

ABSTRACT

“Those Who Trust Us Educate Us”
The Ethical Reticence of the Narrator in *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*

Sierra S. Davies, M.A.

Mentor: Kristen A. Pond, Ph.D.

Omniscient narrators often receive negative critical attention because of their tendency to narrate with instructive authority. This is especially true of the narrators in Victorian novels such as *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*. In these novels, scholars have alternately derided or extolled the omniscient narrator, depending upon the most fashionable theoretical model of the moment to give them their interpretive cue. I argue, however, that the narrator's attempts to address and involve the readers in the text ought to play a larger role in directing critical analysis of the narrator's conduct. If readers are attentive to the narrator's absence as well as the narrator's presence, then they will be better able to assess the narrator's conduct. A close inspection of when the narrator is absent and what textual information the narrator obscures in those absences reveals that ethical reticence undergirds the narrator's behavior in *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*.

"Those Who Trust Us Educate Us"
The Ethical Reticence of the Narrator in *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*

by

Sierra S. Davies, B.A.

A Thesis

Approved by the Department of English

Kevin J. Gardner, Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

Approved by the Thesis Committee

Kristen A. Pond, Ph.D., Chairperson

Dianna Vitanza, Ph.D.

Joseph Stubenrauch, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
August 2016

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Copyright © 2016 by Sierra S. Davies

All rights reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
DEDICATION	vi
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER TWO	18
The Ethical Instructor in <i>Daniel Deronda</i>	18
Practicing Ethical Reticence: Gwendolen’s Transformational Moments	28
Permitting Independent Interpretations: Gwendolen’s Pivotal Choice	45
CHAPTER THREE	55
The Polite Moralist in <i>Vanity Fair</i>	55
Heritage of Politeness and Victorian Society	59
Receding Ethically: The Case of Amelia Sedley	63
Exaggerated Politeness: The Case of Becky Sharp	74
CHAPTER FOUR.....	95
Conclusion	95
WORKS CITED	99

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Only my name appears on the title page, but in reality this project was authored by the joint efforts of many individuals who supported me through writing this thesis. I cannot sufficiently thank all those individuals here, but I would like to acknowledge a few of them. To my parents, thank you for your tireless encouragement and patience through this and every endeavor I have undertaken. To Kala Holt and Caitlin Lawrence, thank you for enduring many late nights writing with me and for walking through daily life with me for the past two years. To Alicia Constant, Rachel Kilgore, and Mackenzie Sarna, thank you for conveying God's grace and faithfulness into my life through this process. To my director, Kristen Pond, thank you for helping me to untangle the thoughts between my ears into words on the page. To my committee members, Joseph Stubenrauch and Dianna Vitanza, thank you for your time and invaluable responses to my work. To my professor, Janice Brown, thank you for sharing your wealth of knowledge and expertise about British literature with me. To my mentor and professor, H. Collin Messer, thank you for advising me both professionally and personally through each stage of my higher education. Finally, to my teacher, Jacqueline Gill, thank you for fostering my interest in English literature in the first place. Without all of your many named and unnamed contributions, this project would not have been possible.

DEDICATION

To my parents and teachers

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In a critical age of multiplicity, when a plethora of critical ideologies and practices, bringing drastically different if not openly conflicting interpretations to literature, are rubbing shoulders together in a relatively collegial forum, the omniscient narrators of Victorian novels frequently offend if not repulse postmodern views.¹ As a hallmark of nineteenth century British literature, omniscient narrators cannot simply be ignored in critical interpretations of Victorian novels; however, their easy epistemological certainty often earns them the derision of contemporary critics.² Meir Sternberg's description of omniscient narrators points to why Victorian narrators so frequently find themselves offending:

Though he [the omniscient narrator] may pretend to descend into the fictive arena and rub shoulders with the characters, he essentially stands above the world which he sometimes professes to have created and over which he has complete control owing to his godlike privileges of unhampered vision, penetration to the innermost recesses of his agents' minds, free movement in time and space, and knowledge of past and future" (257).

¹ The term "omniscient narrator" has fallen out of critical fashion and been replaced by some scholars with the term "authorial narrator." While the term "authorial narrator" does have the advantage, as Suzanne Keen notes, of avoiding the religious and theological overtones of "omniscience," I prefer to use the term "omniscient narrator" for two reasons. First, I believe it is a less exclusionary term that will be more accessible to an audience who are not all narratologists. Second, although I also do not intend to tie the narrator to the god-like connotations of the word, I also do not want to imply that I view the narrator as synonymous with the real-life author. Because my argument hinges on the distinction between the narrator and the author, I will use the term "omniscient narrator" to refer to the narrators of *Vanity Fair* and *Daniel Deronda*. For Keen's discussion of "omniscient" and "authorial" narrators, see *Narrative Form*, pages 38-39.

² The number of critical discussions that have censured the omniscient narrators of Victorian novels is too extensive to survey in totality here. However, a helpful starting point is Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* which inaugurated critical interest in the unreliable narrator.

Victorian narrators disgruntle modern scholars because they make declarative statements that encompass the characters, the world of the novel, and the world outside of the novel on their own personal authority in a manner that seems to minimize if not exclude the presence of readers.³ The two novels I will discuss, *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*, have garnered this kind of critical attention.⁴

In one response to this perturbation with Victorian omniscient narrators, Jonathan Culler argues that it is not the narrators themselves that offend contemporary critical sensibilities but rather the connotations of the “omniscient” label traditionally bestowed upon them. Culler explains that the term “omniscience” compels readers and reader-scholars alike to expect perfect knowledge of the novel from the narrator: “since omniscience is said quite logically to be indivisible, even the slimmest indication of unusual knowledge provokes the idea of a narrator who knows everything, and then the critic finds herself obliged to explain why the omniscient narrator declines to tell us all the relevant things he must know” (25). Because omniscience implies limitless knowledge, readers decide whether or not to trust omniscient narrators based upon what they reveal about the world of the novel; when the narrator appears to withhold

³ In my use of the term “reader” I am referring to the actual, flesh-and-blood readers of texts. See Keen’s discussion in *Narrative Form* of the difference between actual readers and implied readers for a further explanation. Especially pages 34-35.

⁴ For a sample of the critical attention that interprets the narrators of *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair* or the narrators of Eliot and Thackeray in general as untrustworthy, see Ann Y Wilkinson’s article, “The Tomeavesian Way of Knowing the World: Technique and Meaning in *Vanity Fair*,” Cynthia Griffin Wolff’s article, “Who is the Narrator of *Vanity Fair* and Where is He Standing?”, William Elkin’s article, “Thackeray’s VANITY FAIR,” Nancy Anne Marck’s article, “Narrative Transference and Female Narcissism: The Social Message of *Adam Bede*,” and Barbara Hardy’s critical work, *The Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction*, to name a few.

knowledge of the characters or events of the narrative, then readers begin to doubt the narrator's reliability and ethicality.⁵

Two particular features of omniscient narration identified by Culler pertain to the inclusion or exclusion of the reader by Victorian novels which I will pursue in this project: "the incontrovertible narrative declaration" and "the reporting of innermost thoughts and feelings [of the characters]" (26). Both George Eliot and William Makepeace Thackeray use "incontrovertible narrative declaration" to advance what Suzanne Keen explains is the "discourse" of the novel (17).⁶ An example of this kind of declaration occurs as the narrator in *Vanity Fair* introduces Amelia Sedley to readers: "But as we are to see a great deal of Amelia, there is no harm in saying at the outset of our acquaintance that she was one of the best and dearest creatures ever lived" (5). Thackeray's and Eliot's narrators also both use "the reporting of innermost thoughts and feelings" or in Keen's terms, "narrated monologue" to intimately familiarize readers with the characters (60). Eliot's narrator more frequently uses this technique; for example, as Gwendolen Harleth contemplates whether or not she ought to marry Grandcourt, the narrator describes her internal struggle: "While she lay on her pillow with wide-open eyes, 'looking on darkness which the blind do see,' she was appalled by the idea that she

⁵ In *Narrative Form* Suzanne Keen cites Seymour Chatman's helpful explanation of Wayne Booth's idea of unreliable narration: "what makes a narrator unreliable is that his values diverge strikingly from that of the implied author's' that is, the rest of the narrative – 'the norm of the work' – conflicts with the narrator's presentation and we become suspicious of his sincerity or competence to tell the 'true version' (42). In my use of the term "unreliable," I imply a value judgment about the narrator's truthfulness as a figure rather than a judgment about the similarity between the narrator's values and the implied author's values.

⁶ Keen concisely explains the idea of a text's discourse in *Narrative Form*: "Briefly, 'discourse' indicates the word of the narrative as they are actually presented, including – as they occur page by page – any digressions, repetitions, omissions, and disorderly telling. Discourse streams along in the linear path of language itself" (17). Story, on the other hand, "represents the whole narrative content as (re)constructed in a reader's understanding" (17). My argument uses discourse and story according to Keen's definitions.

was going to do what she had once started away from with repugnance” (259). Both these kinds of narration require readers to trust that the narrator is reporting the full truth about the character in question without any evidence from a source outside of the text as proof.

In the case of Victorian novels like *Vanity Fair* and *Daniel Deronda*, any slip in the narrator’s knowledge or move to limit the interpretations of the reader’s knowledge of the novel’s world causes readers to feel they ought to mistrust the narrator. Both techniques in omniscient narration described above can appear to direct or even control the reader’s interpretation of the novel’s story; however, it is the problem of trusting the narrator in the event of narrated monologue that I will focus on here. Narrated monologue presents a problem for modern critics for two reasons. First, it filters the interior thoughts of a character through the narrator’s lens. Second, it provides a platform for the narrator to move from sentences that are mimetic to what Felix Martinez-Bonati describes as sentences that are “imaginary” (130). Culler explains that Martinez-Bonati’s imaginary sentences consist of “affirmations that are not narrative or descriptive: generalizations, aphorisms, opinions, moral views – which by convention are *not* taken as constitutive of the world of the novel and may receive varying degrees of acceptance from readers” (Culler 27). Both of these effects seem to place all control of interpreting characters into the narrator’s hands rather than into the reader’s hands. Not only are readers receiving the character’s thoughts indirectly, but they are also receiving the narrator’s authoritarian affirmations afterwards which they may disagree with but are veritably compelled to accept.

An example from the narrator’s description to readers of Gwendolen’s internal state after her marriage to Grandcourt will illustrate the point. Gwendolen swiftly regrets

her decision to marry Grandcourt in spite of Lydia Glasher's prior claims on him. As she dwells on her decision, the narrator's description shifts from factually reporting her thoughts to offering the narrator's opinion and generalization that applies to the world outside of the narrative, the reader's world:

Accomplishments had ceased to have the exciting quality of promising any pre-eminence to her; and as for fascinated gentlemen – adorers who might hover round her with languishment, and diversify married life with the romantic stir of mystery, passion, and danger which her French reading had given her some girlish notion of – they presented themselves to her imagination with the fatal circumstance that, instead of fascinating her in return, they were clad in her own weariness and disgust. The admiring male, rashly adjusting the expression of his features and the turn of his conversation to her supposed tastes, had always been an absurd object to her, and at present seemed rather detestable. *Many courses are actually pursued – follies and sins both convenient and inconvenient – without pleasure or hopes of pleasure; but to solace ourselves with imagining any course beforehand, there must be some foretaste of pleasure in the shape of appetite;* and Gwendolen's appetite had sickened.⁷ (emphasis added 362-3)

The passage of narrator-commentary begins with narrated monologue that might easily be rephrased as Gwendolen's quoted thoughts. As the narrative continues, the narrator's description shifts in the italicized portion to offer a generalization about human nature, and she connects it to the world of the readers by addressing them and incorporating them into her generalization with the first person plural pronoun "ourselves." Eliot's narrator could offend modern sensibilities on two fronts in this passage. The first front is the depth of interiority that the narrator provides into Gwendolen's psyche without actually quoting Gwendolen's internal thoughts. The narrator declares to readers that simpering suitors have always seemed absurd to her and continue to repulse her, assuming the authority to tell readers what Gwendolen is thinking. The second front is the generalization the

⁷ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014) 363. All citations of *Daniel Deronda* come from the Oxford World's Classics edition.

narrator makes and the language she uses to draw readers into accepting her deduction. The narrator presumes that readers will accept her generalization by incorporating them through the inclusive “ourselves” into her statement, and her incorporation leaves little room for readers’ independent interpretations. While readers may disregard the italicized generalization and still draw their own conclusions about Gwendolen, the narrator does not seem to create interpretive space for readers to do so.

Both Eliot’s and Thackeray’s narrators draw readers into agreement by using the inclusive first-person plural pronoun, as the above passage taken from Eliot’s novel illustrates. This technique is one of the primary aspects of omniscient narration in Victorian novels. Scholars frequently point to this strategy to demonstrate that novels with an omniscient narrator, especially Victorian novels, do not permit readers to form independent interpretations. Garrett Stewart’s seminal work, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, mines and analyzes the works of canonical authors like George Eliot and William Makepeace Thackeray to make his case that Victorian novels make reading a “site of conscription” (8). Stewart explains that typical features of Victorian novels such as the omniscient narrator function to prefigure their readers’ responses to the story of the novel and compel readers to accept those responses:

Implicated by apostrophe [“dear reader”] or by proxy, by address or by dramatized scenes of reading, you are deliberately drafted by the text, written with. In the closed circuit of conscripted response, your input is a predigested function of the text’s output – digested in advance by rhetorical mention or by narrative episode. (8)

Whether by vocative address, such as the “dear reader” trope, second-person address, or “third-person reader reference,” the Victorian novel compels readers, in Stewart’s view,

to accept their predetermined interpretation of the events and characters in the story.

Although Stewart does not focus on the narrator's use of the first-person plural pronoun as a means to draw readers into the text, this form of readerly connection works in a similar manner as I go on to demonstrate in the following chapters.

Stewart's argument casts a negative shadow over the activity of Victorian novels, and he casts this shadow without treating the narrator as more than a structural tool of the narrative. As one of the most generally present and vocal species of narrators in literature from the Victorian period, the narrator of nineteenth century British novels ought to be treated as a more fully embodied character that inhabits the text. Nineteenth century British novels do not always use narrators that are marked by a clear personality and presence like Eliot's and Thackeray's narrator; however, narrators that similarly seek to influence and communicate with the readers ought to be assessed on similar terms to the other characters in the text. Treating the narrator as a character is especially important for holistically understanding his or her relationship to readers and by extension the relationship of Victorian novels to their readers. The narrator is the conveyor of the kinds of reader-addresses that Stewart argues conscript the reader's response into the text. As such, the narrator ought to be treated as a three-dimensional figure with the same capacities of forming and communicating meaning as the characters in the novel. While Stewart pays meticulous attention to when the narrator is *present* and addresses the readers, it is just as essential to consider when the narrator is *absent* and what that absence communicates to readers about the narrator's character.

In Eliot's and Thackeray's novels the narrator is so persistently and blatantly present in the discourse of the novel that the absence of the narrator's voice is especially

striking. Readers are arrested by moments in each novel when the narrator's guiding presence suddenly recedes from the forefront of the text. In *Daniel Deronda* the narrator's presence is marked by her use of the journalistic "we" that aligns readers with her own point of view and directs readers to agree with her interpretation. The absence of the narrator as a directive instructor for readers in *Daniel Deronda* is therefore signaled by the omission of the journalistic "we" from the text. The narrator recedes from the forefront of the story during transformational moments of a character. These moments consist of climactic experiences for a character that show either a development or a failure to develop in moral sympathy. In *Vanity Fair* the narrator's presence as an instructor is not as easily tied to one particular word or phrase; however, he still recedes in his narration by turning away his gaze from moments in the characters' stories that expose the vulnerability of the human heart. The narrator diverts his gaze most frequently by using one of the several forms of vocative address described by Stewart to offer commentary based on his own experience outside the world of the novel that ties into the world of *Vanity Fair*. By turning his satirizing and criticizing gaze away from these moments, the narrator instructs readers that they must limit their desire to know and interpret characters based on the restricted information that they can obtain.

In both Eliot's and Thackeray's narration, the absence of the narrator from transformational moments in *Daniel Deronda* and the absence of the narrator from vulnerable moments in *Vanity Fair* makes their retreat into the background of the story a display of ethical reticence. Both narrators recede from the limelight of the novel at narratively critical times. In *Daniel Deronda*, the transformational moments in the story present opportunities for the narrator to conscript reader's interpretations into the text,

obliging readers to interpret the moment as an example of the character's transformation into moral sympathy.⁸ In *Vanity Fair*, the emotionally vulnerable moments in the story tempt the narrator to capitalize on them for the sake of his social satire and conscript readers' interpretations of those moments as just another example of the injustice and vanity of life. The fact that both narrators turn aside from these opportunities demonstrates that they do not always narrate with the intention of conscripting the reader's interpretation into the text.

In Victorian novels with an omniscient narrator, the effectiveness of the "rhetorical transaction," as James Phelan designates it, between the author and readers depends upon the reader's interpretation of the narrator's character, both as an ethical communicator and as a morally guided figure (*Reading People* 207). Phelan describes the rhetorical transaction between authors and readers as the summation of the communications made by the text to readers, in other words, the complete text from which the reader's experience of the story arises. In *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*, the omniscient narrator is the pervasive medium through which readers experience the communication of the text. In a later publication Phelan claims that in their experience of a text readers make three kinds of judgments, and those judgments are guided by the implied author: "The three [judgments] are (1) interpretive judgments about how to understand a particular character, event, or narrational act; (2) ethical judgments about the values displayed by characters, narrators, and authors; and (3) aesthetic judgments about not simply the beauty but rather the overall quality of the experience that the

⁸ Eliot's project of promoting moral sympathy is exhaustively canvassed by scholarship on her works. Suzanne Keen is one of the many scholars who discusses Eliot and moral sympathy in her book *Empathy and the Novel*. See especially page 38.

narrative offers us” (“Judgment” 116). The nature of these judgments determines the worth of the textual experience to readers. While Phelan distinguishes between the implied author and the narrator, I argue the distinction is artificial in Victorian novels that use overtly present omniscient narrators. The narrator in *Vanity Fair* refers to himself as the “author” and speaks with the accompanying authority to his readers, and the narrator in *Daniel Deronda* similarly takes upon herself the authorial mantle (52). There is an essential difference between the actual Eliot and Thackeray and their respective narrators; however, as readers experience the text, little reason remains for them to maintain the distinction in their interpretation. Because the narrator’s presence is so explicit in these novels, the narrator becomes the guiding force for readers to help them make their judgments.

Since the rhetorical transaction depends upon the efficaciousness of the narrator, if readers sense that the narrator is deceptive or uninformed, then the “mimetic illusion” of the text loses its integrity (Phelan, *Reading People* 5). Phelan concisely explains that “for the mimetic illusion to work, we must enter the narrative audience,” and Peter J. Rabinowitz concurs with his assessment, stating that “if we fail to be members of the narrative audience, or if we misapprehend the beliefs of that audience, we are apt to make invalid, even perverse interpretations” (*Reading People*, 5; Rabinowitz 129). While some textual experiences depend upon the reader’s resistance to the mimetic illusion, Victorian novels depend upon the reader’s perception that their stories are representations of life outside of the novel’s world. Therefore, the success or failure of *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair* to communicate their stories to readers rests upon whether or not readers are confident in the narrator’s character. Narrators who are as thorough in their guidance as

Eliot's and Thackeray's narrators make their presence in every moment so clear that readers cannot feasibly separate them from their own textual experience. We must believe the narrator's ethical behavior will keep him or her from misrepresenting the progression of the novel's story, and we must believe the narrator's morality will keep him or her from manipulating the reader's experience. If readers are not confident of the narrator's ethical and moral integrity, then they cannot trust their rhetorical exchange with the text.

