Depressive Realism: Readings in the Victorian Novel

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation makes two arguments: First, it elaborates a depressive genealogy of the Victorian novel that asserts a category of realism rooted in affect rather than period or place. Second, it argues for a critical strategy called "depressive reading" that has unique purchase on this literary history. Drawing on Melanie Klein's "depressive position," the project asserts an alternative to novel theories that are rooted in sympathy and desire. By being attentive to mood and critical disposition, depressive reading homes in on the barely-contained negativities of realism. Through readings of novels by William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy, and Charlotte Brontë, it explores feelings of ambivalence, soreness, and dislike as aesthetic responses and interpretations, as well as prompts to varieties of non-instrumentalist ethics. In the final chapter, the psychological and literary strategy of play emerges as a creative and scholarly possibility.

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Acknowledgments

My name is on the cover, but this document is filled with other people's ideas—some that I was given, some that I overheard or stole, and many that I misunderstood.

I am very lucky to have had a dissertation committee who allowed me back my way into an argument. Their patience and confidence that I would figure everything out in time taught me a great deal about writing.

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My husband Gabriel only rarely forced me to talk about what I was doing. He gave me the thing I most want: privacy. I thank him for that and for everything else.

Introduction:
Depressive Realism, Depressive Reading

"Depressive Realism" is an argument for a critical strategy with unique purchase on realism. Like Eve Sedgwick's "reparative reading," it uses the work of Melanie Klein to structure a style of reading. But unlike Sedgwick, who emphasizes that "the more satisfying object" inaugurated by the depressive position is "available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in return," I emphasize the negative aspects of the depressive position.[1] "In the depressive position," Ruth Stein writes, "the person deals with the feelings by bearing (with) them, by acquiring the capacity to tolerate their essentially ambivalent and fluid nature."[2] This dissertation explores the feeling of "bearing with" ambivalent feelings, such as soreness and dislike, as aesthetic responses and as interpretations. Rather than imagining an interpretation to be separate from feeling, as Susan Sontag did when she called for the replacement of interpretation with erotics, I use feeling as an interpretive strategy. The meaning of the novels I write about lies in the feelings they provoke as well as the feelings that structure their worlds.

My four authors—William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy, and Charlotte Brontë—share an ethos that my readings try to bring to light. They exist on a continuum, representing different degrees of stuckness or woundedness, and different strategies for tolerating or rejecting ambivalence. Reparative reading is a big

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[1] Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2003: 128.
[2] Ruth Stein, "A New Look at the Theory of Melanie Klein," in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 71 (1990): 505

tent, and at times depressive reading will find itself beneath its poles.[3] But my project holds off from theorizing a love-relationship to the object of criticism that is Sedgwick's ultimate concern. The antagonist of "Depressive Realism" is not paranoid reading—it's the discourse around sympathy. The depressive reading style might be a portable one, although it has fallen outside the limits of time-to-degree to explore that possibility. One reason I call this project "Depressive Realism" and not "Depressive Reading" is that I don't yet know what a depressive modernism, for example, would look like.

The phrase "depressive realism" was coined by Lauren Alloy and Lyn Abramson, two psychologists who in 1979 found that depressed people are more realistic and accurate in their perceptions of the world that non-depressed people. Their experiment involved asking depressed and non-depressed college students to choose whether or not to hit a button. Once the response time had passed, a light would or would not illuminate. Then the participants rated their control over the outcome. The non-depressed subjects were found to overvalue their control over this contingent situation, while the depressed subjects correctly perceived their lack of control. The depressed students were labeled "sadder but wiser," and said to have a firmer grasp on reality than the non-depressed. Later researchers, however, have argued that it is the depressive's negative bias, or inherent pessimism, that cause her to rate her control lower. That is, the issue is not one's own sense of contingency, but one's willingness to make any positive statement at all.

[3] "The reparative reading position undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks." See Sedgwick, 150.

The depressed person is not more attuned to the reality of her lack of control, but simply doesn't want to say "yes" to anything.[4]

Like the depressed experimental subjects, depressive readers are nay-sayers—not because they are distrustful or suspicious, but because they understand the critical enterprise to be incomplete, thwarted, or powerless. Being a depressive reader means recognizing the impossibility of scholarly ideals like disinterestedness, and giving up on the pursuit of "really" getting to the singular truth of any given text. The emphasis here is not so much on the embrace of multiplicity, in the matter of a deconstructive criticism, but on the *stakes* of criticism: What does criticism matter? To whom and for whom does it matter? What is the meaning of our insistence that it matter at all? I am not saying that the scholarly critical endeavor is a futile one, necessarily; I am asking what we might be left with, or even gain, if we relinquish what we have come to rely on as its most obvious justifications. (In some especially vocal quarters, this has to do with political purchase; in other corners, criteria such as greatness or beauty.) This project begins from a refusal to justify its object (the novel); its existence is justified by the novel.

Depressive reading admits that critical interests and preoccupations are driven by temperament and affinities rather than the truth of an object at hand. One could read the depressive critical move as a response to a failure to get properly interested in the given object of study—in this case, the Victorian period. But a depressive reader would say that the object, in any case, is usually an alibi for something else. The depressive reader doesn't try to bury or sublimate moods or dispositions or interests in something more

[4] See Lorraine G. Allan, Shepard Siegel, and Samuel Hannah, "The sad truth about depressive realism," in *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 60:3 (2007): 482-495.

respectable, like archival research; the very moods and dispositions of critical writing are themselves the subject. Depressive reading, which acts like antennae to search out the depressive aspects of the novel, is thus a useful way of dealing with the schizoid-paranoid feelings that producing scholarship produces—the feelings of inadequacy and aggression, the sense of futility or pointlessness, "the frustration [that] is felt as persecution."[5] On the one hand, scholars have largely neglected the negative feelings that are everywhere in the Victorian novel, and my dissertation wants to bring attention to what has been neglected. On the other hand, I don't deny that the bad feelings are coming from me.

While novel theory has been typically interested in sympathy or desire, my work takes ambivalence to be both the subject of the novel and a critical orientation towards the novel. To be sure, since Franco Moretti wrote *The Way of the World*, ambivalence has been a key concept in thinking about the novel. But this has mostly been grasped in terms of the compromises attendant on bourgeois participation in the social order. What about the feelings of compromise—feelings that are sometimes "calm passions" but sometimes rather more pronounced varieties of pain? In the chapters that follow, I theorize vanity, soreness, and dislike, as well as the psychological and literary strategy of play, to work towards a post-Freudian psychoanalytic novel theory. In some of the chapters that follow, especially the reading of *Jude the Obscure,* I veer close to what Raymond Williams would call a "structure of feeling," in which a lived and affective formation is in explicit relation to a contested social formation. In my chapter on Trollope, I diagnose one way of thinking, vacillation, in terms of liberalism. But by and large I have not followed through

[5] Stein, 503.

on connecting the feelings that structure the particular novels to a historical or social critique. That work can still be done.

What's new about any of this? Doesn't everyone already know that the realist novel instructs the reader in accommodating herself to the "reality" of the world as given? Isn't realism by definition, if not depressive, than at least depressing? This sense of the depressive side of realism comes from Frederic Jameson, who described the mechanics of narrative realism as a "peculiar dialectic, in which the desiring subject is forced to enumerate the objections to his or her Imaginary gratification in order to realize the latter even on the level of a daydream."[6] What is depressing here—or lazily called so—is the lack of gratification, or not getting what you want. Techniques such as omniscience, and plot obstacles that the narrative overcomes, are for Jameson in the service of a wish-fulfilling fantasy that butts up against the reality principle. That which cannot be overcome *is* the Real. Realism establishes itself as the form that does not grant all wishes.

> The Real is thus—virtually by definition in the fallen world of capitalism—that which resists desire, that bedrock against which the desiring subject knows the breakup of hope and can finally measure everything that refuses its fulfillment. Yet it also follows that this Real—this absent cause, which is fundamentally unrepresentable and non-narrative, and detectable only in its effects—can be disclosed only by Desire itself, whose wish-fulfilling mechanisms are the instruments through which this resistant surface must be scanned.[7]

The novel, in other words, is the structure of desire itself, desire being that which cannot be sated; if one were to ever get the thing, desire would move elsewhere.

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[6] Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981: 183.
[7] Jameson, 183-184.

But in my work, the depressive—even when understood most crudely, as simply bad feeling—doesn't arise from unmet desires, or from problems of desire at all. Classical Freudian psychoanalysis, like that from which Jameson takes his notion of the unconscious, emphasizes repression of desire and conflictual drives as the root of conflict. This has resulted in narrative theory that overprivileges desire as the activity that occurs while reading, and moreover, that neglects readings that are not pleasure-seeking or suspense-driven but are bound up in states of duress, unpleasure, or burden.[8] (Do we insist in the academy that narrative is desire because so much of our own reading is done instrumentally or unhappily?) I don't conceptualize narrative as a form of desire, and consequently my readings explore pathologies that arise not from conflictual drives, but from dissociation or arrested development. Jody Messler Davies has described how relational models of the mind picture the unconscious as "not an onion which must be carefully peeled…but a child's kaleidoscope in which each glance through the pinhole of a moment in time provides a unique view."[9]

So rather than arriving at one single truth or originary smoking gun, I am interested in readings that might kaleidoscopically co-exist with other scholarship. *Kaleidoscope* is how I think about Trollope's plotting, too, as well as Thackeray's. Balzac and Dickens move towards a receding object of desire, but Thackeray and Trollope rotate, each episode refracting some new light. Almost any scene or situation

[8] "We can, then, conceive of the reading of plot as a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text. Narratives both tell of desire—typically present some story of desire—and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification." See Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1984: 37.

[9] See Stephen A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* (New York: Basic Books), 1995: 218.

can function as an emblem of their novels, because the shape of their plots is not a line but a crystal that can be examined from many sides. Progress is not made; likewise, in *Jude the Obscure,* progress is continually un-made. This has very interesting consequences for character. Rather than delaying the distribution of knowledge within the fictional world to create gaps that must be overcome, Thackeray and Trollope allow everyone to know everything all the time. A kind of laziness permeates their worlds. There is no real reason to finish their books. If we do, it's not because desire is at play, but other factors, which I explore in my readings—killing time in the case of Thackeray, comfort in the case of Trollope. The image of the kaleidoscope is also an image for reading itself, and not only reading kaleidoscope-shaped plots. Wolfgang Iser writes that "the activity of reading can be characterized as a sort of kaleidoscope of perspectives, preintentions, recollections."[10] Depressive reading is always aware that it is only one such perspective.

So while my project bears affective affinities with Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, it ultimately has very different stakes. For Berlant, cruel optimism is a structure of failure that exists somewhere between repetition compulsion and false consciousness. It involves an attachment that is fueled by desire for a fantasmatic (because it is impossible) notion of the good life. I, too, am interested in how subjects negotiate the good things that the world presents to them, whether they critique them as hollow or false, or cling to them for their comforts. But my work does not give an account of "bad desire." Depressiveness is a form of attachment, not the residue of an ungratified longing.

[10] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in *New Literary History* 3:2 (Winter 1972): 284

"Depressive Realism" also opposes the commonplace that the novel is the literary form that represents consciousness, and, consequently, the project has only a little interest in free indirect discourse. For many people, free indirect discourse has become equivalent with the novel itself; the notion that what novels do is "represent consciousness" is popular wisdom for non-academic readers and academic readers alike. As Dorothy J. Hale has written, what brings novel theory and cultural studies together is a joint commitment to the study of point-of-view. It is widely acknowledged that the novel "instantiates [identity] through its form."[11] From Henry James to Bakhtin and beyond, readers have been trained to pick apart "who is speaking" in a hunt for alterity. The novel's ethical project has become the instantiation of alterity itself, and the purpose of reading, that of gaining a window into the experience or lives of others.

