformatory power of fiction finds full voice in *Barchester Towers*. In *Barchester Towers*'s sole treatment of a sermon in any depth – that of Mr. Slope upon the inauguration of Dr. Proudie as Bishop – Trollope criticizes sermons while linking novel-writing to preaching. Slope's sermon, based on the text of St. Paul in which the apostle counsels Timothy to "[s]tudy to show thyself approved unto God," veers wildly

off the scriptural track in its denunciation of religious ritual as inappropriate to a solemn and earnest age (47). In its austerity and directness, Slope's sermon represents all that Trollope would later deplore in "Novel-Reading": it is boring, dull, and long. Jull Felicity Durey remarks that "Trollope had a horror" of evangelical preaching all his life, in part because of what seemed to him the sheer joylessness of the evangelical point of view (24). Slope embodies this joylessness in his repudiation of everything he deems extravagant and luxurious: he laments "all ceremonious modes of utterance" and "crie[s] down religious feeling which might be excited, not by the sense, but by the sound of words," preferring to these the sober preaching of scripture (48). As the narrator remarks with no small amount of bitterness, for Slope, the religion of the past "had been an affair of the imagination: now, in these latter days, it had become necessary that a Christian should have a reason for his faith [... he should] not only hear, but understand" (48). Slope's evangelicalism leads him to the belief that the aesthetic dimensions of Church worship are a hindrance and a distraction to genuine devotion as expressed by a sober lifestyle. When the narrator of *Barchester Towers* describes the minister Mr. Slope's deep aversion to "a new church with a high pitched roof," and his equally deep affection for "Sunday observances – the loved subject of all his evening discourses, the source of all his eloquence, the secret of all his power," there is something more pernicious in the man's character than

inflexible legalism (28). Slope's theology spares no room for delight or pleasure; the rejection of these is a sin Trollope cannot forgive. Much of the novel, Christopher Herbert notes, "is oriented toward defending the legitimate rights of pleasure against the assault of dour oppressiveness" (44). Slope is a man only half formed: he lacks imagination, a love of beauty, and a sense of wonder – three sins that reveal his small-mindedness and make him undoubtedly ill-suited to the position of moral pedagogue.

Trollope's treatment of Slope's sermon in the novel is fully consistent with his discussion of sermons in "Novel-Reading." In the latter essay preaching is described as being a form without imagination and a cold moral discourse that rarely encourages the hearer's heart to seek after the right. Novels, by contrast, *because* of their ability to excite the passions and invite sympathy move their readers to moral action by example. Trollope would agree with Slope that "formerly the religion of the multitude had been an affair of the imagination," but he would not lament the fact. Indeed, Trollope provides a pre-emptive rejoinder to the imaginative frigidity of Slopean preaching in the passage just prior to Slope's sermon. Describing the service, the narrator lingers with careful attention over how well the service is conducted: "The psalms were *beautifully* chanted; the Te Deum was *magnificently* sung; and the litany was given in a *manner*, which is still to be found in Barchester, but if my taste be correct, is to be



found nowhere else" (46, emphasis mine). The narrator's emphasis, conveyed by his repeated strong adjectives, is on the *manner* of the service. The content or import of the singing is nowhere in the narrator's view, and he goes so far as to introduce the aesthetic category of "taste" into a discussion of Church services. Unlike Slope, the narrator values the "sound" of words rather than merely their "sense" (48).

Lying behind the narrator's disagreement with Slope as to the right order of service is a more fundamental disagreement about the nature of moral instruction. For Slope, the aesthetic is merely ornamental; it serves no positive function in inculcating right conduct, although it can provide a harmless distraction from the more serious matters with which the Church should deal. Trollope, however, recognizes the role beauty and fancy can play in stirring others to action, a dynamic subtly depicted by Mr. Harding's heightened "exertion" in singing before the service because "[o]thers were doing their best, and it was natural that he should emulate his brethren" (46).

In a direct address to the reader during the description of Slope's sermon, Trollope's narrator ironically links the preaching of sermons to novels. Before Slope's sermon begins the narrator admits that

It would not be becoming were I to travesty a sermon, or even to repeat the language of it in the pages of a novel. In endeavoring to depict the characters of the persons of whom I write, I am to a certain extent forced to speak of sacred things. I trust, however, that

I shall not be thought to scoff at the pulpit, though some may imagine that I do not feel all the reverence that is due to the cloth. I may question the infallibility of the teachers, but I hope that I shall not therefore be accused of doubt as to the thing taught (47).

The link between sermons and novels, between preachers and novelists, is here established as a hierarchy: the low novelist ought not to profane the holy by representing a sermon in the pages of his work. In one sense, the narrator's admission is sincere, for he does not reproduce Slope's sermon verbatim, nor does he "travesty" it (47). Yet it would be a mistake to overlook the irony of the narrator's admission. Commenting on this passage, Paul Lyons observes that, although Trollope overtly denies any connection between the lofty sermon and the humble novel, he nevertheless "must preach an anti-sermonistic sermon, a tale amusing on the surface but morally instructive" (43). The novelist must assume the task of the preacher and perform it better than the preacher could by appealing to the sympathy and imagination of his readers whereas the preacher seemingly only addresses the minds of his hearers.

*"And do thou also, Reader": Novelist as Extra-Ecclesial Preacher*

The connection Trollope's rhetoric carefully draws between the novelist and the preacher constitutes the central component of his narrative persona. By eliding the distinction between these two roles, Trollope situates himself in the

text as both truth teller and artful storyteller.<sup>5</sup> He is both a spinner of tales and a fount of wisdom, an artful fabricator and a moral pedagogue. The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment allows these disparate authorial roles to work in harmony, granting Trollope the tonal versatility to compose a satiric representation of human failings, while tempering the bitterness with sentimental elements that entreat the reader to consider the flaws in others and amend the flaws in ourselves with sympathy, humble self-reflection, and compassion. In spite of, or perhaps because of, its artfulness, fiction is an effective vehicle for expressing moral truths. In this way, the complex rhetoric of *Barchester Towers*'s narrative persona works to achieve Trollope's goal of demonstrating the reformatory power of the novel. Trollope's prose references, but ultimately transcends, the confines of sermonistic discourse.

Trollope proves the versatility of the preacher/storyteller by establishing complex relationships with both readers and characters. The preacher stands behind his pulpit and preaches down to his passive audience below. But by adopting the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment, Trollope alters the power relations, developing a more egalitarian and intimate relationship with his reader; his intrusive, digressive narrative technique encourages his readers to

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<sup>5</sup> I use this term in both of its meanings; Trollope believes there is a delicacy and fancy inherent in art that reaches his readers more effectively than the blunt force of a sermon. But also, the novelist makes use of fiction, of made-up stories, to impart essential moral truth.

stand beside him as they together actively evaluate the intrigues and manipulations of Barchester's colorful citizenry. This, Robert Polhemus argues, designates the reader as "a witness and interpreter with as much credibility as the narrator" (107). Recall that Thackeray performed just such a delicate narrative tightrope act in *Vanity Fair*. Like Thackeray, Trollope's insinuating narrative persona highlights the fictive status of the text and subtly encourages the reader to identify with the narrator. Having cultivated just such a relationship with the reader, Trollope can shift organically between the rhetoric reminiscent of the pulpit and of a close, confidential friend, between rhetoric of the satirist and the writer of sentiment. In this way he, as Geoffrey Harvey has explained, delights in a "tension between [the reader's] imaginative sympathy and moral scrutiny" (9). It is the intersection of these two impulses that Trollope believes produces a lasting effect upon the reader.

Though the narrative persona asserts his presence and influence in many ways throughout *Barchester Towers*, the most significant is in the way he adopts the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to interact simultaneously with both character and reader. It is through his treatment of characters – the good, the bad, and the silly – that Trollope imparts moral wisdom. Locating his social critique in his well-drawn characters encourages the reader to consider human vice and virtue not as vague theological or intellectual quandaries, but as they actually

exist and battle in a human breast. Trollope adopts the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to emphasize the complexity of his characters by providing extended introductions that provide a detailed and revealing description and biographical background.

In these remarkable passages, Trollope's narrator functions as a character in his own right, introducing the novel's characters as a friend introduces another friend. This familiarity lends a distinctive realism to the characters on the page. Though the intrusions of the narrator remind readers of the fictive status of the text, the complexity of these character sketches present the characters as lifelike and nuanced, their personalities a decidedly human combination of strengths and moral weaknesses that the reader can recognize as familiar. In these passages, Trollope paints with a brush that both satirically parodies certain character types (the grasping parvenu, the domineering wife) and encourages his readers to sympathize with their flaws. Take, for instance, the narrator's description of Eleanor Bold:

Poor Eleanor Bold! How well does that widow's cap become her, and the solemn gravity with which she devotes herself to her new duties. Poor Eleanor! I cannot say that with me John Bold was ever a favorite. I never thought him worthy of the wife he had won. But in her estimation he was most worthy. Hers was one of those feminine hearts which cling to a husband, not with idolatry, for worship can admit of no defect in its idol, but with the perfect tenacity of ivy. As the parasite plant will follow even the defects of the trunk which it embraces, so did Eleanor cling to and love the very faults of her husband. [...] Just eight months after the father's

death a second John Bold was born, and if the worship of one creature can be innocent in another, let us hope that the adoration offered over the cradle of the fatherless infant may not be imputed as a sin (15-16).

This passage establishes Eleanor bold in the tradition of sentimental heroines. Yet throughout, sometimes even in the same sentence alongside the openly sentimental material, is a subtle vein of satire. Like *Vanity Fair's* Amelia Sedley, Eleanor is characterized by her blind devotion to an unworthy man and a subsequent blind devotion to his child. But the comparison of the sentimental qualities of love and steadfast loyalty to ivy, parasitically clinging even to the worst elements of its host, renders the scene subtly satiric. The repetition of the narrators lament, "Poor Eleanor," suggests to the reader that the reader has more reason than just Eleanor's recent widowhood to bestow sympathy (15). Here, Eleanor's flaws and virtues are one in the same. The narrator's understated admission that "I cannot say that with me John Bold was ever a favorite" speaks volumes. Indeed John Bold figured prominently in the earlier Basset novel *The Warden* (1855). The reader understands John Bold was an unworthy, a man characterized by "arrogance of thought" and a constant "attempt at being better than his neighbors" (15). Our sentimental heroine, then, has already made a poor choice. Unconditional love is only as worthy as its object, a fact novels of sensibility too often overlook. Here, Eleanor's blindness is willful; she recognized her husband's flaws yet clung to him all the tighter for them. That blindness

wasn't lifted upon John Bold's death, but merely transferred to her son, though the narrator assures us he is "really delightful" (17). The scene strikes such a lovely, delicate balance between sentimental description and satiric critique. The critique of Eleanor's flaws is mitigated by the utter humanity with which the narrator sketches her character. Her love arises from a tender heart, and her loyalty and natural goodness will serve her well in the political conflicts in which she soon finds herself swept up.

Of equal significance, though, is the way that the narrator inserts himself into this descriptive passage, making the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment his primary mode of discourse. The narrator, by referencing his extra textual knowledge of the characters, and by expressing his own assessment of their very likeability, establishes himself as a character in his own right. In admitting dislike for Eleanor's late husband John Bold the narrator suggests that he is an integral part of the happenings and history of Barsetshire. Indeed, Eleanor's romance comprised much of the main narrative of Trollope's earlier Barset novel, 1855's *The Warden*. So, while Mr. Harding, Dr. Grantly, and Eleanor Bold are returning characters, the reader can assume that the narrator himself is a returning character as well, eager to continue the chronicle where *The Warden* left off. The assumption of familiarity differs from the traditional conventions of omniscient narration and establishes a much closer relationship between reader and

narrator. The narrator is not just a guide, he is a confidant, engaging in conspiratorial gossip with the reader. (One has the impression that “Poor Eleanor” would look angrily upon anyone who cast dispersion upon the memory of her husband). His personal knowledge of the characters succeeds in making him both more and less trustworthy. His knowledge arises not from the mere magic of fictive narration, but from some kind of actual experience. Yet, shedding the cloak of narrative objectivity may call into question some of his judgments. Despite this, the narrator’s opinions and, thus, the characters about whom he opines, feel grounded in reality; their flaws and virtues alike feel real, for they are drawn and presented in a way that mirrors the complexity of real life. This description of Eleanor, succinctly and beautifully establishing her role in the novel, her flaws and her virtues, serves as a prototypical example of Trollope’s method throughout. His use of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment aids the narrator in establishing his own unique persona, in presenting his characters in a way that reflects the imperfections of real people, and in encouraging in the reader to develop sympathy for the characters while still depicting vice as vice.

The treatment of the character of Mr. Slope serves as a rich example of Trollope’s narrative and rhetorical technique. As with Eleanor Bold, the narrator offers a generous description of the cleric’s figure and character, albeit after



acknowledging at the end of the previous chapter that “Mr. Slope, however, on his first introduction must not be brought before the public at the tail of a chapter” (24). With this nod to his narrative duty, Trollope continues:

Of the Rev. Mr. Slope’s parentage I am not able to say much. I have heard it asserted that he is lineally descended from that eminent physician who assisted at the birth of Mr. T. Shandy, and that in early years he added an ‘e’ to his name, for the sake of euphony, as other great men have done before him. [...] His acquirements are not of the highest order, but such as they are they are completely under control, and he knows the use of them. He is gifted with a certain kind of pulpit eloquence, not likely indeed to be persuasive with men, but powerful with the softer sex. In his sermons he deals greatly in denunciations, excites the minds of his weaker hearers with a not unpleasant terror, and leaves an impression on their minds that all mankind are in a perilous state, and all womankind too. [...] his soul trembles in agony at the iniquities of the Puseyites. His aversion is carried to things outward as well as inward. His gall rises at a new church with a high pitched roof; a full-breasted black silk waistcoat is with him a symbol of Satan; [...] To him the mercies of our Savior speak in vain, to him in vain has been preached that sermon which fell from divine lips on the mountain – ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’ [...] I never could endure to shake hands with Mr. Slope. A cold, clammy perspiration always exudes from him, the small drops are ever to be seen standing on his brow, and his friendly grasp is unpleasant. [...] Not as mere associate does Mr. Slope travel down to Barchester with the bishop and his wife. He intends to be, if not their master, at least the chief among them (28-38).

I quote this passage at great length because, not only is it a delightful example of Trollope’s energetic (if not elegant) prose, but also because it is of great significance in terms both the style and substance of the novel. This is a masterful sketch of the novel’s antagonist, at once a satiric burlesque of the affected

righteousness of low-church evangelicals, but it is also a humorous and humane description of the modern middle-class man looking to move up in the world by using nothing but his wits. Once again the narrator asserts his personal knowledge of Mr. Slope, admitting his disgust for Slope's sweaty palms and the questions his gossipy research has left unanswered regarding Slope's past. The narrator threatens to subvert the realism of the passage by alluding to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*; he links Mr. Slope to the infamously incompetent Dr. Slop who was responsible for Tristram's unfortunate circumcision via window shash. The opacity of the allusion, though, ensures the reference serves merely as a humorous nod to another of literature's persnickety pedants. The reference to Sterne also, though, places what follows in a more self-consciously satiric register. Mr. Slope is a consummate "clerical parvenu," a grasping social climber whose adopted religious persona is less about his devotion to doctrinal philosophy and more about amassing a loyal retinue of equally zealous (mostly female) followers (49). Slope's exaggerated reactions to religious practices not in keeping with the unadorned aesthetic of evangelicals are distinctly satirical. So, too, is his noted lack of interest in the mercies of the New Testament. Slope is a devotee of a harsh, exacting, unforgiving gospel. Yet in his personal life he is a slimy chameleon, willing to "stoop to fawn" to whoever can secure his advancement (27).

It is in the contradictory nature of characters that the narrator's innate sympathy is revealed. The narrator provides little evidence in favor of Mr. Slope's character, but he complicates matters by drawing a direct comparison to Dr. Grantly, Eleanor's brother-in-law, and the leader of the "right" side of Barchester's religious debate. "Both men are eager," explains the narrator, "much too eager, to support and increase the power of their order" (29). Ambition is not a trait exclusive to middle-class schemers, Trollope acknowledges, but is common to all. This admission adds dimension to Slope, humanizing him, making him less villainous and more, well, human. The narrator goes even, further, however, and begs his reader to consider Slope with greater nuance.

We will not talk about his heart: not that he had no heart, but because his heart had little to do with his present feelings [of attraction for Madeleine Stanhope]. His taste had been pleased, his eyes charmed, and his vanity satisfied. [...] And here the author must beg it to be remembered that Mr. Slope was not in all things a bad man. His motives, like those of most men, were mixed [...]. He believed in the religion which he taught, harsh, unpalatable, uncharitable as that religion was. [...] He believed himself to be a pillar of strength, destined to do great things; [...] he had taught himself to think that in doing much for the promotion of his own interests he was doing much also for the promotion of religion. But Slope had never been an immoral man (126-127).

Despite his scheming, the narrator insists, Slope is a blend of complex motives, conflicting impulses, and virtues, misplaced though they may be. It is Slope's ambition alone that proves corrosive to his better nature. Ambition twists his religious devotion into an affectation, degrades a pure-hearted confidence in his

intellectual abilities into arrogance, and it alters his natural desire for a wife into a desperate, indiscriminate debasement. Despite this, the narrator urges the reader to remember that Slope's virtues still lurk in his heart, and to discount them would be uncharitable and hypocritical. The narrator's portrait of Slope is distressingly complex. His schemes make our skin crawl at the same time we keenly feel his final humiliation. The novel form and his chosen tool of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment, allow Trollope the freedom to present his fairly simple didactic message in a more subtle, nuanced, and artful way than is allowed by the sermon form. His honest depiction of the complexities of vice, and the difficulty of distinguishing them clearly in the breasts of complicated, human individuals also allows him to better equip his reader to uncover vice in the world outside the page.

Trollope offers similarly rich descriptions for many of his characters. But I will turn here to the description of Mr. Arabin, who fills the role of sentimental hero by eventually winning the hand of Eleanor Bold. Trollope offers the following description of the studious Mr. Arabin:

Of his doings in the world, and of the sort of fame which he has achieved, enough has been already said. It has also been said that he is forty years of age and unmarried. [...] From Winchester he went to Oxford, and was entered as a commoner at Balliol. Here his special career very soon commenced. He utterly eschewed the society of fast men, gave no wine parties, kept no horses, rowed no boats, joined no rows, and was the pride of his college tutor. [...] Though always in earnest, yet his earnestness was always droll.

[...] As a boy Arabin took up the cudgels on the side of the Tractarians, and at Oxford he sat for awhile at the feet of the great Newman. To this cause he lent all his faculties. [...] For it he ate and drank and dressed, and had his being. [...] Mr. Newman left the Church of England, and with him carried many a waverer. He did not carry off Mr. Arabin, but the escape which that gentleman had was a very narrow one. [...] When Mr. Arabin left Oxford, he was inclined to look upon the rural clergymen of most English parishes with contempt. [...] And yet it was from such a one that Mr. Arabin in his extremist need received that aid which he so much required. It was from the poor curate of a small Cornish parish that he first learnt to know the highest laws for the governance of a Christian's duty must act from within and not from without. [...] Mr. Arabin returned to Oxford a humbler but a better and a happier man (172-175).

Trollope paints the portrait of Mr. Arabin with the same attention to subtle character detail and balance between humane satiric critique and sentimental flourish as he did with Eleanor and Mr. Slope. This passage performs several functions at once. It establishes Mr. Arabin as not only the sentimental romantic hero – the intelligent, forthright man of God who deserves a devoted woman like Eleanor – but it also establishes him as the hero best equipped to resolve the ecclesiastical conflict in Barchester. As with Eleanor, Mr. Arabin's personal strengths are also his greatest flaws. Arabin is a man possessed of a great intellect. His early religious fervor and intellectual gifts lead him to Oxford, where his ascetic lifestyle (he eschews the dissolute conduct of the typical cosmopolitan, privileged Oxford lad) is the perfect candidate to be swept up in John Henry Newman and Edward Bouverie Pusey's Oxford movement. He shifts

his obsession from his studies, where he was the “pride of his tutor,” to the furtherance of the Oxford movement – the high-church, Anglo-Catholic movement that promoted a return to the liturgical observances that had fallen out of practice in favor of a more latitudinarian approach.<sup>6</sup> This obviously aligns Arabin with Dr. Grantly and his high-church leanings in Barsetshire, but here Trollope uses this to sketch the portrait of a man caught up in the arrogance of brilliant youth. “Mr. Arabin was,” the narrator explains, “a very young man, and [...] was much too confident in his own powers of fence, and too apt to look down on the ordinary sense of ordinary people” (175). The delights of high-minded ideals and well-constructed theological arguments had replaced the purpose of the movement – to aid people in their worship of God. Had Arabin succumbed to the lures of Catholicism, Trollope suggests, he might never have overcome his intellectual arrogance.