In my discussion of the relationship between ethics and the narrator, I look to the work of Leona Toker as she examines the ethical behavior of the narrator in relation to the narrator's "eloquent reticence" (7). In Toker's framework, eloquent reticence has an ethical impact upon the reader's interpretation because the gaps in narrative information created by the narrator result in a "self-reflexive insight" for readers (8). These insights "[elicit] certain potential features of the reading process and [turn] them into a virtual object of the reader's perception" (Toker 8). The features that the narrator's eloquent reticence reveal are the attitudes that readers bring with them to a text based on prior beliefs or values. Toker operates from the assumption that "the formal features of a work . . . have an ethical significance" and that in "genuinely moral fiction" the formal features are part of the novel's means of "test[ing] and refin[ing]" the audience's preconceptions and values (2). Thus when gaps occur in the novel's *sjuzhet*, the "totality of devices and techniques used in the telling of the story," Toker argues that a curtain is drawn over the reader's knowledge of the *fabula*, "the sum total of fictional events in their chronological and logical order" (5). In some instances, this curtain itself, rather than what lies behind it, is the ethical feature of the text.

The curtain, in Toker's view, provides "mirrors" that reflect to readers the unjust or prejudiced attitudes they bring to their interpretation (5). In this way, the curtain which is drawn by Eliot's and Thackeray's narrators through their absence, functions ethically to confront readers with their biases. Toker focuses primarily on examples of eloquent reticence in narrators that involve only a temporary suspension of information, but even if the suspension is never lifted, the drawing of the curtain itself can be important for determining the ethical character of the narrator. Both Eliot's and Thackeray's narrators recede from the forefront of the text at critical junctures of interpretation for readers, and in this recession their ethical concerns are clear.

By compelling readers to fill in the gaps of information caused by the narrator's eloquent reticence, the story creates "mock circumstances that can reveal real toads in imaginary gardens" (7-8). For example, when the narrator recedes from intruding into Amelia's moments of deep emotional distress in *Vanity Fair*, readers must estimate Amelia's internal state and that estimation makes readers aware of the attitudes they hold that underlie their conclusion. Some readers' attitudes may contain toad-like prejudices that unethically skew their interpretation of Amelia's pain. Toker acknowledges the fact that the exact effects of the narrator's eloquent reticence vary from text to text; however, these "moments of reorientation [for readers] often have an ethical significance" (7). Toker's analysis is helpful for establishing the ethical effects of reticence; however, since my interpretation is exclusively tied to the ethicality of the narrator's reticence, I will use the term "ethical reticence" rather than Toker's term "eloquent reticence." In *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*, I argue that the "ethical significance" is not only tied to the

“self-reflexive insight” these gaps afford to readers but also to the revelations they unfold about the narrator’s attitude towards readers themselves.

If, as I argue, the narrators of *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair* provide sufficient evidence in their narration to establish their ethical and moral character, then readers must reciprocate and respond to the narrator with respectful attention to his or her communication. In his seminal work, *The Company We Keep*, Wayne C. Booth argues that texts only have “power” if their readers permit themselves to become immersed in the story (10). If this immersion takes place, then “the ethical reader will behave responsibly toward the text and its author, but that reader will also take responsibility for the ethical quality of his or her ‘reading,’ once that new ‘text’ is made public” (Booth 10). For Booth, ethical reading involves truly listening to a text, but this does not necessarily mean submitting our interpretation to authorial intent or “the inherent powers of the story-as-told” (10). True listening manifests in readers as “a large part of our thought-stream is *taken over*, for at least the duration of the telling, by the story we are taking in,” and if we resist that appropriation of our thoughts by the text, then Booth claims we have not acted justly towards the implied author (141).

While Booth’s ethical framework for readers resonates with the practices I argue readers must take towards Eliot’s and Thackeray’s narrators, the defense he gives for showing deference towards the implied author is dangerously subjective. Booth claims that appraising an implied author (or the omniscient narrator in the case of *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*) by a single standard is a kind of “critical bigotry” for the seemingly obvious reason that readers do not judge other aspects of the text, such as plot or character, by a one criteria. As an example Booth refers to Anthony Trollope and

analyzes the implied author of *The Way We Live Now* to initially claim that readers can never be “sure just how much sincerity lies behind any author’s claim to write for our good” only to reverse his claim in a footnote and state, “Trollope’s [moral] intentions are clearly visible in almost every scene” (211, n. 8). If Booth’s judgment of a text’s ethical quality is based upon an assessment of the implied author’s morality that can change with every reading of a subsequent text by the same author, then no connection can be made between a reader’s ethical practices and the actual ethical qualities of a text. If every reader’s interpretation of the ethics of a text depends upon their subjective experience of it, then the formal qualities of the text – such as the behavior of the narrator – make no substantial difference in determining the reader’s judgment of a given text as ethical or unethical. In essence, the charge that has been made against omniscient narrators for denying readers their right to interpret and judge the ethical worth of a text independently is in turn perpetrated against the text itself. By denying the actual features of the narrative, including the narrator, any space to testify to their ethicality, critics who resist or condemn the voice of the narrator perpetrate the same unethical behavior against the narrator that they accused the narrator of displaying.

The ethical behavior of Thackeray’s and Eliot’s narrators is also intimately tied to the moral character of the narrators. The moral concerns of many texts are exhaustively acknowledged by scholars, two of whom are Martha C. Nussbaum and Alexander Lucie-Smith. Nussbaum states in no uncertain terms that “literary works are not neutral instruments” and argues that “built into the very structure of a novel is a certain conception of what matters” (26). Speaking about narrative more holistically, Lucie-Smith states, “A narrative presents us with a coherent and accessible story, through which

we as a community and as individuals come to understand truths about ourselves and our communities and the rules through which we live” (11). Whether described as “a certain conception of what matters” or as a “coherent and accessible story” that reveals “truths about ourselves and our communities,” literature’s concern for morality has a long history. This history of moral concern perhaps peaked in novels during the Victorian era.

The Victorian concern for morality is so thoroughly discussed in conversations surrounding the novel that it has become a veritable critical commonplace. Eliot frequently spoke of her concern for the moral effect of art; perhaps one of the clearest examples of her concern for morality appears in an 1859 letter she wrote to Charles Bray. Eliot writes, “If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. . . . the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures” (*Letters* 3:111 5 July 1859). For Eliot the moral quality of art ought to manifest in an enlargement of the readers’ sympathies, and the narrator of *Daniel Deronda* frequently works with Eliot’s aim for her work. However, the narrator does not always behave in her narration in the most advantageous way for Eliot’s vision of moral sympathy to come to fruition in her readers. The moments when the narrator practices ethical reticence frequently occur when the narrator’s clear guiding presence would most benefit Eliot’s goal.

Paradoxically, the fact that the narrator recedes from moments when her moral guidance could have the most impact demonstrates her moral character. If the narrator inserted her voice into morally critical moments, then the reader’s autonomy would truly

be usurped by the narrator and render her an unethical and manipulative figure. William Makepeace Thackeray's concern for morality is not so explicitly stated by Thackeray, however, the narrator of *Vanity Fair* fashions himself as a "moralist," albeit a moralist in fool's clothing, and his use of ethical reticence as well as his exaggerated politeness demonstrates his adherence to an ethical and moral code of conduct (83).⁹ Thackeray's narrator, more clearly than Eliot's narrator, recedes from morally critical moments in order to create a permanent gap in the reader's rhetorical transaction with the text. By creating these gaps, Thackeray's narrator uses them to "reveal real toads in imaginary gardens" and expose his readers' hypocrisy in their attitudes towards the characters (Toker 8). His retreat from these moments in the case of virtuous characters models for readers the narrator's moral code, and his exaggerated politeness exposes readers who do not share that same moral code.

Through my analysis of the ethical reticence used by both Eliot's and Thackeray's narrators, I hope to begin rectifying the interpretive dilemma revolving around the nature of the omniscient narrator for readers of Victorian novels. By analyzing the specific language each narrator uses, my argument will assess the ethical qualities of the omniscient narrator based upon concrete features of the narrative and attempt to tie what Booth infers by feeling to specific rhetorical evidence. My evidence will arise from assessing how the narrator's rhetorical choices instruct readers to make moral judgments about the characters. Booth argues that in "most of the great stories . . . the plots are built out of the characters' efforts to face moral choice," and as readers encounter the characters' moral choices, their "own capacities for thinking about how life should be

⁹ William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ed. Peter Shillingsburg (New York: Norton, 1994) 83. All citations of *Vanity Fair* come from the Norton Critical Edition.

lived” are stretched (187). The narrator’s behavior towards the characters during moments of moral choice reveals the narrator’s intent towards his or her readers. By examining the narrator’s behavior towards the characters, readers can ground their interpretation of the narrator’s ethicality and morality upon more than their emotive reactions. If we suspend some of our modern suspicion of omniscience and approach the narrators of *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair* with critical, attentive listening, then perhaps we may think of our relationship with the narrator as Andrew H. Miller argues the Victorians did, “as one of friendship” (77).

CHAPTER TWO

The Ethical Instructor in *Daniel Deronda*

In George Eliot's fiction, the voice of the narrator winds among the lives of the characters, creating an infrastructure of commentary that both illuminates and critiques their actions. The narrator of Eliot's novels consistently exhibits certain features such as a tendency to pause the narrative in order to offer what Lynn Pykett calls "universally acknowledged human truth[s]" (234). These "truths" are one of the most defining features of the narrator's commentary, and in *Daniel Deronda* they frequently appear to offer the reader a broader perspective on the characters' lives. For example, in book two, "Meeting Streams," the narrator pauses the story to expound on Gwendolen's inadequate understanding of Grandcourt:

Could there be a slenderer, more insignificant thread in human history than this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant?—in a time, too, when ideas were with fresh vigour making armies of themselves, and the universal kinship was declaring itself fiercely: when women on the other side of the world would not mourn for the husbands and sons who died bravely in a common cause, and men stinted of bread on our side of the world heard of that willing loss and were patient: a time when the soul of man was waking to pulses which had for centuries been beating in him unheard, until their full sum made a new life of terror or of joy. What in the midst of that mighty drama are girls and their blind visions? They are the Yea or Nay of that good for which men are enduring and fighting. In these delicate vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affections. (101-2)

The connections the narrator draws between Gwendolen's small, insignificant drama and the larger pulsations of the world exemplify the usual content and tone of the narrator's remarks about the characters. The narrator frequently begins her comments by gently

satirizing the character's situation, then drawing a connection to the external world of the readers, and finally offering a directive interpretation of the character's actions. Whether in extended comments such as the one quoted above or in shorter statements, the narrator's strong voice seems to afford no room for readers to interpret the characters differently. The prescriptive quality and frequency of the narrator's intrusions into the plot have earned her the fraught label "omniscient" and caused scholars to view her as Eliot's authorial presence in the text.¹

The frequency of omniscient narrators in Victorian novels suggests that contemporary audiences did not mind the narrator's pervasive presence in the text, but nearly two centuries later, Eliot's omniscient narrator has become the ground upon which critics either defend or discard her works. Critical responses to Eliot's narrator range from touting her omniscience and treating her as Eliot's benevolent representative to censuring her as a patriarchal authority derived from Eliot's provincial views.² These

¹ The narrator's omniscience causes polarized reactions among critics for reasons illuminated by Jonathan Culler in his article, "Omniscience." Culler explains that omniscience is ultimately an inadequate and inhibiting label for any narrator like Eliot's because it causes readers to look upon the author with skepticism at any time that the narrator appears to withhold information which an omniscient being would know (24-25). In regard to Eliot's narrator, the term omniscience is especially unhelpful because it necessarily implies that Eliot and her narrator are one and the same figure in her fiction. Liz Maynes-Aminzade tries to modify the omniscient label given to Eliot's narrator. She attempts to repackage the omniscience of Eliot's narrator as "omnicompetence" which she defines as expertise in "generalist knowledge" (237). Maynes-Aminzade's characterization improves upon the omniscient label but it is ultimately inadequate as an encompassing description for the narrator.

² Critics who respond to Eliot's narrator as authoritarian or as a wise, pervading presence have largely neglected to study the narrator in *Daniel Deronda* and have instead focused the most critical ink on Eliot's narrator in *Middlemarch*. Josie Billington, Eugene Goodheart, Katherine M. Sorenson, and J. Hillis Miller treat the narrator in *Middlemarch* as a semi-supernatural figure because of her omniscience. Of these, Miller is the first to characterize the narrator as "an all-embracing consciousness," and Sorenson's label of a "critic of society" implies the narrator has the same all-knowing capability (83, 20). The seemingly limitless knowledge of Eliot's narrator justifies these descriptors and fits the narrator as an emblematic model of an omniscient narrator. In contrast, Barbara Hardy, Nancy Ann Marck, and Lyn Pyckett all respond negatively to the narrator's omniscience. Speaking about Eliot's narrator in general, Barbara Hardy claims that Eliot's narratives are aware of "the manipulation of the reader's feelings, and a sense of the multiplicity of response" created by the narrator's analysis of the characters' intense emotions (13). Marck critiques Eliot's narrator in *Adam Bede* as authoritarian and patriarchal, while Pyckett argues for

approaches, however, either launch the narrator into the realm of mysticism or bury her within the layers of the novel's framework. Approaching Eliot's fictional narrator as a mystical presence or a collection of techniques embedded in the novel's structure, imposes qualities upon the narrator that provoke polarized interpretations of her function. Nancy Anne Marck calls the narrator of *Adam Bede* "manipulative and biased," (452), while, on the opposite side of the debate, Josie Billington views the narrator as "substituting for a lost deity" (13). But Eliot's fictional narrator deserves neither the harsh censure nor the hyperbolic praise that critics have placed upon her. Critics such as Marck and Billington that have denounced and extolled Eliot's narrator have referred to her as a character, but none have seriously considered the narrator as a character and assessed her narration from that starting point. They have referred to her as a character but interpreted her as indivisibly connected to Eliot's role as an author and predicated their condemnation or praise upon that connection. However, the narrator's account in *Daniel Deronda* indicates that she does not always act as Eliot's agent in the novel and can function independently from Eliot's concerns.

In fact, the narrator behaves independently from Eliot's concerns in the novel during moments when critics would least expect her to. I label these moments as "transformational moments," defined as points in the text where the characters make a high-stakes choice that greatly influences their development in moral sympathy. In Eliot's

a divided view of Eliot's narrator in *Felix Holt the Radical* as a voice of authoritative irony as well as a voice of wisdom (452, 234). Billington helpfully points out that critics such as Hardy, Marck and Pykett who find fault with Eliot's narrator are actually raising objections based upon the modern skepticism and shock that Eliot's narrator claims to present "a single knowable reality" through her style of narration (14). However, even scholars who treat the narrator as all-knowing do not all accept the omniscient label for the narrator. Billington argues the narrator is Eliot's way of "substituting for a lost divinity" after she left her father's faith, while Goodheart firmly states that the narrator is "no god" because she "attempt[s] to achieve knowledge of the other" throughout *Middlemarch* (13, 561).

fiction, the positive trajectory of her characters' developments are persistently directed towards a broadened and deepened moral sympathy. In the characters' stories, they frequently encounter choices that have the potential to permanently alter the course of not only their own stories but the stories of other characters as well. These choices become transformational moments for the characters because the choice they must make requires them to serve either their own needs or the needs of others. If they choose to put the needs of others ahead of their own, then they have chosen a course of action that demonstrates their growing moral sympathy.

If, however, the characters choose to satisfy their own needs at the expense of others' needs, then they have chosen a course of action that could justifiably condemn them in the judgment of Eliot's readers. Thus, the temptation escalates for Eliot to use her narrator to manipulate the revelation of characters' choices as progressions in moral sympathy. The judgments readers make during transformations in the characters are vital because the success of the education Eliot seeks to impart to her reader hinges upon those moments. In the characters' transformational moments, readers may either heed Eliot's offered education and bestow sympathetic judgment on Eliot's characters or disregard the education Eliot provides and unsympathetically judge Eliot's characters. However, it is precisely in these transformative moments when Eliot's own interests would be best served by an intrusive and controlling narrator that the narrator recedes into the background of the story. As characters make choices that could condemn or exonerate them, the narrator's instructive presence is absent from the text. Her guiding voice, which critics have lambasted as authoritarian and manipulative, remains respectfully and graciously silent.

One way we can understand the strange silence of the narrator in these transformational moments is to compare it to Eliot's journalistic "we." In Eliot's journalism, she frequently uses the inclusive "we" not only to mask her own presence as author but also to appeal to the collective authority of the journal in order to support her statements. This same journalistic "we" appears in Eliot's novels and is equally persuasive. In the context of the novels, the "we's" authority does not come from a journal but rather from the perception created by the word's plurality. The "we" creates the impression for readers that the external community reading Eliot's novel knows and agrees with the narrator's interpretations. The process of creating a perception that claims made with the journalistic "we" refer to the opinion of a large group of discerning readers is an intensely persuasive tool and quite plausibly convinces most readers that the narrator's interpretation is the correct one. Thus the power of the journalistic "we" consists of the ability to persuade readers to suspend their own judgments of a characters' actions for the judgment of the narrator.

The narrator recognizes that to include the journalistic "we" in her account of transformative moments would place herself in an ethically compromising situation. If the narrator intruded into the transformative moment with the journalistic "we," she would compromise her integrity in the minds of readers. Transformative moments do not only involve choices for the characters in them; they also involve choices for the reader. As the transformative moment unfolds, the reader must decide whether or not the narrator's account of events can be trusted in addition to deciding whether or not the characters' choices are demonstrating a growth into moral sympathy. If the narrator used the journalistic "we" in her account of transformational moments, readers could not judge

the decision of the character and the actions of the narrator confidently and independently. Their own interpretive capabilities would become overwhelmed by the narrator's more persuasive and authoritative voice. Garrett Stewart argues that *Vanity Fair* conscripts the reader's response into the text through the narrator's many vocative apostrophes, compelling readers to become "that ubiquitous nobody of self-interested consumption" (50). Stewart views the narrator's activity in the novel as ultimately usurping the reader's authority and causing readers to lose "all coherent personality of response" (52). However, the narrator's absent journalistic "we" during transformational moments creates an interpretive space for the reader's personality to direct their own judgments of the characters. Many Victorian novels do use a narrator that suffocates the readers' judgments, but, as K. M. Newton observes, "Eliot's fiction is distinctive in using a narrator, often highly intrusive, who is not intended to be 'unreliable' and whose views and interpretations are to be respected by readers, but at the same time it does not deny readers sufficient freedom to qualify or even differ from the narrator's views and interpretations" (315). Newton's assessment is better born out by the narrator's actions during transformative moments than Stewart's sense of the narrator's reader-conscription. As I will demonstrate, the narrator's choice to recede from the forefront of transformative moments permits readers to make their own judgments and demonstrates that the narrator's code of conduct in Eliot's novels is founded upon an ethical reticence.

During transformative moments, the narrator's presence does not recede entirely from the text – her voice must at least be present to advance the events of the moment – but the absence of the journalistic "we" results in an absence of the narrator's most directive, instructive tool. The journalistic "we" is powerful as an instructive tool because

it implicitly carries the authority of a body of individuals rather than a single author.