My dissertation looks at novels that imagine their ethical work as something rather different than the mere assertion of alterity, and that excel in formal techniques other than free indirect discourse or dialogue. My authors tend to have very strong presences in their novels, and the voices of the narrators are much stronger than those of individual characters. In the case of Thackeray, Hardy, and Brontë, there is little effort on the part of the author to establish characters as actually distinct *thinkers* from the novel itself. Their novels do not aspire to represent thinking at all. So if I am overly loose in whether I ascribe meaning or intention to the narrator or author, that habit arises from my conviction that these particular novels blur the distinction. Generally speaking, I'm interested in thinking insofar as it is a form of feeling. I prefer the word "feeling" to the word "affect" because of its sense of feelers, antennae, that signal, point, perceive, and

[11] Dorothy J. Hale, *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 1998: 13.

receive cues from the environment. In this project, consciousness is that which is literally felt out, shaped by feeling.[12]

My first chapter dwells on the mechanics of direct address in *Vanity Fair*, which functions by making appeals for the reader to reflect not on the lives of the characters in the novel, but on her own life. The turn from free indirect discourse is hand in glove with a turn from the notion of a representable psychological interiority. Rather than represent consciousness of characters in language or through patterns or styles of thought, Thackeray presents characters as congealed dispositions. In my second chapter, I show that even though Trollope is at great pains to narrate thinking, he deploys characters as nodes of force who compel one another to act in certain ways over time, rather than as "voices" that debate or reason. Though his characters chat on and on, their logorrhea is not an invitation for the reader to imaginatively enter their consciousness, but a crisis that the reader enjoys or endures (or both). For Hardy, a felt response—dislike—does the work of elaborating a space of character that is deprived of clear motives or intentionality. In Brontë, my focus shifts away from character and towards her novels' incorporation of the genre of the *devoir* or school composition. Others might read this in terms of heteroglossia, which would foreground the novel as a master genre capable of incorporating other genres. Instead, I read the *devoir* in terms of transitional object and play.

The scholarly conversation on negative feeling has thus far been centered in the twentieth century. Sianne Ngai, for example, locates weak negative affects like irritation, anxiety, and envy in "what T.W. Adorno calls the fully 'administered world of late

[12] "Klein assumes that in psychic reality, feelings *create* objects… Klein has no theory of a mental apparatus, and feelings are not placed in any such frame." See Stein, 508-509.

modernity.'"[13] My work argues that actually dissatisfaction and attenuated modes of subjectivity are at the heart of realism. I share with Christopher Lane the sense that the Victorians have been too often depicted as one-dimensionally industrious, helpful, charitable, and dutiful, without enough attention to the seething discontent that accompanied and qualified such virtues. But unlike Lane, I am not writing a history of Victorian culture; depressiveness is not a *theme* or object of representation in the Victorian novel. I imagine it as part of the novel's architecture as well as a mood generated by reading these novels. Moreover, while Lane imagines that hatred might have a function like liberation—he writes in *Hatred and Civility* that "hatred escapes regulation in many literary and cultural texts, forging visions of individual freedom more imaginative than Foucauldians and conservatives generally admit"—freedom is not a term in my argument.[14] I'm not opposed to individual freedom on principle, but the authors I study don't put much faith in it.

The richest critical inquiry into depressiveness has been in queer theory, in the work of Judith Halberstam, Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, Heather Love, and others. In *No Future*, Edelman goes so far as to embrace annihilation of the species, writing that "we do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all of these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future."[15] In *Feeling Backward,* Heather Love finds in late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature an "archive of feeling" produced by modern homophobia: "nostalgia, regret,

[13] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2007: 1.
[14] Christopher Lane, *Hatred and Civility: The Antisocial Life in Victorian England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 3-4.
[15] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2004: 31.

shame, despair, *ressentiment*, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness." Love locates these feelings in relation to social marginalization and "the historical 'impossibility' of same-sex desire."[16] I write about similar feelings, but my focus is on how they arise in relation to participation in norms rather than in exclusion from them. As I argue in my chapter on *Jude the Obscure*, the psychic and social pain of participation in convention does not manifest as abjection, stigma, or shame; instead, it manifests as dislike and repetition, which open up space for individuation even within regimes of compulsory participation.

Since the mid-twentieth century, novel theory has followed two lines of thought, one investigating desire and one concerned with sympathy. Depressiveness is an alternative to both of these traditions. It resists the sympathetic discourse of the novel's inherent good, which has made a critical comeback in the last ten years, and holds out the hope that reading novels may be something other than a healthy way to spend one's time. Sympathy is something like the zombie of literary criticism, already put down in the 1980s by Foucauldians like D.A. Miller and Nancy Armstrong. The political context of the immediate post-9/11 era bears some responsibility for its return: Sympathy promotes a moderate liberalism in the face of a rapacious neo-conservatism. A renewed interest in Adam Smith and his writing on sympathy and suffering suggests a desire to rescue the thinker most closely associated in the public imagination with selfish capitalism and greed. Those in the sympathy camp are invested in a model of the self that privileges rationality, deliberation, judgment, and moderation—qualities that have been in short supply in American political life in the last fifteen years.

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[16] Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

What's more, literary critics and professors in the early years of the twenty-first century have found themselves in desperate need to justify their readings—and their jobs. Fueled by the so-called "cognitive turn" on the one hand and crunched by the "crisis in the humanities" on the other, they have attempted through various means to prove that the novel is a necessary good because it promotes sympathy or sympathetic modes of thinking. If English can no longer be called upon to define or instill "critical thinking," it's at least "proven" to help students recognize the emotions of others. When faced with the always thorny question of what makes literature worth funding, sympathy provides an answer; the archive of nineteenth-century discourses of sympathy gives Victorianists special purchase on the subject. For readers of the *New York Times,* any work of "literary fiction" can be counted on to improve the moral self; for Victorianists, it is the nineteenth-century British novel, and its mechanisms of free indirect discourse, metonymy, and characterization, that promotes sympathy.

Notable sympathetic-minded critics have included Rachel Ablow, Andrew H. Miller, and Rae Greiner. Each defends the novel—and they do offer *defenses*—in terms of moral and ethical development. I don't entirely dismiss the impulse to assign an ethical imperative to the study of the novel—in Miller's words, novel-reading is "an ethical practice" that explicitly addresses the meaning of a good life—but my project takes issue with the notion that improvement, reform, and sympathy are the form that ethics takes.[17] Whereas Miller's *Burdens of Perfection* is a study of "the desire to improve and the history of that desire" as it appears in "narratives of ethical development," my "Depressive Realism" is a study of the resistance to improvement, and that resistance's

[17] Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 2.

attendant feelings of stuckness or staying-in-place.[18] Depressiveness suggests that possibility might reside in remaining with what is useless and non-instrumental, rather than trying immediately to turn it to account or make it useful, productive, and purposeful. "Depressive Realism" is very much in the spirit of Anne-Lise Francois's *Open Secrets*, which "contest[s] the ideology of improvement," although it does so by attending to narratives of dissatisfaction rather than "nonappropriative contentment."[19] My depressive readings do not make claims about nineteenth-century cultural discourses, the history of thought, or even transtextual narrative structures. Like Francois, who also turns from narrative moments of action (as well as reigning critical modalities of suspicion and originality), I want to preserve a space for a non-instrumental ethics that isn't immediately conscripted in "permanent vigilance" to its own partiality.[20] To that end, I am more interested in the flavor of each author's vision of what is non-instrumental—comfort in Trollope, or dislike in Hardy—rather than in the non-instrumental as such.

Those in the sympathy camp are more or less openly acknowledged transcendentalists or idealists. (Miller makes theology a resource for his concept of perfectionism.) But my dissertation is resolutely earth-bound: It studies novels that investigate *this world*, novels that do not imagine help or even exemplarity in relation to the next one. My work is keyed not to George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, or Charles Dickens, all of whom imagined the novel as a tool for facilitating engagement between classes, or at least between persons. This worldliness, obviously, informs the project's commitment to divorcing novel-reading from a project of spiritual uplift. So while I share

[18] Miller, 1.
[19] Anne-Lise Francois, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2008: 21, xvii.
[20] Francois, 64.

with those in the sympathy camp a deep commitment to thinking about the self in terms of inter-relationality, my temperament drives me to very different conclusions. Miller writes that moral perfectionism believes that

> we become what we are in response to others… the individual who emerges…is not the solitary self familiar from more recent cultural history, beating its wings against inescapable regimens of surveillance. Instead, moral perfectionism provides a complex, relational understanding of selfhood, one that does not reduce human contact to forms of domination and subjection."[21]

Depressiveness also provides a complex, relational understanding of selfhood that does not reduce human contact to forms of domination and subjection—but nor does it rely on an unspoken transcendental horizon.

Scholars of sympathy are well aware that skepticism meets their projects. They reject "easy" identifications of the sort that Martha Nussbaum has been prone to, and encourage readers to see sympathy as a structure of self-definition rather than an emotion.[22] They want to rescue the discourse of sympathy from unsophisticated critics, and raise it to a philosophical investigation. In Greiner's analysis, sympathy is social reality itself. She writes in *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* that for nineteenth-century writers, "reality would depend on the practice, and the central proposition, of sympathy—that what is true in a given moment is that which is collectively thinkable and can be felt as such."[23] Through sympathetic mechanisms, a character and a reader acquire new knowledge about themselves, coming to see

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[21] Miller, 15.
[22] See Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 2.
[23] Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 50-51.

themselves from the other's point of view. For George Eliot, "only a sympathy that maintains a separation between self and other enables ethical choice."[24]

I am interested in characters that create the separation between self and other in less nice ways, whether they are explicitly determined by disposition or driven by inexplicable dislike. My dissertation draws attention to moments in which sympathetic mechanisms break down, fellow-feeling is rejected, and though feelings are shared and dispersed, they lack moral justification. Depressive skepticism does not, like Foucauldian skepticism, interrogate discipline. One way to think about my project is as a dialectical synthesis of sympathetic and paranoid readings, a third point of entry into the theory of the novel. My point is not that people are naturally un-sympathetic, but that the accommodations to the social order that sympathy celebrates (and that the novel undeniably participates in) are achieved by a complex working-through of loss, anxiety, guilt, and depression.

How does the novel come to be a container for these negative feelings? What gives shape to this negativity, and prevents it from spilling over entirely? A historicist critic might point to liberalism, which, after all, instituted "toleration" as the necessary prerequisite for liberty.[25] But though liberalism is at play in my readings of Trollope and Hardy, in general I'm interested in "toleration" as the relationship that exists between reader and novel. The barely-contained negativity that depressive reading homes in on and draws out is contained *by the reader* and by the coherence and persuasiveness of her reading, not by a political context, narrative structure, or personified element of form. It

[24] Greiner, 139.
[25] See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 1975, and Harriet Taylor, "An Early Essay on Toleration."

is not "realism" that is engaged in a process of mourning, fearing, or being anxious; it is the reader *of* realism.

But why does the reader have to "tolerate" anything? Of all the verbs used to describe that relationship between novel and reader, why have I chosen such a negative one? And just what is the object that requires tolerating—is it these particular novels, the Victorian period, or scholarship itself? I want to emphasize the latter, because the basic moves of academic scholarship—the assumption of expertise, the imperative to generate paradigms, even the making of argument itself—are so deeply alienating. But the truth is that there is some dislike in this project of the material, as there is dislike and aggression in every form of attachment. Besides, the ability to wade deep into unpleasure and stay there is a necessary part of institutional membership. Nobody likes all of their work all of the time. The novel, of course, is a useful analogue for thinking about the career and the deformations it requires.[26] One of this project's tensions lies between the world of Thackeray and Trollope and that of Hardy and Brontë. The former hew, cognizant of all its disappointments, to liberal bourgeois values; the latter explode them, rejecting what is socially safe, without, however, providing any plausible alternatives. It may be that liberal bourgeois values are themselves what academic criticism must learn how to tolerate, or admit that it does tolerate—the very ideology that critics so often rail against, and yet that provides us with the structure and limits within which we work.

This project, then, is an exploration of different critical possibilities. The chapters do not progress chronologically by novel's publication date, but tell a story about evolving attitudes. Each of the chapters very clearly maps onto the last three years of my

[26] See, for example, Nicholas Dames, "Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition," in *Victorian Studies* 45: 2 (Winter 2003): 247-278.

own moods. Each is exemplary of some discrete struggle with the endeavor to write this at all. My first chapter argues that Thackeray's sharp social critique in *Vanity Fair* is not in the service of rising up against the inadequacies of the world, but rather in depressively coming to terms with them—in settling. This is the first move in any long game. The heart of the dissertation is the middle two chapters. Chapter Two, "Soreness, Pain, and Comfort," analyzes how Trollope portrays thinking as a kind of soreness in the novels *He Knew He Was Right* and *Orley Farm*. This soreness helps clarify Trollope's ethics, which seek to ameliorate suffering through comfort. Chapter Three, "What is it you don't like in him?," theorizes dislike and disidentification in *Jude the Obscure*, and shows that these are mechanisms of individuation in a world of crushing conformity. The final chapter, on Charlotte Brontë, resumes the conversation around play inaugurated in *Vanity Fair*. It considers how something like academic writing—Brontë's own school compositions, which I call a form of transitional object—can be smuggled into other forms of writing, and allows the project to end on a note of possibility rather than rejection.