Trollope paints his portrait of Arabin with both satiric critique and sentimental indulgence. Arabin is a good man with a “special” gift; he is kind, mild-mannered, and “earnest” (172). His gentle nature makes him a “more a general than a special favorite” with women (177). His natural intellectual bent

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<sup>6</sup> Some excellent recent studies of the Oxford Movement and its influence include Stewart Brown and Peter Nockels’s *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World, 1830-1930*, S.A. Skinner’s *Tractarians and the Condition of England: the Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement*, and Brad C Faught’s *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and their Times*.

causes him to “doubt whether he had ever allowed his heart to be touched” (177). Arabin has all the trappings of a gentle romantic hero. But, as with Eleanor and Mr. Slope, there exists throughout the narrator’s description a subtle satiric critique. Alongside his obvious affection for Arabin is a critique of his youthful zeal, which leads him to devote himself obsessively to causes. He takes up the “cudgel” of the Oxford movement, and for it he “ate and drank and dressed, and had his being” (173). This lack of moderation earns the narrator’s chastisement. Arabin could have been insufferable, lost forever to his heady intellectual pursuits, had he not left the confines of Oxford for a time. Service to the community and sympathy for common parishioners from the “selfish freedom” he found in Oxford. Time spent in a small-town church led by a small-town priest helped curb Arabin’s excesses and turned him into a man able to balance theological concerns with practical realities.

This ability to balance and seek the public good makes Arabin more than just Trollope’s romantic hero, though ultimately it will be his impending marriage to Eleanor that promises to set right all of Barchester’s conflicts, but Arabin comes to represent the fulfillment of Trollope’s moral agenda. Where Slope comes to represent open ambition and theological small-mindedness, Arabin comes to represent true progress – a man who can work to advance the state of the Church without sacrificing its character. Arabin embodies the notion

of healthy ambition; he is a young man with gifts and ambitions, but his ambitions are not for the mere advancement of his personal power. Finally, he represents the results of the healing effects of sympathy. He takes the open position at the small St. Ewold's because he believes he can perform service, aid the community, and work to advance the church in meaningful ways. Arabin, however, doesn't reach these heights of character on his own. He receives a push from an unlikely moral guide – Madeleine Stanhope.

*"Full of Mischief": Madeleine Stanhope and The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment*

Trollope enacts his narrative and rhetorical theory in the pages of *Barchester Towers*. His narrative persona functions as an extra-ecclesial preacher, who uses the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to dispense moral wisdom to his characters. But just as *Barchester Towers* depicts both good and bad pulpit preachers, it also depicts good and bad author/preachers. A great deal of Trollope's energy in his essay "Novel-Reading" is directed toward criticizing writers who he feels have failed to fulfill their obligation of encouraging readers to virtuous behavior; John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* earns Trollope's particular scorn. So, if Trollope demonstrates his conviction that the novelist is a kind of preacher in his rhetoric and use of characters as moral exempla, he depicts the novelist's temptation away from his duty in the figure of Madeleine Stanhope. In



the novel it is Madeleine who most exemplifies the novelist's temptation away from the right use of his powers for the moral benefit of his audience.

Madeleine Stanhope has not yet been considered in her relationship to the narrator/preacher of *Barchester Towers*. Most often, Madeleine has been regarded as an enigma and an anomaly. Recent feminist critics and body theorists, for example, have found much to discuss in Trollope's depiction of the beautiful yet physically broken Signora. Cindy LaCom has applied body theory in order to read Signora as representing an affront to "Victorian standards of [sexual] normalcy" (189). LaCom argues that Signora Neroni's characterization is a sign that for Trollope, female sexuality is fundamentally deformed, frightening, and yet somehow dangerously alluring. Likewise, in her article "Abject and Defiled: Signora Neroni's Body and the Question of Domestic Violence," Kate Lawson argues that the prominent war metaphors in *Barchester Towers* are transposed to the domestic sphere in the figure of the Signora. For Lawson, the Signora represents an anomalous intrusion of the feminine into Trollope's masculine world of Barchester. Because domestic violence is inscribed on her body in her useless leg, the Signora comes to stand for the unspeakable (and gendered) system of violence that lies beneath the institution of marriage. Thus Lawson views the Signora as a text, a signifier of the unthinkable that the male characters – including the narrator himself – are unable to comprehend (66). Although

Lawson, LaCom and other critics focusing on Madeleine Stanhope have offered valuable insights into her character and significance, accounts such as these fail to offer a holistic understanding of her character in light of Trollope's own poetics. I suggest that, though her body is used as a text, Stanhope herself is the author of it, consciously crafting and manipulating her behavior and appearance in order to create a distinct narrative. By placing her character in dialogue with Trollope's theories of fiction and his notion of the author as preacher, I believe we can begin to make more sense of her role as a misguided author figure. The artifice and manipulation Madeleine carries out gives a fuller understanding of the dangers present in Trollope's poetics. The author is a powerful figure, and his moral duty to cultivate virtue in his reader must be undertaken with deadly earnest.

Madeleine is a proto-Jamesian figure whose latent aestheticism has been heightened by her sojourn in Italy, and the injury in her leg serves in part to emphasize her profound indolence. Her beauty, we are told, has something of the demonic mixed with it: "Her eyes were long and large, and marvelously bright; might I venture to say, bright as Lucifer's [...] she was a basilisk from whom an ardent lover of beauty could make no escape" (79). The narrator notes that in her eyes "was no love. Cruelty was there instead, and courage, a desire of masterhood, cunning, and a wish for mischief. And yet, as eyes, they were very

beautiful" (79). Like the novelists deplored in "Novel-Reading" for irresponsibly exciting passion in readers, Madeleine presents a vision of beauty that is morally corrosive. She is a beautiful aesthetic object of admiration that is ultimately harmful for her admirers.

The idea that Madeleine represents an author-figure is more forcefully supported by Trollope's treatment of her as possessing a natural ability for both satire and sentiment. Madeleine's artful exploitation of her injured leg suggests an awareness of herself as a tragic, sentimental heroine deserving of the love and sympathy of men. For Madeleine, the injury to her leg is an aid to her in social conquests: "she bore her suffering in silence, or alluded to it only to elicit the sympathy and stimulate the admiration of the men with whom she flirted" (179). As we have seen, for Trollope the duty of the novelist as preacher is to present characters whose virtue move the reader to sympathy and thus to virtue. Madeleine is essentially her own author in that she is the creator of the image she presents to the world, and she uses her injury to present herself as vulnerable and deserving of sympathy and romantic adoration. Yet in her hands sympathy is dangerous and misdirected. Indeed, for most of the novel Madeleine exploits her preternatural understanding of the conventions of sentiment as a tool to entrap her male victims. As Trollope says of Arabin, "[h]e also, moth-like, burnt his wings in the flames of the signora's candle [...]. He thought her a very clever

and a very handsome woman; he thought also that her peculiar affliction entitled her to the sympathy of all" (240). I find it fascinating that here Trollope is tacitly acknowledging the artifice at the heart of all artistic creations. We are faced with the undeniable fact that, however morally upright, the words we read in the pages of a novel are illusory, beautiful falsehoods that manipulate our emotions toward particular, predetermined ends. The difference between a Trollope and a Madeleine Stanhope, however, is the faithfulness of the representation and the moral value of the predetermined end. Trollope believes he fulfills his moral duty as an author when he depicts the ugliness of vice and the beauty of virtue. Madeleine's carefully crafted persona does the opposite; she hides her selfish, acquisitive nature behind an artful appearance and performance of beauty and feminine mildness. She goes through her performance of loveliness for no other reason than to gain the admiration of men. The good author, of course, writes as a service to his fellow man, to encourage them to develop sympathy, compassion, and a love of goodness. But though she uses her artistic gifts for selfish ends, Madeline Stanhope possesses the author's preternatural insight into human nature.

Madeleine exhibits an understanding of the conventions of sentimentality. She crafts her persona – her dress, her mode of address – in a way that elicits the greatest sympathy and affection from her male admirers. She is also, however,

gifted with an innately satirical nature. She has the author's ability to instantly assess and understand the nature of people. More than perhaps anyone else in the novel, Signora Neroni has a perfectly accurate understanding of the character of Mr. Slope. She quickly understands that Mr. Slope's attraction for her is at odds with his mercenary pursuit of Eleanor Bold's affections. "It was all very well to have Mr. Slope at her feet, to show her power by making an utter fool of a clergyman [...]. The signora had indeed discovered with the keen instinct of such a woman, that Mr. Slope was bent on matrimony with Mrs. Bold [...] She instantly perceived from her lover's blushes, what was on his mind, and was not slow in taking advantage of it" (251). Deriving perhaps from her ability to craft her own person as a text to be read in a certain way, Madeleine has the keen ability to read the true natures of others. She sees what kind of man Slope is and glories in her ability to let him know she is aware of it. When Slope admits to possessing a healthy ambition, Madeleine says, "'Of course you have ambition, and the natural passions; and therefore I say that you don't believe the doctrine you preach. [...] I will think no preaching sincere that is not recommended by the practice of the preacher'" (253). With the author's economy, Madeleine lays bare the ambitions and false ideals Slope thought he had successfully hidden. In some sense, Madeleine does no more than the narrator does. The narrator, recall, openly expresses his dislike of Mr. Slope. The narrator uses his humane, subtle

satiric critique to guide the reader toward a true assessment of his character – good points and bad. Madeleine too employs satire; drawing an ironic comparison between Slope and St. Paul, she claims both are slaves to their ambition (251)<sup>7</sup>. But Madeleine satirically skewers Slope to his very face for the sole purpose of exerting her power over him. She uses her authorial gifts of insight and her penchant for irony for selfish, cruel motives, failing in her duty to be a good author.

For much of *Barchester Towers* Madeleine, as an author-figure, is morally problematic but near the end of the novel she (for a moment) fulfills the author's function of preaching truth to the benefit of her audience. During the party at Ullathorne, Madeleine and Arabin discuss Arabin's life and fortunes in love. As they are speaking, Arabin has the strange sensation that Madeleine can "read the secrets of his heart" and tell "him the unwelcome bodings of his own soul" (371). As the conversation goes on Arabin is increasingly aware of Madeleine's strange oracular power over him: she speaks in the voice of "some inner spirit of his own, to whom he could not refuse an answer, and to whom he did not dare to give a false reply" (371). In this moment Madeleine assumes the authority of both author, preacher, and prophet, reading Arabin's own life narrative and

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<sup>7</sup> Like the narrator, Madeleine too expresses a mistrust of sermons, though her reasons differ from the narrator's. Madeleine mistrusts the motives of the preacher because she can so clearly see their sinfulness. The narrator mistrusts the rhetorical effectiveness of the form.

representing in words complete truth to Arabin about his own soul. ““Why,”” the Signora demands, ““do you let the Slopes of the world out-distance you? [...] Has not God made you a man, and intended you to do a man’s work here [...]? The greatest mistake any man ever made is to suppose that the good things of the world are not worth the winning. And it is a mistake so opposed to the religion which you preach!”” (371). As she does with Mr. Slope, Madeleine has succinctly laid bare Arabin’s soul. Her gift for reading the hearts of men is nearly preternatural. Here, too, we must believe Madelein’s words to mimic Trollope’s himself. Ambition is not a sin when kept in proportion. For a brief moment, the author makes Madeleine his mouthpiece. Like the author whose teaching is done incidentally as a matter of course, Madeleine does not intend her words “to be received as true, and yet he had answered her in the very spirit of truth” (372). In her mind Madeleine has simply spoken, but Arabin has experienced her speech as directed at his heart. Like the author who offers fiction to the people, Madeleine realizes that what she may consider idle talk can potentially have great authority. Because of this realization Madeleine makes the moral decision “to do a good-natured act for once in her life, and give up Mr. Arabin to the woman he loved” (374). For a brief moment, then, Madeleine uses her power as a figure to whom sympathy is owed for a moral end, thereby becoming a picture

of Trollope's author and is, at this moment, not simply a "*femme fatale*" (Pollard 58).

Once she has performed the good work of encouraging Arabin to take action and pursue Eleanor Bold's hand, she fulfills her duty once more by doing the same for Eleanor. Out of jealousy over her apparent intimacy with Mr. Arabin, Eleanor does not welcome the Signora's visit. "'How stiff you are with me, Mrs. Bold, and I the while am doing for you all that one woman can do to serve another. [...] Do you love him, love with all your heart and soul [...]? For I can tell you that he loves you, adores you, worships you, thinks of you and nothing else. [...] What I tell you is God's own truth; and it is for you to use it as may be best for your own happiness'" (446-447). Here again Madeleine's incisive understanding of human nature is on full display. She speaks truth to Eleanor Bold in a way that instantly shocks Eleanor out of her complacency. Madeleine's words reveal a keen understanding of both Eleanor and Arabin, whose reserved, stubborn personalities make declarations of love difficult. Madeleine understands that her words are "indelicate," but she is convinced "'that I am right in [speaking]'" (446). Once again, Madeleine works against her own nature to dispense service to another fellow human. Her words are not just truth but "God's own truth" (447). Madeleine draws a comparison between herself and the role of author; her ability to read the hearts of others and dispense truth that is a



catalyst to right action again draws her close to the author. More than any character in the novel, Madeleine acts as truth-teller, moral guide, and extra-ecclesial preacher. She may succumb to the temptation to be a bad author, to craft herself into a sentimental text that manipulates the emotions of men. But in her natural penchant for irony and her small, but undeniable love for the good, Madeleine represents the hope that the novelist is not the only one who may effectively teach. Sympathy, love, and a soft heart can be encouraged anywhere there is an individual, signora or no, willing to selflessly speak "God's own truth" (447).

Madeleine Stanhope is unique in this dissertation as the one character who self-consciously uses the conventions of satire and sentiment. As a proto-author figure, she understands the range of narrative possibilities inherent in the two modes and makes use of these tropes to craft her own persona much like a narrative. She exemplifies the dangers of an author who eschews his moral duty to create morally edifying art and instead employs the modes of satire and sentiment only to manipulate and seduce. In deciding to use her narrative gifts for the moral improvement of Arabin and Eleanor by helping each understand their position in their own love story, however, Madeleine takes up the mantle of author and acts as a preacher of true, worthy sermons.

## CHAPTER FOUR

“A Girl in Love will do a Great Deal”: Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*

An important sub-claim in chapters two and three is that by employing the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment, William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope posit it as a literary technique capable of engendering true social change. Thackeray adopts it as a way to bond readers into an extra-textual community united by their shared sympathy. Trollope offers it as a viable replacement for the sermon, believing that its capability to engage both the reader’s intellect and emotions make it better suited to encourage readers to repentance and right action. In *North and South* (1855), Elizabeth Gaskell will offer the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as a way to counteract the inhumanity inherent in industrial capitalism and to impress upon readers the importance of women’s active participation in combating this inhumanity. This lofty goal sets Gaskell apart from other Victorian writers of industrial fiction, though strictly speaking, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*, with its championing of sympathy and domestic affections as a remedy to the social ills of industrialization, was neither radical nor particularly unique. At the time of its publication “condition of England” novels was a well-established subgenre of industrial fiction,

popularized by such female writers as Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, Frances Trollope, and Harriet Martineau (Matus 30). “Condition of England” novels denounce the callousness of the capitalist enterprise by detailing the poor conditions of factories and the numerous indignities visited on industrial laborers. These popular novels, like Tonna’s *Helen Fleetwood: A Tale of the Factories* (1841), were often structured metonymically – the problems of an individual character or community stands as representative of a larger social concern. The subgenre as a whole, observes Jill Matus, bears many hallmarks of Sentimental fiction, namely the privileging of sensibility as the chief indicator of virtue and the insistence that an emotional reaction from the reader was necessary to fulfilling its rhetorical purpose (30). Gaskell’s *North and South* does indeed share the same basic structure and rhetorical purpose as Frances Trollope’s shamelessly sentimental *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy* (1840) and Tonna’s unabashedly polemical *Helen Fleetwood*.<sup>1</sup> But, having contentedly relegated *North and South* to this subsection of industrial fiction, critics have largely neglected to examine what other generic modes may be at play in the novel. *North and South* both masters and expands the possibilities of the “condition of England” novel. The precision of the novel’s structure and the complexity and breadth of its social project set it apart from other works of its ilk. This chapter will argue that the

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<sup>1</sup> Considered by many scholars to be the work that inaugurated the genre of “industrial novel” (Ayers).

success of both the novel's structure and rhetorical purpose rely on Gaskell's innovative use of generic modes. Gaskell avoids the saccharine sentimentality of Tonna and Frances Trollope by incorporating a measure of bitter satire into her honeyed romantic narrative. Just as *North and South* expresses faith in the compatibility of the middle and working classes, I argue, Gaskell's novel likewise makes the case for the compatibility of satire and sentiment as agents of social change.

Much of Gaskell's early literary career saw her adopt female dominated genres as rhetorical tools to advance a political agenda.<sup>2</sup> As such, it must be noted that Elizabeth Gaskell was not driven purely by aesthetic concerns. For Gaskell, fiction was a platform upon which she could engage an audience in social issues of importance to her. "I could not – physically *could* not," Gaskell admits in one of her letters, "speak out more than a blurting sentence of abuse, tantamount to a box on the ear. [...] It is different when speaking as a character in a story – or even as the author of a book. Do you think I could say or write in a letter [...] what I have said in both MB [*Mary Barton*] and *Ruth*?" (Gaskell *Letters* 255-256). The medium of fiction and the role of novelist provided Gaskell a safe

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<sup>2</sup> Set in the northern city of Manchester, *Mary Barton* (1848) was Gaskell's first novel. It follows the working class Bartons, especially Mary and her sister the "fallen woman" Esther, and also highlights the struggles and injustices faced by the working class, especially working class women. Her second novel *Ruth* (1853) makes the "fallen woman" the central female character and confronts oppressive Victorian notions of sin and illegitimacy.

and sanctioned space to publically engage with politics, a favor she will likewise bestow upon the heroine of *North and South*.<sup>3</sup> Because of her devotion to a political agenda, Nancy Henry agrees that Gaskell is “less self-consciously artful” than many Victorian authors, including her near contemporary George Eliot (150). Rather, Gaskell wrote fiction to arouse sympathy and compassionate identification with those marginalized by Victorian society – unwed mothers in *Ruth* (1853), the indigent poor in *Mary Barton* (1848), and both factory workers and their masters in *North and South*. For her, the novel is a *topos*, a rhetorical space from which Gaskell may safely offer public critique of the broken English social system.<sup>4</sup>

Her *North and South* in particular is a novel remarkable for its political ambition and scope. In its pages, cut short in serialization by Gaskell’s professional mentor Charles Dickens, Gaskell attempts nothing less than to bring about reconciliation between working-class factory laborers and their bourgeois masters; between the genteel, rural South of England, and the cold, hard,

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<sup>3</sup> Barbarah Leah Harman notes the excessive “surprise Victorians felt when they saw a woman in a public place: to appear in public was to make a spectacle of oneself, openly to elicit notice, to create a stir” (351).

<sup>4</sup> Because of their exclusion from many aspects of public political engagement, women in the nineteenth century relied heavily on *topoi* to engage with politics. Nan Johnson notes that “the arts of rhetoric were the undisputed province of the male professional classes” (3). Carol Mattingly’s *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* argues, for example, that the temperance movement provided women entrance into public life because they were able to frame their writings and speeches in the less-threatening context of the *topos* of the home; their concern as wives and mothers lead them to speak, not their wish to invade the male-dominated public arena. Women’s romantic fiction provides a similar safety for Gaskell.

industrial North; between women and men. More remarkable still is the fact that the salve that heals the economic, regional, and social ruptures is the affections of a passionate young woman, the novel's heroine Margaret Hale. Through the character of Margaret, Gaskell proposes quite progressively, that, contrary to traditional Victorian conceptions of femininity, domestic angel and political firebrand are not mutually exclusive categories. Rather, Margaret's very femininity and the values she embodies as Gaskell's sentimental heroine better equip her to assume the role of advocate for common sympathy and affection to combat the callous, selfish lifestyle of the bourgeoisie satirized throughout the novel. It might appear that Gaskell's novelistic aims, spanning as they do the full gamut of Victorian social, political, and economic problems, are too ambitious for a single novel, even for a literary era for which brevity was not considered a virtue.

Gaskell negotiates the complexities of her monumental ambitions, however, through the novel's unique structure. As in Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, in *North and South* a sentimental love plot blossoms amid a tumultuous political drama. These two narratives are interwoven so that the development and resolution of one carries significance for the other. Gaskell goes further, however, and, as its title suggests, frames her novel around a series of conflicts between opposed forces, what I will call thematic binaries: the North and the

South; the rural and the industrial; lower class and upper class; masters and workers; men and women. Gaskell couples this binary narrative structure with the metonymic structure common to “condition of England” novels. This framing device broadens the scope of the novel to the extent that Gaskell’s characters, though well drawn and complex, serve a symbolic, nearly allegorical function. Margaret Hale, for instance, stands as representative of all women, of the South, of the traditional, hierarchical British class system. John Thornton symbolizes all men, the industrial North, and the new breed of English gentleman – the self-made tradesman. The marriage of Margaret and John, then, promises to unite more than an amorous couple. The end of the novel symbolically unites all of these opposed forces, providing hope that all conflicts can find a similarly auspicious resolution off the page as well.