Leslie Stephens explains the effect of the “we” on the journalist:

The inexperienced person is inclined to explain it [the ‘we’ effect] as a mere grammatical phrase which cover in turn a whole series of contributors. But any writer in a paper, however free a course may be conceded to him, finds as a fact that the ‘we’ means something very real and potent. As soon as he puts on the mantle, he finds that an indefinable change has come over his whole method of thinking and expressing himself. He is no longer an individual but the mouthpiece of an oracle. He catches some inflection of style, and feels that although he may believe what he says, it is not the independent outcome of his own private idiosyncrasy. (qtd. in Dillane 81)

The author is not the only party interacting with a text who can sense the power of the “we.” The “we” can also align readers with the position of the author. For example, in Eliot’s essay “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” the “we” frequently positions readers as co-critics with the author. By tracing the logic of her judgment for readers, Eliot aligns readers with her own opinion: “But, then, as we are almost invariably told, that a heroine [in a novel by a lady novelist] has a ‘beautifully small head,’ and as her intellect has probably been invigorated by an attention to costume and deportment, we may conclude that she can pick up the Oriental tongues, to say nothing of their dialects, with the same aerial facility that the butterfly sips nectar” (143). This aligning effect is particularly powerful because it draws readers into the text and invites them to adopt the opinions of Eliot and, by association, the opinions of the journal as their own.

The concept of a corporate authority that lies behind the “we” in Eliot’s journalism carries forward into her narrator’s rhetorical repertoire. The authority is no longer tied to the *Westminster Review* or any of the other journals that Eliot featured in as an author; instead it is tied to the unidentified body of reading peers that accompany the individual reader as they encounter Eliot’s fiction. The narrator indicates that the source

of authority for the “we” is tied to the reading public because her comments are frequently based on common knowledge, or what Pykett has called the “universally acknowledged human truth” (234). In the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the narrator generally alludes to the current movements in educated society which she assumes her readers know. The wealth of knowledge that the narrator refers to in these claims makes K. M. Newton’s label for the narrator as a “historic novelist” particularly fitting. The narrator does possess historic and current knowledge, but the second term in Newton’s label, “novelist,” implies that Eliot and her narrator are synonymous. Because the “we” the narrator uses is tied to Eliot’s journalistic use of the word, the narrator is more appropriately described as a reporting historian.

As a reporting historian, the narrator serves several functions in *Daniel Deronda*. She functions as a reporter, a commentator, and an instructor. In each of these functions, the narrator uses common rhetorical tools such as analogies, rhetorical questions, quoted dialogue, and extended philosophical observations to guide readers through the story. These tools are used fluidly in each of the narrator’s functioning capacities, and at times her functions overlap. However, only the journalistic “we” carries the implied authority of both the narrator and Eliot’s audience. Therefore, the narrator’s instructing comments only become prescriptive when they are tied to the journalistic “we.” The narrator can and occasionally does instruct without the journalistic “we,” but in the absence of the journalistic “we,” the reader is not aligned with the narrator’s point of view. Readers are offered a choice in the absence of the journalistic “we” to either accept or reject the narrator’s interpretation. An example from the narrator’s characterization of Gwendolen will better illustrate this distinction.

In her characterization of Gwendolen, the narrator moves through each of her functions as a reporting historian to present a full portrait of Gwendolen's character to readers. As the narrator describes the dynamic between Gwendolen and her family, the narrator uses the phrase "princess in exile" to depict Gwendolen's temperament, but in this instance she uses the phrase in a factual, reporting manner to offer insight into Gwendolen's history:

Having always been the pet and pride of the household, waited on by mother, sisters, governess, and maids, as if she had been a princess in exile, she naturally found it difficult to think her own pleasure less important than others made it, and when it was positively thwarted felt an astonished resentment apt, in her cruder days, to vent itself in one of those passionate acts which look like a contradiction of habitual tendencies. (18)

Although the narrator does use an analogy – "as if she had been a princess in exile" – to elaborate on the facts of Gwendolen's attitude, she only does so to illuminate rather than interpret Gwendolen's behavior. This distinction between expounding on facts and directing the reader's interpretation becomes clear when the narrator uses the same phrase – "princess in exile" – in an instructive manner a chapter later.

In her second use of the phrase "princess in exile," the narrator shifts into her instructive function as a reporting historian and signals to the readers that she is doing so. The first signal she sends to readers occurs in a question that interrupts the progression of events: "Always she was the princess in exile, who in time of famine was to have her breakfast-roll made of the finest-bolted flour from the seven thin ears of wheat, and in a general decampment was to have her silver fork kept out of the baggage. How was this to be accounted for?" (32). The insertion of this question halts readers and alerts them to the fact that what follows is the narrator's own opinion and explanation of Gwendolen's

character. The answer that follows the question also contains signals that alert the reader to the narrator's instructive voice:

But beware of arriving at conclusions without comparison. I remember having seen the same assiduous, apologetic attention awarded to persons who were not at all beautiful or unusual, whose firmness showed itself in no very graceful or euphonious way, and who were not eldest daughters with a tender, timid mother, compunctious at having subjected them to inconveniences. . . . Hence I am forced to doubt whether even without her potent charm and peculiar filial position Gwendolen might not still have played the queen in exile, if only she had kept her inborn energy of egoistic desire, and her power of inspiring fear as to what she might say or do. (33)

The narrator's sudden use of the first person pronoun introduces her own opinion into the text as does her use of analogies which draw on external knowledge. In this way, the narrator draws upon her experience to justify the insights she offers into Gwendolen's character. Both her use of analogies and the first person pronoun lend her comments an instructive quality that seeks to broaden the reader's understanding of Gwendolen.

In the analogy the narrator constructs, she uses the singular first person pronoun "I" to alert readers to the presence of her voice in the text. As she concludes her comments, she introduces the journalistic "we" to produce a new instructive effect:

However, she had the charm, and those who feared her were also fond of her; the fear and the fondness being perhaps both heightened by what may be called the iridescence of her character – the play of various, nay, contrary tendencies. For Macbeth's rhetoric about the impossibility of being many opposite things in the same moment, referred to the clumsy necessities of action and not to the subtler possibilities of feeling. **We** cannot speak a loyal word and be meanly silent, **we** cannot kill and not kill in the same moment; but a moment is room wide enough for the loyal and mean desire, for the outlash of a murderous thought and the sharp backward stroke of repentance. (33, emphasis added)

In this passage the narrator draws from Shakespeare to illustrate her point and follows that allusion with an explication that uses the journalistic "we" to draw the reader into

agreement with her statement. By using the “we” in this moment, the narrator predicates her statement on commonly held knowledge, and she directs readers to accept her statement by positioning them as co-owners of that knowledge. Through the structure of her statement, the narrator fashions the journalistic “we” as an invitation to readers to enter the world of the novel while also directing readers to agree with her interpretation. The narrator uses this technique in order to assert a crucial insight about Gwendolen’s nature that the narrator believes is essential for readers to understand. While the narrator does instruct apart from using the journalistic “we,” the narrator’s instruction only becomes prescriptive when the journalistic “we” is introduced.

Practicing Ethical Reticence: Gwendolen’s Transformational Moments

Choices saturate and propel the development of both Gwendolen and Daniel in *Daniel Deronda*, but not all choices point to a transformational moment. The difference between the kind of choices Daniel and Gwendolen make illustrates the difference. Gwendolen relishes the power to choose her own course in life, while Daniel frequently shies away from exercising his own volition, preferring to allow the needs of others to direct his actions. Together their choices constitute the plot of the novel, and the narrative fluctuates back and forth between their stories, weaving the intersections together into a cohesive whole. Gwendolen, however, is the only character who encounters choices that constitute transformational moments. Daniel also makes important choices, such as his choice to rescue Mirah and his choice to accept the mantle of Judaism from Mordecai, but none of his choices result in a course of action that will change his nature. Additionally, none of his choices oppose the development towards sympathy that Eliot desires for each of her characters. The important choices Daniel makes are choices that

require him to continue exercising the sympathy that is already present in his nature.

Thus his moments of choice do not transform how the readers understand his nature or how the readers understand the narrator's practices of narration.

In contrast, Gwendolen encounters several transformational moments. In Gwendolen's transformative moments, her actions allow readers to interpret her nature as changed or unchanged. Either interpretation is justified by the narrative, but Eliot's aim to educate her readers by showing her characters' developing sympathy is only fulfilled by one of those interpretations. If readers choose to judge Gwendolen's development with sympathy, then Eliot's effort to educate readers in sympathy will succeed. If readers choose to judge Gwendolen's choices with severity, then Eliot's effort to instill sympathy into readers will fail. Thus, as a partner with Eliot in her aim to impart sympathy to readers, the narrator has a vested interest in readers' decisions to judge Eliot's characters sympathetically or severely. Throughout Gwendolen's characterization, the narrator has shown her ample willingness to direct readers towards interpretations that further Eliot's educating mission. Due to this pattern of narrative behavior, readers naturally expect the narrator to direct their interpretation during transformational moments by employing the journalistic "we." This expectation and the narrator's strong instructive presence up until the moment of transformation has generated the critical history of interpreting Eliot's narrator as imperious and manipulative.

However, such interpretations are insufficient and fail to recognize the significant insights that the absence of the journalistic "we" during transformative moments reveals about the narrator's character and conduct. The narrator's reticence to intrude into the story during transformational moments demonstrates both her determination to behave

ethically towards Eliot's readers and to advance Eliot's educational goals. As a figure with a vested interest in the judgment readers make about Gwendolen, the narrator cannot disinterestedly comment upon transformational moments in her story. If the narrator were to comment, she would be commenting as a figure who has aided Eliot's aim to develop sympathy in her audience. Readers would not be able to discern if the narrator was presenting a disinterested or distorted representation of Gwendolen's actions during transformative moments. By refraining from using the journalistic "we" during those moments, the narrator chooses to remove the possibility of unjustly reproducing the scene and behaving unethically towards the readers. Her absence from Gwendolen's transformational moments becomes an ethical act of reticence as readers are permitted to interpret Gwendolen's actions without the narrator's potentially biased comments.

Although the narrator's reticence may seem like a restraint that impedes Eliot's educational efforts, the narrator's choice not to comment upon transformational moments is an essential part of the education process. If Eliot seeks to educate her readers through Gwendolen's developing sympathy, then eventually readers must be given the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned and choose to accept or reject that education. Readers receive that opportunity when the narrator recedes into the background of the text, allowing readers the interpretive stage to demonstrate what they have learned. Thus the narrator's reticence does not undermine nor impede Eliot's educating efforts. Instead, the narrator's refusal to use the journalistic "we" during transformational moments functions as the culmination of Eliot's education for readers.

Readers receive the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned at three times during the narrator's communication of Gwendolen's story. Each of these three

instances occur as the narrator gives an account of pivotal choices Gwendolen faces in the novel. The first crucial decision Gwendolen encounters occurs during Grandcourt's proposal and only becomes apparent as a crucial decision because of the narrator's insights into Gwendolen's mind. During the proposal, the narrator shifts among her many functions as a reporting historian. In her account of Gwendolen's thoughts, the narrator comments on and explains Gwendolen's reactions, but she never introduces the journalistic "we" into her narration to try and make Gwendolen's responses more palatable. The narrator's point of view is freely offered, but she does not attempt to corral the readers into agreement with her by portraying her interpretation of events as obvious and indisputable. Instead of using the journalistic "we" to lend final authority to her point of view, the narrator uses rhetorical questions – a technique she frequently uses to introduce her own opinion into the text – to make a strong assessing statement about Gwendolen's idea of marriage:

But now—did she know exactly what was the state of the case with regard to Mrs Glasher and her children? She had given a sort of promise—had said, 'I will not interfere with your wishes.' But would another woman who married Grandcourt be in fact the decisive obstacle to her wishes, or be doing her and her boy any real injury? Might it not be just as well, nay better, that Grandcourt should marry? For what could not a woman do when she was married, if she knew how to assert herself? Here all was constructive imagination. Gwendolen had about as accurate a conception of marriage – that is to say, of the mutual influences, demands, duties of man and woman in a state of matrimony – as she had of magnetic currents and the law of storms. (249)

In the final sentence from this passage, the narrator has created an opening for introducing the journalistic "we" to guide readers to agree with her assessment of Gwendolen's competency. To introduce the journalistic "we" would best serve the narrator's and Eliot's interests because at the scene's climax Gwendolen decides to

accept Grandcourt, thereby exposing herself to condemnation from readers. The journalistic “we” is the strongest rhetorical tool in the narrator’s repertoire for convincing readers to accept her interpretation. Asserting Gwendolen’s innocence in spite of her former resolve to refuse Grandcourt could be presented as the logical interpretation of the accepted proposal if the journalistic “we” were employed. The narrator could easily make a statement about some piece of knowledge we all share which excuses and explains Gwendolen’s decision to ensure her own survival at the expense of Lydia Glasher’s prior claim on Grandcourt. However, the narrator refrains from introducing the journalistic “we” even though this scene prepares readers to answer a critical interpretive question. Gwendolen’s choice in this scene will demonstrate to readers whether or not she has the capacity to act in the best interests of others apart from her own gain.

As Gwendolen internally rationalizes her decision, the narrator does not attempt to coerce the readers into accepting Gwendolen’s rationale. Instead, the narrator neutrally observes and reports Gwendolen’s decision:

‘I wonder what mamma and my uncle would say if they knew about Mrs. Glasher!’ thought Gwendolen, in her inward debating; not that she could imagine herself telling them, even if she had not felt bound to silence. ‘I wonder what anybody would say; or what they would say to Mr. Grandcourt’s marrying someone else and having other children!’ To consider what ‘anybody’ would say, was to be released from the difficulty of judging where everything was obscure to her when feeling had ceased to be decisive. She had only to collect her memories, which proved to her that ‘anybody’ regarded illegitimate children as more rightfully to be looked shy on and deprived of social advantages than illegitimate fathers. The verdict of ‘anybody’ seemed to be that she had no reason to concern herself greatly on behalf of Mrs. Glasher and her children. (250)

This account of Gwendolen’s mental debate remains uninterrupted by any interpretive comments from the narrator even though it does not present Gwendolen’s capacity for selflessness and sympathy in a positive light. Gwendolen battles between justifying the

temptation to accept Grandcourt and feeling repulsed by his proposal. Her repulsion, however, is not based upon Grandcourt's deplorable behavior towards Lydia Glasher by courting the former in spite of his promise to the latter. Instead, she is disgusted by Grandcourt's attentions because he deigned to consider himself suitable as her suitor when his social pedigree has been sullied by his connection with Lydia. Gwendolen's displeasure arises solely from her own vanity rather than any sense of moral injustice.

Despite the inadequacies Gwendolen's thoughts reveal about her character, the narrator does not intervene to gloss over the gross deficiencies in Gwendolen's moral sensibility. She remains in the background even as Gwendolen reveals that she is merely planning on toying with Grandcourt by permitting him to come:

She had never meant to form a new determination; she had only been considering what might be thought or said. If anything could have induced her to change, it would have been the prospect of making all things easy for 'poor mamma:' that, she admitted, was a temptation. But no! She was going to refuse him. Meanwhile, the thought that he was coming to be refused was inspiring: she had the white reins in her hands again; there was a new current in her frame, reviving her from the beaten-down consciousness in which she had been left by the interview with Klesmer. She was not now going to crave an opinion of her capabilities; she was going to exercise her power. (250-51)

The narrator only functions as a recorder of events in this passage even though it presents the opportunity for the narrator to mitigate the negative interpretation readers may be forming about Gwendolen. Gwendolen does appear to consider her mother's happiness during her deliberations, and the narrator could have magnified her concern into the beginning of true sympathy for others. However, the narrator does not attempt to gild Gwendolen's impulses as disinterested concern for her mother, nor does she soften the harsh light cast on Gwendolen's character. Gwendolen's exultation in her ability to

exercise her own power over Grandcourt shines an incriminating spotlight on her motives during the proposal.

As the proposal scene climaxes at the moment of Gwendolen's choice, the narrator begins to function in her instructive capacity. She expounds upon Gwendolen's internal debate to clarify Gwendolen's struggle for the readers:

Inwardly the answer framed itself, 'No; but there is a woman.' Yet how could she utter this? Even if she had not promised that woman to be silent, it would have been impossible for her to enter on the subject with Grandcourt. But how could she arrest this wooing by beginning to make a formal speech—'I perceive your intention—it is most flattering, &c.' A fish honestly invited to come and be eaten has a clear course in declining, but how if it finds itself swimming against a net? And apart from the network, would she have dared at once to say anything decisive? Gwendolen had not time to be clear on that point. (252)

The comparison the narrator draws between Gwendolen's predicament and a fish swimming against a net instructs readers in an indirect manner. The analogy suggests to readers that Gwendolen is out-manuevered by Grandcourt's smooth rhetoric and the short time she has to reply. The narrator could take action and shape the narrative so that readers are directed to believe that Gwendolen was coerced into accepting Grandcourt's proposal. The journalistic "we" would effectively guide readers to accept Gwendolen as a hapless victim of Grandcourt's trap. Instead, the narrator remains reticent and refuses to unethically skew the readers' perception of this transformational moment.

The narrator's determination not to recast Gwendolen's actions and motives during the proposal scene into a more appealing form continues through the moment when Gwendolen ultimately accepts Grandcourt's offer. In her narration just before Gwendolen agrees to marry Grandcourt, the narrator reveals that Gwendolen is not unaware of the gravity of her choice: "Repugnance, dread, scruples – these were dim as

remembered pains, while she was already tasting relief under the immediate pain of hopelessness. She imagined herself already springing to her mother, and being playful again. Yet when Grandcourt had ceased to speak, there was an instant in which she was conscious of being at the turning of ways” (253). The conscience that makes Gwendolen aware of the irreversible effects her decision will have on her life also makes her more culpable for any harm that occurs because of her marriage to Grandcourt. Her awareness also renders her more guilty for the suffering she will cause Lydia Glasher by marrying Grandcourt, and readers have more cause to judge her incapacity for sympathy. Readers have an additional reason to judge her severely, creating yet another opportunity for the narrator to intercede and defend Gwendolen’s character.

At this point in the proposal, the narrator has ample motivation to try to excuse Gwendolen’s response and represent her choice to readers as inevitable and unconnected to her capacity for sympathy. Once again the narrator’s ethical reticence keeps her from intervening to mitigate the reactions readers will have to Gwendolen’s capitulation. As the narrator relates Gwendolen’s acceptance, she absents her voice and point of view from the text:

‘Do you command me to go?’ No familiar spirit could have suggested to him more effective words.

‘No,’ said Gwendolen. She could not let him go: that negative was a clutch. She seemed to herself to be, after all, only drifted towards the tremendous decision: - but drifting depends on something besides the currents, when the sails have been set beforehand.

‘You accept my devotion?’ said Grandcourt, holding his hat by his side and looking straight into her eyes, without other movement. Their eyes meeting in that way seemed to allow any length of pause; but wait as long as she would, how could she contradict herself? What had she detained him for? He had shut out any explanation.

Yes,’ came as gravely from Gwendolen’s lips as if she had been answering to her name in a court of justice. (254)

The narrator emphasizes the finality of Gwendolen's choice by comparing her assent to speaking in a courtroom, but the narrator does not offer any comment. The final words that Gwendolen exchanges with Grandcourt, binding herself to him and disregarding any prior reservations, are presented by the narrator in interpretive silence. In the silence, the narrator vacates her role of interpreter, leaving the position open for readers to fill.

Gwendolen's solemn "Yes" undermines any positive impression readers might have of her nature from the concern she shows for her mother. Her ability to disregard Lydia Glasher's prior claim upon Grandcourt reveals the selfish motives underlying any sympathy she displays. If Gwendolen does express sympathy and concern for her mother's position, readers may reasonably assume that her sympathy for her mother is self-reflexive. The selfishness that guides Gwendolen's choice indicates that her development is not progressing towards sympathy. Eliot's educating ambitions seem to be flouted by Gwendolen's narcissism. The narrator's absence while Gwendolen's egotistic desires threaten the triumph of sympathy is a grave narrative risk.