Depressiveness is appropriate for a time in which feelings of political exhaustion are everywhere. The post-9/11 era has been marked by the incomplete projects and failures of the political left. Whereas earlier generations of critics had to navigate a political situation of thwarted utopia, my project exists in a context of base insufficiency: We have not been granted even the least that we expected. As Ann Cvetkovich notes in *Depression: A Public Feeling*, the "customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis, are no longer working either to change the world or to

make us feel better."[27] Depressiveness as a position may help negotiate these disappointments by getting to know them better. In a world of increasingly attenuated agency—of data surveillance, of compulsory participation in unstable financial markets, of political apathy—the answer may not be a naïve return to the celebration of action but rather a more nuanced understanding of attenuation itself.

If a sympathetic reader wants to rescue and a paranoid reader wants to get to the bottom of things, a depressive reader is curious about moods, and almost overly sensitive to the particularities of individual texts. (Reparative reading shares this sensitivity, although its aim of producing an object that provides nourishment means, first, that it must seek out certain kinds of objects, or, second, compel resistant objects to provide comfort. Depressive reading doesn't know at the outset what the object will provide, or how the relationship will end.) Even though the Kleinian depressive is a unifying position that brings order to a disordered psyche, depressive criticism avoids unifying theories. It doesn't treat literary texts as moves in an argument that's really about something else—it doesn't take literary texts as evidence for some other kind of discourse. Sympathy produces knowledge of other minds; Ruskin called Self "our great enemy," and argued that the aim of literature was to focus on the plight and fortunes of others.[28] Paranoia produces knowledge of the state and ideological repression. Depressive reading inhabits literary texts in an act of two-way discovery: the text is at once the thing that the reader gets to know, and the thing that allows the reader to know herself by finding her interests in it. The gambit is that this isn't pure solipsism, and that, to paraphrase Emerson, by

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[27] Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 1.

[28] Ruskin wrote, "Have we not for the time [of reading] overcome, or, rather, driven away our great enemy, Self? Have we not become more like the angels?" See Ablow.

knowing what is true for you may know what is true for others. Depressive reading begins from a place of radical subjectivity and alienation but ends in relationality.

In each chapter, I struggle to articulate a relationship between individual and world, and specifically to grasp what is "inside" the subject and what is "outside" of her. I try to think in terms of worldliness, which evacuates some sense of innerness. "Inside" the subject is "the way of the world" itself. This doesn't necessarily mean world-weariness or disillusion or automatism. I think of worldliness in Heideggerian terms, as that which delimits a space of possibility, where a person has certain options for meaning available and others, not. To understand a given individual, then, a whole world has to be disclosed and known. The range of potentialities of the world will be both all-encompassing and divisive. Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* does not live in the same world as Jude, even though they share an apartment.

Thinking of characters in terms of worldliness leads away from dichotomies of active/passive, agentive/non-agentive, and freedom/repression. I draw on terms that de-emphasize interiority, including disposition, force, and disidentification, and emphasize the placement of a subject into a world. I begin from the assumption that affects are produced interpersonally and are therefore not "interior" to the character. Insofar as affects are part of the definition of one's identity, they are part of that definition for other people. In this I am well in line with contemporary writing on affect. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg gloss affect as follows:

> Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and

> sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability.[29]

This brings to mind the example of Mrs. Gradgrind from *Hard Times,* which Rachel Ablow writes about in the essay "Victorian Feelings":

> "Are you in pain, dear mother?
> "I think there's a pain somewhere in the room," said Mrs. Gradgrind, "but I couldn't positively say that I have got it."[30]

Such instances of what Ablow labels affective contagion are an important background to my own writing on character. In my reading, however, the externalization and portability of feeling are conditioned by negativity: a waning or reduction that imagines the self not as motivated, conscious, and agentive but as sensitive, attuned, melancholic, and resistant. It could only be a "pain" that Mrs. Gradgrind cannot quite locate in herself, but rather finds connected to her but outside of her.

Much other recent writing on feelings also explores subjectivity in terms of attenuation and porousness. Ngai expressly links her "ugly feelings" to what she calls "ambivalent situations of suspended agency."[31] Cvetkovich describes her aim as that of "generat[ing] new ways of thinking about agency."[32] Somewhat more radically, Teresa Brennan's work on the transmission of affect explores how feelings circulate outside of

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[29] Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers" in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 14.
[30] Rachel Ablow, "Victorian Feelings," in Deirdre David, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel,* Second Edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 193.
[31] Ngai, 1.
[32] Cvetkovich, 2.

and between individuals, and associates the notion of the "emotionally contained subject" with Eurocentrism.[33] Berlant also assumes a shared affective environment. I hope that "Depressive Realism" can contribute to ways of thinking about character that complicate discourses of rational agency by attending to permeability, suspension, attenuation, mood, disposition, transmission, and worldliness.

This project does not engage in straightforward ideology critique, but it also doesn't wholly participate in surface reading. (The critic is far too implicated in the readings for me to claim that I am just reading, or observing, or describing.) I draw freely and pluralistically on discourses as they become useful or relevant. Freud, Klein, and Winnicott emerge as key figures, but appearances are also made by Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Erving Goffman, Barthes, Sedgwick, D.A. Miller, Pierre Bourdieu, Elaine Scarry, and Stanley Cavell. The point is not to create intellectual chaos but to be sensitive to what each text needs. I read deeply and closely but do everything possible to find theoretical lenses that match or complement the mood or idea of the novels themselves, privileging the specific contours of each case rather than approaching all nails with the same hammer.

Does the academy need yet one more call for "how to read"? Paranoid reading, reparative reading, distant reading, surface reading—these are the latest symptoms of the perennial confusion about what it is that we are doing as teachers and critics of English literature. What is this line of work, anyway? What counts as work in it? And what is it that we want to know in the first place? The pendulum has swung very far towards portable paradigms and trans-authorial analyses; I am dragging it back towards exegesis

[33] Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 2.

and authorial oeuvre. The measure of the value of depressive reading will be if it can produce meaningful and persuasive readings, stories about stories that are true, interesting, and capable of explaining how these novels work and what they mean. But just as important—if only to me—is that it provides a way to tolerate the ambiguity around the practice of criticism itself. This is an ambiguity that involves both the compulsory and the irrelevant. But rather than imagine an escape or subversion of the compulsory, it performs it, all the while insisting on the irrelevance of the task at hand. The extent to which this paradox is a perogative of the novel form itself remains an open question.

"Made to Go On Pleasantly Enough": Settling for *Vanity Fair*

But is the world, then, a peep show? These things are certainly beautiful to behold*, but to* be *them is something quite different.—Arthur Schopenhauer*[34]

In Lukács's classic formulation, the novel is the form of a hero alienated from the world. On the one side stands the individual, coherent and independent and seeking; on the other side lies the world, a disconnected totality of disabling institutions and norms. Lukács's phrase for this state of things is "transcendental homelessness." For Lukács, meaning is no longer immanent, and the hero of the novel must, through experience, catch "a mere glimpse of meaning," a glimpse that will make the burdens of living worthwhile.[35]

This has been an influential account of the novel, and it describes some novels very well. But "transcendental homelessness" does not describe William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848). Indeed, one of the unusual aspects of *Vanity Fair* is that its characters are introduced as already entirely at home in the world. They handle and manipulate the world easily; they are in the world, of the world, and shot through with the world. The realm of meaning is not somewhere else, like the Tower Society in *Wilhelm Meister*; there is no transcendence, lost or otherwise. Unlike in Lukács's examples, Thackeray's characters don't struggle to learn the world through experience or apprenticeship; they are born having inherited the world and they know what to do with it. And while the feeling that Lukács ascribes to the novel is alienation, the feeling that permeates *Vanity Fair* is something weaker: disappointment. Disappointment is not the result of a dislocation of meaning, but is the deflated feeling of settling into the world as

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[34] Wolfgang Schirmacher, ed., *The Essential Schopenhauer: Key Selections from* The World as Will and Representation *and Other Writings* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2010): 33.
[35] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge: MIT Press), 1996: 80.

it is given. To find that one already possesses everything that is coming is, understandably, something of a comedown.

From the preface "Before the Curtain" to the equanimous ending, where Amelia and Becky meet a joint fate, *Vanity Fair* positions the human actor and literary character not as a person possessing an interiority who makes choices, but as an externalized actor who plays or operates a game of strategy. Thackeray's word to describe the subject of this social field is "disposition." The first section of this chapter attempts to come to terms with what Thackeray means by disposition, and what relationship exists in this novel between individual and world. In the second section, I explore the ideas of vanity and transitoriness, and argue that Thackeray's sharp social critique in *Vanity Fair* is not in the service of rising up against the inadequacies of the world, but rather in depressively coming to terms with them. I pull back from the brink of nihilism by taking up his image of gameplay as a way of making sense of the novelistic art of "killing time." Finally, I argue that Thackeray's use of direct address reveals the possibility of an ethics that is based not on justice, but on compassion.

Disposition

Throughout *Vanity Fair,* Thackeray is at pains to justify the existence of the novel he is writing. It all comes down to Becky and Jos's inability to get themselves engaged. If only he had carried Becky off in marriage when she first arrived at the Sedleys', we're repeatedly reminded, none of this would have happened. First there is Jos's failure of courage—he stuffed Becky with jam instead of proposing. Then George and Amelia made matters worse by untimely returning to the room where the would-be lovers were sitting in the dark. But neither explanation sticks. The real culprit is fingered at Vauxhall.

"That bowl of rack punch was the cause of all this history," Thackeray writes of the liquor that Jos Sedley orders.[36] The punch is definitive. Jos might have screwed up his courage and George and Amelia might have stayed out of the way, but he never had a chance with the punch. "Everybody had rack punch at Vauxhall."[37]

The fact that Jos will drink the punch and that the punch will derail the engagement is a fait accompli. Neither intention nor reason are operative. Before getting into Thackeray's handling of the scene, it's worth thinking about how a very different realist depicted states outside of reason or choice. Consider as a point of comparison George Eliot on Lydgate's mania in *Middlemarch* (1874). In that novel, two kinds of irrationality are possible: "hereditary constitutional craving" of the kind that drives someone to drink or opium, and "that excited narrow consciousness which reminds one of an animal with fierce eyes and retractile claws" that characterizes Lydgate at the gambling table.[38] The latter animalistic trance is the inversion of vocation: both are forms of irrational, irruptive, inward gaze. Just as vocation is a moral choice that defines choice as responsiveness to a higher calling, the fall into gambling is a choice that Lydgate makes to respond to his baser impulses.

Eliot is clear that Lydgate's moral error lies in his first entering the gambling hall, where he will be inevitably pulled into its environment and deeper into the darker corners of human instinct and desire. But though it is a choice, the temporality of choice is off. There is not one clear moment where he chooses badly. Is it when "his thought…began to

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[36] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2008: 66.
[37] Ibid, 66.
[38] George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (New York: Penguin), 1994: 686, 672.

turn"?[39] When gambling *occurs* to him, as if from outside? He tells himself he's running up to the billiards room to find Mr. Bambridge, but this is hardly an innocent mission. His plan is to cheat on a horse trade for a mere twenty pounds. Is *that* the fall? He slides into it smoothly, surreptitiously, hiding whatever intention exists from himself. Once inside, there is only one way to bet. And if the fall is slow, the waking up is quick. A "sharp concussion" upon recognizing Fred and hearing him speak of Mr. Farebrother pulls Lydgate out of the state.[40]

In *Middlemarch,* gambling mania is an opportunity to investigate consciousness. Even so, the focalization of the narrative shifts from Lydgate to Fred. Eliot's narrator does not enter the gambling mentality; she observes it through Fred, who is able to recognize "something unfitting" because he, at other times, has himself inhabited it.[41] The betting scene is a lesson, and a warning, about losing oneself. In the end, it doesn't reveal anything fundamental about *Lydgate*—it uses Lydgate to reveal something fundamental about the workings of thought and the human inclination to get swept away in a hollow of excitement that makes unique men all the same.

Thackeray's use of the rack punch at Vauxhall is entirely different. First, there is no sense of his characters entering a world that is separate from that to which they belong, no crossing of a threshold from places where they should be to places where they should not be. There is no investigation of the process of consciousness that led them to choose to go into the bar for supper. There is no consciousness at all. This is not to say that they are naturalist brutes; there are also no drives or instincts at work. We simply, suddenly,

[39] Ibid, 669.
[40] Ibid, 673.
[41] Ibid, 672.

find ourselves in the bar with not even a preamble to indicate how long the characters have been there.

> The two couples were perfectly happy then in their box: where the most delightful and intimate conversation took place. Jos was in his glory, ordering about the waiters with great majesty. He made the salad; and uncorked the champagne; and carved the chickens; and ate and drank the greater part of the refreshments on the table. Finally, he insisted upon having a bowl of rack punch; everybody had rack punch at Vauxhall. 'Waiter, rack punch.'