Gaskell’s novel explores the points of tense intersection between these opposing forces. Both the characters and Gaskell are able to critique and revise these seemingly irreconcilable forces to identify commonalities that allow them to find harmonious reconciliation. In Milton, the culture of the North and South are brought into conflict in the interactions of Thornton and Margaret. Margaret, after spending time with Northerners from all social backgrounds, comes to have a greater respect for the north, while at the same time developing a more nuanced, realistic opinion of her beloved south. She revises her idealized view

her southern hometown as “a village in a poem – in one of Mr. Tennyson’s poems” (14). Later in the novel, she counsels Nicholas Higgins away from seeking work in the south. “[Southerners] labor on from day to day, in the great solitude of steaming fields – never speaking or lifting up their poor, bent, downcast heads. The hard spade-work robs their brain of life” (299). Though she finds the conflict between factory masters and workers to be baffling, Margaret learns to respect the vitality, activity, and innovative spirit of the North. The languid routine of southern agrarian laborers no longer seems idyllic; Margaret recognizes the danger of mental torpor in such a life. The dynamic point of intersection between opposed forces becomes a site for resolution, greater understanding, and harmony.

I argue the novel investigates the intersection of yet another important binary – the modes of satire and sentiment – both of which perform important thematic work in the novel. Critics have spilled generous amounts of ink examining the binary structure of *North and South*.<sup>5</sup> Yet scholars have failed to examine this same binary structure with regard to the generic modes at work in the novel. The strongly satiric scenes help reveal the vacuous emptiness of bourgeois English culture, especially women, who from birth have been led to believe their purpose to be merely decorative. Thus her satire targets the very

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<sup>5</sup> Other critics include Bonnie Gerard, John Pikoulis, Lynnette Felber, Jessie Reeder, and others.



audience for sentimental fiction – middle-class women with a penchant for romantic stories. If sentimental fiction's only value is in presenting fluffy romances, then as a genre it is empty, its expressions of emotion trite and ostentatious. Like Thackeray, Gaskell implies that the novel of sentiment has devolved into romantic nonsense; it is characterized by excessive emotion in service of nothing. Forcing the sentimental elements of the novel into contact with this satiric critique of bourgeois values allows Gaskell the ability to revise the conventions of sentimental fiction in order to expand the possibilities of the genre and rescue it from its shallow impotence. Margaret and John's relationship may follow a traditional sentimental trajectory, but their love is in service of something much more meaningful. Their union signals the hope that all the conflicting forces of the novel can be reconciled. Further, Gaskell expands the notion of "love," beyond the romantic love that so much sentimental fiction is devoted to. Drawing a connection between love and sympathy, *North and South* is also a love story between Margaret and the workers of Milton, and it is a platonic love story between mill owner John Thornton and rabble-rousing union man Nicholas Higgins. The satiric critiques, characterized by irony, that punctuate the narrative enables this interrogation and revision of sentimental conventions. The satiric scenes expose the vices that the sentimental scenes revise and restore. But the clash between the forces of satire and sentiment also calls the

efficacy of satire into question. Satire, while an effective tool for exposing vice does not provide a means for its correction. It needs to be softened and to serve a purpose larger than mere chastisement. At the end of the novel, then, the conflict between these two modes finds resolution. When employed in tandem, they allow for an effective and humane social critique that provides the hope and means of true amendment.

This means is represented in the novel by the union of Margaret Hale and John Thornton, both of whom are characterized by their sentimental qualities – a capacity for deep feeling, compassion, and affection for others. In her hero and heroine, Gaskell endorses sensibility as the primary virtue of both women and men. “I am a man,” Thornton declares boldly, “I claim the right of expressing my feelings” (193). She suggests that, in a newly mechanized economy, the “new” man and woman must exhibit emotional honesty and seek human connection. It is this sincere compassion that enables Margaret and Thornton to effect true change in themselves and their community – to move past their own prejudices and differences and unite their two souls, which in turn leads to large scale social change in Milton Northern, and Gaskell hopes, offers a similar possibility for the world off the page. It is compassion and disinterested love for one’s fellow man that explodes class and economic barriers, emphasizing a common humanity that encourages individuals to selflessly seek the good of others.

Though the novel ends with the sentimental convention of the promise of marriage, Gaskell subversively upends several generic expectations. The marriage of Margaret and Thornton is decidedly more egalitarian than most such unions in sentimental novels.<sup>6</sup> It is Margaret who, at the end of the novel, is financially secure, a wealthy heiress who uses her substantial means to rescue Thornton's failing textile mill.<sup>7</sup> It is Thornton, the hero, who is saved from poverty by a financially advantageous marriage. By reversing the traditional gendered power structures, then, the marriage of Margaret and Thornton is liberating, freeing them both to do good work that will positively impact the community. And, importantly, Gaskell provides an important role for women in this philanthropic social enterprise. At the same time, their union symbolizes the resolution of the various binary conflicts in the novel – the north and south, the middle class and the working class, men and women. Gaskell's inclusion of satire allows her to thoughtfully engage, critique, and revise the conventions of sentimental fiction to highlight its focus on the potential power of female

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<sup>6</sup> My argument is not primarily concerned with gender; and ultimately Gaskell probably does reinforce traditional Victorian definitions of gender roles. But if we take her as a product of her time period, we can see she is gesturing toward a world that offers more options for female engagement with public life – limited as these may be to roles characterized by stereotypical “female” traits – compassion, sympathy, etc.

<sup>7</sup> We can compare this to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, whose own surprising inheritance makes her marriage to Rochester much more egalitarian, and similarly overturns expectations for a story that begins with an impecunious governess and a wealthy bachelor. Gaskell, of course, penned a biography of Brontë and would have been familiar with the work.

emotions and sympathetic identification and downplay its romantic melodrama. For she does not intend for her social and political harmony to remain symbolic, bound to the pages of the novel. Randi Koppen notes that, like her professional mentor Charles Dickens, "Gaskell explicitly aim[s] for social reform, inviting readers to complete the text through forms of social and political action" (245). If fiction allowed Gaskell to fully express her political opinions, she certainly doesn't mean for her opinions to remain confined to the page. Gaskell aims to convince the reader that her project is achievable; it is up to the reader to prove that her faith in humanity is not misplaced.

*"The outer world is allowed [...] to cross the threshold": Gaskell's Generic Inventiveness as a Means of Reinscribing the Doctrine of Separate Spheres*

My analysis of *North and South* deviates from much of the existing criticism. Many critics consider the novel in light of the doctrine of separate spheres, an issue with which Gaskell is obviously interacting. A majority of critics approach the doctrine of separate spheres through a feminist lens alone that, while important and illuminating, often disregards the stylistic elements at work in the novel. I approach Gaskell's interaction with the doctrine of separate spheres through a structural lens, connecting it to the larger thematic, rhetorical, and structural construction of the novel. I consider the doctrine of separate spheres, which holds that the public realm of business and politics is the domain

of men, and the domestic hearth is the domain of women, to be yet another binary brought into conflict in the narrative. I believe that, aided by her use of the conventions of satire and sentiment, Gaskell exposes the absurdity of the distinction between the public and private spheres. Women, who are gifted with sympathy and tenderness have a special role in her social model. Margaret Hale insinuates herself in the political strife in Milton when she cares for workers during the strike. And she intervenes in the conflict between Thornton and the mob of rioters, urging both to treat each other with humane sympathy. The domestic sentiments, then, aid women in their participation in public life. Further, the domestic sentiments are not unique to women. The sympathy for his workers that Thornton develops over the course of the novel makes him a better master and a better businessman. The marriage of Margaret and John's equips them both to continue their good work in the public sphere.

Feminist critics of *North and South*, which make up the vast majority of scholarship on the work, largely fail to look beyond the issues of gender to Gaskell's larger social concerns. As a result these critics overlook much of what makes the novel inventive, complex, and important. Though there has been no major scholarly analysis of Gaskell's engagement with the conventions of satire and sentiment, her fiction has earned notice from several critics for its generic

inventiveness. Her short fiction in particular elicits from Shirley Foster the appellations “innovative” and “experimental” (108). Gaskell’s works

experiment with form, using multilayered and multivocal narration, mingling past and present, and exploiting a central voice which is both observer and participator. Especially notable is their generic indeterminacy [...]. By suggesting ways in which the imagination can stimulate reflection on a historical moment, using memory to capture the past and then recreating it as a new formulation, these pieces foreground the act of creativity itself (Foster 110-111).

Her penchant for weaving together multiple genres, Foster suggests, adds complexity to the narrative and highlights the creative process. There exists in Gaskell’s prose an intimate connection between the story and the storytelling. This discursive relationship is fundamental to the success of the novel’s rhetorical purpose.

Though they may have failed to adequately explore Gaskell’s complex storytelling approach, in Gaskell’s oeuvre, feminist critics have indeed found a ripe field of study, for Gaskell is a writer who wrote thoughtfully and insightfully about how the rapid changes in the Victorian economy affected communities and individuals, especially women. In his elegantly written consideration of Gaskell’s fiction, Terence Wright observes that, while Gaskell’s characters include individuals of all classes and categories, her novels take a unique interest in the individual experience and struggles of women (19). As in life, her female characters experience “suffering, pain and death in her darker

works, but it is always strong with the possibility of adaptation, rebirth, and self-discovery” (Wright 2). In *North and South*, Margaret’s adaptation and self-discovery is made possible by the opportunity the North affords her to use her feminine gifts of sympathy and deep feeling to meaningfully participate in the politics of Milton Northern, namely, the labor conflict between the city’s cotton mill owners and workers. Gaskell endows Margaret with a significant amount of agency, allowing her to transcend the confines of restrictive Victorian gender norms and take action of political import. Many critics consider this a direct challenge to the doctrine of separate spheres.

The critical controversy that governs much of the scholarship on *North and South* concerns the ways in which the novel engages with the doctrine of separate spheres, though there is debate over whether Gaskell destabilizes or endorses this doctrine. Modern critics generally agree that Gaskell’s fiction, though it may seem to promote a proto-feminist agenda, largely capitulates to the patriarchal, capitalist status quo. Koppen, for instance, states that the marriage of Margaret and Thornton is ultimately an “economic transaction, enabling the continuation of the capitalist, as much as the sympathetic, enterprise” (261). According to these scholars, Gaskell is unable to sustain and eventually abandons her progressive notions of gender roles and the agency with which she endows her heroine in favor of a more traditional view of marriage and gender, where the

social and economic power rests firmly with the man.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Jessie Reeder argues that Gaskell unconsciously undermines her own progressive agenda by emphasizing the physical and sexual threat posed to Margaret in the moments when she does participate in public action. "Gaskell's vision of Victorian womanhood is anything but agentic," Reeder insists, "her powerful protagonist achieves political ends only ambivalently and only by the deconstruction of hers and other female bodies" (2). Gaskell's novel, these critics conclude, is a failed experiment, revealing only her impotence to challenge the dominant patriarchal system of gender norms.

There are many others, however, who argue that Gaskell uses the character of Margaret to expose the illusory nature of the boundary between the private, feminine sphere of the home, and the public, masculine sphere of business and politics. For Gaskell, a Victorian wife and mother, to make this observation, these critics agree, reveals a startling insight and earns her the title of progressive proto-feminist. Indeed, Patsy Stoneman's 1978 declaration that "*North and South* anticipates [...] modern feminist theory" facilitated Gaskell's

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<sup>8</sup> Dorice Williams Elliot concurs that, though Gaskell may advocate for women's entry into public life, the domestic space is still governed by patriarchal power. "Men rule over women legally, sexually, and emotionally" (Elliot 26). Christoph Lindner concurs, arguing that each rebellious or seemingly public act by Margaret actually reinforces the capitalist, patriarchal institution it tries to shatter (393). Sarah Dredge, too, argues that for Margaret to breach the public sphere, she must rely heavily upon her perceived role of domestic angel, otherwise her entry would be barred or her reputation ruined. In this way, then, Gaskell reinforces rather than challenges these gender norms (86-88).



entry into the contemporary canon.<sup>9</sup> Susan Johnston's oft-cited *Women and Domestic Experience in Victorian Political Fiction* makes the compelling argument that *North and South's* "blurring of the distinctions between private and public space occurs [...] through the colonization of economic space by the concerns and affective relations of the household" (105). The domicile is the site of the social and emotional development of the individual, a fact that renders the domestic sphere inherently political, as Nancy Armstrong has famously pointed out. And, since the individual eventually advances into the world at large, the public sphere cannot but be shaped by domestic concerns (Johnston 104-108). Johnston suggests that Gaskell essentially shares her understanding that the boundary between the private sphere and the public is diaphanous at best. The social connections formed in the home, Gaskell implies, should ensure that individuals approach the market with compassion and sympathy. Johnston's central argument is subtle and effective. Johnson's contention, however, that Gaskell develops this idea through an examination of the physical space of the household and Margaret's "linguistic aerobics" is less convincing (129; 111). And absent, once again, is any consideration of the generic structure of the novel.

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<sup>9</sup> Critics writing as far back as John Pitkoulis in 1976 have examined *North and South* in terms of the doctrine of separate spheres. He argues that Gaskell is quite radical in her conception of gender roles. Margaret is able to enter the public realm, and tend to the needs of the factory workers, thereby having a direct affect on the strike. Her love for Mr. Thornton ends in a union where neither has to sacrifice their power – a marriage of equals. Additionally, Barbarah Leah Harman argues that Gaskell "both challenges the conventional boundaries between private and public and legitimizes public action for women" (361).

Gaskell does include detailed descriptions of physical spaces, and Margaret's developing comfort with Yorkshire dialect and idiom certainly reveals her growing connection to the North, but I believe Gaskell has a more complex and effective strategy at work.

I extend Johnson's argument by showing how Gaskell reinscribes the Victorian concept of separate spheres by employing the conventions of satire and sentiment. I agree with Johnson, who identifies this as the thematic key to resolving the many conflicting binaries in the novel. The failure of critics to explore the ways in which satire and sentiment interact in *North and South* leads to a general misunderstanding of Gaskell's attempt to reinscribe this important political and philosophical concept. Gaskell employs these modes to work in tandem; satire exposes the social ills and her sentimental plot offers a hopeful resolution for them, a resolution enabled by Gaskell's the adoption of the revised domestic sentiments into the public sphere. Both structurally and thematically, then, satire and sentiment are complementary.

Before turning to my central argument, I will briefly define the concept of separate spheres that held such resonance for the Victorians and has created such vigorous debate among scholars of nineteenth-century literature. The rapid industrialization of the nineteenth century forever transformed the economy of England (Lovell). The majority of men now pursued professions outside the

home, leaving the domestic space the domain of women and children. This led to the notion that society is split into “private” and “public” spheres, with women the governors of the home and hearth, and men, to protect the delicate feminine and moral sensibilities of their wives, the masters of all things public – politics, business, and industry (Koppen 252-253). According to John Ruskin, “man’s duty, as a member of a commonwealth, is to assist in the maintenance, in the advance, in the defense of the state. The woman’s duty, as a member of the commonwealth, is to assist in the ordering, in the comforting, and in the beautiful adornment of the state” (Ruskin 72). So conceived, the doctrine of separate spheres envisions the boundary of these domains as crystalline, clearly defining the duties of men and women as individuals, as partners in a marriage, and as citizens. The public and private spheres, then, constitute both a material and an ideological space. As an ideological concept, the doctrine was used to justify the exclusion of women from engagement with politics or finance – it was simply outside their domain and not one of their clearly prescribed duties.

As it so often does, however, reality proved exceedingly more complex, for the Victorians and for twentieth century scholars seeking to understand them. Both the doctrine of separate spheres and the boundary between the spheres themselves are far more ephemeral than they appear. Late twentieth-century scholarship on nineteenth century gender ideology has exposed the

contradictions that reveal this “doctrine” to be made of gossamer rather than crystal. Mary Poovey’s *Uneven Developments* (1988) argues this doctrine was constantly in flux, being continually defined and redefined so as to be “open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations” (3). In her seminal *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), Nancy Armstrong claims that domestic fiction engages with political issues by transforming them into domestic ones, thereby transforming the domestic space of the home into a site of political import (252-253). The work of more recent feminist critics has pushed the implications of Poovey and Armstrong’s arguments further, claiming that the boundary between the public and private spheres is entirely illusory, and that the function of both spheres rely on the domestic sentiments which are of interest to the state. Dorice Williams Elliot claims that actions that occur in the domicile “are already coded with a public meaning,” since the home is the site of so many personal interactions (24). Sarah Dredge concurs, arguing that because working men necessarily have emotional and material responsibilities in the home, and women outside the home, the concept of separate spheres is unstable. “Women’s place in the domestic realm is both confirmed and undermined in acknowledging their value in this social sphere, which suggests that the development of this field served to unsettle the demarcation of public and private that shaped middle-class gender relations” (84). The work of these

scholars is insightful and compelling. The Victorian household is an extremely dynamic site, and it cannot keep the outside world of business and politics at bay. When the home is the site of the development of the individual, Johnson argues, intimate, personal interactions carry great political significance for the commonwealth (8-9). The personal, quite literally, is political. I argue that Gaskell's fiction exhibits a keen awareness of this truth. She is progressive in her comprehension of the problems inherent in the doctrine of separate spheres. *North and South* reveals her deep dissatisfaction with this conception of social relationships. The separation of the domestic from the professional sphere contributes to the schism that affects every level of society; women and men, master and worker find themselves on opposite sides of an unbreachable barrier. To divorce domestic concerns from the public sphere gives license for the dehumanization of the professional realm and its workers, for any charity, tenderness, or mercy can be safely disregarded as existing outside its purview. By restricting these domestic virtues to the hearth, they are rendered toothless, stripped of their power to perform good work. Margaret states as much to Thornton in one of their many philosophical battles. Thornton asks,

'Do you give your servants reasons for your expenditure, or your economy in the use of your own money? We, the owners of capital, have a right to choose what we will do with it.' 'A human right,' said Margaret, very low. [...] you are a man, dealing with a set of men over whom you have, whether you reject the use of it or not, immense power; just because your lives and your welfare are so

constantly and intimately interwoven. God has made us so that we are mutually dependent. We may ignore our own dependence, or refuse to acknowledge that others depend upon us in more respects than the payment of weekly wages; but the thing must be, nevertheless' (117; 122).

In one brief statement, Margaret reveals how flimsy and illusory is the doctrine of separate spheres. When basic notions of charity are removed from the public sphere, what results is the exploitation and dehumanization of the workforce. But though masters may seek to maintain the illusion because it benefits them, Margaret suggests that they will ultimately be subject to the sentimental affections and empathy that connects all mankind. I maintain that Margaret's traditional marriage does not sacrifice the novel's project of demolishing the boundary between the public and private spheres. Instead, Gaskell posits that true romantic partnership is one where private and public affections are united, and where both parties work together, at home and in the community, for the good of their fellow man.

#### *"Indescribable Weariness": Satire in North and South*

Gaskell's rhetorical project in the novel requires that satire and sentiment be brought into contrast. In this way, she is able to critically analyze both modes, offer revisions, and posit a model that uses both to resolve the novel's other binary conflicts. Scenes of darkly humorous satire bookend *North and South*. These scenes introduce the thematic concerns of the novel and set up a

comparison against which the reader can judge the moral development of Margaret and Thornton. Her ironic critiques expose the vanity and indifference of the English middle-class.<sup>10</sup> The instances of humorous social critique hold a wider significance to match the scope of *North and South's* social project. The customary foibles of human nature— vanity, affectation, the empty luxury of the upper classes – fall victim to Gaskell's satiric critique. She blames these vices for the deep-rooted social divisions the novel explores. Mrs. Hale's distaste for northerners, for instance, registers as snobbery and vanity. "Fancy living in the middle of factories, and factory people! [...] these factory people, who on earth wears cotton that can afford linen?" (46-47). The thoughtless pretentiousness, so common to the middle-class, results in an inveterate prejudice, a blindness to her Northern neighbors specifically, and a contempt for the laboring classes in general. This callous blindness is not confined to the Hales' household, but is endemic to Margaret's entire bourgeois class, the entirety of which is implicated in Gaskell's critique.

Gaskell punctuates her narrative with satiric scenes that establish the opposing thematic binaries her sentimental plot will resolve. Some of the blame for society's blindness to the realities of suffering is laid at the feet of sentimental

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<sup>10</sup> There is a surprising lack of critical work examining the humorous elements of Gaskell's fiction. Olivia Malfair and Eileen Gillooly are two exceptions. Their work, however, focuses solely on her domestic romances. There are no book-length projects examining the satire or humor of the industrial novels.

conventions that privilege romantic love as the highest ideal to which women should aspire and encourage women to work toward nothing but making themselves objects of male desire. These satiric scenes are subtle and complex, more so than they may at first appear, for they deftly accomplish three rhetorical purposes at once – they expose vices on which Gaskell blames the strife between the laboring and leisure classes, and they critique characters which act as foils for Margaret, and they begin to revise sentimental conventions so that the focus on sincere emotion and sympathy may be directed toward more meaningful ends. In these character foils, which include Margaret's cousin Edith and Thornton's sister Fanny, Gaskell paints a portrait of a culture that views women as decorative and encourages them to remain blissfully ignorant to the state of the world outside their drawing rooms. Men, too, are implicated, for they are products of this culture and are trained to treat both women and workers as objects to be acquired for status and wealth. Structurally, the novel strikes the most pointedly satiric mode at three points in the novel: in the opening scene which takes place in a fashionable London house and introduces Margaret alongside her cousin Edith; in the Milton portion of the novel with the character of Fanny Thornton, who enjoys the Thornton's wealth and privilege but has no memory of the suffering and struggle her family endured to attain it; and in the last chapters of the novel, again with Edith, Margaret, and their posh London



companions. My analysis of Gaskell's satiric scenes will examine each of these instances in turn. Gaskell uses the traditional satiric techniques of exaggeration, ironic juxtaposition, and humor to render moments that effectively establish the parameters of the broken social system that her sentimental love story sets out to mend, thereby fulfilling the novel's rhetorical purpose.