The risk the narrator takes by receding from Gwendolen's first transformative moment is a strange divergence from the narrator's typical relation to Gwendolen's story. Throughout the progression of events to this moment in Gwendolen's experience, the narrator has frequently offered interpretive as well as directive comments that are intended to influence readers to perceive Gwendolen in a particular way. For example, the narrator does not hesitate to offer her perspective on Gwendolen's impulsive decision to leave Offendene and Grandcourt in book two:

Gwendolen's uncontrolled reading, though consisting chiefly in what are called pictures of life, had somehow not prepared her for this encounter with reality. Is that surprising? . . . Perspective, as its inventor remarked, is a beautiful thing. . . . What hymning of cancerous vices may we not

languish over as sublimest art in the safe remoteness of a strange language and artificial phrase! Yet we keep a repugnance to rheumatism and other painful effects when presented in our personal experience. (129)

In this passage, the narrator reveals an unflattering fact about Gwendolen's mental alacrity; her experience of the world had not prepared her to deal with the sordid realities in it. In contrast to the proposal scene, however, the narrator does not relinquish all control of interpretation about this fact to the readers. Instead, the narrator immediately follows this statement with her usual instructive commentary that utilizes rhetorical questions and answers with the journalistic "we." Readers are directed to identify with Gwendolen's naivety and perceive her surprise at a common reality of life as a surprise that anyone would feel. Yet Gwendolen's impulsive decision to flee to Leubronn does not have the same interpretive significance as her decision to marry Grandcourt. Her flight to the gambling tables may be ill advised, but the effects do not immediately harm anyone around her. Readers may take note of her impulsiveness, but it does not create the grounds for condemnation.

Since the narrator does instructively comment on the first, less significant instance of Gwendolen's failure to act wisely, Gwendolen's far more significant lapse in judgment during Grandcourt's proposal raises a much more pressing opportunity for the narrator to guide readers' reactions. In spite of the far more significant consequences Gwendolen's choice to accept Grandcourt may have on readers, the narrator does not use any of her established rhetorical tools to shape the reader's response. The narrator's choice to withhold commentary from Gwendolen's actions is a stark divergence from her usual mode of operation. Her reticence signals to readers that the proposal scene reveals important aspects not only of Gwendolen's character but of the narrator's character as

well. As the consequences of Gwendolen's decision to marry Grandcourt unfold, the narrator continues to remain silent and absent from the text. By doing so, the narrator reveals to Eliot's readers that she is adhering to an ethical code of conduct which prohibits her from overextending her ability to shape the readers' perceptions of the characters in *Daniel Deronda*. The intentionality of her silence during transformative moments becomes even more significant to readers' understanding of Gwendolen as consecutive transformational moments arrive.

During Gwendolen's choice to accept or reject Grandcourt, the narrator's reticence permitted readers to judge whether Gwendolen possessed a preexisting capacity for sympathy. The reader's choice to interpret Gwendolen as a selfless or selfish character influences the perception of her that they will carry into her subsequent transformational moments. For this reason, readers' judgments of Gwendolen's acceptance are important, but they are not conclusive. Gwendolen's development in her marriage is far more revealing, and the crucial choice she makes presents a greater challenge for the narrator's reticence. The stakes of the trials Gwendolen faces in her marriage are far higher, and consequently the narrator's depiction of those trials is vital for the readers' final judgments of Gwendolen. The narrator's behavior during Gwendolen's decision to accept Grandcourt impacted readers' assessments of Gwendolen's existing disposition, but the narrator's account of Gwendolen's actions after her marriage will influence readers' judgments of her ability to develop moral sympathy. If Eliot's method of educating her readers into moral sympathy is through the example of her characters' growth, then the narrator's depiction of Gwendolen's choice will either advance or hinder the reader's education.

In the events of the story leading up to Gwendolen's second transformational moment, the narrator adopts the instructional function of her role as a reporting historian. The narrator shares Eliot's knowledge of the story's ending and knows that the second transformational moment is more meaningful for the readers. Thus she instructs readers in her narration to try to position them to perceive the transforming process occurring in Gwendolen since her marriage:

No chemical process shows a more wonderful activity than the transforming influence of the thoughts we imagine to be going on in another. Changes in theory, religion, admirations, may begin with a suspicion of dissent or disapproval, even when the grounds of disapproval are but matter of searching conjecture.

Poor Gwendolen was conscious of an uneasy, transforming process – all the old nature shaken to its depths, its hopes spoiled, its pleasures perturbed, but still showing wholeness and strength in the will to reassert itself. . . . This beautiful, healthy young creature, with her two-and-twenty years and her gratified ambition, no longer felt inclined to kiss her fortunate image in the glass; she looked at it with wonder that she could be so miserable. One belief which had accompanied her through her unmarried life as a self-cajoling superstition, encouraged by the subordination of every one about her – the belief in her own power of dominating – was utterly gone. (356-7)

In this extended analysis, the narrator meticulously constructs an image of Gwendolen's internal life since her marriage to persuade readers that the only unaltered aspect of Gwendolen's character is her name. The narrator refers back to the moment when Gwendolen vainly kissed her own image because it encapsulates Gwendolen's self-obsession. Thus by saying that Gwendolen no longer felt the impulse to kiss her own reflection, the narrator supports the initial claim of her inserted commentary. The journalistic "we" used in the narrator's first statement instructs readers to accept the premise of the statement; Gwendolen's character is transformed by her perception that Daniel thinks of her as a "selfish creature who only cared about possessing things in her

own person” (356). The following analysis of “Poor Gwendolen” demonstrates that, in the narrator’s point of view, Gwendolen is indeed becoming a different individual from her former, unfettered self. The journalistic “we” and the authoritative tenor of the narrator’s analysis affords readers no opportunity to remain skeptical of Gwendolen’s change.

In the interim between Gwendolen’s marriage and her pivotal choice in her marriage, the narrator spends considerable time educating readers about her changing nature by analyzing her internal reflections. The narrator may insist that Gwendolen is changing, but the new characteristics that Gwendolen develops are not clearly delineated for the readers. The narrator implies that Gwendolen’s selfishness is decreasing by claiming that her “belief in her own power of dominating” has vanished, but the narrator has not yet presented to readers any of Gwendolen’s actions that definitively display her new selfless, sympathetic nature (365-7). The narrator describes Gwendolen’s “rising rage against him [Grandcourt] mingling with her shame for herself” when they drive by Lydia Glasher and her children in the park, but Gwendolen’s emotions do not manifest in any external course of action (510). Her new concern for the suffering of Lydia Glasher may only arise from her regret for her own suffering. Readers do not yet know if Gwendolen’s new characteristics can manifest in external displays of sympathy. Because they do not yet know if Gwendolen will now behave with moral sympathy, the opportunity for the narrator to control whether or not readers will decide that Gwendolen has changed still exists. The definitive interpretation of Gwendolen’s moral or immoral character has not been made by readers or the narrator.

The narrative finally does arrive at a transformation moment for Gwendolen: she must decide between her own desires and the needs of her domineering husband; she must face the choice between saving Grandcourt's life or reclaiming her freedom. Unlike Grandcourt's proposal, the narrator does not recount Grandcourt's fall from the yacht and Gwendolen's attempt to save him as it occurs. Instead, the narrator reveals Gwendolen's choice after Grandcourt has drowned by describing Gwendolen's confession to Daniel. The narrator's choice to present Gwendolen's account of the moment after it has happened may seem like a strategy to control the readers' perception of her actions. By recording Gwendolen's memory of her choice, the narrator could more easily shape the moment by fluidly moving among Gwendolen's quoted thoughts, narrated monologue, and the narrator's analysis of Gwendolen's actions and motivations. However, the narrator recounts the scene through Daniel's point of view, thus placing a barrier between herself and Gwendolen's confession. Because the confession is described from Daniel's perspective, any narrated monologue used by the narrator comments upon his reaction rather than Gwendolen's remembered motivations and thoughts on the yacht. The narrator's choice to position Daniel as the mediating presence between her narration and Gwendolen's story is a distinct attempt to guarantee that readers are not forcefully aligned with the narrator's interpretation.

As Gwendolen begins her confession, the narrator once again recounts the moment with ethical reticence. The temptation to intrude with the journalistic "we" and instruct the readers is severe, but the narrator resolutely refrains from inserting her own voice. Because readers are encountering the scene from Daniel's point of view, the narrator is restricted to commenting on his reactions rather than Gwendolen's actions.

After the narrator records Gwendolen's admission that she longed for Grandcourt's death and her remorseful exclamation, "I have been a cruel woman! What can *I* do but cry for help? . . . Forsaken - no pity - *I* shall be forsaken," the narrator relays Daniel's reaction to Gwendolen's words rather than relaying Gwendolen's internal despair:

He was completely unmanned. Instead of finding, as he had imagined, that his late experience had dulled his susceptibility to fresh emotion, it seemed that the lot of this young creature, whose swift travel from her bright rash girlhood into this agony of remorse he had had to behold in helplessness, pierced him the deeper because it had come close upon another sad revelation of spiritual conflict: he was in one of those moments when the very anguish of passionate pity makes us ready to choose that we will know pleasure no more, and live only for the stricken and afflicted. He had risen from his seat while he watched that terrible outburst – which seemed the more awful to him because, even in this supreme agitation, she kept the suppressed voice of one who confesses in secret. (584-85)

Because Gwendolen's confession is told to readers through Daniel's point of view, the narrator must comment on his thoughts rather than on Gwendolen's guilt or innocence in Grandcourt's death. The journalistic "we" in the observation – "he was in one of those moments when the very anguish of passionate pity makes us ready to choose that we will know pleasure no more" – aligns readers with the narrator's interpretation of Daniel's reaction. Thus the narrator's instructive commentary only impacts readers' interpretations of Daniel's words and actions rather than Gwendolen's confession.

Throughout the rest of Gwendolen's confession to Daniel, the narrator refrains from commenting directly on her actions, with or without the journalistic "we." As Gwendolen reveals her thoughts before jumping into the sea to save Grandcourt, readers recognize the significance of the narrator's reticence. Her reticence in this scene is not merely a stylistic choice or a decision to minimize commentary on Gwendolen because Daniel's character development is the most important aspect. Her decision to refrain from

offering her own analysis of the climax of Gwendolen's admission is a purposeful, ethical choice. Gwendolen haltingly explains her despair to Daniel:

And now, I thought just the opposite had come to me. I had stepped into a boat, and my life was a sailing and sailing away – gliding on and no help – always into solitude with *him*, away from deliverance. And because I felt more helpless than ever, my thoughts went out over worse things – I longed for worse things – I had cruel wishes – I fancied impossible ways of – I did not want to die myself; I was afraid of our being drowned together. If it had been any use I should have prayed – prayed that he might sink out of my sight and leave me alone. I knew no way of killing him there, but I did. I did kill him in my thoughts. (586)

Gwendolen's words reveal to the readers that her intentions towards Grandcourt merit condemnation and show no progression towards moral sympathy. Readers may be able to identify with Gwendolen's desires because of Grandcourt's vile behavior, but her revelation of those desires does not offer an example of moral sympathy for readers. Her confession impedes Eliot's education of her readers in moral sympathy, but the narrator does not intervene to gild her words. The narrator delivers her confession in long, uninterrupted paragraphs of quoted monologue, with only brief connecting statements to describe any changes in her rhythm or manner of speech: "She sank into silence for a minute, submerged by the weight of memory which no words could represent. . . . She began to speak more hurriedly, and in more of a whisper" (586). Apart from her comments on the delivery of Gwendolen's confession, the narrator remains silent on the implications of Gwendolen's words.

With Gwendolen's admission of guilt, Eliot needs the narrator to instruct readers with the journalistic "we" and guide them to see that Gwendolen's actions are not damning. Yet the narrator's ensuing comments do not focus on absolving Gwendolen from her guilt. Instead her narrated monologue focuses on Daniel's internal response:

Deronda felt the burden on his spirit less heavy than the foregoing dread. The word 'guilty' had held a possibility of interpretations worse than the fact; and Gwendolen's confession, for the very reason that her conscience made her dwell on the determining power of her evil thoughts, convinced him the more that there had been throughout a counterbalancing struggle of her better will. It seemed almost certain that her murderous thought had had no outward effect – that quite apart from it, the death was inevitable. (587)

Daniel's rationale excuses Gwendolen's hesitation to save Grandcourt and could persuade readers to align their own interpretation with Daniel's point of view. However, the narrator reemerges into the text to seemingly undercut the positive effect of Daniel's interpretation: "Still, a question as to the outward effectiveness of a criminal desire dominant enough to impel even a momentary act, cannot alter our judgment of the desire; and Deronda shrank from putting that question forward in the first instance" (587). In this observation, the narrator exhorts readers not to withhold judgment from Gwendolen simply because Daniel is inclined to do so. Her comment erodes Daniel's sympathetic projection of Gwendolen and uses the journalistic "we" to counter any biases Daniel's reaction may persuade the reader to adopt, even if those biases might position readers to think Gwendolen is developing moral sympathy. By doing so, the narrator demonstrates that she can function independently from Eliot's wish to teach her readers to have and exercise moral sympathy by giving them examples of morally sympathetic characters.

The narrator uses her independence in this scene to ensure that readers will judge Gwendolen more objectively than Daniel is inclined to do. But the narrator does not let her desire for unbiased judgment cause her to act unethically in this moment and refrain from communicating the full extent of Daniel's perception of Gwendolen. Immediately after inserting her own voice and opinion into the narrative, the narrator retracts her own voice and reports more details of Daniel's reaction:

He held it likely that Gwendolen's remorse aggravated her inward guilt, and that she gave the character of decisive action to what had been an inappreciably instantaneous glance of desire. But her remorse was the previous sign of a recoverable nature; it was the culmination of that self-disapproval which had been the awakening of a new life within her; it marked her off from the criminals whose only regret is failure in securing their evil wish. Deronda could not utter one word to diminish that sacred aversion to her worse self – that thorn-pressure which must come with the crowning of the sorrowful Better, suffering because of the Worse. (587)

In this narrated monologue, Daniel justifies Gwendolen's actions by clinging to her remorse as evidence of an improving nature, and the narrator does not offer instructive commentary about his interpretation. She only reports Daniel's internal logic, and by refraining from voicing her own interpretation, she acts according to the ethical code of conduct she has held herself to throughout the novel. She will instruct her readers about moral sympathy, but she will not compel them to interpret the characters as moral figures who deserve sympathy. The narrator's decision to permit readers the interpretive space to make their own judgment of Gwendolen's development towards sympathy upholds that ethic. In her adherence to the code, the narrator chooses to trust the readers' discernment and ability to independently decide whether or not Gwendolen still has the capacity to transform and renew her nature.

Permitting Independent Interpretations: Gwendolen's Pivotal Choice

The last and greatest test of the narrator's ethical conduct towards Gwendolen arises in the final transformational moment Gwendolen faces. As Eliot's novel draws to a close, the narrator presents to the reader the final encounter between Gwendolen and Daniel in which Gwendolen has one last opportunity to demonstrate to Eliot's readers that her nature can be transformed. The success of Eliot's desire to instruct readers in moral sympathy by providing examples of characters who develop into moral and sympathetic

individuals depends on the reader's interpretation of this scene between Gwendolen and Daniel. If readers interpret the scene as a proven example that characters like Gwendolen can become sympathetic and behave morally, then they may accept Eliot's teaching that moral sympathy is essential in life. As Gwendolen faces Daniel's imminent departure, the narrator has the opportunity to shape the final judgment readers will make about Gwendolen's ability to act in the best interests of someone else rather than for her own gain.

Before this opportunity arises, however, the narrator makes a concerted effort to acquaint readers with Gwendolen's character since her freedom from bondage to Grandcourt. Throughout the novel, the narrator has described Gwendolen's growing dependence on Daniel and developing view of him as the source of her security. After the traumatic yachting accident, Gwendolen's attachment to Daniel becomes stronger, and the possibility of being separated from him is beyond her comprehension. To illustrate how painful it will be for Gwendolen to break her bond with Daniel, the narrator posed the question to the readers that this final encounter with Daniel will ultimately answer:

Would her remorse have maintained its power within her, or would she have felt absolved by secrecy, if it had not been for that outer conscience which was made for her by Deronda? It is hard to say how much we could forgive ourselves if we were secure from judgment by another whose opinion is the breathing-medium of all our joy – who brings to us with close pressure and immediate sequence that judgment of the Invisible and Universal which self-flattery and the world's tolerance would easily melt and disperse. In this way our brother may be in the stead of God to us, and his opinion which has pierced even to the joints and the marrow, may be our virtue in the making. (642)

By asking the readers to consider whether or not Gwendolen would continue transforming into a virtuous woman without Daniel's powerful influence, the narrator prompts readers to assess Gwendolen's actions towards Daniel according to that question.

The journalistic “we” functions to guide readers to accept the narrator’s interpretation that Daniel is a sufficient conscience for Gwendolen. Daniel’s function in Gwendolen’s life is to bring the judgment of “the Invisible and Universal” into her consciousness. By presenting Daniel as that force and positioning readers to accept him as that force, the narrator makes a strong instructive move in her description of Gwendolen’s perception of Daniel.

The question of Gwendolen’s morality begins to intermingle with the question of any romantic attachment she might be developing towards Daniel. However, during the private interview Gwendolen and Daniel have two weeks after the yachting incident, the narrator steps into the scene to dismantle any such suspicions and unfold the true state of Gwendolen’s feelings:

It is only by remembering the searching anguish which had changed the aspect of the world for her that we can understand her behavior to Deronda – the unreflecting openness, nay, the importunate pleading, with which she expressed her dependence on him. Considerations such as would have filled the minds of indifferent spectators could not occur to her, any more than if flames had been mounting around her, and she had flung herself into his opened arms and clung about his neck that he might carry her into safety. She identified him with the struggling regenerative process in her which had begun with his action. Is it any wonder that she saw her own necessity reflected in his feelings? She was in that state of unconscious reliance and expectation which is a common experience with us when we are preoccupied with our own trouble or our own purposes. (649)

By introducing the journalistic “we” in this interpretive comment, the narrator insists that readers accept her explanation of Gwendolen’s deep bond with Daniel. To “indifferent spectators” Gwendolen’s deep vulnerability and honesty with Daniel appears to arise from a romantic attachment towards him; however, the narrator firmly refutes such false impressions as perversions of Gwendolen’s true relationship with Daniel (649). The

narrator insists that Gwendolen views Daniel as a salvific presence in her life rather than an opportunity for a second chance at romance.

As the reporting historian of the novel, the narrator knows that readers will only be equipped to understand Gwendolen's reaction to Daniel's decision to leave England if they recognize that Gwendolen has attached to Daniel a guiding power for her life.

Gwendolen's dependence on Daniel stretches far into the future she imagines for herself:

. . . she did not imagine seeing him otherwise than always within her reach, her supreme need of him blinding her to the separateness of his life, the whole scene of which she filled with his relation to her – no unique preoccupation of Gwendolen's, for we are all apt to fall into this passionate egoism of imagination not only towards our fellow-men, but towards God. And the future which she turned her face to with a willing step was one where she would be continually assimilating herself to some type that he would hold before her. (670)

In this passage the narrator seeks to fulfill her function as an instructor while following an ethical code of conduct. By introducing the journalistic "we" in this passage and others that explain Gwendolen's interpretation of Daniel's presence in her life, the narrator equips readers with the full knowledge they will need to assess Gwendolen's behavior during the final test of her character. The narrator's instruction does become more assertive than it has been in previous passages of instruction, and to some degree she does intrude into the reader's ability to interpret Gwendolen's character independently. The narrator's willingness to permit readers to interpret transformational moments independently must be partially attributed to the thorough and directive instruction she uses in her commentary to readers. However, by noting the function of the journalistic "we" to separate moments of instructive narration from moments of recessive narration, we can discern the ethicality the narrator attempts to include in her narration by permitting readers opportunities to interpret characters without her directive voice. For

this reason, Eliot's role as a journalist ought not to be separated from Eliot's role as a novelist. The narrator requires both the directive voice of the journalist and the capacity of the novelist to grow moral sympathy in readers in order to immerse readers in the world of the characters and enable readers to judge the characters with clarity.