How long has Jos been in his glory? It's a tableaux. It feels like it has always been happening, and will go on happening in the background, even as the plot advances. A paragraph intervenes in which Thackeray dilates on the consequences of the punch for his novel. Then:

> The young ladies did not drink it; Osborne did not like it; and the consequence was that Jos, that fat *gourmand*, drank up the whole contents of the bowl; and the consequence of his drinking up the whole contents of the bowl was, a liveliness which at first was astonishing, and then became almost painful; for he talked and laughed so loud as to bring scores of listeners round the box, much to the confusion of the innocent party within it; and, volunteering to sing a song (which he did in that maudlin high key peculiar to gentlemen in an inebriated state), he almost drew away the audience who were gathered round the musicians in the gilt scallop-shell, and received from his hearers a great deal of applause.[42]

Thackeray is far more interested in how Jos acts while drunk on the punch than in what he thinks before drinking it or why he drinks it. This is because Jos, "that fat *gourmand*," does not *choose* to drink the punch; he is *disposed* to drink the punch. He's the kind of person who drinks punch and excuses it by saying that everybody drinks it. (Amelia and George and Becky don't have rack punch. Dobbin is never even in the bar.) Eric Auerbach wrote that "the fate of Achilles is Achillean"; we could say that in *Vanity Fair* the fate of Jos is Josian, just as the fate of Becky is Beckian and the fate of Dobbin,

[42] Thackeray, *VF*, 65-66.

Dobbinian.[43] The question the novel answers is what a Becky Sharp is—and a Dobbin, and a Jos, and a Rawdon—and it shows how these fates belong to some overlap between internal qualities and the world. The first words Becky speaks in the novel are, after all, "I suppose I must."[44] Thackeray's characters are fundamentally responsive to circumstance, not because they desire to be, but because they must—that's what they're there to do.

Is there something tautological in this? Becky does X because she is Becky; Jos does Y because he is Jos. It's more complex than that. What is at issue in terms of character is the alignment of Jos's mode of participation in social life (or the world) with the structure of social life (or the world) itself. Disposition is frequently invoked by the narrator and explains a wide range of behaviors and styles.[45] Dispositions can be kind and placable, generous and manly, sociable and far from proud, selfish, complying, kind and forgiving, good-natured and obliging, generous, simple and demanding protection, soft and foolish, or benevolent. Notably, there are not dispositions to greatness or heroism, public works or ambition, triumph or warfare. Dispositions are domestic and interpersonal. Moreover, dispositions may come into focus at certain moments—as in the scene with the rack punch—but they do not function like heroic virtues that come out under pressure or duress or in moments of crisis. Dispositions are not revealed in great action but in habits. By the time Jos drinks the punch, we've already seen him, on an

[43] Eric Auerbach, *Dante, Poet of the Secular World* (New York: New York Review Books), 2007: 2.
[44] Thackeray, 9.
[45] There are many examples of Thackeray's use of the word, including "Rebecca was of a good-natured and obliging disposition" (Thackeray, 384) and "Dobbin was much too modest a young fellow to suppose that this happy change in all his circumstances arose from his own generous and manly disposition…" (Thackeray, 56).

earlier night, drink two-thirds of a bottle of champagne. The scene confirms an expectation; it doesn't challenge or overturn one. Dispositions do not suddenly emerge; they are by definition unsurprising. This is not to say that all dispositions are the same. It is only to say that disposition—which we could imagine as a horizontal axis, intersecting the vertical axis of ethical action—undercuts the ability of someone to change or choose an ethical action. Some dispositions are surely better than others, but if your disposition is not up to you, then we must rethink our notion of responsibility, as well as blameworthiness or praiseworthiness.

When Jos sends his parents a bit of money after their bankruptcy, this is also chalked up to his disposition. "Jos Sedley had acted as a man of his disposition would, when the announcement of the family misfortune reached him."[46] His actions are unheroic and barely noticed by the Sedleys. It's the gift of the Sedleys' own spoons that the stockbrokers buy at the auction of their household property that reduces Mr. Sedley to tears. So even though character in *Vanity Fair* is generally structured as disposition, it's also true that disposition is the background or status quo against which idiosyncrasy sometimes appears in relief. (Generosity is an idiosyncrasy in this world.) What makes Becky interesting is that she is predictable (insofar as she will always hurtle herself at the next obstacle in order to overcome it) while always being unpredictable (her methods will be ingenious and surprising).

Disposition is always directional: One is put into a position, from which one is then disposed towards something or someone. It is disposition to do or behave in a certain manner in a social field, an orientation or an opening position in a longer game.

[46] Thackeray, 206.

It at first seems to be an inborn condition, something like Freud's notion of constitution. But constitution is what the world acts *on*; it precedes and is separable from experience. Freud calls it hereditary. Though Thackeray makes reference to nature and instinct, he does not mean to separate those inborn qualities from the social. Disposition is bound up *in* the world; it's not the stuff that the world molds. It's more like inheritance than a hereditary trait. Interestingly, the only negative disposition that Thackeray specifies is "selfishness," which operates as an umbrella for all anti-sociality: There *is* no negative characteristic in *Vanity Fair* except the withdrawal from others.

This world of social play functions very like the rules of habitus and disposition that Pierre Bourdieu established in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. For Bourdieu, disposition "expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body), and, in particular, a *predisposition*, *tendency*, *propensity*, or *inclination.*"[47] When reading for disposition, instead of looking for agentive choices, we must think about the strategies that certain dispositions allow for or close off, and to how disposition is performed bodily. Disposition is Bourdieu's way into what others call the relationship between ideology and subject.

"Habitus" is Bourdieu's word for the social field populated by individuals whose dispositions have been "inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group."[48] Ideologies (his example is honor) are enacted in ways of walking, holding one's hands, looking others in the eye, speaking, and so forth. He

[47] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2011: 214. The translator adds that the "semantic cluster" around disposition is wider in the French than in English, but that the "equivalence is adequate."
[48] Bourdieu, 15.

calls the habitus the "immanent law" that is instantiated in each individual "by his earliest upbringing" and supplies the "minimum of concordance" in the social field. Disposition and habitus are bigger than "subjective intentions and conscious projects."[49] It is not the thing that someone brings *to* the social; it is the way that someone operates in or navigates the social. One does not decide to cultivate a certain disposition like honor or generosity or courage. The social conditions of the habitus act as "immanent law" that lays out the guidelines for playing the games of honor or generosity or courage. You do not choose to play or not play; there is no outside the game.

Bourdieu writes:

> The principles em-bodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and therefore, more precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as "stand up straight" or "don't hold your knife in your left hand."[50]

What we see here is that the experience of being in the social teaches the subject, who learns a set of practices that then reinforce the rules of the game. This is a model that excludes epiphany, the preferred novelistic mode of consciousness-raising or learning. It is not vulgar behaviorism, but imagines behavior as a way of knowing the world. What one learns in one instance is useful to the next, so that Becky learns, while in the company of the Crawleys, to condescend to the Sedleys. But learning in this context is more like the dealing of new hands in a game of cards than it is like revelation. Becky doesn't have to *think* about condescending to the Sedleys, or reflect. She just does it.

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[49] Ibid, 81.
[50] Ibid, 94.

When Bourdieu describes the habitus as "the feel for the game," he is explaining the coordination of individual and context that allows, in his example, the ball player to appear just where the ball appears in time for the catch. The consequence of such training, Kent Puckett writes in *Bad Form*, is "an un-self-conscious and spontaneous display of good form."[51] An idea of habitus and the status of the mistake go a long way towards explaining Thackeray's *Book of Snobs*; *Vanity Fair*, however, is engaged in a different project. To be sure, attention to the habitus explains how mistakes show up as ruptures in the coherence of a closed game that should proceed smoothly. It's undeniable that Jos makes a social mistake and exhibits bad form at Vauxhall. He gets drunk; he embarrasses himself and the others. For Puckett, "bad form…is bound up with efforts to produce and secure narrative authority in the omnisciently narrated nineteenth-century novel."[52] But what is interesting about *Vanity Fair* is how it challenges what Puckett calls the good aesthetic form of the nineteenth-century novel, which privileges, in his telling, interiority, closure, and omniscience. *Vanity Fair* refuses each of these: Psychologically it foregoes interiority in favor of foregrounding disposition; the many gaps and elisions of the plot refuse closure; and the narrator, though he is everywhere the characters are, doesn't always know what is happening with them.

Thackeray is interested not only in the play of social life in Vanity Fair and the accidents that proceed from it, but in something more metaphysical: its capacity for world-making.

> Thus the world began for these two ladies [Becky and Amelia]. For Amelia it was quite a new, fresh, brilliant world, with all the bloom upon

[51] Kent Puckett, *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 25.
[52] Ibid, 40-41.

> it. It was not quite a new one for Rebecca… But who can tell you the real truth of the matter? At all events, if Rebecca was not beginning the world, she was beginning it over again.[53]

This is a world, to be sure, where manners have the power to decide the course of events. But the deep melancholy of the narrator hints that something more is at stake than snobs and how they eat their peas. The narrator establishes his authority over his characters by chastising them or excusing their errors. But unlike in the *Book of Snobs*, the mistakes they make are not matters of etiquette. Nor are they exactly matters of ethics—Thackeray states plainly in the prologue that the world of the fair is amoral. He explores what lies between etiquette and ethics: something more like ethos, or the spirit of the age. Whereas ethics and etiquette both depend on an actor who can be held responsible, ethos is that which speaks through the individual. Ethos has consequences but not, strictly speaking, responsibility.

To say that the world began for Becky and Amelia is different than to say that they set off to find the world. This world does not exist until Becky and Amelia make it. This doesn't mean that they are free to make the world however they want it to be. This isn't even Becky's first beginning, just the first we learn of her beginning-agains. She will begin the world many times in the novel, and, it is implied, many times outside of the story we are told. The fact that Becky is not a virgin is crucially bound to this power of beginning: She literally has nothing to lose. There is another instance of "beginning the world," which is after the Sedleys' bankruptcy, when they also have nothing left to lose: "'We're ruined, Mary. We've got the world to begin over again, dear.'"[54]

[53] Thackeray, 21.
[54] Thackeray, 212.

There is something Heideggerian in this idea of beginning the world. Heidegger also had a concept of disposedness, which has to do with moods. Put simply, for Heidegger moods are not to be found "inside" the person or even "outside" her but are present in certain situations or positions the person finds herself in. Dispositions to fear or anger or happiness or joy disclose the "thrownness" that characterizes being-in-the-world—the circumstances that reveal some possibilities and hide others.[55] To return to our example of Jos and the rack punch, we could say that the punch was part of the world of Vauxhall that was available for Jos and that he was disposed to use. It was not a choice made by a rational actor, but part of a world that appeared for him and through which he appeared. It is this sense of character as disclosed by the world that Thackeray relies on throughout the novel.

Making the world is a matter of beginnings that accumulate but don't develop or deepen. In *The One Vs. The Many,* Alex Woloch made much of the fact that Miss Jemima must exit *Vanity Fair* to make room for Becky.[56] But we never get to know Becky in a deeper way than we knew Miss Jemima: We just get more of her. Thackeray is not interested in deep psychology or character growth or in distinctions between major and minor but in a field of exteriorities, episodes, and gestures, such as Becky's triumphant chucking of Samuel Johnson's Dictionary out the carriage window on her way from Miss Pinkerton's School. The illustration is called "Rebecca's Farewell." (Thackeray always uses Becky's full name to ironize moments when her low behavior and "proper" name clash.) In the drawing, Becky has just flung the dictionary out the window; her arm is still

[55] See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Perennial), 2008.
[56] See Alex Woloch, *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2003: 40.

raised, in a closed loose fist that almost looks like a salute. Her eyes are dark and her face is pinched, but her lips are just ever so slightly raised in a smile. She relishes the moment. Miss Jemima's hands are open, in shock, as if to catch the book; an unidentified girl hides her face in shame at the gate. The dictionary hangs, open, in the air. The drawing freezes the action so that, like Jos's background of drunkenness, it seems to be happening not once but always, like there is a temporality in which Becky Sharp has continually just thrown the dictionary at Miss Jemima. Such an action is partial but also complete in itself, and yields no consequences. It contains all of Becky.[57]

The narrative of *Vanity Fair* emerges as a series of discrete crystallized moments or gestures like this flinging of the dictionary. (Another example is Becky's performance as Clytemnestra.) The exchangeability of these episodes and their evenness in terms of attention and affect and import seems to have something in common with the form of the panorama, which overwhelms, and whose discrete components become something of a blur. A panorama, of course, is a painting arranged in the round so that a centrally-positioned viewer can take in all the images.[58] What's important about the mode of display is that while a panorama might contain a lively scene or detail, in general, it is experienced in its plenitude; often, there is no detail at all, only plenitude. Just as Percy

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[57] Andrew Miller argues that "the episode with the dictionary [is] the exception that proves [the] rule" of how Becky responds to gifts—she usually accepts them demurely (Miller 1049). The dictionary, however, is not just any gift: It is a representation of good manners and fixed meanings, of staying in one's place. The gesture is a perfect distillation because it captures and makes visually quotable what no long passage of prose could capture, which is the non-verbal, instinctual rejection of the speech of the age. See Andrew Miller, "Vanity Fair Through Plate Glass," in *PMLA* 105.5 (1990): 1042-1054.