In the opening pages of the novel, Gaskell depicts the idle luxury of London and provides Edith as a negative foil for Margaret by adopting the satiric mode. Her description of Edith is tinged with a subtle but distinctly ironic, critical edge that satirically undercuts its apparent positivity. Edith is introduced as the embodiment of English feminine perfection. Dressed in "white muslin and blue ribbons" with flaxen "curls," Edith is a striking "beauty" (7, 11). Margaret views her beauty with genuine appreciation – Edith is a perfect porcelain doll. Everything about her epitomizes middle class respectability. She is "properly in love" with handsome, young Captain Lennox, and is about to assume the role of proper English housewife, a role Edith believes will be characterized by its "picturesqueness" (9). On the surface, both the narrative voice and Margaret regard Edith with unabashed admiration. In the first chapter alone, Edith is compared to a fairy tale princess three times, to Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Titania (7, 10, 11). There lurks behind this exaggerated adulation the seeds of a

bitter satiric critique, for Gaskell suggests throughout that this particular fairy princess is preoccupied with decidedly trivial concerns.

Likening Edith to fairy tale princesses proves to be an unflattering comparison, one that underscores the triviality and moral vacancy of the middle-class women who have internalized these hackneyed romantic tales.<sup>11</sup> Like Sleeping Beauty, Edith is introduced in an entirely passive and inactive state. She lies in recumbent repose, “curled up on the sofa in the back drawing room” (7). So languorously idle and passive is she that the narrator calls her “a soft ball of muslin and ribbon, and silken curls” (7). Late in the novel, Edith is reintroduced yet again reclining on a sofa. “[Edith] languidly stroked Margaret’s cheek as she sat by her in the old attitude, – she on a footstool by the sofa where Edith lay” (364). Beautiful she may be, but Edith is consistently depicted as almost entirely passive. Gaskell’s language here renders Edith an object, reducing her to the trappings of feminine beauty without any markers of an autonomous identity. Edith’s words and actions, too, are equally passive, banal, and indolent. She ponders “the difficulty of keeping a piano in good tune (a difficulty which Edith seemed to consider as one of the most formidable that could befall her in her married life), and what gowns she should want in the visits to Scotland” (7).

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<sup>11</sup> In my following section analyzing Gaskell’s use of sentiment, I suggest that Gaskell offers subtle critiques of sentimental tropes and conventions, even while adapting many of them herself. Thackeray, I have argued, does something similar in *Vanity Fair*.

Edith is a creature of idle luxury; her only fears and anxieties concern frivolous matters. Near the end of the novel, Edith's shallowness is emphasized once again. When Margaret expresses her grief and restless dissatisfaction with life in London, Edith responds by ensuring by

'Poor child!' said Edith. 'It is a little sad for you to be left, night after night, just at this time when all the world is so gay. But we shall be having our dinner-parties soon [...]' Margaret did not feel as if the dinner-parties would be a panacea. But Edith piqued herself on her dinner-parties; 'so different,' as she said, 'from the old dowager dinners under mamma's regime'" (364).

Blind to the depth of Margaret's grief over the loss of her parents, Edith offers the prospect of parties as a cure, for little exists for Edith beyond the pursuit of her own pleasure. Even the natural demands of motherhood prove too onerous for Edith's constitution. Her son "was the pride and plaything of both father and mother, as long as he was good; but he had a strong will of his own, and as soon as he burst out into one of his stormy passions, Edith would throw herself back in despair and fatigue, and sigh out, 'Oh dear, what shall I do with him! Do, Margaret, please ring the bell for Hanley'" (395). Edith is humorously ill equipped to care for the complex needs of another person. She simply does not have the strength of character to look past her own needs and seek anything beyond her own pleasure. Indeed, the narrator goes to so far as to call Edith the "supreme authority" of all "arrangements for a pretty effect" (13). Anything more is outside of Edith's abilities.

Though each of the Edith scenes are peppered with humorous moments, Gaskell's satiric critique emerges from the stark, ironic contrast between Edith's beauty and her vacuousness, between her lovely appearance and the reality of her deficiencies of character.<sup>12</sup> This golden-haired beauty can think of nothing more serious than keeping a piano in tune and pursues activities of no greater significance than attending dinner parties. Edith is not unkind, nor is she actively thoughtless or intentionally selfish, but Gaskell, with wry humor, presents her as the product of a system that demands that women be purely decorative. The tragic irony is that Edith, passivity, banality and all, perfectly embodies the bourgeois feminine ideal. The hollowness of this ideal makes Margaret's emotional and moral development all the more striking. She is a character defined by her activity: she rejects proposals, keeps secrets, argues, debates, tends to the sick, walks alone, intercedes in a riot, scolds, consoles, mourns, and loves. But she is able to engage in this whirlwind of activity only after she is removed from the London social scene and deposited in a city that doesn't yet adhere as rigidly to the same gendered social strictures.

The text registers an anxiety that the North's attempts to legitimize industrial enterprise as a respectable bourgeois endeavor will result in a similarly

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<sup>12</sup> As I mention earlier, Griffin suggests that satire's power lies in exposing the gap between the real and the ideal. The difference between appearance and reality is a theme that runs throughout the whole of *North and South*.

vacuous social world. Gaskell does not only subject bourgeois women, the products of generations of luxury and privilege, to the sting of her satiric critique but reserves a measure of humorously biting satire for the new category of Northern working middle-class. Fanny Thornton, the sister of John Thornton, is representative of this new breed of idle female, and through her, Gaskell critiques the pretension, vanity, and entitlement of the *nouveau riche*. This affectation serves only to sever the newly wealthy from their laboring brothers and sisters, nursing in the hearts of both strife and resentment instead of charity and sympathy. Gaskell signals to the reader a link between Fanny Thornton and Edith by drawing a linguistic connection between them. Fanny, too, is introduced as languid and idle, complaining that she cannot possibly visit the Hales because “‘I am so tired. [...] – the weather, I think. It is so relaxing’” (95). Reminiscent of Edith’s anxiety about the tuning of her piano, among Fanny’s first words to Margaret is a bemoaning that the Hale’s home boasts no piano. “‘I wonder how you can exist without one. It almost seems to be a necessary of life’” (97). Fanny, then, is rendered on the same satiric register as Edith. Her wealth and status is undercut by a satiric depiction of her moral weakness. Though her family is among the most powerful in Milton, Fanny’s conversation reveals her to be ignorant as well as shallow. “‘London and the Alhambra are the two places I long to see!’ ‘London and the Alhambra!’ ‘Yes! Ever since I read the Tales of the

Alhambra. Don't you know them?" (97). Similar to her satiric comparison of Edith to fairy tale heroines, here Gaskell again employs a literary reference as a method of exposing the Fanny's shallowness and ignorance. Fanny is a ridiculous creature. She implicitly draws a connection between London and Washington Irving's 1832 series of exotic tales and sketches, *Tales of the Alhambra*, suggesting that she elides reality with popular fiction. Additionally, as it does with Edith, the reference to tales of fantasy suggests a moral vacuousness and lack of taste or discernment. Patricia Ingham notes that "the individual's reading or lack of it is to be decoded as character revealing" (432). Fanny's ignorance, though certainly ridiculous, is indicative of a deeper character flaw: she is shallow and spoiled. Because she was spared the hardship and penury her mother and brother faced, she remained underdeveloped, morally and emotionally. Vanity is not a problem unique to the South but occurs wherever women are encouraged to be merely idle and decorative instead of given the opportunity develop self-awareness and compassion by recognizing and experiencing the suffering of others.

During the riot at Marlborough Mills, for instance, Fanny hides in panic, oblivious to the suffering and hardship that prompted the laborers' display of force. "Fanny had returned, screaming upstairs as if pursued at every step, and had thrown herself in hysterical sobbing on the sofa" (172). The exaggerated

emotions provide a broadly humorously satirical moment in an otherwise tense dramatic scene. Fanny's hysterics are contrasted with Margaret's strength, compassion, and bravery as she boldly confronts the striking laborers and protects Thornton. This sudden and stark contrast informs Gaskell's satiric critic. Though from different regions and backgrounds, Gaskell draws a connection between Fanny Thornton and Edith Lennox, both women represent the inactive, socially torpid feminine ideal. Gaskell places the blame for this not on the women themselves, but on the society that produced them and restricted their social function to being merely decorative. Gaskell's satiric portrayal of Fanny serves as a unique warning; she reveals a danger inherent in newly gained financial security – the desire for respectability often encourages individuals to distance themselves from the lower classes and from their past. A willful ignorance to the suffering of the laboring class, Gaskell suggests, is the cost of doing business.

Perhaps the most harshly revealing moment of satiric contrast occurs upon Margaret's return to London near the end of the novel. After her eventful sojourn in Milton, characterized by her participation in the momentous political affairs of the city, Margaret returns to London and paradoxically finds the cosmopolitan hub suspended in inactivity. Gaskell depicts London as a façade, a beautiful exterior that lacks any substance. Anything ugly, or painful, or real has

been pushed aside in favor of the decorative and the fashionable. With great economy, Gaskell bitterly encapsulates the vapidness of London society in the novel's most harshly satiric passage:

The elements of the dinner-parties which Mrs. Lennox gave, were these: her friends contributed the beauty, Captain Lennox the easy knowledge of subjects of the day; and Mr. Henry Lennox and the sprinkling of rising men who were received as his friends, brought the wit, the cleverness, [and] the keen and extensive knowledge [...]. Every talent, every feeling, every acquirement; nay, even every tendency toward virtue, was used up as materials for fireworks; the hidden, sacred fire, exhausted itself in sparkle and crackle. [...] They lashed themselves up into an enthusiasm about high subjects in company, and never thought about them when they were alone; they squandered their capabilities of appreciation into a mere flow of appropriate words (397).

Here again, Gaskell's satire functions by offering a sharp juxtaposition between a pleasing appearance and reality; the contrast between the two reveals a harsh truth. The first half of the passage describes Edith's dinner parties as exciting gatherings of the beautiful, the privileged, and the brilliant – the standard bearers of English cultural power. The latter portion of the passage sharply undercuts the former by implying that this power, brilliance, and beauty is employed in service of nothing but vanity and smug self-satisfaction. These "rising" men gathered around Edith's table have "knowledge" and the capacity for "virtue" (397). Yet these men exercise these gifts in a shallow social performance of wit. What matters is not true enthusiasm, true virtue, but the appearance of it. Behind the social performance is nothing but the same idleness



and languor that plague Fanny and Edith, certainly no true concern for their fellow men. Any evidence of suffering, in fact, is carefully and effectively concealed. After Milton, Margaret is disconcerted by the absence of the lower classes. "There might be toilers and moilers there in London, but she never saw them; the very servants lived in an underground world of heir own, of which she knew neither the hopes nor the fears; they only seemed to start into existence when some want or whim of their master and mistress needed them" (364). The working classes are a distasteful necessity that should be hidden when possible and have no place in a society devoted to ornament and fashion.

Ultimately, Gaskell's satire exposes and ridicules the ramifications of the division of domestic affections and public interests. Thus women, prohibited from active engagement in social issues, are denied any productive pursuit to which to devote their energies. Mere frivolities, like the intricacies of piano tuning, then, become matters of supreme importance. And men, who are praised for braving the heartless, ruthless world of the free market, become calloused to the needs of those excluded by the capitalist system. In this way, social issues become fodder for erudite dinner-party conversation and can be dismissed from the mind as easily as the servants who poured the brandy. Gaskell's biting social satire is all the more effective because of its restraint. It interjects that narrative only at certain, strategic moments, its ironic comparison stands in stark contrast

to the sentimentality that governs much of the novel. Their placement at the beginning, middle, and end of the novel ensures Gaskell's rhetorical agenda is established early. Her satiric scenes paint a picture that will be challenged by the Milton sections of the novel. It is in the stark contrast between the two modes, however, that Gaskell's novel fulfills its rhetorical purpose. Gaskell's use of satire offers a potent critique of the dangerous outcomes of the capitalist enterprise; her use of sentimental conventions provides an ambitious, optimistic endorsement of the power of human affection, romantic and communal, to overcome the inhumanity of industrialization.

*"To one whom I love": Sentiment in North and South*

To prove the continued viability of the sentimental mode of fiction as a way of encouraging social harmony, Gaskell first subtly critiques some of the mode's more trite emotional and romantic excesses. *North and South* begins where a typical sentimental novel ends: with a proposal of marriage from a respectable, eligible bachelor. Walking among the beauty of a Southern summer afternoon, Margaret Hale receives an offer of marriage from Henry Lennox, a successful barrister and a member of her aunt's fashionable London social circle. "'Margaret,' said he, taking her by surprise, and getting sudden possession of her hand [...] 'I have been hoping [...] to find you regretting London [...] – enough to make you listen more kindly [...] to one who has not much to offer, it is true –

nothing but prospects in the future – but who does love you, Margaret, almost in spite of himself” (30). The exaggerated perfection of the scenery, the familiar romantic rhetoric, and the demeanor of Lennox himself all mark the scene as one a reader of sentimental novels has encountered many times. It is only the structural placement that renders the scene discordant. The declaration of love strikes Margaret, and the reader, as hollow – as lovely words expertly performed, rather than the expression of sincere emotion.

He, not many minutes after he had met with a rejection of what ought to have been the deepest, holiest proposal of his life, could speak as if briefs, success, and all its superficial consequences of a good house, clever and agreeable society, were the sole avowed objects of his desires. Oh dear! how she could have loved him if he had but been different, with a difference which she felt, on reflection, to be one that went low – deep down (33).

Lennox’s superficiality and artifice align him with the subjects of Gaskell’s satire. He too is self-centeredly devoted to frivolities and vanity. Margaret’s refusal sets her apart from other sentimental heroines, and signals to the reader that this story, though concerned with affairs of the heart, will be unique. Margaret feels disdain not just for the man – for Henry Lennox and the acquisitive, superficial lifestyle he represents – but also for the romantic trajectory she is expected to follow, a trajectory encouraged by many sentimental domestic novels. A major endeavor in the novel is for Margaret, and Gaskell, to discover a broader, deeper purpose in the trappings of romance. Gaskell finds a greater narrative power in

sentimental conventions in two ways: in sentimental fiction's ability to evoke pity and compassion for those less fortunate, which breeds the unity and solidarity, and mutual respect missing from the capitalist enterprise; and in its depiction of an edifying, ennobling romantic love that makes marriage much more than a means to financial security or a requisite narrative plot point. Over the course of the narrative, both Margaret and John will cultivate true sentimental affections that lead them to form strong bonds with workers and with each other, thereby equipping each other to do the good work of healing the rifts brought about by industrialization.

Gaskell works to employ sentimental conventions to expand the notions of love beyond the romantic. For a novel dominated by a traditional romantic love story, Gaskell expends a considerable amount of ink developing another love story, that between Margaret and the workers of Milton. The sentimental virtues of sympathy and compassion develop in Margaret a deep empathy and respect for the working class. Though Margaret is right to reject Henry Lennox's offer of a life of hollow bourgeois respectability, Margaret's sentimental education is far from complete. In the early part of the novel, Margaret is decidedly selfish and holds fast to a haughty prejudice against the laboring classes. Early on, she expresses her aversion to "shoppy people" (20). And when her father announces his intention to become a tutor to industrial workers in the

North Margaret scoffs, "A private tutor! [...] What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman!" (40). Like many Victorian sentimental heroines before her, Margaret's education will come through the experience of suffering. Margaret's time in Milton is characterized by "sorrow," "discord," loneliness, and disillusionment (44, 217). But Gaskell again shifts this formulaic convention, instead allowing Margaret's suffering and loneliness to be less central to her sentimental education than her witnessing of the suffering of others. Witnessing first-hand the economic hardships of Nicholas Higgins, Bessy Higgins, and the desperate worker Boucher makes Margaret less self-focused, even as she faces great suffering of her own – the silent betrayal of her father, and the slow wasting illness of her mother. Though her suffering situates her firmly in the tradition of sentimental heroines, Gaskell uses Margaret's suffering to sharpen her feelings and refine her emotions in a way that makes her better able to serve others in a charitable capacity.

Thus, Margaret's sentimental trajectory, which leads her from a bourgeois complacency and entitlement to a deeper, more complex respect and concern for mankind, is nurtured and sustained by the development of her affections – for the working class individuals she befriends, and the factory owner she comes to love. Her first encounter with Nicholas and Bessie Higgins, the rough union

leader and his tender, but coarse daughter, sees Margaret attempt to bestow charity that the northerners interpret as patronizing and insulting.

At Helstone it would have been an understood thing, after the inquiries she had made, that she intended to come and call upon any poor neighbor whose name and habitation she had asked for. [...] [Margaret] suddenly felt rather shy of offering the visit, without having any reason to give for her wish to make it [...]. It seemed all at once to take the shape of an impertinence on her part; she read this meaning too in the man's eyes. 'I'm none so fond of having strange folk in my house,' [...] 'yo' may come if yo' like'" (74).

The inherent pride and blunt honesty of Higgins and Bessie reveal the inadequacy of Margaret's standard philanthropic measures. Her good intentions ring hollow, and these interesting workers demand to be treated as more than needy indigents. The importance of this meeting between Margaret, Nicholas, and Bessie lies not in the paltry offer of charity, but in the opportunity for true human connection, a connection that can transcend the cultural and economic gap that exists between them. "'Yo' see,'" Nicholas says, "'North and South has both met and made kind o' friends in this big smoky place'" (73). Margaret will learn to love Nicholas and Bessie, to respect their strength and honesty, and she will ultimately allow this connection to show her a means to take meaningful action. So, while Fanny Thornton may complain that Milton is a "dirty, smoky place," but for Margaret, Milton becomes a "brighter place" to Margaret, because in it "she had found a human interest" (98, 75).

This human interest forms the basis of Margaret's strong critique of the industrial capitalist enterprise and governs many of her actions in the narrative. Many of the refreshingly substantive conversations between Margaret and Thornton involve the duties Thornton, master of a cotton mill, owes his workers. Thornton allows the laissez-faire philosophy to extend to the treatment of his employees, believing his only duty to his workers to be in keeping the mill running efficiently and profitably, thereby ensuring his workers' continued wages. "Why, if I were a workman," avers Thornton, "I should be twenty times more impressed by the knowledge that my master was honest, punctual, quick, resolute in all his doings, [...] than by any amount of interference however kindly meant, with my ways of going on out of work-hours" (123). Thornton advocates a strong, dictatorial command his workers that exists only to the boundaries of the factory. Margaret finds in this odd combination of authoritarian control and neglectful indifference the roots of class strife and suffering between masters and men. "I see two classes dependent on each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interest of the other as opposed to their own; I never lived in a place before where there were two sets of people always running each other down" (118). Her solution to the strife and discord seemingly inherent in the industrial system, is a respect born of

sympathy and compassion, and an awareness of the obligations men owe to each other as fellow human beings – Gaskell’s prized sentimental virtues.

You are a man, dealing with a set of men over whom you have, whether you reject the use of it or not, immense power; just because your lives and your welfare are so constantly and immediately interwoven. God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent. We may ignore our own dependence, or refuse to acknowledge that others depend upon us in more respects than the payment of weekly wages; but the thing must be, nevertheless (122).

On a pragmatic level, the sentimental virtues of sympathy and compassion are utilitarian. Margaret encourages Thornton to recognize the relationship between masters and workers as a symbiotic connection; strife between the two groups is counterproductive to the ambitions, aims, and well-being of both.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the relationship between master and worker mirrors the marital relationship between men and women; strife is mutually detrimental. But this mutual dependence far transcends economic or practical concerns. Margaret considers sympathy a “religious” obligation, suggesting that the relationship between individuals is a distinctly spiritual one (118).

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting here that, though Gaskell finds much to criticize in the effects that industrialization has on human relationships, she is positively disposed to the endeavor as a whole. With almost an artistic appreciation, Thornton praises the industrial enterprise as a conception of much “grandeur” that has produced “marvels” (82, 81). Mr. Hale, too, sees life in the factory town of Milton as one of unprecedented “energy,” whose men are defined by their “power” (70). This is a noticeable contrast to the physical and emotional weakness of Mr. Hale himself.