As the narrator ushers in Gwendolen's last interview with Daniel, the narrator initially remains in the background of the text, only functioning to relay the exchange between the two. After Daniel tells Gwendolen that he is a Jew, the narrator does not intercede to instruct the readers on how to interpret Gwendolen's reaction to this news: "Again Gwendolen seemed shaken – again there was a look of frustration, but this time it was mingled with alarm. . . . Great ideas in general which she had attributed to him seemed to make no great practical difference, and were not formidable in the same way as these mysteriously-shadowed particular ideas" (676). The narrated monologue contains no instructive commentary from the narrator that directs readers to sympathize with or scoff at Gwendolen's initial response. However, when Daniel announces to Gwendolen that he is a Jew and will be traveling to the East to discover his heritage, the narrator steps into the narrative and explains Gwendolen's internal turmoil. The narrator uses a long extended analogy comparing the shock experienced by a devotee when the higher power he worships does not spare him from pain and suffering to the pain Gwendolen now anticipates with Daniel's departure:

There comes a terrible moment to many souls when the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind, which have lain aloof in newspapers and other neglected reading, enter like earthquakes into their own lives . . . Then it is that the submission of the soul to the Highest is tested, and even in the eyes of frivolity life looks out from the scene of human struggle with the awful face of duty, and a religion shows itself which is something else than a private consolation. (677)

The narrator uses this comparison to remind readers that Gwendolen has come to identify Daniel with the force in her life that keeps her from committing an act which might condemn her and make her the lost woman she feared to become. If Daniel is the only fixture in her life keeping her from devolving into a life of self-absorption, then his absence from her life is as catastrophic to Gwendolen as the blight of war is to those who believed their religion would spare them from disaster. Moreover, Gwendolen begins to realize that she must take responsibility for her own transformation and that responsibility will require further privation and endurance from her. The narrator reveals that this “awful duty” may be more than Gwendolen is capable of fulfilling, and as a result her function as an example of a character transformed into moral sympathy is in jeopardy. By using this analogy, the narrator has elevated the importance of Gwendolen’s actions towards Daniel to a climactic pitch and constructed this final encounter as a test not only of Gwendolen’s character but of the character of the narrator herself as well.

The narrator further clarifies the importance of the moment by instructively commenting on Gwendolen’s feelings:

That was the sort of crisis which was at this moment beginning in Gwendolen’s small life: she was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving. . . . she could not spontaneously think of him as rightfully belonging to others more than to her. But here had come a shock which went deeper than personal jealousy – something spiritual and vaguely tremendous that thrust her away, and yet quelled all anger into self-humiliation. (677-78)

By specifically explaining Gwendolen’s instinctual response, the narrator has disclosed to readers that Gwendolen’s nature has not yet been transformed; her traumatic experiences have begun the transformative process within her, but she has not yet made the choice to

usher that process into its completion. The narrator is aware of this reality, and by informing the readers of this fact, the narrator chooses to offer readers the opportunity to interpret Gwendolen with the knowledge that remnants of Gwendolen's former nature still remain. She has not yet shed all of her former selfishness, and in Daniel's absence, she may not be able to sustain her developing moral sympathy. In her choice to fully disclose the status of Gwendolen's nature, the narrator trusts the readers with knowledge that could result in the reader's choice to dismiss Gwendolen as a relentlessly selfish woman. If she cannot maintain her resolution to live a renewed, purposeful life, then she is not a positive example to readers of the transformative power of moral sympathy. As the interview between Daniel and Gwendolen continues, the narrator recedes into the background while Gwendolen faces the choice of acting in her own interests or acting to place Daniel's needs ahead of her own.

Even as Daniel's actions towards Gwendolen become highly suggestive of romantic feelings, the narrator does not violate the trust she has placed in readers by intruding into the narrative in order to instruct and interpret: "Sobs rose and great tears fell fast. Deronda would not let her hands go – held them still with one of his, and himself pressed her handkerchief against her eyes" (679). Daniel's tender care for Gwendolen certainly creates a moment that any passing observer would interpret as a scene between two individuals in love. Readers could dismiss Gwendolen's pain during this moment as the pain of a woman in love losing the object of her affections rather than the pain of a person who has realized that to live a moral life and exercise sympathy towards others requires acute sacrifice. If readers interpret Gwendolen's pain as merely the regret of a lover, then they may conclude that Gwendolen's transformation is not sincere. If readers

make this interpretation, then Gwendolen no longer advances Eliot's aim to educate readers by providing them examples of transformative moral sympathy. In spite of this great risk, the narrator does not employ the journalistic "we" to ensure that readers do not dismiss Gwendolen's pain as the loss of love.

The narrator's choice to ethically recede from the scene continues into the climactic moment for readers' interpretations of Gwendolen. Finally, the moment arrives when Gwendolen must decide whether to ensure her own happiness and act to hinder Daniel's departure for the East or to place his interests ahead of her own and release him from any obligation towards her that might hinder his mission. Gwendolen makes her choice by rising to bid Daniel goodbye in silence with only a "withered look of grief, such as the sun often shines on when the blinds are drawn up after the burial of life's joy . . . [which] seemed to have the hardness of easy consolation in them" (679). At first Gwendolen's silence seems to be a selfish silence that will cause Daniel to doubt his resolution to fulfill Mordecai's vision, but Gwendolen extends comfort to Daniel by looking at him "with a sort of intention in her eyes, which helped him" (679). Gwendolen has made her decision silently, and readers are left to interpret her silence and the look in her eyes as evidence of selflessness and a developing moral sympathy or as evidence of her failure to set aside her own self-centered ego. The interpretive decision readers make is crucial; however, the narrator does not offer any prefacing, instructing remarks as she did earlier in their interview. If the narrator inserted her voice into the narrative, she would undermine the trusting relationship she has sought to establish with Eliot's readers. Rather than risk ruining the trust she has shown to readers, the narrator simply records Gwendolen's words without inserting the journalistic "we":

He advanced to put out his hand silently, and when she had placed hers within it, she said what her mind had been laboring with –

‘You have been very good to me. I have deserved nothing. I will try – try to live. I shall think of you. What good have I been? Only harm. Don’t let me be harm to you. It shall be the better for me —’

She could not finish. It was not that she was sobbing, but that the intense effort with which she spoke made her too tremulous. The burthen of that difficult rectitude towards him was a weight her frame tottered under. (679-80)

As the narrator conveys Gwendolen’s parting words, Daniel receives them as a heartfelt release of any claims he may think she has on his continued presence in her life. The narrator's interpretation of Gwendolen’s words, however, is not clear, and the narrator does not offer any concluding comment on Gwendolen’s interview with Daniel. Gwendolen’s final request for Daniel to carry out his plans and travel to the East is left open for readers to interpret as they choose. The narrator remains ethically reticent, permitting readers to interpret Gwendolen’s transformation as a success or a failure. In spite of the great importance of the readers' responses to this moment, the narrator adheres to the ethical contract she has created with readers perhaps in the hope of realizing her claim that “those who trust us educate us” (363).

By practicing ethical reticence during transformational moments in Gwendolen’s story, the narrator displays her trust in the reader’s ability to interpret Gwendolen justly. Her trust is not disinterested, and she does not exercise that trust without first instructing her readers as thoroughly as she can. The journalistic “we” in her narration stridently urges if not blatantly compels readers to accept the instruction in her commentary that employs that rhetorical tool. The narrative passages that contain the journalistic “we” provide ample evidence for viewing the narrator as a mere conduit for Eliot’s authorial presence rather than a character who can function independently of Eliot’s desire to

educate her readers. However, to judge the narrator justly, readers must consider not only how the narrator's voice is present but also how it is absent from the text. An examination of those absences reveals that they occur at the moments that determine the success of Eliot's instruction for readers in moral sympathy. Because the narrator absents herself from Gwendolen's transformational moments, those moments demonstrate her ethical behavior towards the independent judgments of readers and suggest that our interpretation of the narrator ought to be transformed as well.

CHAPTER THREE

The Polite Moralist in *Vanity Fair*

As readers enter the world of *Vanity Fair*, they are greeted by the ambivalent salute of the “Manager of the Performance” who invites persons “of a lazy, or a benevolent, or a sarcastic mood” to enter the fair. After thanking the audience for the kind reviews his fair has received, the manager deferentially bows to readers and retires, leading them to believe that he will vanish from the forefront of the story. However, the manager reemerges as the conflicted and conflicting narrator of *Vanity Fair*. Unable to find a single costume that suits his shifting role in the fair, the narrator adopts and discards as many outfits and attitudes as he pleases. After spending several chapters acquainting readers with Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley, the narrator pauses the activity of the fair to offer an explanation of his management:

And while the moralist who is holding forth on the cover, (an accurate portrait of your humble servant) professes to wear neither gown nor bands, but only the very same long-eared livery, in which his congregation is arrayed: yet, look you, one is bound to speak the truth as far as one knows it, whether one mounts a cap and bells or a shovel-hat, and a deal of disagreeable matter must come out in the course of such an undertaking.
(83)

Fashioning himself as a moralist in the “long-eared livery” worn by fools and readers alike, the narrator presents a conflicted image and declaration of his activities in the fair.

The image the narrator constructs of himself presents a strange picture to readers of a moralist or clergyman in fool’s clothing. By combining the character of a moralist with the “cap and bells” worn by a jester, the narrator suggests that there is something

foolish in the morality which he will continue on to espouse. The narrator attempts to resolve the conflicting image he has offered of himself by aligning himself with “brother” readers and elaborating further on his intended conduct in *Vanity Fair*:

And 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. If they are good and kindly, to love them and shake them by the hand: if they are silly, to laugh at them confidentially in the reader’s sleeve: if they are wicked and heartless, to abuse them in the strongest terms which politeness admits of. (84)

The narrator’s explanation of his intended behavior only further complicates the image of a foolish moralist that he adopted. His attitude towards readers in this declaration becomes strangely deferential for a figure who has previously donned the role of the overseeing manager in *Vanity Fair*. For a self-designated moralizing fool, the narrator’s humble wish to “ask leave” to introduce the characters and only abuse the wicked ones as far as “politeness admits” conflicts with the implied authority of his position as stage manager. His promise just a few lines before not to “spare fine language” when the villains arise also contradicts his assurance that he will only abuse characters politely. However, as the narrative unfolds, readers discover that the figure of a foolish moralizer who behaves politely characterizes the narrator’s behavior towards virtuous and wicked characters alike.

In the many dramas enacted in *Vanity Fair*, politeness marks the narrator’s commentary to readers as he describes and expounds on the events of the characters’ lives. At times his politeness is closely linked to the mocking critique he makes of the vanities and hypocrisies in the characters. The extent of his satire led some contemporary reviewers to critique the novel and Thackeray for indulging in mockery so thoroughly that no moral remained for readers to glean. In an 1848 review, George Henry Lewes

declares that the mocking laughter in the novel undermines any moral lesson Thackeray meant his readers to learn: “The writer began, no doubt, with the wholesome intention of lashing the vices and follies of Vanity Fair in a more restrictive sense – regarded as one of the social phases: but gradually *all* the districts of society are swept into his Vanity Fair – and there is *nothing good in it*. This is false and unwholesome teaching” (756). The total absence of any moral conscience in the novel is also commented on by modern critics. Ann Wilkinson softens Lewes’s claim and argues that while Thackeray may have a moral code, it is not the job of the narrator to communicate that code as he is essentially “a gossip who is telling a story he has gleaned largely through gossiping with other eavesdroppers” (376). Wilkinson’s view of the narrator as a gossip leads her to state that the narrator “is not above all interested in the truth, but in the telling of a good story” (376). Although their statements are separated by over a century, both Wilkinson and Lewes misinterpret the narrative’s exclusion of any virtuous sect of society or clear moral lesson from the narrator as the absence of any significant moral concern. In spite of his relentless, and at times abrasive, satirizing, the narrator’s mocking social satire is not evidence of the absence of any moral lesson but rather a different manner of instruction about morality.

The narrator’s politeness extends towards wicked, foolish, and good characters alike, and it evolves into a lesson for his audience. As the narrator entertains readers with his story, he aims to reveal and critique the limitations of nineteenth century ideals of polite conduct as well as instruct readers in true practices of politeness. The narrator teaches readers by adopting Victorian standards for polite conduct which emerge in his narration as reticence and exaggeration. In his social satire, the narrator seems to show no

reservations in his mocking criticism. Initially, the example he sets for readers is an intrusive and critical analysis of the lives of every character, regardless of their virtues or vices. However, in moments of intense emotional distress or suffering, the narrator holds back from analyzing the moment in order to feed his social satire. Geoffrey Tillotson attributes the narrator's reticence to Thackeray's determination not to present an ideal world but a realistic one which does not permit the narrator to know and discuss that which is hidden in the human heart (734-36). The narrator may be withholding his satirization partly because of Thackeray's realism, "which demanded of him reverence towards the naked human heart," but the same respect for human vulnerability, particularly during moments of suffering, prompts the narrator to recede from describing those moments to readers (Tillotson 736). By receding from painful moments in his characters' stories, the narrator teaches readers that true politeness must enforce limitations on our desire to know. Because intruding into those moments with the narrative gaze would violate the sanctity of the human heart, the narrator chooses to behave ethically and refrain from exercising his omniscient ability to expose the internal suffering of his characters. As he refrains from doing so, he simultaneously turns the reader's gaze away as well in an effort to show that politeness connected to morality must be ethically reticent.

The narrator not only teaches his readers what true politeness should look like by ethically receding but also teaches his readers about the limitations of politeness by exaggerating his polite behavior. In the Victorian mind, Andrew St. George explains, the "impulse was to construct personality through the control and moderation of the desires" (46). The Victorians judged a person's character based upon their external behavior, and

as a result, “decent behavior, especially in conversation with others, was often a matter of concealment and understatement” (St. George 46). The narrator subverts both of these beliefs by demonstrating in his own behavior that moderation is not a prerequisite for external politeness and polite concealment does not always indicate true decency much less true morality. As the narrator familiarizes readers with the polite world of *Vanity Fair*, he strategically exaggerates his politeness during moments in his characters’ stories that reveal the immoral or unethical motives beneath the surface of their polite behavior. As he exaggerates his politeness during these moments, the narrator directs his exaggerations towards the readers in order to demonstrate that the hypocrisy readers perceive in *Vanity Fair* also pervades their own society. By exposing the hypocrisy in *Vanity Fair* and in Victorian society, the narrator teaches readers that true politeness must be limited. In order for politeness to correlate with morality, readers must not assume that proper behavior is a direct result of moral virtue.

Heritage of Politeness and Victorian Society

The pervasive concern for politeness in the Victorian cultural conscience arises from a long evolution of ideas about civility and manners. Many scholars look to the eighteenth century as the apex of this evolution. In Lawrence Klein’s view, politeness in the eighteenth century “was extensive in reach and formative in effect,” representing the cultural ideals in the same way that “‘honour’ or ‘godliness’” did in previous centuries (877). The ideal of politeness manifested primarily as a “consciousness of form, a concern with the manner in which actions were performed” (Klein 874). The manner privileged by eighteenth century society, according to Paul Langford, was paradoxically informal: “Above all, if there was one key feature of what was meant by being polite that

came to be considered axiomatic in the eighteenth century, it was its emphasis on avoiding constraint and ceremony, in favour of ease and informality, even in arcane rituals of daily intercourse” (315). Polite ease and informality also characterized evolving notions of gentility which made politeness itself a desirable quality to acquire because of its social currency (Klein 876). As the definition of gentility shifted to focus on polite forms of conduct, the gateways were opened for socially savvy individuals such as Becky Sharp to advance their standing in society in spite of their absent pedigree and property.

In the eighteenth century the ethos of politeness climaxed, and the nineteenth century brought increased efforts to codify and moralize polite behavior. St. George attributes the intensified pursuit of correct forms of behavior to the need Victorians felt amidst the many industrial and scientific changes occurring to reach for fixity and stability (xvi-xvii). The extent of this need is evidenced in the many conduct or etiquette books that were written to instruct both men and women in polite behavior. In works such as *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character, and Responsibility*, written by Sarah Stickney Ellis in 1842, and *Self-help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance*, written by Samuel Smiles in 1881, the Victorian move to merge polite manners with moral character appears. Ellis defines polite “taste” for women as “all which belongs to dress, manners, and social habits, so far as they may be said to be ladylike, or otherwise” and declares that it must always “be held in subordination to religious principle” (146). Politeness in a woman’s “taste” and social behavior may only be achieved by an attention to religious teaching, and the same is true for men. Smiles blithely declares, “Morals and manners which give color to life, are of much greater importance than laws, which are but their manifestations” (426). For men,

polite manners are as essential as good morals “for the want of it [manners] has not unfrequently been found in a great measure to neutralize the results of much industry, integrity, and honesty of character” (Smiles 427-28). Yet Smiles reassures his male audience that if they have a “great heart” then they need not fear for their ability to acquire polite manners, since “there never yet existed a gentleman but was lord of a great heart” (429). In his easy assumption that gentlemanliness will naturally be accompanied by “a great heart” or a high moral sensibility, Smiles indicates that for Victorians politeness was synonymous with moral virtue.

By equating polite behavior with morality, Victorian society rendered politeness the standard for judging a person’s moral character. St. George argues that the connection between morality and politeness distinguished the Victorian sense of civility from previous centuries since in the nineteenth century more than in any previous centuries, “to be known as a man of character was to possess moral collateral” (11). Successfully navigating the forms for polite behavior demonstrated one’s character in the nineteenth century. One anonymously written conduct book, *How to Shine in Society; or the Art of Conversation; containing its Principles, Laws, and General Usage in Modern Polite Society*, speaking in the voice of a collective Victorian sage, admonishes its readers to marry their minds with the correct matter so that politeness may naturally flow through their actions (52). Some “tolerant minds,” Smiles explains, may bear with “defects and angularities of manner . . . but the world at large is not so forbearant, and can not help forming its judgments and likings mainly according to outward conduct” (428). If an individual cannot master the many forms and manifestations of polite conduct, then society will not look beyond his social insufficiencies to determine if true virtue lies

underneath. One's character will be judged according to one's actions, specifically by the degree to which politeness is displayed in every habit of his or her life.

The union of morality and politeness in Victorian society created a breeding ground for hypocrisy that flies in the face of the principle that only sincere morals can lead to truly polite conduct. *How to Shine in Society* indicates that Victorians were aware of the potential for hypocrisy by assuring readers that artificiality is not the mark of true politeness: "We do not want you to be made up of patchwork, or of clockwork, or of anything artificial - we wish you to be the power in your mind that acts in your manner as the law of true politeness demands" (52). However, it provides a weak prescription for identifying and warding against artificiality:

We wish to make you, (so far as telling can do it) a *polite* or *polished* man, and it is only metal of the proper grain which can take on the polish. . . . Polish to be sure may be used as a cover to gross vice, but this being merely superficial must always be shallow and easily seen through, and if beneath it there appears no sterling substance, the judicious observer can have only one impression forced upon his mind, and that cannot be favorable to a vicious man, however polished he be. (5)

The anonymous authors are naively certain that no "vicious man" could possibly be cunning enough to polish himself so well with polite conduct that he could dupe a truly "judicious observer." The potential for hypocrisy created by Victorian standards of social conduct was so obvious, according to Walter Houghton, that the Victorians themselves recognized and critiqued it: "Of all Victorian attitudes none was so often attacked by the Victorians themselves as hypocrisy. Indeed, much of the evidence for calling the age hypocritical comes, as we have seen, from the hostile criticism of Carlyle, Mill, Morley, Froude, and others" (424). The narrator of *Vanity Fair* also saw the enormous potential for and perpetuation of hypocrisy created by the high social premium placed on morality

and the convergence of morality and politeness. Exposing the problems of Victorian politeness and instructing readers on true ethical displays of politeness drives the narrator's behavior in his narration of the stories of Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp.