[58] The first panoramas were exhibited by Robert Barker in Scotland in 1792; the next year, he moved them to a building designed for circular display in Leicester Square. For more on the panorama, see Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

Lubbock wrote of Thackeray's narratives, panoramic details emerge out of a background.[59] Even Becky's final dispatch of Jos is not really the fulfillment of the novel's arc, but simply one more episode, on par with all the others came before. Because we know that Becky's life in some way exceeds the plot, we have no way of resolving this plot or creating hierarchies within it. In order for a painted panorama to look correct, the proportions had to be altered at the smallest level. We might say that in order for a novel of *Vanity Fair*'s length and scope to *seem* proportioned, leveling description must be utilized. From a step back, everything comes into focus. (As Lukács wrote, "narration establishes proportion, description merely levels."[60]) In this way, *Vanity Fair* shows that the *bildung* structure is not at all necessary for the project that Moretti identified as the novel's reconciliation to the status quo. The process of accommodation is done away with; time does not change or fulfill but only passes.

History still occurs, but the way we receive it is domesticated. The chapter "How Captain Dobbin Bought a Piano," describes the Sedleys' property being disposed of at auction, and the next chapter, "Who Played on the Piano Captain Dobbin bought?," largely eschews any story about the cause of the bankruptcy. "Ventures had failed; merchants had broken; funds had risen when he calculated they would fall. What need to particularize? If success is rare and slow, everybody knows how quick failure is."[61] Even Trollope, who was also given to pronouncements on Society and "the way things are," gives an account of the fears and predicaments of speculation gone wrong in *The Way We Live Now*; he elaborates the mechanics and the consequences and the mental anguish

[59] See Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York: Viking), 1969.
[60] Lukács, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press), 1978: 127.
[61] Thackeray, 212.

caused by the Ponzi scheme. Thackeray's disinterest in the details of Sedley's screw-up is remarkable: The particularities—the very details that realism is supposed to be relish—are not even interesting enough to summarize. In Vanity Fair, the specifics of one's own life are unavailable. From the point-of-view of the narrator, stories are meaningful *only* in the abstract, as cases or examples of general laws. This emptying-out is bound up in the melancholy of the novel's tone. It's a disappointment to not have a life whose details are interesting, a disappointment to have a life that feels like everyone else's.

Midway through the chapter, we at last get some cause for the family's suffering: Napoleon. "So imprisoned and tortured was this gentle little heart [Amelia's]," Thackeray writes, "when in the month of March, Anno Domini 1815, Napoleon landed at Cannes, and Louis XVIII fled, and all Europe was in alarm, and the funds fell, and old John Sedley was ruined."[62] Surely not *everyone* was ruined. But whatever intermediary steps Sedley took, whatever his actions, whatever his unique errors, the ultimate mover of this history is History itself. (First John Sedley joked that his champagne is as good as "Boney"'s, and then Bonaparte caused his downfall.) The ironizing of these links between the individual and history communicates Amelia's overvaluing of her own romantic life and her disinterest in geopolitics. But what is not ironic is Thackeray's understanding that history shows up in daily life in just these ways—that how his readers as well as his characters experience history is not as the generals marching, but as a series of economic reverberations.

So although the characters literally run away from the Battle of Waterloo—the only "order for march" we get is Jos whipping the horses he has bought from Becky to

[62] Ibid, 214.

use to flee the city—it's not quite right to say that the world of *Vanity Fair* excludes the historical.[63] Thackeray excuses the gap in narration with something of a kettle defense: the history of Waterloo has been told many times before, the commonness of the knowledge makes further telling unnecessary, and if he were to tell it, the readers would get needlessly worked up and vengeful over it. But it is the novel's worldliness itself—the way it imagines the relationship between disposed individual and social habitus—that requires the recession of the major events of the world. And if the recession is literal, so much the better; it shows the seams of vanity when class is deprived of money.

Vanity

In the last of his *Punch* column on Snobs, published in 1847, Thackeray considered the case of one Jawkins, tormentor of dinner companions. The author reported sharing a secret laugh over the man's pretensions with a young lady while

> Jawkins, meanwhile, went on blundering, and bragging and boring, quite unconsciously. And so he will, no doubt, go on roaring and braying, to the end of time or at least so long as people will hear him. You cannot alter the nature of men and Snobs by any force of satire; as, by laying ever so many stripes on a donkey's back, you can't turn him into a zebra.[64]

Jawkins will go on blundering, bragging, and boring as long as the social world will tolerate him, or to the end of time—in one breath Thackeray invokes the possibility of a world beyond the social and closes it off. If there ever were a world in which Jawkins could not be heard, it would be much the same thing as coming to the end of time. There is no hope for Jawkins, and there is, alas, no hope for anyone who comes within earshot.

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[63] Ibid, 402.
[64] Thackeray, *The Book of Snobs by One of Themselves* (Rockville: Arc Manor), 2009: 167.

This is the world that Becky and Amelia begin and begin again, and that the reader of the novel begins, and begins again. A popular protest slogan claims that "another world is possible," but Thackeray is more interested in the feelings that arise from beginning *this* world than in the structure of that which has not yet come. The problem, for Jawkins as well as Thackeray's other characters and his readers, is not that he won't learn; it's that the nature of things has nothing to teach. In this world experience is not educative; it accrues, but it does not culminate. From the highest to the lowest all are the same.[65] We are all donkeys, and a donkey can never be turned into a zebra. Now, would it be better if you could turn a donkey into a zebra? Probably! But you can't.

Jawkins's vanity—the self-admiration that causes him to *jaw* away, talking about himself and imagining his blunders as charms—is connected to another kind of vanity. This is a more Schopenhauerian vanity, the vanity of the world itself. "Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?—Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out."[66] Vanity in the sense of futility is a consequence of disposition; character cannot be transformed, develop, or reach fulfillment. It becomes what it already was. Unlike Trollope, who finds satisfaction in his own notion of worldliness, Thackeray ends on a note of elegy, wistfulness, regret. It's not that things could have been otherwise—to think so would be vanity—but it still would have been nice if they could have been.

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[65] "It is currently reported that even in the very inmost circles, they are no happier than the poor wanderers outside the zone; and Becky, who penetrated into the very centre of fashion, and saw the great George IV face to face, has owned since that there too was Vanity," (Thackeray, *VF*, 637).

[66] Thackeray, 878.

There is, however, a species of freedom, or at least relief, in foregoing happiness as a goal and settling for what comes. It involves foregoing futurity.

When Andrew Miller writes that "to read Thackeray is to experience the world as [characters in the late novel *Philip*] do, able to see but not possess the objects we desire," he assumes that possession as such is an intrinsic good.[67] But it seems to me that Thackeray paints the dream of possession as just one more vanity. *Vanity Fair* contains the unexpected notion that possession is not a failed end but no longer a desired goal at all. At issue is not *meaning*—Miller writes that "in Thackeray's view, objects have no extrinsic, transcendental meaning"—but ways of passing the time.[68]

Sixty years ago, F.R. Leavis dismissed Thackeray from "The Great Tradition" on the grounds that his novel was merely a way of passing—rather, killing—time. He wrote that

> [Thackeray] has (apart from some social history) nothing to offer the reader whose demand goes beyond the "creation of characters" and so on. His attitudes, and the essential substance of interest, are so limited that (although, of course, he provides incident and plot) for the reader it is merely a matter of going on and on; nothing has been done by the close to justify the space taken—except, of course, that time has been killed (which seems to be all that even some academic critics demand of a novel).[69]

Far from missing some secret essence of Thackeray's work, Leavis captures it precisely. Thackeray's plots are strings of episodes, panoramic in nature, whose main interest is in the "creation of characters" (or dispositions), which go on and on (eight hundred some

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[67] Miller, 1052.
[68] Ibid, 1047.
[69] F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Faber and Faber), 2008: 32.

pages) and "kill" hours of the reader's time. The only thing that Leavis misses is that the project of "killing" time is one worth taking seriously.

The expression "kill-time" was born in the context of the novel. Its first recorded use is by Samuel Richardson, who used it both in *Clarissa* and in a letter to Mrs. Barbaud, in which he decried entertainments without moral lessons as being "mere kill-time amusements to thinking minds!"; later it was later used by Coleridge to describe the "habit" of reading novels.[70] For Leavis, "killing time" seems to indicate that "nothing" happens in Thackeray; for 18th and 19th century writers, "killing time" also connotes the moral waste of time spent reading literature. "Something" must "happen" for there to be a moral lesson and an ethical pay-off.

But is time really "killed" in *Vanity Fair*? Is this the right way to metaphorize the act of reading a work of such duration? Time is not so much done away with as it is drawn out. Within the world of the novel, time functions to delay, becoming the medium of maneuvering, tactics, and strategy. (Bourdieu's intervention in anthropological discourse was, through disposition and habitus, the introduction of time into purely synchronic ethnographic models.) Unlike *Henry Esmond* or *Pendennis*, which suggest a developmental model of time ("mental changes" in *Pendennis* are likened to the graying of hairs), the episodic structure of *Vanity Fair* suggests that the *order* of events is not so important as their sheer piling up. This piling up is uncumulative, by which I mean it does not build to anything other than itself. Time therefore does not yield truths, but is instead the medium that reveals the sheer waste and vanity of life. As Schopanhauer wrote,

[70] "Kill-time," Def. A., *Oxford English Dictionary* (Web. 25 July 2014).

> The way in which this *vanity* of all objects of the will makes itself known and comprehensible to the intellect that is rooted in the individual is primarily *time*. It is the form by whose means that vanity of things appears as their transitoriness, since by virtue of this all our pleasures and enjoyments come to naught in our hands, and afterwards we ask in astonishment where they have remained. Hence that vanity itself is the only *objective* element of time, in other words, that which corresponds to it in the inner nature of things, and so that of which it is the expression.[71]

Vanity Fair, then, *must* be a long novel: transitoriness is expressed in duration rather than in brevity.

In Thackeray, there are not experiences of greater or lesser intensities, of more or less meaning. Knowledge is not historical knowledge or divine knowledge but worldliness itself, knowledge of the game. It is difficult to remember such knowledge. Indeed, Thackeray's frequent admonitions to himself that he must not get too far off topic or lose the story do not seem a sign of anxiety that the reader will forget the narrative, but rather draw attention to the inevitability of that reader's forgetting. The knowledge of *Vanity Fair* is not intended for keeping. Like a panorama that exceeds what a viewer can take in at any one moment, the episodic structure and the sheer length of the narrative indicate that one is not *meant* to remember all of its details and events; such a thing is undesirable, impossible—undesirable *because* impossible. It is a function of *Vanity Fair* that one passes through it; like its pleasures, it may consume the moment, even threaten to overtake it, but it is ultimately fleeting. One returns not with a moral, but only with, as the Prologue advises, "a sober, contemplative, not uncharitable frame of mind."[72] This frame of mind is the thing that the novel is cultivating. Becky's story of upward mobility and striving is, in the end, a story about the virtues of settling: settling for the terms of

[71] Schirmacher, 24.
[72] Thackeray, 1.

this world, settling in for the puppet show, for the given. The virtues of settling are endurance, acceptance, and a sporting attitude. We, too, are invited to settle into a comfortable chair; reading, not revolution, is on offer. The settling rooted in the disappointment of the narrative voice denies the possibility of self-overcoming—what Andrew Miller, after Stanley Cavell, calls moral perfectionism—as much as it denies political or social change. This is not resignation to the status quo, but a confrontation with the irresolvable disappointments of the status quo.

Time is killed in another sense—that it has not been turned to profit. When you settle for something, you give up on making improvements to it. You also give up on work. As Miller imagines it, "moral perfectionism" is not a slavish disciplining regime. But it *is* an anxious, ceaseless project of improvement that "propos[es] that we turn from our ordinary lives, realize an ideal self, and perfect what is distinctly human in us—and that we do so in response to exemplary others."[73] This entire pursuit, of deep responsiveness to others and transfiguration, is alien to Thackeray.[74] A gentleman, after all, is idle. *Vanity Fair* suggests that if the form of the novel does not of necessity provide spiritual or moral uplift, it at least is not of necessity another arena for tireless—and hopelessly hypocritical—bourgeois self-improvement. Published at the end of the 1840s, a decade of industrial strife and industrial novels that took that strife as subject, *Vanity Fair* shrugs at work, shrugs at piety, shrugs at improvement. Thackeray does not bother, like Dickens, to parody the reformers and evangelical do-gooders; he ignores them. The

[73] Miller, *Burdens*, 3.
[74] Miller invokes "disposition" as a first cause of some Victorians' adaptability to moral perfectionism. Of Newman, he writes, "Newman's fidelity to incarnational discourse no doubt made such a disposition natural to him" (Miller, *Burdens*, 3).

one example of work (at least in the sense of "working it") that we get is Becky, and even if she is everyone's favorite, she is nobody's hero.