For Margaret, and I believe, for Gaskell, there exists in sympathy and compassion the power to ameliorate the inequity that exists between men due to birth and circumstance. Nicholas and Bessie Higgins believe the economic disparity they experience exists even on a spiritual level, and many of their conversations with Margaret concern the nature of God and question how a loving God could dispense blessing and favor so disproportionately. Bessie, dying from lung disease caused by her work in the mills, struggles, “‘And if I think, if this should be th’ end of all, and if all I’ve been born for is just to work by heart and my life away [...] – I think if this life is th’ end, and that there’s no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes’” (101-102). Though the character of Bessie is one of Gaskell’s least subtle creations, this passage is compelling in its uniquely Victorian iteration of the traditional problem of suffering. How could a loving God, wonders Bessie, force some individuals to live lives of poverty, sickness, and waste? Nicholas has similar theological doubts. “‘I reckon,’” he tells Margaret, “‘yo’d not ha’ much belief in yo’ if yo’ lived here, - if yo’d been bred here. [...] I sees these people. [...] They don’t believe i’ the Bible, - not they. They may say they do for form’s sake; but Lord, sir, d’ye think their first cry i’ th’ morning is, ‘What shall I do to get hold on eternal life?’ or ‘What shall I do to fill my purse this blessed day?’” (222-223). Those blessed with wealth, Nicholas suggests, are the least devout, and the forms and rituals of religion have little to

offer laboring men who have known only struggle. The gulf that separates the bourgeoisie from industrial laborers creates a similar rift between men and God. Though Margaret's assurances are in line with Victorian theology, they feel weak and insufficient. "'Surely,'" Margaret insists, "'you believe in what I said, that God gave her life, and ordered what kind of life it was to be?'" (91). Truisms about Christ's providence fall on deaf ears when the listeners have never tasted the fruits of God's bounty. Though Gaskell remains distinctly orthodox in her worldview, she bravely confronts these difficult, unanswerable questions.<sup>14</sup>

When words fail, as they so often do, Gaskell offers the sentimental virtues of love, compassion, and sympathy, Gaskell insists, as the means to bridge these seemingly insuperable chasms between master and worker, and man and God. Soon after Bessie's death, Margaret, Mr. Hale, and Nicholas Higgins meet to discuss Higgins's future. After mourning together, Mr. Hale makes an unusual offer. "'Stay!' said Mr. Hale, hurrying to the bookshelves, 'Mr. Higgins! I'm sure you'll join us in family prayer?' Higgins looked at Margaret, doubtfully. Her grave sweet eyes met his; there was no compulsion, only deep interest in them. He did not speak, but he kept his place. Margaret the Churchwoman, her father

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<sup>14</sup> These scenes, although often lacking subtlety, nevertheless feel quite authentic. One reason for this is Gaskell's own background. Gaskell was the wife of a Unitarian minister in Manchester, the Northern industrial town that is the obvious source for Milton. Her position as minister's wife gave her unique access to all classes, high and low, in Manchester, and gave her the experience to render the people and their struggles realistically (Stoneman).

the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm” (230).

The development of Margaret’s compassionate affection for others and the many sentimental threads in the novel find full expression in the relationship of Margaret and John. The union of this man and woman holds the promise of uniting North and South, master and worker. Margaret and John’s story does follow a typical sentimental course. Despite an initial attraction, deep-rooted prejudices and misunderstandings keep the two apart. Once these misunderstandings are resolved and the prejudices revised, Margaret and John are able to confess their love, and the novel ends with the promise of their marriage. The story may indeed be a familiar one, but the sentimental conventions governing the love plot are given greater depth and more lasting significance because they are linked to the larger social issues in the novel. Once again, Gaskell employs but revises sentimental conventions; the typical ends of sentimental love stories – romance, marriage, economic security – are replaced with far nobler goals – communion, *caritas*, and sympathy for all.

Our heroine’s early dislike of the hero is a common trope in sentimental romances. Where would we be if Darcy had not insulted Elizabeth Bennett at the Meryton ball? But Margaret’s initial bad opinion of John is indicative of the large cultural shifts experienced by nineteenth-century England. Because of his birth,

background, and profession, Margaret considers John, “not quite a gentleman” (65). That word, “gentleman,” holds great significance in the novel. Margaret defines that term in the traditional way – a man of means and leisure, well-educated and well-bred. Thornton, the self-made tradesman, the rough manufacturer who crawled his way out of penury with his wits and hard work, does not fit this description. Even after several intellectually stimulating debates with Thornton, Margaret refuses to grant him the respect that accompanies the appellation of “gentleman.” ““He is the first specimen of a manufacturer – of a person engaged in trade – that I had ever the opportunity of studying, papa” (165). During Thornton’s disastrously unsuccessful first proposal of marriage, yet another common sentimental trope, Margaret employs the word as a weapon, an arrow meant to wound and insult. ““I do feel offended; and, I think, justly. You seem to fancy that my conduct yesterday [...] was a personal act between you and me; [...] instead of perceiving, as a gentleman would – yes! a gentleman [...] that any woman would come forward”” (193). Gaskell endows both sentimental conventions, initial dislike and a failed proposal, with deeper thematic resonance. Margaret resists, doggedly and perhaps cruelly, the changes in the English middle class brought about by the rise of the industrial economy. Though Thornton and his ilk possess the necessary wealth to earn them

recognition by the bourgeoisie, the fact that their wealth comes from trade keeps them at a distance.

So, more than a mere narrative motif, Margaret's aversion to Thornton's class, which has already been demonstrated in her early prejudice towards Higgins and Bessie, has its origin in a social prejudice that embodies the conflict between classes. The relationship between Margaret and John, then, takes on a larger, more universal significance. Just as Margaret and John's conflict has symbolic import, so too will their burgeoning affection. Margaret and John's romantic compatibility is exemplified by their sensibility; they both possess a considerable capacity for deep feeling. This connection between them serves the narrative function of intimating to the reader that this couple's campaign of misunderstanding and resentment might find a happy resolution. It also proves that Margaret and John possess the tools necessary to transcend the conflicts that surround them and enact meaningful social change. In Thornton, Gaskell offers a revision of the ideal British gentleman and sentimental hero. After their first introduction, Margaret can't help but describe Thornton as extremely expressive; he possesses a startling "'expression of resolution and power, [...] sagacious, and strong'" (65). That confident power is indicative of an openness of spirit. Thornton is an emotional man, and he values those feelings for the guidance they provide him. Plainly put, Thornton is a thoroughly modern man of sensibility, a

shrewd self-made tradesman with a tender heart. Fully cognizant of the depth of his feelings, he refuses to apologize for professing his love to Margaret, even when she refuses to return it. “One word more,” Thornton demands after Margaret brutally rebuffs his declaration of love, “You look as if you thought it tainted you to be loved by me. You cannot avoid it. Nay, I, if I would, cannot cleanse you from it. But I would not, if I could. I have never loved any woman before: my life has been too busy, my thoughts too much absorbed with other things. Now I love, and will love” (194). Here, Thornton exhibits a remarkable self-awareness. Despite the rejection and humiliation he receives, Thornton follows his emotions. This obstinate adherence to his own feelings earns him the reputation of a stern, but utterly fair employer. With grudging respect, Nicholas Higgins admits, “let John Thornton get hold on a notion, and he’ll stick o it like a bulldog; yo’ might pull him away wi’ a pitchfork ere he’d leave go. [He’s] honest up and down. Thornton’s as dour as a door-nail; an obstinate chap, every inch on him” (135). Thornton, with his emotional awareness and his savvy head helps Gaskell redefine that all-important term “gentleman.” Thornton himself muses on the significance of the word.

“I am not quite the person to decide on another’s gentlemanliness, Miss Hale. [...] I take it that ‘gentleman’ is a term that only describes a person in his relation to others; but when we speak of him as ‘a man,’ we consider him not merely with regard to his fellow-men, but in relation to himself, - to life, - to time - to eternity. [...] I am rather weary of this word ‘gentlemanly,’ which

seems to me to be often inappropriately used, and often, too with such exaggerated distortion of meaning, while the full simplicity of the noun 'man,' and the adjective 'manly' are unacknowledged" (163).

Thornton's masculine identity derives from his self-respect and self-understanding, not from his wealth or family background. His confidence, hard-earned respect, and professional skill are what earn him a place in the English elite. This, of course, is a massive departure from a man like Henry Lennox, defined by his detachment and social status. Recall, Margaret refused Lennox's offer of marriage because he spoke as if "success, and all its superficial consequences [...] were the sole avowed objects of his desires" (33). Her nature revolts against the emotional reserve and avaricious tendencies of Lennox's class. It is Thornton, of course, who turns out to be Margaret's, and Gaskell's ideal man. And, defined herself by a capacity for deep feeling, Margaret matches Thornton's passionate, emotional nature.

Margaret is no less passionate than Thornton, though she is less in command of her own emotions. It is Margaret's emotional nature that distinguishes her as our sentimental heroine, and she is defined by the same frankness as Thornton. Margaret differs noticeably from the practiced femininity of Edith, bearing instead a "smile which had not a tinge of shyness or self-consciousness in it" (12). Lennox deduces more artfulness in Margaret's openness than is there, observing, "a regular London girl would understand"

that her actions offered an invitation. Gaskell is careful to insist, of course, that Margaret is assuredly not a “regular London girl.” In truth, Margaret is a woman defined by her depth of feeling, though she is less attuned than Thornton to the workings of her own heart. If Thornton’s task in the novel is to cultivate a greater compassion for the workers in his mill, Margaret’s is to cultivate a fuller understanding of her own deep-feeling heart. Margaret feels things deeply: her father’s crisis of faith, her mother’s illness, the loneliness of her early days in Milton. Margaret, however, rarely gives voice to these feelings; the weakness of her parents leads her to assume the role of caretaker, always giving comfort rather than demanding it for herself. She has the gift of compassion – she feels deep sympathy and empathy for the pain of others. When she tells her mother of Mr. Hale’s decision to resign his position in the Church of England, “Margaret sat down by her mother, and took her unresisting head on her breast, bending her own soft cheeks down caressingly to touch her face” (45). Margaret dispenses sympathy and tender compassion despite her own “sorrow” (44). She gives similar motherly care to Bessie Higgins, visiting often and caring for the dying girl. “Margaret held her in her arms, and put the weary head to rest upon her bosom. She lifted the thin soft hair from off the temples, and bathed them with water” (92). Margaret’s tender heart grants her insight into the needs of the Higginses and those around her, and her strength and natural confidence grants



her the initiative to translate her sympathy into action. These traits, though typical of female protagonists in sentimental novels, also align her with Thornton. United by romantic love, Gaskell suggests, Thornton and Margaret can combine their sympathetic hearts and their powerful intellects to make a meaningful impact on the society of Milton.

Perhaps the most central component of Gaskell's rhetorical purpose in *North and South* is the notion that sympathy and compassion for humankind is not merely an intellectual exercise. These emotions, tender and true though they may be, are useless if they are not acted upon in a tangible, measurable way.

*"What strong feeling had overtaken her at last?" The Resolution of Satire and Sentiment*

Gaskell employs the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment to highlight the inhumanity endemic to both the capitalist enterprise and the callous entitlement of the bourgeoisie and to encourage her readers to rediscover humankind's natural, spiritual connection and responsibility to one another. Gaskell offers the sentimental conventions in a way that expand the possibilities of romantic love. Romantic love is not an end in itself, Gaskell suggests, but a tool that heightens one's sympathetic insight and equips individuals to take action in a way that may heal and forge anew the bonds that exist between all women and men. Gaskell achieves this in *North and South* by making the love between Margaret and Thornton the inspiration for both to take public, politically charged action to

put this radical social philosophy into practice. The most representative example of this is Margaret's intervention at the Marlborough Mills riot. This is the scene that has drawn the most critical comment. Modern feminist critics have found much to dislike in the passage that sees Margaret sustain an injury both to her body and her reputation when she steps in between Thornton and the angry mob of striking workers. Rather than serve as an instance where Margaret defies traditional gender roles and powerfully asserts her agency, critics like Reeder lament that Margaret's display of sexual preference results in humiliation and violence. Indeed, Gaskell's "vision of Victorian womanhood", Harman concludes, "is anything but agentic – her powerful protagonist achieves political ends only ambivalently and only by the deconstruction of hers and other female bodies. [...] at the center of the labor struggle [...] is a pile of broken female bodies" (2;4). If we are willing to more closely examine the scene, however, I believe that we will see a striking enactment of Gaskell's rhetorical objective.

Seeing that an angry mob of striking workers has gathered at Thornton's mill to protest Thornton's decision to import labor from Ireland to undermine the strike, Margaret rushes to his aid. She addresses both Thornton and the crowd.

"Oh, do not use violence!" she begs the mob,

'He is one man and you are many. [...] Go! Go peaceably. Go away. You shall have relief for your complaints, whatever they are.' [...] And instantly the storm broke. The hootings rose and filled the air. [...] Another moment and Mr. Thornton might be smitten down, -

he whom she had urged and goaded to come to this perilous place. She only thought how she could save him. She threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond. [...] A sharp pebble flew by her, grazing forehead and cheek, and drawing a blinding sheet of light before her eyes (176-177).

In this remarkable passage, Margaret is guided by her love for Thornton and her sympathy for the starving workers. These powerful emotions for the man she loves and the people she cares for, which for Margaret are not predetermined enemies, leads her to act as intercessor for both. She knows firsthand of the suffering faced by the strikers. She entreats Thornton to deal with them according the philosophy she has espoused all along. ““Can you do nothing to soothe these poor creatures? It is awful to see them. [...] Speak to your workers as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly”” (175). Thornton does indeed face them, but not humanely, as Margaret suggests. Instead, towering over them, he insists upon asserting his power, a physical and economic menace. Though Margaret’s intervention doesn’t immediately soothe the large, enraged mob, her actions are still notable. Her decision embodies the values Gaskell’s novel advocates. Her sympathies give her the authority to engage the political conflict. Her position as woman (and outsider from the North) grants her the objectivity to deal with both parties fairly and compassionately. And her action at the riot ultimately breaks the riot and the strike. The sight of Margaret’s “pale and upturned face, with closed eyes, still and sad as marble” stirs sympathy even

in the angriest of rioters (178). Her injury gives a human face to the cost of such an angry conflict. Neither side can deny the humanity of the other. When they are struck with sympathy for their fellow human being, their folly and hatred for one another cannot persist.

Reeder is correct to point out that the riot scene concerns gendered power structures, but I believe the feminine holds more sway than Reeder implies. Margaret cleverly manipulates the gendered expectations of respectable Victorian women. She uses her tenderness and emotions, concepts closely associated with the domestic, feminine realm, and sues for their application to the public, masculine realm of business. Indeed, her position as concerned woman gives her the liberty to engage in Milton's very public political conflict. Her notions about connection and sympathy of all men lead her to champion the causes of both masters and men. Barbara Leah Harman argues that underneath Gaskell's seemingly progressive agenda, she subtly reinforces existing repressive notions of gender (357). Emotions remain the province of the domestic, while cutthroat economic ambition remains the concern of the masculine, public sphere. But this conclusion denies what the majority of the novel evidences. The sentimental virtues of compassion, affection, and sympathy are not restricted to any gender or sphere of life, but rather they are the primary virtues which should guide the actions of all men and women. Tying these traits to either

gender is insufficient; they are not feminine or masculine virtues, but human ones.

Thornton, under the influence of his deep love for Margaret, alters the way he runs his mill, to the mutual benefit of both master and worker. One of the most satisfying relationships in the novel is the, grudging at first, friendship between Thornton the mill owner and Higgins the union leader. As she does throughout the novel, Margaret is the intermediary between these two passionate, but honorable men, encouraging them to set aside their differences and learn to respect one another. After the strike and riot lead Boucher, a worker, to commit suicide, Higgins nobly takes on the burden of caring for Boucher's six orphaned children. But as the figurehead of the worker's movement, employment becomes exceedingly difficult to come by. Margaret, with faith in Thornton's fairness, encourages Higgins to seek work at Marlborough Mills. Margaret sees, as Higgins and Thornton do not, that the two men share many of the same virtues. "'There's granite in all these northern people, papa, is there not? [...] If he and Mr. Thornton would speak out together as man to man – if Higgins would forget that Mr. Thornton was a master [...] and if Mr. Thornton would be patient enough to listen to him with his human heart, not with his master's ears--'" (302). Thornton's inherent sensibility, his capacity to feel deeply for others, allows him to transcend his former prejudice regarding the rabble

rousing Higgins. He is able to truly see “the nature of [Higgins’s] character, the tenor of his life. [...] And then the conviction went in, as if by some spell, and touched the latent tenderness of his heart [...] and made him forget entirely the mere reasonings of justice, and overlap them by a diviner instinct” (318).

Thornton and Higgins prove that Gaskell’s social theories survive more than mere philosophizing; they are practicable, if undertaken with an open, feeling heart.

Together, Higgins and Thornton develop a scheme that, though humble, holds the promise that master and worker can work together to revolutionize the structure of industrial mills to the benefit of both parties. Thornton and Higgins develop a plan to construct a working on-site kitchen that will serve healthy, hearty meals to the workers. The scheme is a great success, with Thornton leaving much of the decisions to the men, giving them the freedom to enact the plan with pride and care. The kitchen becomes a symbolic site of connection between the two sides. ““One day,”” Thornton narrates, ““two or three men – my friend Higgins among them – asked me if I would not come in and take a snack. [...] I saw that the men would be hurt if, after making the advance, I didn’t meet them half-way, so I went in, and I never made a better dinner in my life. [...] I am really getting to know some of [the men] now, and they talk pretty freely before me’” (353-354). When both sides are able to treat each other as distinct, human

individuals, both sides work for each other's benefit. Though they represent the conflicting sides – Thornton the stern master, and Higgins the rebellious worker – both men are intelligent, ambitious, and ultimately kind. At Margaret's encouragement, and out of their unabashed affection for her, Thornton and Higgins prove what can be accomplished when Gaskell's philosophies are enacted; masters and men can indeed resolve their difficulties. As such, these men provide a model for the reader of a practicable way of accomplishing Gaskell's ambitious rhetorical aim.

Like the growing friendship between Thornton and Higgins, most of the novel's unions and reunions bear symbolic significance which resolve *North and South's* central binary conflicts. Higgins and Thornton prove that masters and men can develop respect and empathy that can lead to radical changes in the industrial system. Bessie and Nicholas Higgins help Margaret revise her prejudice for "shoppy" people and come to see the "grand makings of a man" inherent in the Northern character (301). But it is the romantic union of John and Margaret that provides the greatest fulfillment of the novel's concerns. In their love lies the hope that North and South can resolve their differences, that Old World bourgeoisie and modern, self-made man can exist in harmony and respect, and that man and woman can unite in an equitable marriage that equips each to perform good, community building work. Gaskell is careful to delay

Margaret and John's inevitable union until their power roles have reversed. At the end of the novel Margaret is a financially independent heiress and Thornton is a bankrupt master with few prospects. Astonishingly it is the woman who is in the position of economic power; it is Margaret who will rescue Thornton from penury and offer him the means to reopen his business. In this way, Gaskell allows Margaret and John to unite on perfectly equal footing. They come together as equals, united by love, affection, and a desire to do good in the world. Rooted in their common sensibility, their capacity for sympathy and tenderness, Margaret and John embody the hope that Gaskell's rhetorical purpose can be achieved.

Gaskell successfully resolves her complicated narrative scheme; by novel's end all binaries are resolved. Important among them is the resolution of satire and sentiment. It is satire that exposes the weaknesses of the sentimental, and it is satire that enables Gaskell to revise sentimental conventions. As such, it is a tool that is a powerful aid to the fiction of sensibility. It helps restrain sentimentality's excesses. At the same time, the presence of sentimental emotion ensures that the satiric critique will be amended. The resolution of these seemingly contradictory literary modes is the essence of Gaskell's rhetorical purpose in the novel. Deftly punctuating her novel with scenes of satire, she leads her reader to an awareness of the central conflicts of the novel. These satiric



scenes smoothly couple with the sentimental elements of the novel, which offer a workable, humane solution to the inhumanity criticized by the satire. Together they speak to the reader, offering a love story that satisfies even the most melodramatic of literary tastes. But Gaskell's love story works on a much deeper, more significant level, offering affection, sympathy, compassion, tenderness – the traditional sentimental virtues – as tools that work outside the realm of domestic romances. These sentimental virtues alone have the power to counter inhumanity, heal wounds, and allow master, worker, men, and women to reforge broken bonds.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### “A Dark Looking Case”: Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*

One major thread connecting the authors in this dissertation is the duty each felt toward their readership to encourage virtue and discourage vice. For these writers this duty necessitates the careful cultivation of a unique relationship with the reader. Charles Dickens certainly shares this awareness of the author’s moral responsibility. Yet, even more than Thackeray, Trollope, or Gaskell, Charles Dickens was perhaps most concerned about his reader’s perception of *him*. Part of this, no doubt, is attributable to the fact that Dickens immensely enjoyed his celebrity and was notoriously solicitous of it, freely admitting that “you write to be read, of course” (Sucksmith 15).<sup>1</sup> After prompting by his friend Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, Dickens famously capitulated to the inclinations of his readership by revising the original, unhappy ending of *Great Expectations* (1861) to one that saw the hopeful reunion of Pip and Estella (Lewis 5). Concessions like these led Thackeray, his closest literary rival, to bestow upon him the unflattering epithet, “Mr. Popular Sentiment”

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis 1

(Lewis/Ford 3).<sup>2</sup> Yet Dickens believed that it was his very popularity that afforded him the greatest opportunity to make a lasting contribution to English society. In an 1853 letter to William Macready, Dickens explains, “the more we see of life and its brevity, [...] the more we know that no exercise of our abilities in any art, but the addressing of it to the great ocean of humanity in which we are drops, and not to bye-ponds (very stagnant) here and there, ever can or will lay the foundations of an enduring respect” (Paroissien 350). In a later correspondence to Rev. David Macrae, Dickens declares his literary mission is “unostentatiously to lead the reader up to those teachings of our great Master” (Storey 9.556). And in the Preface to *Dombey and Son* (1848), he assures his reader directly that he shares the reader’s sympathy in “every stage of the journey” (DS xlix). Though these statements contain a certain bravado (and one might legitimately question whether Dickens’s work is indeed free from ostentation), they demonstrate Dickens’s desire for his fiction to connect him to his fellow man so that he may, as Linda Lewis suggests, metaphorically join hands with them and lead them to a great moral truth (4). J. Hillis Miller concurs, stating, “it is clear [...] that Dickens intended and hoped [his fiction] would not just describe or represent, but that it would be performatively efficacious, that it would be a way of doing something good with written words” (22). Always conspicuously

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<sup>2</sup> Literary journals snubbed his fiction as sentimental “twaddle”. George Eliot and G.H. Lewes similarly found his work lacking in intellectual heft (Ford 78; Davis 12).

conscious that the rewards of literary fame await the happy conclusion of his great task, Dickens nonetheless conceives of his role as moral guide and beloved friend who must both reveal difficult truths and experience the narrative in sympathy with his reader.