The events of both Amelia's and Becky's stories become the test case for the narrator's instruction to readers about polite conduct. In Amelia's story, the narrator redefines Victorian ideals of politeness and reticence to teach readers how politeness that is truly ethical must manifest as reticence under certain circumstances. Victorian ideals of propriety included reticence, particularly in relation to polite conversation, but the narrator's behavior demonstrates that reticence must extend beyond mere conversation and behavior to limitations on the desire to know. The narrator diverts his disclosure of Amelia's experiences during moments when readers most desire to have unlimited knowledge of her internal state. By doing so the narrator displays his concern for imparting true ethical reticence. In Becky's story, the narrator uses exaggerations of polite behavior to expose the hypocrisy in Victorian standards of polite conduct.

Although the structure of Victorian society created the ideal environment for hypocrisy to flourish, the Victorians still attempted to merge polite conduct with moral character. The narrator is aware of this discrepancy, and through the exaggerated politeness he exercises in his comments on Becky's polite behavior yet utterly hypocritical motives, he compels his readers to recognize the pervasive problems in the Victorian conflation of politeness with morality.

Receding Ethically: The Case of Amelia Sedley

In *Vanity Fair*, the narrator's satirizing comments descend upon each of the characters, even characters who are utterly defenseless against his critiques such as

Amelia Sedley. Before readers arrive at moments of emotional crisis in Amelia's life, the narrator makes her kindness, silliness, and naivety plain to his readers and the object of his satire. He patronizingly refers to her as "poor little tender heart" and declines to make her the heroine of his drama because "she is not the sun flower sort," and "it is out of the rules of all proportion to draw a violet of the size of a double-dahlia" (118). The narrator's objection to out-of-proportion depictions informs his complaint against her affection for George Osborne: "He was her Europe: her Emperor: her allied Monarchs and august Prince Regent: he was her Sun and Moon, and I believe she thought the Grand Illumination and Ball at the Mansion House given to the sovereigns, were especially in honour of George Osborne" (121). The narrator's satirization of Amelia's devotion to George becomes apparent when the first person "I" appears, interrupting any illusion of privacy readers may have thought they had with Amelia and her story. By clearly marking his presence in the text, the narrator signals that what "she thought" is his interpretation of her emotions. His blatant presence in the words "I believe" also lends a personal, embodied tone to the rest of the sentence, alerting readers to the dry, laughing critique the narrator is making. Readers cannot mistake the satirical tone in the narrator's words after he has alerted readers of his presence by using the personal "I." In his satirical posture towards Amelia's relationship with George, the narrator shows readers that even the meekest of characters may make themselves ridiculous and worthy of a jesting critique.

By satirizing Amelia while textually marking his satirization for readers, the narrator reveals his presence to readers and obliges them to interpret his characterization of Amelia with that knowledge in mind. It is his opinion and interpretation that mediates

Amelia's story to readers. As a jesting moralizer, the narrator relishes highlighting the absurdity and silliness in Amelia's character, and readers must bear in mind his tendency to exaggerate. However, his jesting does not preclude him from exhorting readers to participate in the story and make judgments about the characters. While the narrator informs readers about Amelia's final teacher, "Love," he declares to readers his expectation that they will assess Amelia and the other characters he will describe: "It is in the nature and instinct of some women [to be blindly devoted]. Some are made to scheme, and some to love – and I wish any respected bachelor that reads this may take the sort that best likes him" (121-22). In his statement following the dash, the narrator postures himself as offering "any respected bachelor" the opportunity to choose between the two types of women in the fair: those who will love bachelors and those who will scheme to get bachelors. In his moralizing, the narrator presents Amelia as a singular, fixed type – a woman who is made to love – and readers must judiciously interpret his tendency to categorize characters in this way.

Throughout his satirical critiques of Amelia, the narrator refrains from unleashing the full force of his critical arsenal. When he gently mocks her romantic idealism, the harshest expletive he issues against her is to call her a "poor little thing" (116). His critiques may expose her folly, but they do not cross the boundary into derisive mocking. The narrator intentionally restrains himself from severely criticizing Amelia's silliness and informs readers of his intent. As the narrator describes Amelia's regular habit of writing long letters and George's habit of rarely reciprocating, he tells readers that he could reveal more of Amelia's secrets but has decided to control the impulse: "I know where she kept that packet she had – and can steal in and out of her chamber like

Iachimo, – like Iachimo? No – that’s a bad part – I will only act Moonshine and peep harmless into the bed where faith and beauty and innocence lie dreaming” (122).

Assuming the readers are familiar with Shakespeare’s characters, the narrator uses the analogy to figuratively communicate another habit he will practice towards the characters. By refusing to peek further into Amelia’s private pains, the narrator reveals that his politeness manifests itself as more than measured restraint in his abuse of wicked characters; it emerges as ethical reticence. His ethical reticence does not only benefit Amelia and protect her deepest emotional experiences; the benefits extend outside of the textual boundaries to instruct readers in the ethics of reading and the desire to know a story’s characters.

In his narration of Amelia’s story, the narrator assumes that readers will want to know her intimately and describes Amelia using rhetorical moves that draw readers into the process of discovering her. One of the key rhetorical moves he uses is the first person plural “we” which assumes an allegiance with readers and draws them into the text. The narrator uses this “we” from the very first moment readers are introduced to Amelia: “But as **we** are to see a great deal of Amelia, there is no harm in saying at the outset of our acquaintance that she was one of the best and dearest creatures that ever lived; and a great mercy it is, both in life and in novels which (and the latter especially) abound in villains of the most somber sort, that **we** are to have for a constant companion so guileless and good-natured a person” (5, emphasis added). By using the “we” the narrator aligns readers with his point of view and his interest in knowing Amelia’s character. The shared interest that the narrator presumes to hold with readers continues to drive his narration of Amelia’s unreciprocated love for George Osborne. The narrator first tells readers that

none of the other characters were interested in knowing Amelia: “In the midst of friends, home, and kind parents, she was alone. To how many people can any one tell all? Who will be open where there is no sympathy, or has call to speak to those who never can understand? Our gentle Amelia was thus solitary” (179). While revealing to readers that Amelia was not known by those around her, the narrator uses the plural possessive “our” to attribute the interest he has in knowing Amelia to readers as well. The narrator satisfies his presumably shared interest with readers in the following paragraph: “To whom could the poor little martyr tell these daily struggles and tortures? Her hero himself only half understood her. She did not dare to own that the man she loved was her inferior; or to feel that she had given her heart away too soon. Given once, the pure bashful maiden was too modest, too tender, too trustful, too weak, too much woman to recall it” (179). As the narrator rules out Amelia’s family, friends, or “hero” as possible recipients of her internal cares, the only recipients left for the narrator’s exposing remarks about her reservations are the narrator himself and his readers.

Because Amelia’s inner turmoil at this point is not especially severe, the narrator has not exposed any parts of her heart or mind that are sacredly private. He has merely shown what any attentive observer might deduce from the external signs of Amelia’s and George’s relationship. However, his behavior shifts when he arrives with readers at a moment of true emotional distress or pain in Amelia’s life. As Amelia faces these moments of crisis, the narrator politely recedes from the private chambers of her heart, and because he has aligned readers with his movements and point of view, readers are implicitly instructed to follow his example. His recession becomes ethical because it refrains from exposing Amelia’s genuine pain to the satirizing critique or moral

pigeonholing that customarily accompanies his narration. By refraining from treating Amelia's pain in either of these modes, the narrator educates readers on the ethical limits of the desire to know. In order to behave ethically towards characters and towards fellow readers, readers must not pursue their desire to know at the cost of violating the sanctity of the human heart.

The first moment of emotional crisis that the narrator uses to educate readers occurs after Amelia has married George and accompanied him to Brussels. Rebecca Sharp is now Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, and she and her husband Rawdon, a military man like George, have also traveled to Brussels. Becky has been cultivating an affair with George, and Amelia suspects the two of them, but she does not realize the full extent of their flirtation. After George is called away to the battle of Waterloo, the narrator follows Becky as she visits the distraught Amelia. Several hours have elapsed since George left Amelia, but this is the first moment that the narrator returns to Amelia's side. As Amelia realizes Becky has arrived, the narrator retrospectively comments on his absence from her story:

Until this dauntless worldling came in and broke the spell, and lifted the latch, we too have forborne to enter into that sad chamber. How long had that poor girl been on her knees! What hours of speechless prayer and bitter prostration had she passed there! The war-chroniclers who write brilliant stories of fight and triumph scarcely tell us of these. These are too mean parts of the pageant: and you don't hear widows' cries or mothers' sobs in the midst of the shouts and jubilation in the great Chorus of Victory. And yet when was the time, that such have not cried out: heart-broken, humble Protestants, unheard in the uproar of the triumph! (308-9)

As the narrator states to readers that up until this moment neither he nor the readers have looked into Amelia's grief, he creates an opening for himself to either satirize or moralize about the excess of Amelia's sentiments. However, he takes advantage of neither of these

options, in spite of their blatant availability to him, and chooses instead to swing the readers' attention away from Amelia's immediate pain to the negligence of war chroniclers who omit the sacrificial tears that women shed over their departed loved ones as the surviving soldiers luxuriate in the bliss of victory. The lesson of the vanity of war is plainly obvious to the narrator's readers, but this lesson is not the only effect of the narrator's behavior towards Amelia in this moment.

By turning to expostulate on the vanities of war, the narrator conveys to readers one of the ethical limits that he has placed upon the desire to know. Prior to Becky's sudden entrance into Amelia's "sad chamber," the narrator related to readers the scene of George's departure for battle. As George rushed about their small quarters, soaring on the adrenaline of the coming fight, both he and the readers are suddenly confronted with Amelia's intense despair:

By way of helping on the preparations for the departure, and showing that she too could be useful at a moment so critical, this poor soul had taken up a sash of George's from the drawers whereon it lay, and followed him to and fro with the sash in her hand, looking on mutely as his packing proceeded. She came out and stood leaning at the wall, holding this sash against her bosom, from which the heavy net of crimson dropped like a large stain of blood. . . . And there was no help: no means to soothe and comfort this helpless, speechless misery. (300-1)

Amelia's pain is so exquisitely acute that she is entirely muted by it, and the drapery of George's red sash clearly and somewhat obviously symbolizes the figurative wound that Amelia must endure as George faces the risks of war. Her wordlessness signifies the purity of her misery and prevents it from descending into the melodramatic. By restraining any commentary and receding from the scene of her suffering, the narrator recognizes the truth of her sentiment and signals to readers that his desire to know Amelia and the readers' desire to know Amelia does not trump her own right to privately

mourn. By politely excusing himself and readers from the scene, the narrator behaves ethically towards Amelia and impresses upon readers that wordless suffering falls outside the ethical boundaries of what readers may justly seek to know about a character or about fellow readers.

Many years elapse before the narrator and readers encounter Amelia's second emotional crisis, and in this crisis, Amelia is faced with the necessity of losing her son, Georgy, to old Osborne, her late husband's father. As Amelia struggles with the decision to surrender her son to her father-in-law who has no affection for her, the narrator vacillates between laughing at her as a silly character and sympathizing with her as a pathetic one. In this way, the narrator's dual role as moralizer and jester is signified to readers. As a jester, the narrator gently satirizes Amelia's melodramatic behavior, mildly mocking, for example, the "sainted agony of tears" which erupt from Amelia as she gives a small sermon to Georgy on the sacrifice Hannah made of her son Samuel to follow God's will (494). Amelia's situation and Hannah's sacrifice are hardly similar, and the narrator cannot help but ironically portray this tender moment to readers. However, the narrator also acts as a moralizer and calls to readers to sympathize with Amelia's pain: "One truth after another was marshalling itself silently against her, and keeping its ground. Poverty and misery for all, want and degradation for her parents, injustice to the boy – one by one the outworks of the little citadel were taken, in which the poor soul passionately guarded her only love and treasure" (492). Amelia has no defense to make against the reality of her circumstances, and the narrator speaks of her as "the poor soul" without any lurking irony. Nonetheless, in the midst of his fluctuations between jesting

and moralizing, the narrator still offers readers a second lesson on the ethical limitations of the desire to know.

As the narrator describes Amelia's eventual decision to permit Georgy to live with the Osbornes, he behaves with the same reticence towards her grief. While Amelia makes arrangements for Georgy to leave, the narrator refrains from commenting on her private thoughts the evening after her decision has been set into motion: "She could say nothing more, and walked away silently to her room. Let us close it upon her prayers and her sorrow. I think we had best speak little about so much love and grief" (495). This sudden hesitancy from the narrator occurs after he has satirized and moralized about Amelia's distress; thus the shift in his behavior arrests readers. The narrator frequently moves back and forth between mocking and moralizing, but his comments are rarely withheld from any events or characters in the fair. Readers are also arrested by the reappearance of the first person plural "we" and are drawn into compliance with the narrator's behavior because of its presence. By communicating his decision to abstain from peering into Amelia's room that evening, the narrator draws readers away from her room and instructs them about the broad conditions under which the limitations on the desire to know still apply. Even though Amelia's pain in separating from Georgy may be unmerited because it is based on her false impressions of his loving, angelic nature, the misguided direction of her affections does not warrant a satirical mocking of her pain. According to the narrator, the imprudence of the sufferer's pain does not alter the circumstances under which it is wrong to satisfy our desire to know. In order to behave ethically, the narrator teaches readers that they must exercise the same politeness towards all genuine pain and restrain their inquisitive impulses.

Readers learn the full extent of the limitation that politeness and ethical reticence places upon the desire to know in Amelia's final moment of intense distress. Up until this final moment, Amelia has not discovered that George was secretly planning to run away with Becky all those years ago in Brussels. Her ignorance has caused her to idolize George and idealize the love she believes they mutually shared. As a result, she has continually rebuffed Major Dobbin's love for her, to the point that he can no longer wait for her to love him in return. After Major Dobbin has left Amelia and Georgy, Becky decides to enlighten Amelia about her dead husband's adulterous intentions. As Amelia realizes that her devotion to George was all in vain, the narrator declines to look into her heart:

Emmy's head sank down, and for almost the last time in which she shall be called upon to weep in this history, she commenced that work. Her head fell to her bosom and her hands went up to her eyes; and there for a while, she gave way to her emotions, as Becky stood on and regarded her. Who shall analyse those tears, and say whether they were sweet or bitter? Was she most grieved, because the idol of her life was tumbled down and shivered at her feet, or indignant that her love had been so despised, or glad because the barrier was removed which modesty had placed between her and a new, a real affection? (680-1)

The narrator's presence emerges in the series of questions that he poses to readers. By posing those questions, he simultaneously feeds readers' desires to know while also refusing to satisfy their hunger. The tension he creates in the reader's experience of this scene mimics the tension between his own desires to ethically recede from Amelia's pain and satirically critique her folly. The narrator's restraint is remarkable because her distress in this moment demonstrates and supports the claim that the narrator has been advancing in his narration all along: "But my kind reader will please to remember that these histories in their gaudy yellow covers, have 'Vanity Fair' for a title and that Vanity

Fair is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of all sorts of humbugs and falsenesses and pretensions” (83). In the narrator’s view, all of life is a vanity, and all vanities will eventually fade away, leaving nothing in their wake. Amelia’s emotional crisis in this moment supports the narrator’s argument, and if he opened her private thoughts to readers, then those thoughts would surely provide undeniable proof to readers that every part of life is full of deception and hypocrisy.

However, the narrator refrains from fully examining Amelia’s distress with his satirical magnifying glass, and by doing so he declares to readers that politeness and the demands of ethical reticence do not dissolve under any desires to know or desires to prove a point. The narrator only reveals Amelia’s hopefully optimistic thought to readers: “‘There is nothing to forbid me now,’ she thought. ‘I may love him [Dobbin] with all my heart now. O, I will, I will, if he will but let me, and forgive me’” (682). Even the narrator’s comment following this wish remains within the bounds of ethical reticence: “I believe it was this feeling rushed over all the others which agitated that gentle little bosom” (682). The narrator does not use the authority of the omniscient observer to violate the inner sanctum of Amelia’s heart and conclusively declare to readers that it *was* the feeling of hope that overwhelmed all her other emotions. Instead, he marks his perspective as an interpretation by using the personal “I” to introduce his point of view. This signal not only demonstrates to readers that the narrator is intentionally choosing not to confirm Amelia’s private reaction; the qualified verb “believe” also maintains a respectful, polite distance from Amelia’s heart. The narrator does not declare that he *knows* what emotion overwhelmed all others in Amelia; rather he politely states what he *believes* Amelia experienced in response to Becky’s revelation. By adhering to polite

practices during Amelia's moments of sincere emotional distress, the narrator instructs readers in ethical reticence. His polite behavior, manifested in ethical reticence, suggest that he is a principled story teller who is concerned with showing his readers the true connections between politeness and morality.

Exaggerated Politeness: The Case of Becky Sharp

In Amelia's story, the narrator depicts for readers the reticent politeness that he hopes readers will learn to imitate. His polite retreat and absence from pivotal scenes instruct readers in the ethical limitations that they must apply to their desire to know. Whether reading about characters in *Vanity Fair* or socializing with fellow readers, the narrator insists that his audience restrain their impulse to know from intruding into moments that expose the human heart. These ethical limitations require readers to turn aside their inquisitive gaze from Amelia's moments of genuine distress. However, the narrator's lesson for readers does not unequivocally admonish them to behave politely. While likeable, albeit somewhat foolish, characters like Amelia or Major Dobbin recommend themselves for the narrator's polite treatment, Becky Sharp's story presents a challenge for the narrator's politeness and the reader's sensibilities. Readers may well expect the narrator to abandon his politeness towards Becky at any of the many offensive acts she commits and fulfill his self-designated role as a moralizer by condemning her indecency. However, the narrator refuses to abandon his polite code of conduct in spite of the reader's repugnance. When Becky returns to the forefront of *Vanity Fair* after a brief absence, the narrator finally comments on his indefatigable politeness and reveals his intentions behind it:

We must pass over a part of Mrs. Rebecca Crawley's biography with that lightness and delicacy which the world demands - the moral world, that has, perhaps, no particular objection to vice, but an insuperable repugnance to hearing vice called by its proper name. There are things we do and know perfectly well in Vanity Fair, though we never speak them . . . it has been the wish of the present writer, all through this story, deferentially to submit to the fashion at present prevailing, and only to hint at the existence of wickedness in a light, easy, and agreeable manner, so that nobody's fine feelings may be offended. (637)

In the politest of tones, the narrator derides his readers and identifies the ironic intent that has directed his treatment of Becky. By only lightly and agreeably hinting at Becky's wickedness, the narrator claims that he has deferred to his reader's "fine feelings," but his narration critiques and subverts the same "fine feelings" that he claims to respect (637). Throughout his narration of Becky's schemes and ambitions, the narrator exposes the limitations of the politeness society requires by exaggerating the politeness he shows to Becky. In the above passage, the dissonance between the polite phrases the narrator uses and the meaning of those phrases exposes the hypocrisy that he perceives in society. Victorian readers are not opposed to the existence of vice among their peers but only to the open acknowledgment of vice, and because of this distaste for what is impolite, the narrator mockingly agrees to "submit to the fashion at present prevailing" (637). As the narrator over-exaggerates his adherence to polite conduct, he mocks society's politeness and reveals the hypocrisy that is veiled and sustained by slavishly following the rules for social conduct.