"Well, well," the narrator clucks,

> a carriage and three thousand a year is not the summit of the reward nor the end of God's judgment of men. If quacks prosper as often as they go to the wall—if zanies succeed and knaves arrive at fortune, and, vice versa, sharing ill luck and prosperity for all the world like the ablest and most honest amongst us—I say, brother, the gifts and pleasures of Vanity Fair cannot be held of any great account, and that it is probable… but we are wandering out of the domain of the story.[75]

I want to suggest that here Thackeray, as in all references to Vanity Fair, is invoking both the world of the novel and the act of reading it. In this interpretation, the novel itself is a gift and pleasure that cannot be held of any great account. By so wryly discounting the moral pay-off of the novel, by imagining it as a kill-time, Thackeray is asking the reader to reconsider what a kill-time might do. A kill-time is something that might be, if not good, then at least good enough.

"Enough" is a characteristic concept for *Vanity Fair*; the word is spoken dozens of times by different characters and the narrator. There are instances of "spent enough," "good enough," "handsome enough"; and, importantly, "time enough." The most clarifying instance of "enough" comes late in the novel, when Becky and Rawdon are busy entertaining the world with parties paid for by money they don't have.

> I protest it is quite shameful in the world to abuse a simple creature, as people of her time abused Becky, and I warn the public against believing one-tenth of the stories against her. 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 expenditure—why, what a howling wilderness and intolerable dwelling Vanity Fair would be! Every man's hand would be against his neighbour in this case, my dear sir, and the benefits of

[75] Ibid, 484.

> civilization would be done away with. We should be quarreling, abusing, avoiding one another. Our houses would become caverns: and we should go in rags because we cared for nobody. …All the delights of life… 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 forebearance, 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. We shake hands when we meet. 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—civilization advances: peace is kept; new dresses are wanted for new assemblies every week; and last year's vintage of Lafite will remunerate the honest proprietor who reared it.[76]

Thackeray's world is not ultimately a Schopenhauerian nightmare of suffering. Still, things going on pleasantly enough is not the same as things being good, or even pleasant. "Enough" indicates that things are acceptable—merely acceptable. "Enough" also indicates that one has stopped hoping and has, instead, settled into what is. Hope isn't interesting in *Vanity Fair*. Dealing with the world as it is, and co-creating the world that is, is what matters. Things are "made to" go on. A novel without a hero is also a novel without a villain. The world itself is at fault. This will not be a satisfying reading to those who want to say, with good cause, that the world is only the people who make it. But Thackeray explores what Schopenhauer calls "man himself"—not particular culpable humans, but the fact of humanness, and the state of there being humans, at all.[77]

One of the reasons that principles can be so easily ignored is that they are ipso facto "silly." The so-called principles of Vanity Fair are snobbishness, elitism, gossip, and so forth. We are not here called upon to dispense with justice, truth, love, and honor, but with the rather less grand practice of socially cutting those whom we dislike. Our reasons for dislike are generally not defensible. So even if dislike is something that can't

[76] Ibid, 642-43.
[77] Schirmacher, 28-29.

itself be eradicated, it can be contained. The taste of a good dinner can make social distaste tolerable. Toleration is here closely linked to enough-ness: It doesn't mean celebrate or even appreciate; it just means enduring, or allowing to persist. The overall good of everyone is therefore protected by this liberal habit of mutual forbearance.

Of course, we can't naively trust the narrator, or take everything he says without salt. He does nothing but tell us stories about Becky, and then warns us from believing stories about Becky. But there is enough in the novel about "enough" to evince that Thackeray trades transcendence or futurity for a here-and-now sociability. The reason that we must tolerate those we dislike is because there is nobody who we really like all the time. This program of shaking hands and enjoying the hospitality of those who are imperfect is the only thing between us and utter loneliness, as well as the only guarantee that *we* will not be hanged by our neighbors.

Writing about vanity creates an interesting critical dilemma, whereby a political criticism appears as only one more vanity. What's the point of writing at all about a book that might not be worth reading? One answer is that attentiveness to something like disappointment is itself an important critical move; the leap to anger and its externalization often covers up the feeling of disappointment, which involves looking inward and taking stock of desires and needs that are unsatisfied. But there is another other option for how we might approach the world, a rather un-Schopenhauerian solution to this otherwise vain scene. *Vanity Fair* imagines its goings-on in terms of a game, a situation of play. (By the end of the 19th century, "killing time" was being used to describe games like chess.[78]) The stakes, to be sure, are of limited value. As Dobbin says

[78] "Kill-time," Def. B., *Oxford English Dictionary* (Web. 25 July 2014).

of Amelia, whom he has been pining for endlessly, "I knew all along that the prize I had set my life on was not worth the winning."[79] Amelia's worthlessness is not something that Dobbin learns from playing—he knew it all along. (This is unlike Henry Esmond, who must learn that Beatrix is not worthy of his love: "Is he the only man that has set his life against a stake which may be not worth the winning?") Dobbin plays the game with his eyes wide open.[80] At the crisis moment, he leaves on the line, "I have spent enough of my life at this play," thus announcing the overlap of the theatrical, the game, and the gamble.[81]

Moreover, women are not only prizes of questionable value; they themselves compete. Lord Steyne tells Becky, "You've got no money, and you want to compete with those who have. You poor little earthenware pipkin, you want to swim down the stream along with the great copper kettles. All women are alike. Everyone is striving for what is not worth the having! Gad!"[82] (Spoken, to be sure, by the man with money: They are always on hand to tell you that money isn't everything.) It is in the nature of winners not to deserve their prizes and in the nature of prizes to be not worth the winning. The game does not confer value on the prize; the game passes the time until the prize passes into one's hands.

Yet to say that a prize is not worth the winning is not to say that the game isn't worth playing. Indeed, playing the game is what staves off nihilism. With his references to play, Thackeray moves the conversation away from the idea of a pay-off—a lesson, a

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[79] Thackeray, *VF*, 853.
[80] Thackeray, *The History of Henry Esmond*, *Esq.* (New York: Modern Library, 1950): 417.
[81] Thackeray, *VF*, 853.
[82] Ibid, 607.

trophy, an object—and towards something durational and experiential. Games are a good form of the transitory, in which the game itself is what's at stake. Playing this game well means valuing the rules over one's own success or failure. The "good-humor" that Thackeray so often describes Becky as exhibiting is most clear when she is able to enjoy "a fun… at her own expense."[83] It's significant that the otherwise un-wise George Osborne distills the message: "There's no fun in winning a thing unless you play for it."[84] This is a remark at once caddish and profoundly true.

Compassion and Direct Address

Where does this leave ethics? What I have been describing—characters without the capacity to make choices, panoramic plots, vanity—risks naturalizing inequalities and the status quo, mistaking the things that are of the world for those that *must* be of the world. Unlike a Balzacian milieu, which seethes with moral dilemmas, a pensive and amoral breeze blows through the Thackerayn habitus. (As I will discuss in detail at the end of this chapter, the very first page begins with a declaration of melancholy.) Yet unlike Balzac's moralizing world of injustice, Thackeray describes his amoral climate as itself just.

> All the world used [Becky] ill, said this young misanthropist [Becky herself], and we may be pretty certain that persons whom all the world treats ill, deserve entirely the treatment they get. The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face.[85]

It's half of justice, anyway. The world of Vanity Fair can't do away with injustice, but it does dole out punishment. It's worth pointing out that Becky herself succeeds by taking

[83] Thackeray, *VF*, 528.
[84] Ibid, 145.
[85] Thackeray, 15.

up the work of the world and reflecting to all of her marks their own faces: she mirrors back their own values, humor, and worldviews. She is herself a vanity mirror. Thackeray does not celebrate the status quo, nor does he deny that some nasty rich people eat well. But if this passage is true, they will receive nasty treatment in some other way, perhaps by coming to recognize themselves, or by meeting their own selves in the form of social treatment.

When looking-glasses are in short supply, it is the narrator who reflects the just deserts. In the early part of the book Thackeray frames his habit of direct address as the practice of a "moralist."[86]

> 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.
>
> Otherwise you might fancy it was I who was sneering at the practice of devotion, which Miss Sharp finds so ridiculous; that it was I who laughed good-humouredly at the reeling old Silenus of a baronet—whereas the laughter comes from one who has no reverence except for prosperity, and no eye for anything beyond success. Such people there are living and flourishing in the world—Faithless, Hopeless, Charityless: let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. Some there are, and very successful too, mere quacks and fools: and it was to combat and expose such as those, no doubt, that Laughter was made.[87]

The narrator is the moral arbiter of this world in which "such people" live vainly; direct address is his weapon. The incidents alone can't be trusted to tell the right story: If the manager of the performance didn't step in to comment, the reader might think that he approved of his characters' poor behavior. This isn't an especially convincing justification—could anyone mistake George Osborne for a gentleman?—and it raises

[86] Ibid, 95.
[87] Ibid, 96.

some serious questions about the narrator, given that his main concern is not the absolute rightness or wrongness of behavior, but that he might be mistaken for approving of that which he disapproves. "Having at" the follies of others is his way of preserving his own moral high ground. Thus even the morality of the narrator is a form of vanity in *Vanity Fair*.

Thackeray claims that direct address is the source of humor. If we had no intermediary, we would be sharing the world with Becky, seeing it as she sees it, unable to create the necessary space to either laugh or make judgments. These are the same: Laughter is judgment. And yet "the moralist, who is holding forth on the cover (an accurate portrait of your humble servant)" is hardly a finger-wagger of righteousness. Abuse "in the strongest terms which politeness admits of" is not very strong abuse. "As a man and brother" was the slogan of abolitionists, which at once exaggerates and deflates the moral imperative. On the cover (in my edition, the title page), a man makes a speech atop a barrel, but on the frontispiece he reclines backstage, assessing himself in a mirror. Is he looking for the reflection that the world has given back to him?

Moretti writes that the "accentuated rigidity, which Bergson was to call 'automatism'" is the source of "the comic dominant to which the English novel owes such a great deal of its popularity."[88] He characterizes the linguistic exchange of the heteroglossia of the comic novel as being rooted in misunderstanding. But there is very little misunderstanding in Thackeray: A feature of life at the Fair is that things generally are what they appear to be. Even the game of charades, which asks a body to dress up as another body, is for Thackeray an occasion of surface-level meaning: The events of

[88] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture* (London: Verso), 2000: 193.

Becky's life make her into Clytemnestra; reality conforms to the game. *Vanity Fair* is not a novel in which different centers of consciousness duke it out. Just as there is very little free indirect discourse, there is also little in the way of compelling dialogue. These two typically go together: Moretti claims that in the English novel, the masters of dialogue are Austen and Eliot, who are interested in "social mobility, 'improvement,' 'reform,' and the reciprocal coming to terms of different individuals, social classes, and cultures."[89] (Austen and Eliot are also, of course, masters of free indirect discourse.)

"Thackeray, too, has a strong flavor of Thackeray," Anthony Trollope wrote in his 1879 monograph on the elder writer.

> I am inclined to think that his most besetting sin in style,—the little earmark by which he is most conspicuous,—is a certain affected familiarity. He indulges too frequently in little confidences with individual readers, in which pretended allusions to himself are frequent. 'What would you do? what would you say now, if you were in such a position?' he asks.[90]

Free indirect discourse is a mode that privileges alterity, between fictional characters and also between the world of the fiction and the reader; direct address appeals to sameness or continuity between the fictional and real worlds. Free indirect discourse and dialogue are complements of reformism—is there an ethics of direct address? These "little confidences" are questions, but they are not truly opportunities for self-investigation or cross-examination. They are moments of authoritative description in which Thackeray reports to the reader on the quality of her life, describing to her her own experiences. He addresses her not as an individual, but as a member of a group, making appeal to a role such as wife or husband or lover. It is as a collection of social dispensations and

[89] Ibid, 195.
[90] Anthony Trollope, *Thackeray* (London: Macmillan & Co.), 1968: 201.

dispositions that readers are appealed to, not as unique individualities. But frequently he invokes his readers en masse, *as readers,* and assumes for them a set of values. His "who questions" take the rhetorical form of Who will not own, Who can say, Who has not, Which of us, Who among us, and so forth. Unlike a discourse of alterity, which would ask the reader to empty the self and inhabit the consciousness of someone else, Thackeray appeals to that which is shared. But he's not hoping to be answered. The questions are rhetorical. The problem with rhetorical questions, of course, is that they end conversations just where they could begin.