In this chapter I argue that in his 1852 novel *Bleak House*, Dickens balances his complex authorial roles of moral pedagogue, spinner of entertaining yarns, champion of social justice, and sympathetic friend by employing the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as the central feature of his narrative aesthetic. *Bleak House*, considered to be among his finest novels, sees Dickens adopt a unique dual-narrative structure, which allows him to vary widely in tone and mode without threatening the aesthetic unity of the novel. Two distinct narrative voices – a particularly critical, but otherwise typical omniscient Dickensian narrator, and the first person narration of the novel's central female character, Esther Summerson – share the task of illuminating a labyrinthine plot governed by a series of increasingly interconnected mysteries. Although many critics have found fault with the execution of Dickens's narrative scheme, I believe those flaws are mitigated when taken as an essential element of his larger rhetorical strategy. Utilizing the conventions of satire and sentiment, Dickens crafts his two narrators as nearly perfect tonal and modal inverses of one another. The omniscient narrator is an overtly satiric, bitter presence, presenting a darkly

funny, but unflinchingly stark look at the innate inhumanity of England's social and political institutions. Esther's narrative more closely adheres to the conventions of sentimental fiction, privileging compassion, sympathy, and community as the highest virtues to which an individual can aspire. Each narrator's excesses are occasionally, but significantly, tempered by adopting the primary tactic of the other. Amid the omniscient narrator's satiric indictments of the inhumanity of the wealthy is an unabashed outpouring of sympathy for the indigent poor. And behind Esther's frank, sincere, and unceasingly generous descriptions of the individuals she encounters creeps in a blatant satiric critique of false piety and disordered philanthropy. Thus, the omniscient narrator serves as a *guide* of sorts, forcing the reader to follow him on a dark journey through London's neglected and abused; Esther is Dickens's feminine ideal, a *model* for the reader – an orphan who feels deeply for all those around her and, in her own small way, endeavors to right the injustices she encounters.

The polyphonic narration affords Dickens the ability to adopt the conventions of satire and sentiment in service of his larger rhetorical purpose. The thematic and narrative structure of *Bleak House* impresses upon its reader the interconnectedness of all men, which underlies our charitable obligation to act toward all with mercy and compassion. To make this moral truth profound and lasting, Dickens must engage both his reader's intellect and emotions, incite both

outrage and sympathy, and make the injustices described in the novel palpable and real. Additionally, he emphasizes mankind's fundamental connection to one another by literally connecting his narrative voices in both tone and content. The omniscient narrator, whose narrative scope is larger and more universal, and Esther, who relates only her own experiences, slowly find themselves entangled in the same mysteries.

Indeed, though Dickens employs the conventions of satire and sentiment throughout *Bleak House*, these modes exist alongside the novel's larger governing genre – that of mystery. The narrative conventions of mystery stories allow Dickens to weave a complex fabric composed of narrative and thematic threads that make great demands on its reader. I find a unique parallel in *Bleak House* between Dickens's use of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment and his use of the tropes and themes of detection and revelation. *Bleak House* is a novel of secrets and mysteries punctuated by moments of startling revelation. The mysteries of the history and parentage of Esther, Lady Dedlock's connection to the law-writer, the identity of Mr. Tulkinghorn's murderer, and the search for a valid will that would resolve the interminable Jarndyce and Jarndyce Chancery case govern the complicated plot of the novel. As the story unfolds and small revelations are made, little by little the reader begins to see that all of the mysteries are intimately connected. At the same time, the dual narrative threads

slowly merge; Esther's story and the narrator's overlap. So, too, do the novel's major thematic concerns, for revelation is an element as crucial to the modes of satire and sentiment as it is to the genre of mystery stories. Factual truth – the solution to the Tulkinghorn whodunit, the identity of Esther's parents, the resolution of Jarndyce and Jarndyce – and moral truth are equally obscured, hidden behind lies and secrets and corruption. It is the reader's task to play detective and work alongside the narrators to uncover both.

*"A quiet, dear, good creature": Esther Summerson's Satiric Sentimentality*

Though Dickens's ultimate rhetorical agenda is itself never mysterious, the way he crafts his narrative is. In *Bleak House*, Dickens creates two distinct narrative voices, Esther Summerson and a separate, omniscient narrator, that together provide a moral lens through which the reader may approach and interpret the work. Dickens blurs the distinctions between the narrative voices, however, by employing the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment; he introduces a measure of the primary generic mode of one narrator into the narrative of the other. Thus, Esther's traditional sentimental narrative contains elements of the omniscient narrator's strident satire. Likewise, amid the harsh satiric critiques of the narrator exists an outpouring of sentimental sympathy and compassion. In this way, the narrator and Esther function as modal inverses of one another. This diversity in narrative technique adds nuance and intrigue to the reader's task, for

she must play detective and solve more than one mystery. Just as the reader must hunt the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn alongside Inspector Bucket, so must she work alongside Dickens to navigate between generic modes and bring to light the few instances where true goodness flourishes amid a grimy, indifferent world.

Esther Summerson's first-person narration provides for the reader a model of true goodness; her narrative rhetoric serves as a paradigm of sympathy and kindness for the reader to emulate. In a novel where virtue untainted by vice or poor judgment is rarely found, Esther functions as the novel's sentimental heroine – a figure of unalloyed goodness, embodying the virtues of sympathy, sincerity, charity, faithfulness, and humility. Surprisingly, though, these virtues have failed somewhat to endear her to either critics or readers. Indeed, the characterization of Esther elicits the loudest complaints from critics about Dickens's otherwise masterful novel. I suggest, however, these critics do not consider Esther's larger function in the narrative, for fulfilling the role of moral norm is not her sole duty. Dickens employs Esther, sentimental heroine though she may be, as a vehicle for much of the novel's most effective satiric critiques. The satire in Esther's narrative, however, is obscured beneath the more conspicuous sentimental elements. The satiric critiques emerge not from Esther's narrative commentary, which remains charitable almost to a fault, but in her



frank, honest depictions of specific events. The reader must take up the mantle of detective and work to read behind Esther's seemingly faithful representation of characters and situations to discover the darkly humorous critique of false piety and "telescopic philanthropy" (Dickens *Bleak House* 48).<sup>3</sup> The inclusion of the conventions of satire both mitigates the excessive sentimentality of the remainder of Esther's narrative and underscores the need for Dickens's reader to act with Esther's characteristic sympathy and compassion.

It is to *Bleak House's* great credit that the novel can sustain such harsh criticism from critics and still be regarded as one of Dickens's most powerful and energetic works. For critics have indeed subjected *Bleak House* to intense scrutiny for its unique, dual narrative structure. Esther Summerson – the meek first person narrator – has been the target of the most severe analysis, whom even Charlotte Brontë dismissed as "weak and twaddling" (Frazee 227).<sup>4</sup> For generations, critics have echoed Brontë's assessment, finding Esther's narrative voice to be "particularly cloying" (Frazee 232). Indeed, critiques of Esther make up a significant portion of *Bleak House* criticism since its publication. Robert

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<sup>3</sup> Hereafter cited as BH

<sup>4</sup> Some critics have come to Esther's rescue by offering counterarguments. Alex Zwerdling suggests Esther's cloying nature is intentional and serves to highlight the narrow upbringing of lower middle-class women. Her narrative, therefore, traces her development into a more self-possessed woman (395). J. Hillis Miller argues boldly that Dickens's depiction of Esther is tinged with a "subtle irony" that emerges when read alongside the more caustic omniscient narrator (222).

Donovan labels her as “unsympathetic and unreal” (41). Dickens’s depictions of female characters have perennially been considered one of his greatest aesthetic weaknesses, and several of Dickens’s heroines have earned similar critiques for their broad characterization and irritating moral perfection; *A Tale of Two Cities*’s Lucie Manette is a notable example.<sup>5</sup> Esther’s role as first-person narrator, however, highlights these unflattering qualities, since her moral virtue and persistent sweetness are depicted through her own words and not those of a more objective narrator. Since the only description of Esther’s goodness comes from Esther alone, her virtue tends to appear self-righteous and falsely humble.<sup>6</sup> The following passage serves as a representative example of how the first-person, confessional quality of Esther’s narrative can come across as grating:

I don’t know how it is, I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think of myself as little as possible, and I am sure, when I find myself coming into the story again, I am really vexed and say, ‘Dear, dear, you tiresome little creature, I wish you wouldn’t!’ but it is all of no use. I hope any one who may read what I write, will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I really have something to do with them, and can’t be kept out (BH 120).

In this passage, Dickens himself seems aware that the role of narrator doesn’t lend itself to the type of humility and self-effacement he wants for Esther. One

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<sup>5</sup> Sternlieb 101

<sup>6</sup> Although contemporaries pointed out the same critiques, the figure

gets the sense that Dickens includes this passage to ward off impending criticism. However, it is just this habit of drawing attention to, then humbly dismissing the compliments of others and her minimizing of her own suffering which Maura Spiegel suggests “points to Esther’s false and exaggerated modesty and to Dickens’s poor moralizing” (7). Donovan agrees, stating that her “modest disclaimers ring false,” adding that Esther is “hopelessly sentimental and out of date” (41). Gordon Hirsch identifies a similar falsity that lingers throughout Esther’s narrative, claiming “her ‘mode’ is the repression<sup>7</sup> of active curiosity, desire, and hostility” (140). Leonard Deen offers perhaps the most damning critique of Esther when he argues that her narrative is a “sentimental and obviously inadequate solution to the serious moral and social problems Dickens raises” (238). These critics imply that Dickens’s decision to grant Esther the task of relating her own story is a structural and aesthetic weakness. The overly simplistic moralizing of the novel’s overly virtuous heroine dulls the sharpness and power of the social satire that binds together the rest of the novel.

What is absent from most critiques of Esther is an acknowledgement that the sentimental register of her narrative is not merely saccharine for its own sake, but constitutes one of Dickens’s major generic and aesthetic choices in the novel.

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<sup>7</sup> The word ‘repression,’ of course, echoes of Freud, and indeed Hirsch is only one of many critics who subject Esther to a Freudian analysis, especially concerning her relationship with her mother. Sara Jaffe is another notable example of a critic who uses Freud’s model to explain Esther’s narrative reticence.

Esther's narrative participates very clearly in the tradition of sentimental fiction, and Esther herself serves as a traditional sentimental heroine. Robert Donovan's reference to the hopeless sentimentality of Esther's story is purely pejorative, and he fails to use the term as a jumping off point to a deeper analysis (41). Yet Esther does indeed embody the traits of a typical sentimental heroine; her background and narrative trajectory, her defining character traits, and her role as the novel's moral norm all distinguish her as a Dickens's sentimental heroine and the moral center of the novel. Esther's background, her tender emotions, and romantic travails constitute a large portion of the narrative. Esther Summerson is introduced to the reader a motherless orphan who was nurtured under the neglect and cruelty of her puritanical godmother. All she knows of her birth mother is that "[she], Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers" (BH 32). Despite this early suffering, Esther is uncommonly kind and mild, possessed with a great capacity for deep feeling. "I am not clever," she immediately confesses to the reader, "I have not by any means a quick understanding. When I love a person very tenderly indeed, it seems to brighten. But even that may be my vanity" (BH 30). Her naturally sympathetic nature grants her both a surprisingly keen insight into human nature and an innate likability; everyone who meets Esther is drawn instantly to her. As a senior student at her boarding school she was much beloved. "Whenever a new pupil came who was a little

downcast and unhappy, she was so sure – indeed I don't know why – to make a friend of me, that all new-comers were confided to my care. They said I was gentle; but I am sure *they* were" (BH 39). These passages again demonstrate the self-effacement that seems to have tried the patience of learned readers for generations; but of greater concern is the fact that Esther's sad past, her humility, sweetness, and the tender compassion which lends insight into her fellow man are traits she shares with many paradigmatic heroines of sentimental fiction. Dickens himself highlights this fact in his working notes to *Bleak House*. He writes that he creates Esther's story in order to dwell "on the romantic side of familiar things" that might be absent were the story presented by the omniscient narrator alone (Stone 186). From the earliest drafts, Dickens planned to structure Esther's narrative along the common sentimental trajectory. "Esther's love," Dickens reminds himself in the margins of the manuscript, "must be kept in view, to make the coming trial the greater and the victory the more meritorious" (Stone 225). In *Bleak House*, Esther must choose between a platonic love for John Jarndyce and a romantic love for Dr. Woodcourt, for whom she considers herself an inadequate partner. Esther conquers these feelings of inadequacy and, in keeping with the conventions of sentimental fiction, her reward primarily takes the form of the promise of romantic love. Esther's story is one of goodness under siege, cruelty overcome, and virtue rewarded.

Dickens selects the sentimental mode, complete with its requisite angelic heroine, in order to provide a model of virtue for the reader. Esther, as sentimental heroine, provides a moral standard of goodness and compassion lacking in the rest of the novel. Like many sentimental protagonists that precede her, her promise of romantic fulfillment is only realized after Esther's perseverance through suffering, disease, and hardship proves her to be the novel's moral standard and exemplar for the reader. In this way, Esther herself functions as a rhetorical tool, epitomizing the sentimental virtues Dickens wishes to cultivate in his reader. Though the inhabitants of Bleak House all demonstrate varying degrees of virtue, Esther surpasses them all. John Jarndyce, though possessed of great generosity and compassion, proves at times to be an ill judge of character, indulging the parasitic naïveté of the odious Harold Skimpole. And despite her innate sweetness and innocence, Ada Clare is too caught up in the selfishness of young love (with the genial but misguided and imprudent Richard Carstone) to fully devote herself to her fellow man. It is Esther alone who embodies the compassion, philanthropy, mercy, and wisdom that confirm her role as Dickens's moral ideal. These characteristic sentimental virtues that Esther typifies are the very traits Dickens takes pains to instill in his reader.

Esther embodies unalloyed goodness; she epitomizes a sweetness, sympathy, and selfless benevolence not complicated by temptation or fault.

Esther is endowed with “good nature,” the intrinsic and undeniable predisposition for goodness that was an essential feature of the principle characters of sentimental fiction. This capacity for sympathy manifests itself in her actions; Esther provides compassionate aid that is offered entirely free from condemnation and judgment. She recounts the impoverished, nearly mad Miss Flite’s poor attempts at gentility with true tenderness. “There were neither coals nor ashes in the grate,” Esther recounts, “and I saw no articles of clothing anywhere, nor any kind of food. Upon a shelf in an open cupboard were a plate or two, a cup or two, and so forth; but all dry and empty. There was a more affecting meaning in her pinched appearance, I thought as I looked round, than I had understood before” (67). Esther surveys Miss Flite’s lodgings and instantly understands the miserable truth of her scanty, penurious existence. Her insight begets compassion rather than judgment or revulsion. And Esther’s compassion has a measurable and lasting impact on many who cross her path. Her gentle nature and kindness inspires Caddy Jellyby to work toward her own betterment and to lessen her resentment for her mother. Esther’s attentions proved to have a “softening” effect on Caddy (189). Caddy’s efforts to grow began with Esther’s ““coming to our house. [...] I felt I was so awkward that I made up my mind to be improved in that respect, at all events” (190). She encounters them all, from the awkward romantic advances of the legal clerk Guppy, to the ominous

inaneities of Miss Flite, to the angry outbursts of Caddy Jellyby, with a kindheartedness that is entirely free from moral judgment or criticism. Richard and Ada may share Esther's sympathies, but they lack her keen ability to immediately prompt trust and perform small service that creates a distinct connection with these individuals.

A benevolent influence and a compassionate spirit aren't the only ways Esther's innate goodness manifests itself. Her selfless generosity is not merely theoretical. Her sensibility – her capacity for deep, sympathetic feeling – leads her to take large, measurable action to care for others, often in ways that risk her own wellbeing. When the homeless, orphaned crossing sweep Jo, a character employed often by Dickens to highlight the indifference and neglect with which British social institutions treat the poor, appears at Jarndyce's London house riddled with fever, Esther and her little maid Charley nurse him back to health, against the protestations of Mr. Skimpole to "turn him out" (BH 415). When Charley contracts Jo's fever, Esther nurses her, too, taking up a constant vigil by her bedside. "And thus poor Charley sickened and grew worse," Ada recounts, "and fell into heavy danger of death, and lay severely ill for many a long round of day and night. So patient she was, so uncomplaining, and inspired by such a gentle fortitude, that very often as I sat by Charley, holding her head in my arms – repose would come to her, so, when it would come to her in no other attitude –



I silently prayed to our Father in heaven that I might not forget the lesson which this little sister taught me" (419-420). Though Esther endeavors to emphasize Charley's grace amidst suffering, her parenthetical aside serves to inform the reader that Esther herself nursed the child in her arms with no thought to her own peril. Esther, of course, does not escape the danger; upon Charley's recovery she falls ill and herself faces a "heavy danger of death" (419). While contracting smallpox may not be the most appealing fruit of her virtue, the reader is encouraged to copy Esther's sympathy and lack of self-regard, which ultimately is handsomely rewarded with a handsome doctor.

Thus far, Esther's narrative presents few generic surprises or innovations. Her narrative conforms neatly to the conventions of sentimental fiction; her narrative aesthetic is infused with the traits of sympathy, compassion, and humility; her narrative follows a trajectory governed by sacrifice, suffering, and love – both platonic and romantic. Indeed, in hands less skilled than Dickens's, Esther's portion of the story might become too cloyingly sentimental to endure. The scenes mentioned above – that tell of Esther nursing poverty-stricken orphans back to health, only to herself contract smallpox and endure her own disfiguring illness with humble grace – sound unforgivably maudlin, their rhetorical power compromised by a hackneyed presentation. But Dickens is too fine a stylist and a moralist to let Esther's sentimentality hold complete sway

over the tone of her narrative. Dickens obviously intends Esther to be a figure of unadulterated virtue that provides a model of sympathy and compassion for his reader; he finds sentimentality a useful mode for creating an affecting portrait of true suffering and the fruits of true goodness. The melodrama associated with the sentimental mode, John Frazee suggest, grants Dickens the ability to “dramatiz[e] the victims of society’s neglect” (229). But Dickens complicates and blurs the tidy generic borders around Esther’s narrative by infusing it with shades of another tone, a strong satiric critique of failures of supposedly compassionate social institutions.

Despite its overt sentimentality, Esther Summerson’s narrative contains some of the most deliciously wicked satirical material in *Bleak House*. Introducing such bitterly satiric content might seem to undermine, weaken, or work against Dickens’s rhetorical strategy for the Esther-directed portions of the novel. However, far from working at cross purposes, the satirical elements enrich and complicate Esther’s narrative, providing a more nuanced and troubled vision of the world than Esther’s own cheerful outlook permits. At the same time, the satiric critique of false piety and “telescopic philanthropy” exposes the need for the same values championed by Esther by painting a world lacking sympathy, compassion, and charity in England’s social, philanthropic, and religious institutions. In addition, the veiled nature of these satiric elements – which are

present but subsumed beneath Esther's dogged insistence upon thinking and speaking charitably of everyone – adds subtlety to Esther's otherwise rather straightforward narrative, demanding that the reader interpret from Esther's narrative more than she herself intends. In this way, the reader's task is not unlike that of the reader of mystery stories. The revelation of truth is delayed, and thus much more powerful.

As Gaskell does in *North and South*, Charles Dickens introduces elements of the satiric mode into Esther's narrative in a way that exposes the distance between the real and the ideal, between the way things are and the way they should be. Like many of Dickens's young protagonists, Esther spends much of her narrative encountering a motley assortment of Dickensian eccentrics and grotesques. Similar to the titular characters in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *Oliver Twist* (1839), and *David Copperfield* (1850), Esther often acts as sympathetic observer to Dickens's outlandish secondary characters. In *Bleak House*, many of these secondary characters are satiric parodies that expose the failure of social and religious institutions to effectively and humanely address true suffering. The satiric tone of these scenes is altered, though, when filtered through Esther's sympathetic first person narration, which is defined by her predisposition to think well of everyone. The bitter irony that exists in depicting the harm and inhumanity perpetrated by these supposed champions of philanthropy remains,

but it is cloaked behind Esther's conciliatory narrative rhetoric. Rather than dilute the potency of the satiric critique, Esther's narrative style strengthens its impact because it places the reality of the moral vacancy of these institutions alongside a sincere depiction of the sincere, sacrificial love for mankind embodied by Esther, Dickens's moral ideal. By weaving the conventions of satire and sentiment together, Dickens creates scenes of greater subtlety; the reader must piece together a satiric agenda that exists beyond Esther's words.