To illuminate the hypocrisy in society's standards of polite conduct, the narrator draws an analogy between Becky and lethal sirens:

I defy any one to say that our Becky, who has certainly some vices, has not been presented to the public in a perfectly genteel and inoffensive manner. In describing this siren, singing and smiling, coaxing and cajoling, the author, with modest pride, asks his readers all round, has he once forgotten

the laws of politeness and showed the monster's hideous tail above water? No! Those who like may peep down under waves that are pretty transparent, and see it writhing and twirling, diabolically hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling round corpses; but above the water-line, I ask, has not everything been proper, agreeable, and decorous, and has any the most squeamish immoralist in *Vanity Fair* a right to cry fie? (637-38)

As he relates to readers Becky's various conquests and schemes, the narrator has faithfully refrained from ever directly depicting her illicit maneuvers and offending his readers' sensibilities. He has, as his analogy explains, only politely focused his narration on Becky's conduct that has technically followed society's sense of propriety. He has not dwelt on the nauseating details of Becky's social rise or eventual fall, and by politely sidestepping those details, he has adhered to society's sense of politeness. However, the gruesome tale of Becky's opportunism is poorly hidden by the thin veneer of politeness, and the narrator's exaggeration of that veneer draws attention to its transparency.

The transparency of society's standards of polite conduct creates and perpetuates the hypocrisy that pervades the world of *Vanity Fair*. While the narrator instructs readers about the merits of polite conduct in Amelia's story, he also delineates the limitations of politeness by using politeness in his narration of Becky as a tool of his satirical critique. In order to compel his audience to see the transparency of society's standards of polite behavior, the narrator must adopt the forms of politeness practiced in society. By adopting these forms and applying them to a distasteful character like Becky, the narrator can expose the hypocrisy that lurks just beneath the surface of a propriety that is disconnected from true morality. Becky's ruthless manipulation of those around her certainly renders her an irredeemable figure in the eyes of the narrator's nineteenth century readers. An 1848 review by Elizabeth Rigby delights in the depravity of Becky which "so thoroughly satisfies our highest *beau ideal* of feminine wickedness" (765). The

narrator senses that readers will dismiss Becky for her immorality and consider her unworthy of any considerations polite conduct might require. However, Becky follows the same rules of politeness as the narrator's Victorian readers and does so without error for the majority of the novel. Her words have no connection to the true intentions of her heart, and society's rules for behaving politely and gaining entrance into society do not expose her deceit. Since the sincerity of Becky's intentions do not impact whether she or anyone like her will gain entrance into society, nineteenth century society's standards for polite conduct fail to successfully marry ideals of morality with ideals of propriety.

The narrator points out the failure of nineteenth century standards of politeness to accurately represent moral character by adopting and mocking the forms of politeness espoused by the arbiters of polite society. Nineteenth century readers would expect a narrator who has identified himself as a moralist to condemn characters who offend their moral sensibilities. However, until Becky's foolish flirtation with Lord Steyne, readers do not encounter any instance of truly reprehensible behavior in Becky's story. Until Becky is caught in a compromising posture with Lord Steyne, her hypocrisy and duplicity has been totally masked by her expertise in polite conduct. The narrator's polite concern to avoid offending his readers has caused him to purposefully avoid narrating any instances of Becky's immorality; however, he frequently narrates instances of dramatic irony when both he and the readers recognize that Becky's intentions are morally compromising while her behavior is perfectly polite. These ironic moments occur because the narrator's comments frequently make readers privy to Becky's immoral motivations which the society of Vanity Fair cannot detect. The narrator's description of Becky's thoughts clearly reveals the chronic hypocrisy in her polite behavior, but her behavior itself does

not betray her opportunism and greed. However, because her depravity is so clear, the narrator demonstrates in his exaggerated politeness that he is aware readers will want to condemn her and that readers' desires yet inability to justly evict her from polite society expose the failure of Victorian ideals of propriety. Neither the narrator nor the readers can place Becky on trial for her hypocrisy because the society of Vanity Fair cannot perceive the hypocrisy hidden beneath her mastery of polite conduct. As the narrator turns away from condemning her immorality, readers are compelled to recognize that their standards of politeness undermine the promotion of morality they were designed for. By using politeness to debunk the politeness the nineteenth century champions, the narrator implicates the hypocrisy and impotence inherent in nineteenth century codes of conduct. The standards of proper behavior that preside over nineteenth century society cannot ensure that impropriety, or even worse, immorality, will not lurk beneath the surface of polite appearances.

When readers are first introduced to Becky Sharp, the narrator ensures that they know she has been extensively trained in all the forms of polite conduct. The novel opens with Becky's and Amelia's conjoint graduation from Miss Pinkerton's finishing school and depicts their farewell to the school's matron. As they depart, the narrator describes Becky's personal disdain for Miss Pinkerton, yet her disdain is expressed perfectly politely: "As the Hammersmith Semiramis spoke she waved one hand both by way of adieu, and to give Miss Sharp an opportunity of shaking one of the fingers of the hand which was left out for that purpose. Miss Sharp only folded her own hands with a very frigid smile and bow, and quite declined to accept the proffered honour" (7). Becky refuses to shake Miss Pinkerton's hand with a polite bow, but her refusal insults Miss

Pinkerton's station as her elder and teacher even as her bow complies with the correct form of conduct. Nineteenth century readers would have recognized the gross insult in Becky's "frigid smile and bow" and expected the narrator to censure Becky for her impudence. However, the narrator makes no gesture of disapproval towards Becky's actions, alerting readers to the unusual stance he will take towards Becky. The narrator begins his depiction of Becky's story with her impolite character, yet his account of this event contains no instance of exaggerated politeness. The absence of any exaggeration in his politeness indicates his inference that readers will not criticize his decision not to censure Becky since Miss Pinkerton is not a particularly likeable character. The absence of reader disapproval is the earliest example of the hypocrisy that the narrator senses in his readers. Even in this brief, introductory scene, the narrator begins to instruct readers about the hypocrisy in their own standards of politeness.

A few chapters after his introduction of Becky, the narrator pauses the story to describe how he will fulfill his role as a dual moralizer and jester. The events of Amelia's story have verified the narrator's stated intentions towards virtuous characters, but it is through Becky's morally dubious acts that readers learn how the narrator will treat seemingly villainous characters. In his exposition for his conduct, the narrator informs readers that he will "ask leave as a man and a brother" to discuss the characters and "if they are wicked and heartless, to abuse them in the strongest terms which politeness admits of" (84). As Becky begins to plan and execute her schemes to win her entrance into society, readers realize that Becky's insolent behavior towards Miss Pinkerton was not merely an aberration from her usual character. Becky quickly establishes herself as a manipulator and an opportunist. As soon as she learns that Amelia's brother, Jos Sedley,

is a respected military man with a large income, she immediately plans to make him propose to her (17). The narrator conveys her internal thoughts to readers, making her mercenary motives plainly apparent. However, he excuses her actions in a direct address to his female readers:

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 though the task of husband-hunting is generally, and with becoming modesty, intrusted by young persons to their Mammams, recollect that Miss Sharp had no kind parent to arrange these delicate matters for her, and that if she did not get a husband for herself there was no one else in the wide world who would take the trouble off her hands. (19)

Under her circumstances, as the narrator points out, Becky's designs are not immodest and in no way violate the rules of polite conduct. She is doing no more than Amelia's own mother would do for her, and by defending Becky, the narrator dismantles the protests of any readers who might decry his refusal to critique Becky for her plans. Her motivations for pursuing Jos are far from morally pure, but Becky has not broken any rules of propriety in her pursuit of him. The narrator's polite explanation makes this clear to readers. As the narrator describes the "delicate matters" of husband-hunting, he mocks the illusion that the reason why young ladies entrust this task to their mother is due to their inherent modesty. Regardless of a young lady's actual modesty, the rules of polite society dictated that marriages must be obtained by a parent acting on the behalf of their daughter. This social practice in no way correlates to the existence of a modest character in the young lady, and the narrator exposes this discrepancy between polite practice and morality in his description of Becky's actions. Becky's motives may be hypocritical, but because her pursuit of Jos follows the forms of polite conduct, society's standards of propriety cannot expose her hypocrisy.

The hypocrisy that polite conduct enables becomes more apparent to readers as Becky is forced to relinquish another opportunity to advance her social position. After leaving the Sedley's home, Becky arrives at Sir Pitt Crawley's estate as a governess and quickly begins to exercise her charms on Sir Pitt. She has soon utterly bewitched him, causing him to propose to make her the new Lady Crawley after his wife suddenly dies (152). Readers justly anticipate Becky's swift acceptance of his offer, but the narrator shocks readers as his account reveals that Becky is already married. As Becky explains her refusal to both Sir Pitt and the elderly Miss Crawley, Sir Pitt's wealthy half-sister, her words are saturated with polite humility and compliments for both members of the Crawley family:

‘My attitude,’ Rebecca said, ‘when you came in, Ma’am, did not look as if I despised such an honour as this good – this noble man has deigned to offer me. Do you think I have no heart? Have you all loved me, and been so kind to the poor orphan – deserted – girl, and am *I* to feel nothing? O my friends! O my benefactors! may not my love, my life, my duty, try to repay the confidence you have shown me?’ (155)

Rebecca's demure attitude is the model of polite, deferential conduct for a poor governess addressing her social superiors.

Readers might have believed Becky's sentimental profusions were sincere if the narrator had not already politely and subtly implied the true reasons for her interest in Sir Pitt. Prior to Sir Pitt's proposal, the narrator delicately informs readers that Becky made it her business “to gain their confidence to the utmost of her power . . . and, if there entered some degree of selfishness into her calculations, who can say but that her prudence was perfectly justifiable?” (92). In his question, the narrator practices the polite sterilization of uncomfortable realities and follows the advice of Victorian etiquette books in the process. One of the many ways a person could demonstrate their moral character was by

mastering the art of polite conversation. The rules for polite conversation dictated the acceptable topics which St. George summarizes with the simple rule that “the unpleasant or the confusing was kept out of the drawing room and away from the dining table” (59). The narrator follows this rule as he avoids unpleasantly identifying the vice in Becky’s motivations. Instead he politely varnishes her motives as mere “prudence,” thereby showing how polite language can produce hypocrisy and excuse immoral behavior. The narrator heightens his example of the hypocrisy in polite standards for speech by issuing a dictum on this point: “Thus it was that our little romantic friend formed visions of the future for herself – nor must we be scandalised, that in all her castles in the air a husband was the principal inhabitant. Of what else have young ladies to think but husbands? Of what else do their dear Mammams think?” (92). The narrator politely excuses the obviously mercenary motives of many young ladies and their “dear Mammams” by reframing their ambition to make an advantageous marriage as “castles in the air” and implying that they have nothing else to occupy their thoughts. By doing so, the narrator demands that readers must overlook Becky’s duplicitous motives and simultaneously teaches them about their own hypocrisy.

As the narrator continues to describe Becky’s attitude towards her new employer, he implicitly declares to readers what he previously implied about Becky’s motives. Rebecca has made herself indispensably useful to Sir Pitt, and the narrator nearly explicitly reveals the hypocrisy in her actions:

Whether it was the heart which dictated this new system of complaisance and humility adopted by our Rebecca is to be proved by her after history – A system of hypocrisy which lasts through whole years is one seldom satisfactorily practiced by a person of one and twenty – however our readers will recollect that though young in years our heroine was old in

life and experience, and we have written to no purpose if they have not discovered that she was a very clever woman. (96)

By breaking from his position as a detached observer to address the readers, the narrator is able to inform readers that Becky's motives are in fact hypocritical without making a direct statement. Such a circular method of telling his readers what they have probably already concluded may make the narrator seem pedantic and patronizing; however, by circuitously telling readers that Becky is perfectly capable of being a hypocrite, the narrator amplifies the reader's paralyzed position in his speech. Readers know of Becky's immoral motives through the narrator's few insights into her thoughts, but they cannot condemn her for them because she has not broken any rules of polite behavior. In this passage the narrator refuses to grant readers access into Becky's private thoughts in order to point out the pervasive flaws in a society that ties polite behavior to morality.

Nineteenth century society's standards of politeness not only provide a mask for hypocrites to hide their immorality behind; they also paralyze any true investigation into individual morality by preventing the discussion of any topic that is considered impolite.

Becky's opportunism and social climbing are hardly topics for polite conversation.

Because the narrator has restricted his censure of Becky by the standards of politeness, he cannot confirm Becky's hypocrisy by discussing what he knows of her internal motivations.

The narrator may politely avoid discussing Becky's immoral motives, but his heavy implications leave readers silently certain of her hypocrisy. Now that the narrator has established Becky's hypocrisy in the reader's mind, he positions readers to expect a denunciation of Becky's hypocrisy when it is clearly evident. He may not condemn Becky for the illicit motives that drive her to make herself agreeable to Sir Pitt, but

readers anticipate that he will rise to the occasion when true vice emerges in Becky. Before Becky's entrance into the Crawley household, the narrator assured readers that he would not shirk his moralizing duties: "My rascals are no milk and water rascals I promise you – When we come to the proper places we won't spare fine language – no no!" (84). With these words, the narrator predisposes readers to anticipate "a vent in suitable abuse and bad language" directed towards the false humility and gratitude Becky expresses when Sir Pitt proposes. However, the narrator does not use his privileged position to gratify readers' expectations. Instead, he begins to address readers with a mock-self-conscious politeness:

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 her 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 himself to be Rebecca's confidante too, master of her secrets, and seal-keeper of that young woman's conscience? (158)

In his parenthetical comment, the narrator mockingly adopts the politeness of nineteenth century society. The narrator's deferential "begging her pardon" heightens the degree of politeness in his remark to the point of subverting and mocking the politeness he has adopted. Since the narrator directs his aside towards his readers by framing it in a question to them, the mocking critique in his exaggerated politeness accuses readers of their own hypocrisy. The narrator's question reveals his knowledge that readers will want to know what Becky's "private feelings" are, and he knows that his readers' desires are tied to the impulse to gossip about Becky's misfortune. His parenthetical "begging her pardon" is steeped in sarcasm and mocks the pretense of polite interest readers take in

Becky's dilemma. The narrator's question begins to lead readers to believe that Becky's deplorable opportunism is about to be revealed; however, the narrator instead takes the opportunity to teach readers that their desire to know in order to gossip about Becky is not only impolite but also unethical. The narrator's following question reminds readers that he has the ability to reveal Becky's internal thoughts, but in his actions as Amelia's confidante, the narrator limited himself to "only act Moonshine and peep harmless into the bed" where Amelia poured out her cares and sufferings, demonstrating the ethical reticence that arose as a result of his commitment to politeness (122). Just as the narrator refused to dissect the internal pains of Amelia's consciousness, the narrator also refuses to intrude into Becky's most private thoughts, thus disappointing his readers who may believe that if they frame their curiosity in the forms of politeness then their motives must be ethical. In his treatment of Amelia, the narrator exercised ethical reticence in order to instruct readers in the practices of true politeness, and in his treatment of Becky, the narrator uses ethical reticence to teach readers that joining politeness to their desires to know does not absolve them from any unethicity in their motivations.

The narrator's exaggerated politeness and reticent comments about Becky's reaction to her missed opportunity become a moment of ironic instruction. As the narrator comments generally on Becky's disappointment, he first aligns readers with his point of view and then issues a series of questions that implicate society for its flaws:

Well then, in the first place, Rebecca gave way to some very sincere and touching regrets that a piece of marvellous good fortune should have been so near her, and she actually obliged to decline it. In this natural emotion every properly regulated mind will certainly share. What good mother is there that would not commiserate a penniless spinster, who might have been my lady, and have shared four thousand a year? 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 honourable,

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. (158)

In this passage, the narrator declares that it is propriety and the rules of polite conduct which oblige all “properly regulated” readers to sympathize with Becky’s misfortune in spite of their wish to condemn her for her opportunistic designs (158). The two rhetorical questions that follow his declaration are steeped in exaggerated politeness as they point out that the circumstances in which readers willingly comply to sympathize with Becky are hypocritical. In the narrator’s questions, he points out that the commiseration and sympathy mothers and young ladies may feel for Becky is dependent upon the fact that she ultimately failed to raise her social standing through marrying Sir Pitt. If Becky had not already married Rawdon and accepted Sir Pitt’s proposal, the “good mother[s]” and “well-bred young person[s]” would balk from offering Becky their polite congratulations. The narrator sarcastically reveals his sense of such reader’s hypocrisy in the excessive certainty he expresses in the statements that bookend his satirizing questions. Their sympathy is contingent upon her ultimate failure to raise her social status, rendering their polite pity utterly hypocritical.

Instead of intruding into Becky’s pain, the narrator’s adherence to society’s ideals of politeness manifests as he declines to offer readers more than one brief sentence summarizing the regret Becky feels. Because politeness requires him to turn away from revealing and analyzing her true response to Sir Pitt’s proposal, the narrator is able to use this moment to scoff at society, and by implication at the readers, for the folly of their social structure. Becky is precisely the opposite of a “meritorious girl” and honor had no relation to Sir Pitt’s proposal. Yet because Becky’s conduct has made her appear

virtuous, the characters and readers of *Vanity Fair* are obliged to respond to her with respectful sympathy. The narrator mocks this inherent hypocrisy as he heaps complementing qualities onto Becky and onto Sir Pitt's proposal. In the narrator's view, the politeness of Victorian readers creates and sustains the hypocrisy in characters such as Becky who move through society undetected and undeterred from marrying false motives with polite conduct. A final ironic jest embeds the narrator's last comment; he is simultaneously amused and repulsed by the social codes which enable Becky to obscure her true motivations and compel the readers and the narrator himself to excuse her mercenary motives.

The combination of the irony, direct address, and declarations from the narrator accuse readers for their hypocrisy and instruct readers in the severe limitations of societal rules for polite conduct. The rules for polite behavior in *Vanity Fair* enable hypocrisy to thrive and perpetuate hypocrisy at every level of individuals' interactions. By exaggerating the politeness in his addresses to readers, the narrator critiques the politeness he adopts in order to instruct readers that their adherence to polite behavior ought not to compromise their moral integrity. In his narration of Becky's relationship with the Crawleys, the narrator moves his exposé of the limitations of politeness from the public arena to the private arena. First, Becky's hypocrisy is heavily implicated in her public interactions with Sir Pitt, followed by the revelation of her mercenary ambitions and hypocritical motives for mourning her inability to accept Sir Pitt's proposal. Hypocrisy saturates Becky's schemes and the social rules she operates by to implement them. The narrator draws the connection between the hypocritical reality of Becky's life in the fair with the world outside the narrative to make his critique an applicable lesson

for readers. He tells readers the story of his own experience in the fair where he observed “old Miss Toady there also present, singl[ed] out for her especial attentions and flattery little Mrs. Briefless, the barrister’s wife, who . . . as we all know, is as poor as poor can be” (158). Miss Toady eventually explained to the narrator that Mrs. Briefless’s father was about to inherit a baronetcy and thus Mrs. Briefless is about to become a baronet’s daughter, prompting Miss Toady to invite her and her husband to dinner. Through this anecdote, the narrator teaches readers that the hypocrisy which they might accuse Becky and Vanity Fair of committing is just as present in their own society.