As we saw in the Vauxhall example, disposition excludes trains of thought and even consciousness itself, privileging ways of handling or manipulating external reality. There is nothing to be learned by going "inside" the minds of those who live in Vanity Fair. What need have we to enter Becky's mind when she plainly writes to Amelia lines like, "as if I cared a fig about my pupils!"[91] This is obviously a thing that Becky *shouldn't* say to Amelia, if she is to keep Amelia believing that she, Becky, is sweet and good. But it is part of the narrative fabric that people show their colors at all times. Since Amelia is an angel and Becky is not, Amelia is not necessarily able to understand what Becky is all the time telling her. Transparency and yet a lack of communication is the rule.

Pendennis (1850), the coming of age story Thackeray published just after *Vanity Fair*, also assumes a shared experience with the reader. The plot follows Pen from his youthful romance with a cheap stage actress to his profligate student days to his journalistic success in London and eventual union with his saintly adopted sister, Laura.

[91] Thackeray, 123.

Thackeray approaches Pen's youth from the perspective of chastened adulthood. He presumes not only shared experience but shared perspective on that experience—a perspective that properly views the romance of youth as foolish. Of Pen's love-fever over the actress, Thackeray writes:

> I suppose there is scarcely any man who reads this or any other novel but has been balked in love some time or the other, by fate, and circumstance, by falsehood of women, or his own fault. Let that worthy friend recall his own sensations under the circumstances and apply them as illustrative of Mr. Pen's anguish. Ah! what weary nights and sickening fevers! Ah! what mad desires dashing up against some rock of obstruction or indifference, and flung back again from the unimpressionable granite! If a list could be made this very night in London of the groans, thoughts, imprecations of tossing lovers, what a catalogue it would be![92]

Thackeray addresses a male reader who has been in the same position as Pen—balked, or thwarted, prevented from attaining, love. And whatever the nature of "some rock of obstruction," whatever the specifics, the effect is the same. It adds up to the collective experience of a catalogue of groaning, cursing lovers spread sleeplessly throughout the city.

> What a pang it is! I never knew a man die of love, certainly, but I have known a twelve stone man go down to nine stone five under a disappointed passion, so that pretty nearly a quarter of him may be said to have perished: and that is no small portion. He has come back to his old size subsequently—perhaps is bigger than ever: very likely some new affection has closed round his heart and ribs and made them comfortable, and young Pen is a man who will console himself like the rest of us.[93]

Pen will console himself *like the rest of us*. In this move, the address incorporates the reader into a shared life history and assessment of that history; it also establishes the terms of sociality and community as that which requires consolation. "We" the readers of

[92] Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis: His Fortunes and Misfortunes, His Friends and His Greatest Enemy* (New York: Penguin), 1986: 163.
[93] Ibid, 163-64.

this novel are a community only insofar as we share a sense of world-weariness or worldly melancholy. As the author refers to the fates of other real men he has known, the text becomes populated with experiences external to its characters—the experiences of its readers, and of others the author has known. The narrative accommodates these experiences as traces and uses them to justify its own story. The narrator is the privileged and melancholic figure who can connect to the reader's world to the novel's world. The privilege and the melancholy go hand in hand.

David Kurnick has argued that the unique melancholy of Thackeray's voice is rooted in a longing for the sociality and public world of the theater. The moments where the narrator breaks character hearken back to the epilogues and prologues in which actors addressed the audience, which were phased out in the 19th century when theater design changed and the stage apron was eliminated. Kurnick treats "Before the Curtain" as one such moment of breaking character. He writes that the voice of the narrator registers the distance between that social world of the theater and the private domestic enclosure, capturing that distance as loss.[94] Of course, Thackeray's intrusions into the narrative are numerous, and not at all confined to the beginning and ending of the novel. But rather than understanding the device as something that breaks or some kind of artifice, as Kurnick does, I would like to consider it as that which draws a wider circumference around a shared reading space. There is one world that the narrator sutures together.

Trollope claimed that familiarity breeds contempt; it's Thackeray's gamble, however, that familiarity breeds a special kind of identification. In *Vanity Fair*, for example, when Mr. Sedley loses his fortune and passes his days in the Tapioca coffee-

[94] See David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2012: 49.

house in The City, the narrator remarks, "My beloved reader has no doubt in the course of his experience been waylaid by many such a luckless companion. …Who does not know the sad eager half-crazy look which he fixes on you with his hopeless eyes?"[95] The reader is asked to envision the scene based not on Thackeray's vivid power of description, not on the accumulation of detail, not on an appeal to imagination, and not on the emptying of self. We are directed not to think about the scene from Mr. Sedley's perspective, but rather, from the perspective of Dobbin, waylaid by Sedley in the pub. The reader is not encouraged to imagine *herself* luckless and half-crazy, but is directed to remember the luckless and half-crazy people she has met.

In addition to enforcing consensus—direct address permits only one speaker—the rhetorical question "Who does not know?" denies the possibility of intercession. Unlike Eliot, who included lowly subjects in art so as to insure that they would be included in the world's religion and philosophy, Thackeray does not suggest that the fictive memorialization of Mr. Sedley's predicament has the slightest power to change predicaments like it. The reader already knows the Mr. Sedleys of the world; this made-up Mr. Sedley has nothing new to teach him. On the contrary, it is only by knowing the Mr. Sedleys of the world and by being already familiar with how he has reacted to them that the reader can hope to know the imaginary Mr. Sedley. There is little room here for the typical realist ethic of learning by example. The reader applies what she knows from life to the novel, not the other way around. In this way it seems Trollope misses something crucial when he claims that Thackeray offers *examples* to live by. On the contrary, Thackeray routinely asks readers to think of the real world before they jump to

[95] Thackeray, *VF*, 238.

fictional conclusions. "If every person is to be banished from society who runs into debt and cannot pay," he says of Rawdon and Becky's woes, "why, what a howling wilderness and intolerable dwelling Vanity Fair would be!"[96] Thackeray believes that readers are harder on fictional characters than they are on the real people they know, and he asks for the same flexibility that the reader would show herself.

The consensual rhetoric becomes a form of tact and protection; it refuses to know or to see what is on the stage or just off it. When Becky thinks to herself "I could be a good woman on five thousand a year," the narrator entertains this as a possibility:

> And who knows but Rebecca was right in her speculations—and that it was only a question of money and fortune which made the difference between her and a honest woman? If you take temptations into account, who is to say that he is better than his neighbour?[97]

The imagination of this compromised communal experience functions as a withdrawal. It refuses to judge, and it refuses to know. The humor—temptations are the standard that levels, not actions—is here smuggling in a universal that we are meant to take seriously. There is a minimalism of both ethics and epistemology: We actually cannot know if money or fortune is to blame for Becky's scheming. There is the wry suggestion that honesty and humbleness would have made her just as happy as her relentless upward scramble, but this remark doesn't properly undo the suggestion that money would make Becky respectable. Our inability to assign cause or responsibility creates the potential for something like compassion to enter.

It's one thing not to know a counterfactual; in *Vanity Fair*, we also do not know all of the facts themselves. The narrator seems to know or not know things depending on

[96] Ibid, 642.
[97] Ibid, 533.

their savoriness. Of Becky's "Vagabond" chapter, the narrator claims, "When she got her money she gambled; when she had gambled it, she was put to shifts to live; who knows how or by what means she succeeded?"[98] We do not get the most interesting or scandalous episodes of Becky's life, perhaps because a novel is not a thing that can capture the rawest and most serious things of life. This novel isn't, anyway. As the narrator says of Amelia's grief at giving up her son, "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."[99] The tableaux that the narrator most delights in are the perversions of classical or sentimental scenes. He has no trouble entering Amelia's closed bedroom when she is pining for George. But the mother-child relationship is a limit of representation, outside the field of vanity. (Becky, he never tires of reminding us, has no mother, and has got to marry herself off. This maternal lack is the only motivator of plot that carries as much weight as disposition, and in fact ought to be considered as a kind of disposition: A placement on the board of life.)

When Who-questions are not a blunt enough instrument, there is always indirect remonstrance.

> The actions of very vain, heartless, pleasure-seeking people are very often improper (as are many of yours, my friend with the grave face and spotless reputation;—but that is merely by the way); and what are those of a woman without faith—or love—or character?"[100]

No one would claim to be the direct target of the parenthetical aside—the grave-faced reader of the spotless reputation. That smug hypocrite must be someone else, some other

[98] Ibid, 823.
[99] Ibid, 627.
[100] Ibid, 813.

reader. But the reminder is effective, as when another student is scolded in class and everyone feels slightly shamed; anyone could have been called out.

Direct address works to different ends in *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis.* In the latter novel, Thackeray insists on a continuity between the reader's disappointment in his own home and his characters' disappointments in theirs:

> Thus, oh friendly readers, we see how every man in the world has his own private griefs and business, by which he is more cast down or occupied than by the affairs or sorrows of any other person. …Mr. Smirke has a private care… and is no more satisfied than the rest of us.

Having established the sameness between text and readerly experience, the passage continues: "How lonely we are in the world! How selfish and secret, everybody! You and your wife have pressed the same pillow for forty years and fancy yourself united.—Psha, does she cry out when you have the gout, or do you lie awake when she has a toothache?"[101] Here we are invited to dwell not on a strange, unfamiliar misery, but our own, all too familiar misery. Adam Smith described sympathy in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, as "changing places in fancy with the sufferer."[102] But for Thackeray's reader, it is the thought of *his own* situation—the situation of the reader—that is the source of feeling. Smith writes that it is by thinking of what I would feel if I were in another's place that sympathy arises. For Thackeray, sympathy—the putting aside of judgment—arises because I reflect on what I *already* feel in my own life. Smirke is "no more satisfied than the rest of us"—we can relate to him because we, too, are unhappy, unlucky, and so forth.

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[101] Thackeray, *Pendennis*, 177.
[102] See Robert L. Heilbroner, ed. *The Essential Adam Smith* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 1987: 66.

While in the Mr. Sedley example from *Vanity Fair* we were invited to remember our usual distance from and perspective on suffering, here we are invited to consider that suffering as our own. Significantly, the suffering that Thackeray puts on the reader is not the extremity of bankruptcy; it is the daily domestic unhappiness that Kurnick describes as "social reduction," the "withdrawal from the scene of promiscuous publicity," and, most unhappily, "the domestic as death."[103] While the economic vicissitudes may divide men from each other, something about the dissatisfactions of romance and marriage are universal. It's not the epoch-making grandeur of history—not Waterloo—but the daily let-downs, the transitory pleasures, themselves inflected by that grand history, that have the power to knit societies together. This means that commonality is found not in individuals having a relationship to an abstraction like a state, but in having direct relationships to each other.

Perhaps it ought not to surprise that an appeal to sameness is the basis of Schopenhauer's ethics, too.

> The virtues of justice and loving-kindness, which [the good man] practices, are due to a direct participation in weal and woe external to himself; and we have learnt that the source of such participation is Compassion. If, further, we pause to consider what is the essential part in this type of character, we shall certainly find it to lie in the fact that such a person draws less distinction between himself and others than is usually done.[104]

An egotist insists on his difference from those around him, but the foundation of ethics is when "the individual directly recognizes in another his own self, his true and very being." When this person meets the external world, "he thinks of it rather as 'myself once

[103] Kurnick, 44-47.
[104] Schirmacher, 186.

more.'"[105] This ethics of compassion is born out of a conception of the world as suffering vanity. "Whatever goodness, affection, and magnanimity do for others is always only an alleviation of their sufferings; and consequently what can move them to good deeds and to works of affection is always only *knowledge of the suffering of others*, directly intelligible from one's own suffering, and put on a level therewith."[106]

Is compassion just another synonym for sympathy, which I have been at pains to separate my reading from? First, the work of sympathy—its imaginative labor of inhabiting the other—is absent here. But more importantly, compassion is not universally available, and can't be imparted where it isn't already found. (It's in the nature of sympathy that it *can* be taught: That's the whole point of Eliot's "In Which the Story Pauses A Little.") While behavior might be shaped by dogma, true compassion, for Schopenhauer, cannot be taught; it is a matter of disposition.