The famous sequence detailing Esther and Ada's visit to the brickmaker's hovel with the severe Mrs. Pardiggle offers a paradigmatic example of how Dickens's satiric critique functions in Esther's narrative. At Mr. Jarndyce's encouragement, Esther and Ada accompany Mrs. Pardiggle, a self-proclaimed soldier for the Christian cause, and her brood of sons as they peddle their particularly ruthless brand of evangelicalism to the poor. With Mrs. Pardiggle, Dickens satirizes sins endemic in a particular type of religious proselytizing and false piety that, along with Mrs. Jellyby's devotion to "Africa," falls under the heading of "telescopic philanthropy," a phrase Dickens settled upon early in his working notes (Stone 207). Telescopic philanthropy suggests a narrow, neglectful vision, and indeed a blindness to the needs and experiences of others is Mrs. Pardiggle's governing flaw. Take, for instance, the scene where Mrs. Pardiggle introduces her troupe of five awful sons to Esther and Ada:

‘These, young ladies,’ said Mrs. Pardiggle, with great volubility, after the first salutations, ‘are my five boys. [...] my youngest (five), has voluntarily enrolled himself in the Infant Bonds of Joy, and is pledged never, through life, to use tobacco in any form.’ We had never seen such dissatisfied children. It was not merely that they were weazened and shriveled – though they were certainly that too – but they looked absolutely ferocious with discontent. [...] ‘They attend Matins with me (very prettily done), at half-past six o’clock in the morning all the year round, including of course the depth of winter,’ said Mrs. Pardiggle rapidly, ‘and they are with me during the revolving duties of the day. I am a School lady, I am a Visiting lady, I am a Reading lady, I am a Distributing lady; I am on the local Linen Box Committee, and many general Committees; and my canvassing alone is very extensive – perhaps no one’s more so. But they are my companions everywhere (110-111).

Mrs. Pardiggle is a prodigiously monomaniacal figure. Her focus is singular; she prides herself on her tireless participation in many charitable and religious causes but neglects entirely the human subjects at their heart. Her language affirms that Mrs. Pardiggle constructs an identity around her philanthropic avocations; she lists her organizations as a succession of “be” verbs. “I am,” she declares, “a School lady, I am a Visiting lady, I am a Reading lady,” and so on. This betrays a startling self-focus in Mrs. Pardiggle’s endeavors. Success, to Mrs. Pardiggle, is defined by busyness, by constant movement and involvement with organizations that earn her praise. She is a whirlwind – blunt, loud, and lacking in delicacy of any kind, the veritable bull in the china shop. Her unceasing haste and indiscriminate charity results in a callous blindness to the actual individuals that surround her, including her own sour, miserable, and apathetic children.

The satiric critique relies on a tacit relationship between the reader and the implied author.<sup>8</sup> With (uncharacteristic) economy, Dickens sketches a nearly perfect, humorous satiric critique of disordered philanthropy. But though the words are ostensibly all Esther's, the satire seems to emerge somehow unbeknownst to her. Her descriptions are frank and sincere, and, though it is clear Esther does not approve of Mrs. Pardiggle's style of philanthropy, her words are not at all intended to function in a satirical register; they remain decidedly innocent and sincere. But it is the very impartiality of her words – her faithful relation of scenes and dialogue – that provides the tools for readers to ferret out the underlying satiric target. To put it another way, by conscientiously recording Mrs. Pardiggle's dialogue, Esther gives Mrs. Pardiggle just enough rope to hang herself. Esther, therefore, is not an unreliable narrator in the traditional sense: she is not deliberately deceptive like Dostoyevsky's Underground Man, nor is she self-deluded, like Nabokov's Humbert Humbert. But the satire present works similarly, by exploiting the distance between the narrator and the implied author, a distance Booth categorizes as "irony" (30). The reader must read behind Esther's goodness to see the critique intended by the implied author, by *Bleak House's* Dickens. Narrative theorist William Riggan

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<sup>8</sup> Recall from Chapter Two that Wayne Booth's seminal *The Rhetoric of Fiction* draws a distinction between the author (the living, breathing individual who writes the book) and the implied author (the individual whose attitudes shape the book) (16-23).

claims that a narrator like Esther, which he labels the “naïf,” produces the following effects in the reader:

(1) [T]he creation of a union between the implied author and reader in the admiration of [the narrator’s] strength of character; (2) a concomitant reinforcement or even augmentation of the positive nature of that character, and (3) a second union of implied author and reader in rejecting the tenets of a [corrupt] society (157).

The first-person narrative gives a fuller picture of people and events than the humble, benevolent Esther perhaps intends. But Riggan suggests that though the satiric critique occurs in spite of Esther’s goodness, it also serves to reinforce Esther’s goodness. For just as the satire relies on the distance between the implied author and Esther, the satire highlights the distance between the ugly, corrupt world we glimpse alongside the implied author, and the pure-hearted virtue of our narrator/heroine.

The subtle, satiric critique present in Esther’s narrative is strengthened by the moments of unabashed sentimentality. As they attend to Mrs. Pardiggle sharing her not-so-good news to a poor, coarse brickmaker and his wife, they witness the death of the couple’s infant child. In the passage that follows, the subtle satire is sharply juxtaposed with moments of true sympathy.

Mrs. Pardiggle [...] pulled out a good book, as if it were a constable’s staff, and took the whole family into custody. I mean into religious custody, of course; but she really did it, as if she were an inexorable moral Policeman carrying them all off to a station house. [...] We felt painfully sensible that between us and these people there was an iron barrier, which could not be removed by

our new friend. [...] Ada, whose gentle heart was moved by [the baby's] appearance, bent down to touch its little face. As she did so, I saw what happened and drew her back. The child died. [...] Presently I took the light burden from her lap; did what I could to make the baby's rest the prettier and gentler; laid it on a shelf, and covered it with my own handkerchief. We tried to comfort the mother, and we whispered to her what Our Savior said of children (BH 117-118).

Here the acutely sentimental is joined with the subtly satiric. Though Esther herself draws the humorous comparison between Mrs. Pardiggle with her "good book" and a constable with his "staff," she walks her criticism back, and she consistently refers to Mrs. Pardiggle as her "new friend" who is "incapable of fatigue" in her evangelical missions (BH 113). As before, the reader must fill in the gaps between Esther's words and Dickens's bitterly satiric portrait of a merciless evangelical proselytizer. Mrs. Pardiggle wields her faith like a weapon, seeking to beat the wicked into submission. Her "mechanical" technique of ministering to the poor is inhumane; it denies the personhood of her subjects, dispensing only indiscriminate punishment for the "moral crimes" around her (BH 117).

In the presence of the understated satiric critique, Esther's sentimental sympathy actually makes the satire more effective, since the targets of satire are juxtaposed sharply with Esther's simple, humane goodness. In the same scene, Dickens provides both a clear portrait of the failure of charitable institutions and offers the means by which this failure can be mended. Esther fulfills the role of



Dickens's moral ideal by offering simple, tender acts of kindness. Esther and Ada share Jenny's, the mother's, sorrow at the loss of a child, proving that they see the brickmaker and his wife as more than an evangelical project. In contrast to Mrs. Pardiggle's excessive "volubility," Esther and Ada "whispe[r]" words of comfort to Jenny (BH 110, 114, 118). Their demeanor is gentle and tender. Mrs. Pardiggle knocks over a chair in her bluster, but Ada and Esther gently and soothingly touch Jenny and the baby (BH 113). Esther and Ada provide neither tidy explanations nor empty comfort, for there is none to be had. What they offer is the sympathy of one human to another, and this itself is a powerful antidote to the poisonous charit peddled by the likes of Mrs. Pardiggle. Dickens acknowledges the wide experiential gulf that stands between the poor and their bourgeois benefactors. Rather than advocating simple solutions or another charitable organization, Dickens offers this simple sympathy as the answer. Esther had previously admitted her doubts about her own qualifications for Mrs. Pardiggle's evangelical project, admitting, "I was inexperienced in the art of adapting my mind to minds very differently situated, and addressing them from suitable points of view," but endeavors to "be as useful as I could, and to render what kind services I could, to those immediately about me; and to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself" (BH 113). Though the satiric critique and sentimental endorsement exist together, the veiled nature of the

satiric critique forces the reader to employ particular analytical tools to identify it and place it within Dickens's larger rhetorical scheme.

Let us briefly consider how satire and sentiment subtly work toward the same rhetorical end in Esther's narrative by looking at the other instance of "telescopic philanthropy," the scene introducing Mrs. Jellyby. Though this scene contains more broad humor than the scenes involving Mrs. Pardiggle, the character of Mrs. Jellyby allows for a similar interaction of sentimental elements with a more subtle satiric critique. Esther, Ada, and Richard Carstone spend their first night together in London at the home of Mrs. Jellyby, a noted philanthropist. The lawyer Mr. Kenge lauds her as "a lady of very remarkable strength of character who devotes herself entirely to the public" (BH 48). Esther soon discovers the reality of what that all-encompassing devotion entails. Mrs. Jellyby's house is in a state of constant chaos and disarray, and her children are "the dirtiest little unfortunates" Esther has ever encountered (BH 49). Mrs. Jellyby exhibits a blindness similar to Mrs. Pardiggle's: she, too, is monomaniacal. Mrs. Jellyby's singular focus is her Africa project. Even her physical appearance registers her obsession; Esther notes she has a "curious habit of seeming to look a long way off" (BH 50). The people and concerns nearest her are not cause for Mrs. Jellyby's concern, even when her young son Peepy humorously finds himself wedged between the bars of an iron gate. As with Mrs.

Pardiggle, Mrs. Jellyby derives satisfaction solely from her charitable pursuits.

“‘It is gratifying,’ said Mrs. Jellyby. ‘[Africa] involves the devotion of all my energies, such as they are; but that is nothing, so that it succeeds’ (BH 51). While her family lives in squalor and her husband sits in misery, Mrs. Jellyby holds self-congratulatory discussions “of which the subject seemed to be – if I understood it – the Brotherhood of Humanity; and [she] gave utterance to some beautiful sentiments” (BH 55).

These moments are rendered with irony and humor, much of which, despite the fact that the words are her own, is lost on Esther. Again, the reader must actively interpret the satiric critique that lies behind Esther’s descriptions. Though Esther obviously finds Mrs. Jellyby’s household appalling, she is unaware of the acerbic satiric thread that weaves its way through her own faithful narration. Mrs. Jellyby, like Mrs. Pardiggle, is guilty of disordered philanthropy. All of her time and effort is spent for the benefit of a country whose remoteness makes it feel arbitrary and empty compared to the obvious suffering and deprivation that exist in her own home. Meanwhile, those individuals that should be her priority feel the sting of her neglect. Her eldest daughter Caddy, forced to serve as Mrs. Jellyby’s amanuensis, ruefully laments, “I wish Africa were dead” (BH 58). Though Esther’s treatment of Mrs. Jellyby gives her the (unearned) benefit of the doubt, the reader understands that Mrs.

Jellyby's particular blindness is symptomatic of the greater failure of England's social and philanthropic institutions.

Once again, the satire present here is made more emotionally and thematically affecting by its immediate contrast with Dickens's moral ideal. Throughout the scenes at Mrs. Jellyby's house are several well-placed references to Esther's goodness that reaffirm her place as sentimental heroine and provide a solution to the problem of "telescopic philanthropy" epitomized by Mrs. Jellyby (BH 48). Caddy Jellyby, Mrs. Jellyby's longsuffering eldest daughter, forms an instant attachment to Esther (an occupational hazard of being Dickens's feminine ideal). Caddy sees in Esther the traits her own mother lacks. "'You used to teach girls,' she said, 'If you could only have taught me, I could have learnt from you! I am so very miserable, and I like you so much!'" (BH 59). Caddy unconsciously understands that Esther possesses the sentimental virtues that make her someone to be emulated. To a poor, neglected girl Esther would make an ideal surrogate mother. That Caddy can express this while her own mother toils for Africa downstairs makes for a more effective satiric critique.

Ada, too, senses that Esther possesses the feminine, domestic virtues Mrs. Jellyby lacks. "'You would make a home out of even this house.' My simple darling! She was quite unconscious that she only praised herself, and that it was in the goodness of her own heart that she made so much of me" (BH 55). Here, of

course, is another prime example of Esther's cloying sentimentality that has rung false to generations of readers; Esther is quite the faithful recorder of praises of her own goodness. But her obtrusive sweetness is mitigated when it serves as a contrast to the blatant, inhumane neglect that the reader has just witnessed.

Were the unashamedly sentimental the only mode at play in Esther's narrative, perhaps she would earn the scorn of readers and critics. But Dickens's inclusion of the conventions of satire, some of the harshest and most effective in the novel, complicates the notion that Esther's narrative is too tidy, sentimental, and cloying. Instead, Esther's narrative relies on the subtle irony that exists between her words and the norms of the implied narrator. The reader must read actively and exercise their detective skills in order to identify the targets of Dickens's social critique, to put them in conversation with the virtues espoused by Esther's sentimental tale, and to place them alongside Dickens's larger rhetorical concerns in *Bleak House*. I believe this makes the Esther portions of the novel as rhetorically effective and as narratively sophisticated as anything in the novel. Dickens maintains but inverts this dual-modal narrative strategy in the omniscient narrator's portions of the novel. The Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment still dominates the aesthetic of the text, just in different proportions. We step away from the sentimental into a narrative characterized by a harshly satiric tone. This alteration in tone, I maintain, is no less demanding of the reader than

Esther's narrative. The reader must still gather the generic pieces scattered throughout and use their detective skills to combine them in a way that illuminates the rhetorical project of the novel. This time, however, instead of providing a model for us to emulate, Dickens gives the reader a guide to lead them through the darker, more troubling sectors of London.

*'My Lords and Ladies': Dickens's Sentimental Satire*

Analyses of *Bleak House*'s narrative structure largely focus on the figure of Esther; she presents the greatest aesthetic obstacle for critics to overcome. But Esther's narrative does not exist alone; her narrative must be read as complementary to the novel's other governing narrator, the third-person, omniscient narrative voice. Readers must consider how the narrators work together, how their techniques differ, and how both contribute to Dickens's larger rhetorical purpose. The omniscient narrator is the tonal and modal inverse of Esther. He expands the narrative, bringing to the particulars of Esther's experience a wider, more universal perspective.<sup>9</sup> Esther's narrative is retrospective; fixed and settled, it takes place after the major events of the novel have occurred. The third-person narrator speaks in the present tense, adding an

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<sup>9</sup> Critics like Lisa Sternlieb have argued that the third-person narrator, characterized by his assertive voice, is decidedly male, which adds another level of distance between his narration and Esther's.

immediacy and indeterminacy to the novel's labyrinthine mysteries. John Frazee claims that this universalizing of the narrative is essential to the success of Dickens's rhetorical purpose. "By bifurcating the narrative, by breaking apart what is essentially a single story, Dickens avoids what would be a fatal centrality of focus and, in addition, provides himself with a framework that allows him to extend the significance of this story to society as a whole" (Frazee 233). These aesthetic differences result in a narrative of a startlingly different tone than Esther's. The omniscient narrator tells his portion of the story with an unflinching determination to paint an accurate, if unrelentingly dark, portrait of London.<sup>10</sup> Yet just as the subtle incorporation of satire strengthens the effectiveness of Esther's sentimental narrative, a measure of sentimental sympathy impels a pathos which only heightens the darkly satirical narration of the third-person narrative voice.

An insistent, assertive presence, the third-person narrator serves as a guide for the reader. He takes the reader on a tour of the darkest parts of London, from the opulent home of the wealthy but haunted Lady Dedlock, to the Lincoln's Inn offices of the icy lawyer Mr. Tulkinghorn, to the squalor of Jo's home in Tom-All-Alone's. The narrator forces the reader to bear witness to the

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<sup>10</sup> When I use the term "accurate," I don't necessarily mean realistic, for Dickens's London is a looming monstrosity populated by grotesques that one could never hope to meet off the page. Murry Baumgarten argues, however, that Dickens uses the grotesque to create a realistic, though impressionistic, vision of London, both visually and morally (107).

injustice and cruelty that is ever present but often remains hidden or conveniently overlooked. In this way, the omniscient narrator also relies on revelation, on the bringing to light of that which would otherwise stay shrouded in darkness. Thus, despite their obvious differences in tone and outlook, Esther and the third-person narrator work toward the same end, and they do so using the same generic and rhetorical tools. Each relies on the conventions of both satire and sentiment to expose the inhumane, parasitic nature of English society's treatment of the poor, and to encourage individuals to counter this inhumanity with compassion and sympathy.

The omniscient narrator, as in many of Dickens's other novels, allows Dickens to write in a highly satiric mode; he labors under the belief in what Sylvia Manning calls the "moral necessity of showing the miserable truth" of the state of England (26). This notion is so close to Dickens's own that many critics have assumed that the third-person narrator is Dickens himself. I, however, agree with Manning, who sees the narrative voice as an "impersonalization" of Dickens's persona, a figure who shares the same moral vision but is distinct from both Dickens himself and Dickens the implied author (200).<sup>11</sup> This distance grants Dickens the freedom to act as both the reader's guide through the dingy

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<sup>11</sup> The presence of Esther as both character and narrator suggests the omniscient narrator is also a character distinct from the implied author – Dickens's presence, who we of course know wrote both narratives.



back-alleys of London and a harsh judge of England's moral failings. In *Bleak House* the third-person offers a harsh satiric critique of England's social and political institutions. "The chief social institution of the novel," argues Manning, "is Chancery, but the [satirical] reflections of its essential nature indicate that it is less a canker upon a healthy organism than an epitome of widespread disorders. Chancery is, in fact, only a metaphor for society and what is happening to it" (103). Though the interminable bureaucratic nightmare of the court of Chancery earns special ire, the third-person narrator targets the inhumanity of England as a whole. Indeed, Dickens himself wrote, "My satire is against those who see figures and averages and nothing else – the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time" (620).

To this end, Dickens employs brutal irony as his major satiric weapon, wielding understatement, absurdity, incongruity, and open contempt to humorously expose the deep inhumanity at the core of supposedly philanthropic institutions. Alexander Welsh claims Dickens's ironic satire is so pervasive that it is "comprehensive" (108). Yet, even amid the darkest, most staunchly satirical moments, the third-person narrator is not devoid of sentimentality. Indeed, the omniscient narrator includes moments and figures that openly appeal to the sentimental values of his reader; he wishes to encourage an outpouring of the emotions of benevolence and sympathy (Purton 18). Though these tender

emotions might seem to dilute the potency of the satiric critique, these sentimental moments only aid the third-person narrator in his task of criticizing the inhumane treatment of the poor, for it adds pathos to the righteous anger. The result is a more comprehensive satiric critique, encompassing a deep sadness for the particular victims of society's neglect, and anger at the institutions who fail in their duty to protect them.

The third-person narrator casts himself in the role of satirist-moralist, choosing for his primary tactic an insistent irony that comments and criticizes the subjects of his narration. He paints London in bold strokes, situating the reader alongside him as he travels across sweeping vistas and invades intimate domestic spaces. The opening pages of the novel are representative of the narrator's satiric technique in his remaining portions of *Bleak House*. It sets the dark tone for the narrative and establishes the scope and targets of the ironic critique. The novel opens, appropriately enough, on Chancery, as the narrator unveils

the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. [...] Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper [...] have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud. [...] Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it

rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollution of a great (and dirty) city. [...] And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery [...] mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-heads against walls of words, and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might [...] (but you might look in vain for Truth at the bottom of it) [...]. There is not an honorable man among its practitioners who would not give – who does not often give – the warning, 'Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!' (BH 17-19).

Whereas Esther's narrative is narrow, centering mainly on the deeds and thoughts of a handful of characters, the omniscient narrator's scope is sweeping. The novel's first pages take the reader on a panoramic journey through an apocalyptic, just-post-deluvian London. The streets threaten to swallow everything in their grime and muck; men and women, in a constant state of disharmony, are in constant danger of losing their footing and getting soiled by the ubiquitous, relentless mud. This excessive filth, the physical corruption, has as its wellspring the High Court of Chancery, the source of institutional and moral corruption. The Lord Chancellor presides over this den of filth, where lawyers with no regard for the truth battle endlessly over bureaucratic minutiae and the linguistic traps of legal jargon.

This passage draws an exceedingly dark picture of a London beset by corruption, but it also draws a unique picture of the figure telling the story itself. Though Dickens also employs the traditional satiric conventions of parody,

contraction and expansion, and understatement to great effect, here we see the third-person narrator adopt the pervasively ironic tone that becomes a defining feature of his narration. Sylvia Manning notes that the rhetorical power of Dickens's satire derives not from a strict adherence to the Horatian or Juvenalian model, but from its subtle, insistent "presence" throughout his fiction (11). Dickens's satiric rhetoric takes the form of a "mode of vision, defined less formally by tone and attitude" that dominates the work (Manning 7). In the opening of the novel, this satiric presence is strongly felt in Dickens's syntax and diction. Dickens colors the passage with short, fragmentary sentences, rhythmically repeated words, and parenthetical asides. These stylistic elements work together to create a narrative voice that is by turns intrusive and pervasively ironic. The passage has a rhythmic, poetic quality to its terse, economical sentences. The catalogue of stark images accumulates to add a visceral nearness to the descriptions of rainy, murky, corrupt London. The dense fog "rolls defiled," the passersby add "deposits to the crusts upon crusts of mud" (BH 17, 18). His style manages to be at once "realistic and figurative" (Johnson 31). The rhythmic quality is broken only by the parenthetical asides, which give the impression that the third-person narrator can't help but interrupt his own well-crafted introduction to address the reader more directly with a comment that underscores the irony. Concerning the "pretense of equity" promised by

Chancery, the narrator addresses the reader directly to lament that “you might look in vain for Truth at the bottom of it” (BH 19). The reader understands she is being led and guided through this dark, impressionistic vision of London by an individual, not just a disembodied, all-knowing voice.<sup>12</sup> This is an individual, a character in his own right, with an eye for detail and an ear for irony. He is acutely aware that the institutions he introduces, Chancery being the most powerful, are parasitic – they survive by feeding off those whose rights and interests they ostensibly protect. He relates this to the reader in off-hand, understated asides, as if he were whispering in the reader’s ear as they walk alongside one another.