At this point in the narrative, Becky has not done anything beyond what is necessary to advance herself to a position where the Miss Toady’s of Vanity Fair will acknowledge her in society. Her ambitions have not crossed outside the boundaries society has established around polite conduct, and as a result the narrator declares to his readers that the same rules of politeness require them to sympathize with Becky: “If the mere chance of becoming a baronet’s daughter can procure a lady such homage in the world, surely, surely we may respect the agonies of a young woman who has lost the opportunity of becoming a baronet’s wife” (158). Becky has followed the social rules of polite conduct in her pursuit of Sir Pitt, but she has failed to win the prize of becoming the next Lady Crawley. As the narrator ridicules readers who behave like Miss Toady, he also implies through his polite reference to Becky’s “agonies” that her loss must be pitied by a society which equates a moral reputation with a reputable social standing. Through Becky’s near ensnarement of Sir Pitt, the narrator reveals that the obligation society has created for itself to link morality with propriety pervades both public and private life.

The narrator further heightens the extent of hypocrisy in *Vanity Fair* through Becky's opinion of her husband, Rawdon Crawley. After Sir Pitt's proposal, Becky is eventually compelled to reveal her secret marriage with Rawdon Crawley to the society of *Vanity Fair*. Both Becky and Rawdon hope that Miss Crawley will eventually relent from her condemnation of their hasty nuptials, but she has not forgiven their duplicity as swiftly as the newlyweds hoped. As Becky and Rawdon discuss Miss Crawley's tardy forgiveness, the narrator offers a rare insight into Becky's thoughts: "If he had but a little more brains,' she thought to herself, 'I might make something of him;,' but she never let him perceive the opinion she had of him; listened with indefatigable complacency to his stories of the stable and the mess . . ." (175). Becky's opinion of her new husband may not be immoral, but it is certainly impolite. However, in her behavior towards Rawdon she plays the part of a happy wife with flawless serenity: "When he came home she was alert and happy: when he went out she pressed him to go: when he stayed at home, she played and sang for him, made him good drinks, superintended his dinner, warmed his slippers, and steeped his soul in comfort" (175). Becky's external conduct towards her husband is irreproachable and perfectly follows any standard of polite behavior that society might impose upon a reputable wife. Because her manners towards Rawdon are impeccable, readers cannot reproach Becky and cast her out of polite society. Nonetheless, the hypocrisy evident in the disparity between her thoughts and her actions is overwhelming to both the readers and the narrator.

The narrator uses this blatant contradiction between Becky's thoughts and actions to issue a larger lesson to readers about the limitations of politeness:

The best of women (I have heard my grandmother say) are hypocrites. We don't know how much they hide from us: how watchful they are when they

seem most artless and confidential: how often those frank smiles which they wear so easily, are traps to cajole or elude or disarm—I don't mean in your mere coquettes, but your domestic models, and paragons of female virtue. Who has not seen a woman hide the dulness of a stupid husband, or coax the fury of a savage one? We accept this amiable slavishness, and praise a woman for it: we call this pretty treachery truth. (175)

The narrator's choice to comment on the hypocrisy in "the best of women" may seem to defend Becky for her ungenerous thoughts and contradict the narrator's self-proclaimed status as a moralizer. However, the narrator issues these comments not to merely justify Becky's hypocrisy but rather to demonstrate the depths of hypocrisy that polite conduct easily conceals. By comparing Becky's conduct to the conduct of "paragons of female virtue" and revealing their similarities, the narrator upbraids readers in a greater moral lesson than a mere denunciation of Becky would achieve. The lesson emerges in the final sentence: society's idealization of polite conduct obliges readers and the narrator to extol women such as Becky for mastering the forms of politeness so well that their "pretty treachery" appears to be honest and true. Becky's behavior towards Rawdon is the narrator's prime example of how deep the perpetuation of hypocrisy extends into the private arenas of life in *Vanity Fair*. Even the interactions between a husband and wife are not free of the duplicity brought by observing society's ideals of politeness. By structuring his observation as an address to readers and aligning readers with his point of view through the plurality of the "we," the narrator extends his condemnation of the hypocrisy in *Vanity Fair* outside the boundaries of the novel and into the world of his readers.

As Becky continues to claw her way up the social ladder, her hypocrisy begins to emerge from beneath her practiced façade of politeness. The higher Becky climbs in the ranks of polite society, the more the narrator's frustration grows with society's blindness

towards her hypocrisy. After her presentation at Court with her brother-in-law and husband in tow, Becky gained entrance into the highest circles of polite society and threw parties worthy of her new status as a member of the social elite. Vanity Fair talked and speculated about how Becky managed to finance these grand soirees. The narrator's frustrations with the hypocrisy of Vanity Fair mounts to a climax as he interrupts the Fair's speculations to blatantly mock their artificial concern: "If every person is to be banished from society who runs into debt and cannot pay – if we are to be peering into everybody's private life, speculating upon their income, and cutting them if we don't approve of their expenditures – why, what a howling wilderness and intolerable dwelling Vanity Fair would be" (507). Not a single character who wonders about and criticizes Becky for her lavish lifestyle can do so without also exposing themselves to the same criticism. As the narrator elaborates on this fact, his derisive tone heavily mocks the vanity and hypocrisy of polite society:

Wine, wax-lights, comestibles, rouge, crinoline-petticoats, diamonds, wigs, Louis-Quatorze-gimcracks, and old china, park hacks and splendid high-stepping carriage horses—all the delights of life, I say,—would go to the deuce, if people did but act upon their silly principles, and avoid those whom they dislike and abuse. Whereas, by a little charity and mutual forbearance, things are made to go on pleasantly enough: we may abuse a man as much as we like, and call him the greatest rascal unhung—but do we wish to hang him therefore? No. (507)

In this passage the narrator conflates the hypocrisy that society's ideals of politeness generate and the vanities of life that absorb polite society. In the midst of all the "delights of life," no one in Vanity Fair observes "their silly principles" and lives according to the morality that they claim to espouse. If they did, the narrator points out, not a single soul would be left to enjoy the pleasures of polite society. The narrator's utter scorn for this complacent hypocrisy is only veiled by the satirical form of his critique. In his final,

synthesizing observation, the satire lies thick over his words: “If his cook is good we forgive him, and go and dine with him; and we expect he will do the same by us. Thus trade flourishes—civilisation advances: peace is kept; new dresses are wanted for new assemblies every week; and the last year's vintage of Lafitte will remunerate the honest proprietor who reared it” (507-8). Food, trade, fashion, and wine all sustain the peace and propel society forward as long as the members of society do not act upon their principles but continue to flatter and feign polite regard for one another. The narrator’s indictment of the forms of polite life enjoyed by his nineteenth century readers derides them for their hypocrisy, and it teaches them about the limitations of politeness.

By exaggerating his own polite responses to Becky and satirically censuring readers for their flawed standards of propriety, the narrator has exposed the doubled limitations of politeness. Society’s sense of polite conduct causes unfortunate but ambitious women like Becky to become hypocrites in order to advance socially, and it also prevents hypocrisy from being exposed because polite conversation cannot broach improper topics. Only when impolite conduct is thrust to the surface of social interaction do the rules of propriety allow immorality to be discussed and condemned. Becky’s mastery of the rules of propriety has allowed her to avoid exposing her impure motives and opportunism, but even her skills in navigating through all the intricacies of society’s standards have their limits. To remain in the top circles of society, Becky has maintained an indiscreet relationship with Lord Steyne and managed to hide the affair from Rawdon. However, Becky underestimates Rawdon’s capabilities and is caught by him in a compromising situation with Lord Steyne. Becky has undeniably broken the rules of polite behavior in her indiscretion and is paralyzed by the knowledge that she has lost all

the social capital that she acquired. As a result of her impropriety, the narrator's comments are no longer saturated with politeness: "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 her wiles, all her wit and genius had come to this bankruptcy" (535). For the first time since Becky's rude behavior towards Miss Pinkerton, she has explicitly broken the rules of proper conduct. Since she has now behaved impolitely in the full view of society, the narrator perceives that Vanity Fair will no longer admit her into polite society. After years of enabling Becky to hide her hypocrisy beneath layers of polite conduct, Victorian society's ideals of politeness finally expose Becky's vice.

As Becky's wickedness comes to light, the narrator's critique of politeness shifts from censuring the hypocrisy polite conduct enables to solemnly denouncing the irrecoverable ruin that Becky is ensnared in because of the nature of society's sense of politeness. The narrator does not refrain from justly placing the blame upon Becky's own shoulders; however, he also notes that no one can tell with certainty if Becky was truly guilty: ". . . who could tell what was truth which came from those lips; or if that corrupt heart was in this case pure?" (535). No one who ever knew or knows Becky can be sure if her relationship with Lord Steyne was only an inappropriate flirtation or an illicit affair. Becky's schemes have justly earned her a fall in her social standing; however, the narrator's question about the uncertainty surrounding her behavior suggests that he censures Victorian politeness not only because of the hypocrisy it enables but also because it provides no path for recovery. Becky can never fully recover her social reputation even if she completely reforms her behavior and acts based upon a true moral

code. Thus the narrator shows that Victorian standards of politeness must be limited not only because they enable hypocrisy but also because they do not recognize the possibility of true moral reform. Perhaps for this reason the narrator chooses not to shed all measures of restraint in his depiction of her demise. Despite all her scheming and villainy, the narrator still treats the severity of her pain with respect and restrains his judgment of her crimes.

In Becky's schemes and Amelia's suffering, the narrator's persistent efforts to instruct his readers about the limitations of politeness reveal an intentionality in his social satire. His satirical yet purposeful commentary elevates his narration beyond a mere exercise in managing the many actors on the stage of Vanity Fair. His function as a narrator is not merely to manage the characters in the novel but also to "speak the truth as far as one knows it" (83). Readers may expect the narrator's commitment to speak the truth to manifest as didactic, sermonizing comments on the virtues and vices of the characters. However, the narrator's instructive strategy foils readers' expectations by using the same politeness which Victorian society believed was a sign of their virtue to reveal the inadequacies of that social norm and of the individuals who abide by it. Politeness is not causally related to morality in the narrator's view, and attempting to merge the two only creates an arena for hypocrisy to flourish. The truth that the narrator speaks is not delivered in the form of easy moral platitudes, but rather arises out of the tension between politely receding and politely exaggerating.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

As the narrator reflectively comments on Gwendolen's internal state after her marriage to Grandcourt, she analyzes Gwendolen's relationship with Daniel and makes the following statement: "Those who trust us educate us" (363). The narrator expresses this as a moral truism in the context of Gwendolen's ability to offer Daniel an education because of the trust she places in him as her guiding conscience. This simple sentence, however, relates to the relationship that the narrators of both *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair* seek to establish with their readers. In the ethical reticence practiced by both narrators and the exaggerated politeness practiced by Thackeray's narrator, attentive readers may perceive the trust that the narrators show towards their readers' abilities to interpret the stories of the novels. The narrators' trust is not bestowed blindly upon readers without any attempts to instructively guide them towards the interpretation that suits Eliot's or Thackeray's goals. Nonetheless, the narrators in both novels subtly seek to create interpretive spaces for readers to judge and decide whether or not to accept the instruction the narrators offer them.

Because the narrators of *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair* have shown respect for the reader's interpretive independence, I suggest we extend them the same respect in return. As my argument in each chapter has tried to demonstrate, the narrators of *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*, who have been derided for using their omniscience to dictatorially manipulate their readers' interpretations, surprisingly use their privileged

position to strategically limit their influence on the readers' rhetorical transaction with the text. However, as readers we may only perceive this gesture of trust if we listen receptively to the language of the narrator. This kind of receptive listening requires, at least initially, a nonresistant reading of the narrator's comments and observations. In essence, it requires readers to respond not only as the actual audience but also as the "authorial audience" of the novel in order to discern the ethical behavior and moral conduct of the narrators¹ (Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric* 215).

Readers must make their rhetorical transaction with a text while trying to become a part of the authorial audience if they hope to understand the omniscient narrators of Victorian novels such as *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*. If, as I have shown in the introduction, the distinction between the kinds of omniscient narrators shown in *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair* and the implied authors are artificially imposed, then the strategies and techniques of the narrator's communication to readers are tied to the expectations of the joint omniscient narrator and implied author. Thus, in order to understand and aptly interpret the narrators of *Daniel Deronda* and *Vanity Fair*, readers must understand the expectations of the narrator for the authorial audience.

Before readers can understand the expectations of the narrator, readers must suspend their resistance to a text's story and join the authorial audience. Peter J. Rabinowitz and Michael W. Smith effectively explain this necessity in their coauthored book, *Authorizing Readers*. Rabinowitz succinctly states the premise of their work "that in order to read intelligently, we need to come to share the characteristics of the authorial

¹ Phelan defines the authorial audience as "the hypothetical, ideal audience for whom the author constructs the text and who understands it perfectly" (215). In contrast, the actual audience consists of the real, human readers of a text.

audience, at least provisionally, while we're reading" (5). My argument has gestured towards the validity of this premise. As part of the author's artistic crafting of a novel, the narrator can only be understood properly if the design of their communication is also understood. Eliot's narrator uses ethical reticence as a strategy to guide readers to perceive the moral sympathy that Eliot hopes to teach readers to emulate by the examples of her characters. Thackeray's narrator uses ethical reticence and exaggerated politeness in order to teach readers about the flaws in Victorian society's code for proper conduct. This does not suggest that authorial intent must be superimposed upon any and all interpretations of the narrator; however, it does mean, as Rabinowitz explains, that "the gap between authorial and actual audience *is* a barrier both to good reading and to a truly democratic pedagogical environment" (6). Rabinowitz concedes that the gap can never be fully closed and that "partiality [in our interpretations] is inevitable" (6). However, this does not excuse readers from making "a good-faith effort to respect the text's fundamental requests" (6).

Daniel Deronda and *Vanity Fair* ask readers to consider trusting their respective narrators as the guide for readers into the worlds of Gwendolen Harleth, Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp. As the reader's guide in the world of the novel, the narrator makes this request of us and offers several reasons for us to consent. The ethical reticence practiced by both narrators towards their characters not only benefits the characters. It also benefits readers by permitting them to judge and interpret each novel's story with the narrator's instruction in mind but not in control of their judgments. The morality of the narrators' ethical behavior arises in the permission afforded to readers. In this permission the narrators show that they are aware of the effects of their narration. Because their

communications are primarily instructive, they choose not to comment during pivotal moments in the characters' stories in order to ensure that they do not manipulate readers' perceptions of the characters. Together these practices demonstrate the narrators' attempt to create a relationship based on trust with their readers. If we mean to listen to the stories their narratives offer, then we ought to recede for a time from our skeptical postures and give the narrator our polite attention.

WORKS CITED

- Billington, Josie. "“What can I do?” George Eliot, Her Reader and the Tasks of the Narrator in Middlemarch." *George Eliot Review: Journal of the George Eliot Fellowship* 31 (2000): 13-26. Web. 3 Feb. 2016.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988. Print.
- . *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961. Print.
- Culler, Jonathan. "Omniscience." *Narrative* 12.1 (2004): 22-34. *JSTOR* Web. 15 Oct. 2015.
- Dillane, Fionnuala. *Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Periodical Press*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013. Print.
- Eliot, George. *Daniel Deronda*. 1876. Ed. Graham Handley. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014. Print. Oxford World's Classics.
- . "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems And Other Writings*. Eds. A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren. London: Penguin, 1990. 140-63. Print.
- . *The George Eliot Letters*. Ed. Gordon S. Haight. New Haven: Yale UP, 1954-78. Print.
- Elkins, William R. "Thackeray's VANITY FAIR." *Explicator* 44.3 (1986): 31. *ProQuest*. Web. 5 March. 2016.
- Ellis, Sarah Stickney, 1799-1872. *The Daughters of England: Their Position In Society, Character & Responsibilities*. London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1842.
- Goodheart, Eugene. "The Licensed Trespasser: The Omniscient Narrator in *Middlemarch*." *The Sewanee Review* 107.4 (1999): 555-568. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Oct. 2015.
- Hardy, Barbara. *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1985. Print.
- Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1957. Print.

"How to Shine In Society, Or, The Science of Conversation: Containing the Principles, Laws And General Usages of Polite Society." Toronto: Toronto News, 1881.

Keen, Suzanne. *Narrative Form*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Print.

Klein, Lawrence E. "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century." *The Historical Journal* 45.4 (2002): 869-98. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 April 2016.

Lucie-Smith, Alexander. *Narrative Theology and Moral Theology: The Infinite Horizon*. Hampshire: Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2007. Print.

Lewes, George Henry. "Review." *Vanity Fair*. Ed. Peter L. Shillingsburg. New York: Norton, 1994. 753-58. Print. A Norton Critical Edition.

Marck, Nancy Anne. "Narrative Transference and Female Narcissism: the Social Message of *Adam Bede*." *Studies in the Novel* 35.4 (2003): 447-70. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 3 Feb. 2016.

Martínez-Bonati, Félix. *Fictive Discourse and the Structures of Literature: A Phenomenological Approach*. Trans. Philip W. Silver. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981. Print.

Maynes-Aminzade, Liz. "The Omniscient Narrator from George Eliot to Jonathan Franzen." *Studies in the Novel* 46.2 (2014): 236-53. *Project Muse* Web. 15 Oct. 2015.

Miller, Andrew H.. *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008. Print.

Miller, J. Hillis. *The Form of Victorian Fiction*. Cleveland: Notre Dame UP, 1979. Print.

Newton, K. M. "The Role of the Narrator in George Eliot's Novels." *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 3.2 (1973): 97-107. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Oct. 2015

Nussbaum, Martha C.. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. Print.

Phelan, James. "Judgment, Progression, and Ethics in Portrait Narratives: The Case of Alice Munro's 'Prue.'" *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 4.2 (2006): 115-29. *Project Muse*. Web. 26 April 2016.

---. *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989. Print.

- Pykett, Lyn. "George Eliot and Arnold: The Narrator's Voice and Ideology in Felix Holt the Radical." *Literature and History* 11.2 (1985): 229-40. *ProQuest*. Web. 3 Feb. 2016.
- Rabinowitz, Peter J. and Michael W. Smith. *Authorizing Readers: Resistance and Respect in the Teaching of Literature*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1998. Print.
- Rabinowitz, Peter J.. "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences". *Critical Inquiry* 4.1 (1977): 121-141. *JSTOR*. Web.
- Rigby, Elizabeth. "Review." *Vanity Fair*. Ed. Peter L. Shillingsburg. New York: Norton, 1994. 731-39. Print. A Norton Critical Edition.
- Smiles, Samuel, 1812-1904. *Self-help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, And Perseverance*. Author's rev. and enlarged ed. Chicago: Belford, Clarke, 1881.
- Sorenson, Katherine M. "Evangelical Doctrine and George Eliot's Narrator in *Middlemarch*." *Victorian Newsletter* 74 (1988): 18-26. *Freely Accessible Arts and Humanities Journals*. Web. 3 Feb. 2016.
- Sternberg, Meir. *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978. Print.
- Stewart, Garrett. *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. Print.
- St. George, Andrew. *The Descent of Manners: Etiquette, Rules & The Victorians*. London: Random, 1993. Print.
- Thackeray, W. M. *Vanity Fair*. 1853. Ed. Peter L. Shillingsburg. New York: Norton, 1994. Print. A Norton Critical Edition.
- Tillotson, Geoffrey. "Philosophy and Narrative Technique." *Vanity Fair*. Ed. Peter L. Shillingsburg. New York: Norton, 1994. 731-39. Print. A Norton Critical Edition.
- Toker, Leona. *Eloquent Reticence: Withholding Information in Fictional Narrative*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1993. Print.
- Wilkinson, Ann Y. "The Tomeavesian Way of Knowing the World: Technique and Meaning in *Vanity Fair*." *ELH* 32.3 (1965): 370-87. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 March 2016.
- Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. "Who is the Narrator of *Vanity Fair* and Where is He Standing?" *College Literature* 1.3 (1974): 190-203. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 March 2016.