Dickens creates a third-person narrative persona who shares his values but is a distinct and unique figure. This figure guides the reader through the narrative by painting a stylized, if unflinching, portrait of London’s moral corruption. Underlying every aspect of his narration is a pervasive sense of irony that points out the hypocrisy and injustices inherent in Britain’s social and political institutions. The irony and darkness that pervades everything in the narrative and seems to serve at the pleasure of Dickens’s righteous anger, doesn’t come at the expense of the human figures of the story. No less than Esther, the

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<sup>12</sup> Esther herself acknowledges the existence of the other narrative voice. She begins her narrative by confessing, “I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages,” freely admitting that she shares storytelling duties with another storyteller (BH 30).

omniscient narrator keeps ever present the human cost of Britain's sins. And if irony is a constant presence coloring the narrative, sentimentality is irony's shadow, more ephemeral perhaps, but no less real. Indeed, at times an outpouring of sentimental sympathy becomes a more insistent element of the narrative, standing in stark relief against the muddy evidence of London's moral failings.

To see more clearly how the omniscient narrator's satiric critique includes elements of the sentimental, let us turn to scene involving the "oily" clergyman Mr. Chadband's excoriation of the homeless young street-sweeper, Jo (BH 347). Chadband hauls Jo in front of Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby and proceeds to sermonize on the evil of his ways. Chadband belongs to the same category of failed philanthropists as Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle; his sermon smacks of self-satisfaction and betrays a callous blindness to Jo's desperation and poverty.

'No, my young friend,' says Chadband, smoothly, 'I will not let you alone. And why? Because I am a harbest-laborer, because I am a toiler and moiler, because you are delivered untoe me, and are become as a precious instrument in my hands. [...] We have among us here, my friends [...] a Gentile and a Heathen, a dweller in the tents of Tom-all-Alone's and a mover-on upon the surface of the earth. [...] Devoid of parents, devoid of relations, devoid of flocks and herds, devoid of gold and silver, and of precious stones. Why? Why is he?' Mr. Chadband states the question as if he were propounding an entirely new riddle. [...] 'because he is devoid of the light that shines upon some of us. What is that light? What is it? I ask you what is that light? [...] It is the light of Terewth' (347-350).

I quote this passage at length to give a better sense of the third-person narrator's satirical strategy. The third-person narrator writes in the present tense, which adds a more active dynamic to the scene. Esther's narrative is retrospective; it is filtered through her memory and overactive sense of Victorian discretion. But the reader witnesses the events in London as they happen, alongside the troubled Mr. Snagsby. Most of the dialogue in the pages immediately preceding this scene is indirect, and indeed much of it is written in the free indirect; Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby's words and thoughts are delivered by the narrator. This gives the scene a heightened sense of immediacy, and at the same time it adds to the stylized, elliptical feel of the scene. It also maintains the close connection between reader and narrator; everything in the scene is filtered through the narrator's words. Everything, that is, until Mr. Chadband's sermon.

The fact that Mr. Chadband's dialogue is quoted directly makes it seem more startling and performative. The exaggerated style of his language, rendered in dialect that reflects his overblown delivery, makes him as colorfully well-drawn as the majority of Dickens's side characters, but it also makes him a parodic representative of "oily," self-righteous evangelical ministers. Mr. Chadband is a spiritual compatriot of our friend Mr. Slope. Chadband's sermon is a rhetorical performance peppered with a combination of self-praise, religious clichés, and an abundance of meaningless rhetorical questions. His pompous list

of self-styled epithets recalls Mrs. Pardiggle's extensive list of titles. "'I am,'" Chadband declares, "a harvest laborer, [...] I am a toiler and moiler [...]" (BH 347). His words smack of a particularly performative and manipulative style of religious discourse, and they serve only to self-aggrandize and to vilify the orphaned Jo. According to Chadband, Jo is a "heathen," whose pitiful state in life is his own fault, the inevitable result of lacking the truth, or, because he can't be satisfied with a single syllable where three will do, "treweth" (BH 348). In the words of this clergyman, Jo's poverty is the result of his own grave sin, which Chadband suggest is his very existence. For Chadband, Jo is a creature on whom God has naturally and justly turned his back. This inhumane sentiment spoken by a supposedly religious figure recalls Esther's ill treatment at the hands of her pious aunt, who constantly told her, "'It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had never been born!'" (BH 32).

The weight of the hypocrisy and injustice of Chadband's words strikes the reader with force. The man, who should be a champion of the oppressed, is a heartless charlatan, caught up in his own self-congratulatory performance of piety. His narcissism and moral degeneration is written even upon his physical person. Dickens describes Chadband as a grotesque figure. He is "fat," "oily;" during his sermons he waves his "flabby paw" and moves "greasily" (BH 346, 347, 350). His physical size and disgusting body mirrors the excesses of his ego



and overblown self-righteousness. This contributes, too, to the reader's disgust; he is revolted in equal measure by his deformed physical and moral nature. We see his attempts at piety are empty and self-congratulatory, the values at the heart of his sermon inhumane and cruel. The reader also recognizes in Chadband an impulse that is all too common among the supposedly pious; he is unfortunately not an anomaly. But though this passage seethes with irony, and its satiric critique is bold and effective, there is the shadow of another impulse that adds to the emotional impact of the scene.

The third-person narrator introduces sentimentality into his bitterly ironic critique of the minister Chadband by consistently drawing readers' attention back to the character of Jo. By this point in the novel the orphaned, friendless Jo is a familiar figure to the reader, for he is a familiar presence in Lincoln's Inn Hall. For the reader he is a figure of pathos, an active reminder of the failures of England's social and political institutions. For some of *Bleak House's* characters, he is an inconvenience, an uncomfortable blight on the city that needs to be hidden. The reader has witnessed many people tell Jo to "move along" (BH 154). The truth is that there is no place for Jo in the London of the novel. Later, Mr. Woodcourt troubles over the realization that "in the heart of a civilized world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog" (BH 597). After witnessing his constant ill treatment, the reader

must now watch Jo endure a further humiliation at the hands of the greasy Mr. Chadband.

Somehow, despite the obvious sentimental echoes of the character of Jo – nothing could be more quintessentially sentimental than the plight of a neglected, mistreated orphan – the sentimentality of the scene is muted, not subtle perhaps, but also not cloying or manipulative. During Chadband's sermon Jo has made for a less-than-ideal congregant. He "feels that it is in his nature to be an unimprovable reprobate, and that it's no good *his* trying to keep awake, for *he* won't ever know nothink" (BH 351). Again using free indirect discourse, the narrator humorously describes Jo's rationale for ignoring Chadband's proselytizing. But that rationale is heartbreaking; Jo has internalized the oft-repeated words of others to the point that he sees himself as Chadband and his ilk do, as a degenerate heathen beyond the scope of grace or hope of salvation. The narrator continues by addressing Jo directly.

Though it may be, Jo, that there is a history so interesting and affecting even to minds as near the brutes as thine, recording deeds done on this earth for common men, that if the Chadbands, removing their own persons from the light, would but show it thee in simple reverence, would but leave it unimproved, would but regard it as being eloquent enough without their modest aid – it might hold thee awake, and thou might learn it yet! (BH 351).

Here is an example of what makes the few instances of sentimentality in the third-person narrator's portion of the novel so powerful. Dickens employs

sentimental conventions at the service of his righteous anger; he does not include elements of the sentimental to elicit tears from his reader, but rage. Adopting a sermoniac tone, the narrator's direct address to Jo is truly an address to the reader. The reader is implicated alongside the Chadbands for viewing boys like Jo as "brutes" and for not telling them the simple hope that lies in the Christian story. Dickens has constructed the entire scene to lead to this moment of subtle revelation – when his anger is aimed at a wider target than Chadband, a target that may just include the reader. But for the reader to plumb the depths of Dickens's righteous anger and feel the full force of this rather rancorous and ironic sentimental moment, he must exercise the same detective-like skills he used in Esther's narrative. Though he may populate his narrative with orphans aplenty, his third-person narrator is no bleeding heart; his heart is on fire.

Another example of the use of sentimental conventions to fuel his righteous anger occurs at the scene of Jo's death. Having finally succumbed to his illness, Dr. Woodcourt and Sergeant George care for Jo in his last few moments. Dr. Woodcourt asks Jo if he knows any prayers. Jo answers:

No, sir. Nothink at all. Mr. Chadbands he was a-prayin' wunst at Mr. Snagsby's and I heerd him, but he sounded as if we was a-speakin to hisself, and not to me. He prayed a lot, but I couldn't make out nothink on it. Different times, there was other genlmen come down Tom-all-Alone's a-prayin, but they all most sed as t'other wuns prayed wrong, and all mostly sounded to be a-talkin to theirselves, or a-passin blame on t'others, and not a-talkin to us.

We never knowd nothink. I never knowed what it wos all about  
(BH 609).

These words delivered by this neglected orphan might be too sentimental to bear were it not for the bitter irony that supersedes all. Again, the abject sentimentality is muted by a white-hot anger at the injustice and inhumanity Jo has suffered. The pompous false piety of Chadband and his like turn their prayers into a meaningless performance. When they pray, these men are only “a-speakin” to themselves. The charity that has been given to Jo is cold and conditional; it comes partnered with judgment and condemnation. Woodcourt prays with Jo the Lord’s Prayer, words he should have been taught before now. Jo dies before he can finish. The narrator responds: “The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead! Dead, your Majesty, Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day” (BH 610). These are perhaps some of the bitterest words ever to flow from Dickens’s pen. The narrator informs those responsible of Jo’s death, from the king down. The reader may nod along as he blames the King and nobility, who should have implemented better laws and programs; the reader may also lay the blame at the feet of clergy, both good and bad. But then, again, the narrator suggests that the reader, good intentioned though he may be, is also responsible for Jo’s tragic end. Though not technically a direct address to the

reader, the implication is clear. The neglect and mistreatment of the poorest, weakest members of society is a human problem, the blame for which all share. Dickens builds up to this nicely. Throughout the novel, Jo has been pushed aside and told to “move along;” finally, Jo sees he has “moved on as far as ever I could go and couldn’t be moved no further” (BH 607). This repeated phrase reveals its full weight only near the end of the novel. The sentimentality and the satiric irony merge in a way that increases the potency of the social critique while mitigating the emotional excesses of its sentimental subject.

*“Another Discovery”: Revelation and Reversal*

The dual-narrative structure in *Bleak House* requires that the reader exercise a particular set of interpretive skills to piece together the novel’s overarching rhetorical strategy. The reader must learn how to “read” each portion of the narrative. In Esther’s pages, the reader learns to read her undiluted sweetness as a rhetorical tool – as the novel’s sentimental heroine she serves as a model of conduct. Her universal compassion and sympathy are virtues to be emulated. Her goodness provides a stark contrast to the instances of cruelty and “telescopic philanthropy” that occur in her narrative. Reading beyond her generous treatment of such characters, one uncovers a deeply satirical critique of the inhumanity and hypocrisy of these false philanthropists. To test these figures against Esther’s pure-hearted virtue only adds to the effectiveness of the satiric

critique. In the third-person narrator's pages the reader is under the unsettling guidance of a bitterly ironic moralist who forces the reader to bear witness to the darkness lurking among London's supposedly just institutions. He shows us the dangers of false piety and the great sins perpetrated by the corrupt legal system. The omniscient narrator uses broadly sentimental tropes in ways that increase the reader's outrage at the depth of injustice, encouraging anger and not the requisite tears.

But to this point, the reader still seems to be awaiting a final revelation before Dickens's rhetorical scheme is fully fulfilled. If our analysis ends here, we know the narrative voices both work to advance a social critique, but they themselves remain separate; their participation in the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment feels incomplete and incoherent. Because both narrators employ the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment in different proportions, the unveiling of the targets of satiric critique occur in a way not unlike the plot revelations of mystery stories; they are important, hidden, and are startling when uncovered. And it is in the revelations of the various mysteries embedded in the plot itself that underscores and completes Dickens's rhetorical project.

Though filled with many digressive episodes and scenes, the main plot of *Bleak House* follows the investigations of several amateur (and one professional) detectives on the trail of a series of complex mysteries. Robert Donovan argues

that the novel should be approached by tracing every instance of “discovery, the Aristotelian *anagnorisis*” (33). The lawyer Mr. Tulkinghorn, the law clerk Guppy (on behalf of Lady Dedlock) race to uncover the identity of the law writer; Esther muses about the identity of her mother and father; the gin-soaked proprietor and landlord Krook searches for the lost Jarndyce will among the mountains of papers in his Rag and Bottle shop; Inspector Bucket, one of the first detectives in fiction, solves all of these mysteries and unmask the murderer of Mr. Tulkinghorn; and ever present is the question of the rightful heir to the “fortune” at the center of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* that will finally bring an end to the interminable legal battle. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that all these mysteries are intimately connected. In true Dickensian style, the outcomes of these mysteries reveal the close ties between most of the major characters. Lady Dedlock is revealed to be Esther’s mother, and the law-writer, known only by the name Nemo, is Esther’s father. Tulkinghorn was murdered by Lady Dedlock’s lady’s maid. And, of course, a valid will is found that resolves *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* in Richard and Ada’s favor, although any financial settlement has been “absorbed in costs” (BH 805). These multiple revelations also bring the narrative voices into much closer contact. The third-person narrator’s interest in Lady Dedlock, Tulkinghorn, and Krook are intimately associated with Esther’s search for her mother and Richard’s interest in the Jarndyce case. The two narrative

voices, which seem to have been near opposites of one another, end up telling the same story.

Though discovery and revelation lie at the heart of the novel, few of these revelatory discoveries prove to be positive or beneficial. Esther, for instance, discovers the identity of her mother, only to have Lady Dedlock flee the comfort of her wealthy home and die alone near the pauper's grave of her lover, Nemo. Esther, out of shame or sadness, ceases to speak of Lady Dedlock altogether, saying only, "I proceed to other passages of my narrative" (BH 758). And the valid will in the Jarndyce Chancery case is discovered too late to yield anything but an unbearably tragic outcome. What, then, is the reader left to conclude? The interconnectedness of the numerous mystery plots leads only to despair and heartbreak. The revelation of truth does little to bring about any hopeful resolution. London is still as dirty as it was on our first visit to Lincoln's Inn Hall alongside the third-person narrator. It seems we must read the darkness in Dickens's world as permanent, despite the few instances of hopefulness, like Esther's marriage to Woodcourt. Truth would then seem to have little bearing on the world of the novel.

But perhaps the significance of the many revelations in the novel, both thematic and narrative, serve to advance Dickens's rhetorical purpose that only finds fulfillment outside the text itself. The mystery plots reveal the



interconnectedness of the characters, a truth which has great significance for Dickens's larger rhetorical project. The dual narration, the dual generic modes, and the increasingly connected mystery plots all point to the interconnectedness of all men. More than solely encouraging compassion and sympathy, Dickens's novel insists upon the close relationship between all men. This underscores our obligation to act toward our fellow man with charity and kindness. This notion of interconnectedness adds a depth to both the satiric critique and the sentimental values espoused by the novel. Every element of the novel – generic, thematic, and narrative – works toward this end. Dickens insists, though, that the world of *Bleak House* is not the place where our charitable obligation to our fellow man may be fulfilled. Too many missed opportunities resulted in tragedy for the end of the novel to be a moral triumph. But Dickens, remember, writes to be read. He wants his audience to love him, certainly. And he gets his wish, for *Bleak House* is a wonderful work of the imagination that draws in even the most cynical of readers. But more than for love, Dickens writes to “unostentatiously to lead the reader up to those teachings of our great Master” (Storey 9.556). His novel trusts that the story may live off the page, that the reader may play detective, uncover the full, interrelated set of values the novel champions, and put them to action in their own lives.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

As projects of this size and scope are wont to do, almost unbeknownst to me this project blossomed into more than I intended at the beginning. When I first conceived of this project, I thought my argument would follow satire and sentiment as thematic strains in Victorian fiction. Though thematic concerns are important to my argument, my project has become an account of the relationship these four authors develop with their readers and how generic modes function as tools that enable them create meaning off the page<sup>1</sup>. I also did not anticipate to what extent the interaction of satire and sentiment allow authors to critique and revise these very modes. Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, and Gaskell are aware of the unflattering excesses of these modes which led to their fall from grace in the nineteenth century. Sentimental fiction had devolved from an aid to the development of a keen moral sense into a genre that offers romantic love as the highest good. Satire must work to resist falling into misanthropy. Yet something lingers in these modes worth rescuing, and part of the project of these writers is to rescue the better parts of these conventions and prove their continued efficacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Ong and Wolfgang Iser's work underlies my conception of the relation of reader and author. Also instructive were William Riggan, Daniel Frank Chamberlain, and Bertil Romberg's accounts of Victorian modes of narration.

As such I think the significance of this project lies in the fact that it traces a hitherto occluded moment in the history of these two genres. For not only do the modes of satire and sentiment work in tandem, a fact I had considered long before I began this journey two years ago, but they function together as a single rhetorical tool that draws the author and reader into a unique relationship bound by a shared sympathy. By exploring the way nineteenth-century writers engage this Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment provides a more precise conceptual vocabulary for dealing with these and other texts.

Though the authors I choose offer a comprehensive, paradigmatic account of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment, to varying degrees, other authors made use of this rhetorical tool. In narrative fiction, the novels of George Eliot exhibit a similar balance between social critique and compassionate sympathy. The figure of *Middlemarch's* Casaubon is the vehicle for some of the nineteenth-century's most gut wrenching satire (or maybe his position as failed academic and unrelenting pedant provides a particularly harrowing warning to burgeoning academics). Her career-long project of encouraging a "religion of humanity" that is characterized by sympathy, and a focus on the common good is extremely close to the goals of Thackeray, Trollope, Dickens, and Gaskell, if somewhat less orthodox. George Meredith's fiction, though he finds little of use with the classic conceptions of both satire and sentiment, certainly make use of the conventions

of both. 1879's *The Egoist* also criticizes and revises the conventions of sentimental fiction and contains a strong satiric critique of social constraints upon nineteenth-century women.

Looking beyond my project, an instructive next step would be to explore the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as it exists in other genres. As I argue earlier, the novel's ability to accommodate numerous generic modes and types of discourse make it a natural place to analyze this technique. But Victorian poetry, much of which is narrative in nature also participates in these modes. Robert Browning's dramatic monologues, for instance, rely on a similar distance between speaker and reader. Browning's reliance on dramatic irony ensures the reader remains at a distance from the speaker because of the reader's greater knowledge. Browning, too, sues for sympathy while still advancing a moral agenda. "Fra Lippo Lippi," for instance gives us a parody of a fat and happy priest, a favorite figure of Browning's. Browning writes the poem in such a way that the reader both identifies and agrees with the Friar's conceptions of art and beauty, while wishing to remain free of his sensual excess. Both satiric irony and sympathetic identification are important for Browning, though some of his poems engender empathy rather than sympathy, which can have disturbing results. The reader is both horrified and fascinated by the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover," for instance. Identifying the difference in style and

rhetorical technique between Browning's use of sympathy and empathy would make for an intriguing project, for which examining his use of the Rhetoric of Satire and Sympathy would be a useful first step.

Though the rise of Modernism challenged many Victorian literary conventions, I believe the impulse for a balance between irony and sympathy are never fully extinguished. Though I do not here attempt to trace a direct line from the Rhetoric of Satire and Sentiment as I conceive it to the writers of the Modern period, I suggest that the synthesis of satiric critique and humane sympathy anticipates impulses latent in twentieth-century fiction. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, though in many ways a reaction against what they considered stodgy Victorian conventions, exhibits an undeniable sympathy for characters amid a full awareness of their flaws. Even James Joyce, that least Victorian of authors, who in *Finnegan's Wake* refers to Thackeray and Dickens as "Thuggery" and "Duckeggs," maintains a balance between satiric censure of social injustice and humane sympathy. Terence Brown argues that Joyce's fiction registers both "the satiric shudder of recoil from the terrible and cruel squalor of so much that takes place in [*Dubliners*]" and an oddly optimistic understanding that we must "endure the diminished lives they live. This kind of emotional consequence is [...] a peculiarly Joycean synthesis of irony with compassion" (xlix-l). Though the Modernists might reject the moralistic stance of Thackeray, Trollope, Gaskell,

and Dickens, which argues for the necessity of traditional virtues, they, and we, can agree that humor and compassion, irony and sympathy, satire and sentiment are important corollaries.

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