> In themselves, however, all deeds (*opera operata*) are merely empty figures, and only the disposition that leads to them gives them moral significance. …Genuine goodness of disposition, disinterested virtue, and pure nobleness of mind, therefore, do not come from abstract knowledge; yet they do come from knowledge. But it is a direct and intuitive knowledge that cannot be reasoned away or arrived at by reasoning; a knowledge that, just because it is not abstract, cannot be communicated, but must dawn on each of us. It therefore finds its real and adequate expression not in words, but simply and solely in deeds, in conduct, in the course of a man's life.[107]

For Schopenaheur, a disposition may dawn on someone. But for Thackeray, a good disposition is only dealt out, as in a hand of cards. This brings together many of the ideas that I have been exploring: a kind of knowledge that is not born of experience; habits and conduct over time that are more revealing than reasoning or language; compassion that is

[105] Ibid, 190-91; 193.
[106] Ibid, 229.
[107] Ibid, 222.

rooted in continuity between self and other. He even goes on to describe the kind of mirroring that Thackeray had in mind when he talked about Becky's misanthropy; an egoist, Schopenhauer writes, feels himself surrounded by "strange and hostile phenomena," while a good person feels otherwise: "the permanent knowledge of his own inner nature in everything that lives…gives him a certain uniformity and even serenity of disposition."[108] What distinguishes Thackeray from Schopenhauer is that his dawning knowledge manifests itself in pleasant-enough play as well as in the frustrations of the will that compound suffering.

In the end, even compassion doesn't provide a true alternative to vanity. Compassion is only the best way to live in a situation of shared hopelessness. The ultimate moral function of the narrator of *Vanity Fair* is to point to the ultimate shared reality: temporality, which leads to death.

> It is all vanity, to be sure: but who will not own to liking a little of it? I should like to know what well-constituted mind, merely because it is transitory, dislikes roast-beef? That is a vanity; but may every man who reads this, have a wholesome portion of it through life, I beg: aye, though my readers were five hundred thousand. Sit down, gentlemen, and fall to, with a good hearty appetite; the fat, the lean, the gravy, the horse-radish as you like it—don't spare it. Another glass of wine, Jones, my boy—a little bit of the Sunday side. Yes, let us eat our fill of the vain thing, and be thankful therefor. And let us make the best of Becky's aristocratic pleasures likewise—for these too, like all mortal delights, were but transitory.[109]

The wine and beef are compensations of some kind, the things that, deprived of, would make life into death. So even if the reader can't identify with Becky's hunger for carriages and titles, she can surely understand wanting a glass of wine at dinner. These are pleasures and necessities that the narrator wishes for everyone, that he would not

[108] Ibid, 227.
[109] Thackeray, *VF*, 634.

deny anyone. Seventeenth-century *vanitas* still-life painting reminded the viewer of the empty (because transitory) nature of material pursuit, and included elements of a world like books, art objects, military symbols, scientific instruments, and pastimes like playing cards, as well as mortality emblems like skulls, flowers, and burning candles. Art historian Sybille Ebert-Schifferer writes that although *vanitas* are "devoted exclusively to the contemplation of the brevity and futility of earthly existence," the symbols of scholarship and artistry "also suggest the conquest of time by way of lasting fame."[110] Human memory, this thinking goes, will outlast the human body. Of course the *vanitas* also often included symbols of eternity and Christ, and served as meditations on salvation. None of these compensations—aesthetics, spirituality, fame—are at stake in Thackeray. His idea of compensation is itself material, transient, subject to rot: food and drink. The gravy and the horseradish get the stuff down so that the eater can be thankful for "the vain thing." We might say that the compensation is the transitory itself, the knowledge that the vanity will come to an end, even if nothing better is to come after. Thackeray's solution—or perhaps just his description—to the problem of time is to eat it while you can.

Another image of equality-in-death is the hatchment that arrives to take the corpse of Rose Dawson, the second Lady Crawley, away.

> The arms quartered on the shield along with his won were not, to be sure, poor Rose's. She had no arms. But the cherubs painted on the scutcheon answered as well for her as for Sir Pitt's mother, and *Resurgam* was written under the coat, flanked by the Crawley Dove and Serpent. Arms and Hatchments, Resurgam. —Here is an opportunity for moralizing!
>
> Mr. Crawley had tended that otherwise friendless bedside. She went out of the world strengthened by such words and comfort as he could

[110] See Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Still-Life: A History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.), 1998: 136-144.

> give her. For many years his was the only kindness she ever knew; the only friendship that solaced in any way that feeble, lonely soul. Her heart was dead long before her body. She had sold it to become Sir Pitt's wife. Mothers and daughters are making the same bargain every day in Vanity Fair.[111]

The moral is not that "poor" Rose Dawson shouldn't have married Sir Pitt. Thackeray generally doesn't get too worked up over should and shouldn't. Rose Dawson, we've already been told, never had a chance. It's not Rose or Sit Pitt that are to blame but Vanity Fair itself. "Oh, Vanity Fair—Vanity Fair! This might have been, but for you, a cheery lass."[112] The tone is ironizing, but it doesn't truly admit the possibility of things having been another way. Rose is no more or less vain and foolish than anyone else. To expect her to pass up the unhappiness of being a baronet's wife for impoverished happiness it to expect something inhuman, something superhuman or religious, even. Where would one person get the strength to buck the ethos of an age? Thackeray doesn't allow for it; we could go farther, and say that *realism*—the realist novel—doesn't allow it. That is his conservatism but it is also his compassion. He isn't hard on Rose; life is hard enough for her already. His "moralizing" doesn't add admonition to her suffering. Besides, she's already dead.

The reader of this novel, though she is called on to find herself in it, is also explicitly imagined as a visitor to its environs, someone who will wander around for a time, finding herself in what she sees, before then returning to her own home. This wandering around the fair, this peripatetic reading practice, this meeting of self, is promised to be restorative; "When you come home, you sit down, in a sober, contemplative, not uncharitable frame of mind, and apply yourself to your books or your

[111] Thackeray, *VF*, 175-76.
[112] Ibid, 98.

business."[113] Work is elsewhere—it's not for those who live in Vanity Fair, or those who pass time there. This may be one reason that the pious will avoid the thing altogether. But for those who are "of a lazy, or a benevolent, or a sarcastic mood," they may find "satisfaction" like that which the puppets have given others.[114]

It is a motley group of readers that Thackeray imagines—those who find satisfaction in melancholy; those who are benevolent, lazy, or sarcastic; those who can be both touched by sentiment and amused by petty villainy. The key thing, though, is that there is meant to be something, if not refreshing, than at least preparatory about the novel. Work can only occur after reading, or visiting the show, because it is by reading or visiting that one learns how to cope with the world enough to work in it. The work that follows an encounter with one's own vanity, though, ought to have a special flavor. Its purpose is not to catalogue what is good and bad, or even to dilate on what is to be done. It has other charges: to understand one's own disposition, to grapple with one's own failings, to share compassionately in the fate of others, and to know one's own irredeemable vanity.

[113] Thackeray, *VF*, 1.
[114] Ibid, 2.

Soreness, Pain, and Comfort:
Feeling and Thinking in Trollope

What does it feel like to think? This question is at the heart of Anthony Trollope's novels. Consider as prologue a passage from the *The Small House at Allington* (1864), in which Lily Dale processes the news that John Eames is staying nearby at Guestwick Manor. Despite having been jilted by Adolphus Crosbie, Lily has rejected Eames, preferring to stay attached to her broken engagement.

> Lily, who remembered accurately all the passages of her last interview with John Eames, said nothing, but felt, in some sort, sore at the idea that he should be so near her at such a time. In some unconscious way she had liked him for coming to her and saying all that he did say. She valued him more highly after that scene than she did before. But now, she would feel herself injured and hurt if he ever made his way into her presence under circumstances as they existed. …
>
> A half-formed idea flitted across Lily's mind, teaching her to imagine for a moment that she might possibly be concerned in this arrangement. But the thought vanished as quickly as it came, merely leaving some soreness behind it. There are certain maladies which make the whole body sore. The patient, let him be touched on any point—let him even be nearly touched—will roar with agony as though his whole body had been bruised. So it is also with maladies of the mind.[115]

In this passage and many others across Trollope's works, characters suffer cognitive soreness, with all its attendant associations of rawness, woundedness, distress, and pain. In this chapter I will argue that the "malady of the mind" to which Trollope attributes this soreness is nothing short of thinking itself. We might even say that rather than thinking *feeling like* soreness, thinking *is* this soreness. Lily's new thoughts trigger memories, acting as a finger probing a bruise, and she "shrink[s] from the finger that threatened to touch her sore."[116] But *what* is Lily thinking? What is the ideational content? Trollope

[115] Anthony Trollope, *The Small House at Allington* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008: 355-356.
[116] *Ibid*, 343.

does not say and does not seem to care. At this moment he is less interested in narrating what she thinks—her idea is "half-formed"—than in registering what it feels like for her to think at all.

As he never tires of hinting, Trollope's narrator knows the outcome of the plot ahead of time. This is because he knows the characters better than they know themselves. His plots are vehicles for characters to come to know themselves as fully as they are known by the narrator; that's why they are so long, and so repetitive. Coming to self-knowledge does not mean experiencing epiphany, like Dorothea gazing out the window and thinking of Will Ladislaw in *Middlemarch*. Instead, self-knowledge has to do with accruing some quantity of repeated experience. (To the question, how much is required?, Trollope's critics would surely say, Too much.) For some of Trollope's characters, the receipt of self-knowledge does ultimately involve making a choice. For others, the drama has to do with thinking their way into feelings they already have—with attaching ideas to bodily sensations and arriving at a union of the two. Broadly speaking, thinking in Trollope takes two forms: vacillation, a mental exercise of indecision, and conviction. The first is purely mental and is associated with futile liberalism, and the second is purely embodied, often described as "unconscious." Conviction, however, is not the answer to vacillating liberalism. These two modes of thinking pose different sets of questions, and operate on different registers. The defining question of vacillation is *What should I do?*; the defining question of conviction is *How do I feel?*

The purpose of introducing these modes is not to anoint one as good thinking and deride one as bad thinking. For while vacillation is always bad (insofar as it is punishing both to the thinker and to those around him), conviction can be either good *or* bad (as

when principles drive a man to insanity). Taken together, they help us track Trollope's acute interest in how feelings and thinking must be coordinated, and the mental and physical imbalances that result when one or the other grows too powerful. Why should anyone care about what Trollope thinks about feeling? First, it can help us arrive at a clearer understanding of Trollope's political conservatism by clarifying his critique of liberalism as reflection run amok. Secondly, it helps us grasp his ethical project, which discredits the pursuit of fairness as liberal futility, and valorizes comfort as a moral good. When we understand how *sore* thinking makes a person, we can gain a deeper appreciation of what it is about comfort that is so important to Trollope. His ethics reside not in fair distribution but in the consolation of suffering, and the assuagement of injury.

Conviction I: Insanity and Soreness

He Knew He Was Right (1869) demonstrates the injury that accompanies being "right." The plot concerns Louis Trevelyan, who, by the end of chapter one, has become convinced that his young wife Emily, whom he met in the Mandarin Islands where her father is a colonial governor, is carrying on an inappropriate relationship with her old family friend, Colonel Osbourne. They are both right and both wrong. On the one hand, the colonel *is*, technically, older than Emily's father, by a year or two; on the other hand, the colonel is dashing and vigorous. On the one hand, he *is* an old family friend, and, maybe, Emily's godfather (no one can remember). On the other, when he surfaces in London, Emily hasn't seen him for twenty years.

The quarrel, which blooms in the first chapter, results in the dissolution of the household. The novel's sympathy is clearly with Emily, who, as a woman, is forced to bear the burden of her husband's accusation without recourse. There is much discussion

of the abuse of women in marriage, and Trollope goes so far as to call the novel's vocal man-hater, the never-will-marry Priscilla Stanbury, his heroine. Louis's conviction eventually takes on the quality of insanity, as he enlists the aid of a down-market private detective named Bozzle and insists that Emily can return to him only if she will "repent—repent—repent."[117]

While vacillation is concerned with choosing, conviction is concerned with rightness. The peccadillo of "liking one's own way"—which everyone in this novel suffers, from Louis and Emily, to Emily's sister Nora Rowley, to Priscilla and Dorothy Stanbury, and their aunt, Miss Stanbury, and even the much put-upon Rowley relation Mr. Outhouse—can easily snowball into obsession. (The name is only an additional insult.) It is not necessarily pleasurable or easy to be right. Enjoying being right is the first step to suffering from it. Conviction produces just what Lily Dale was subjected to when she thought—soreness.

> Emily Trevelyan felt acutely that she had been ill-used, not only by her husband's suspicion, but by the manner in which he had talked of his suspicion to others—to Lady Milborough and the cook, and she was quite convinced that she was right herself, because he had been so vacillating in his conduct about Colonel Osbourne. But Trevelyan was equally sure that justice was on his side. Emily must have known his real wishes about Colonel Osbourne; but when she had found that he had rescinded his verbal orders about the admission of the man to the house,—which he had done to save himself and her from slander and gossip,—she had taken advantage of this and had thrown herself more entirely than ever into the intimacy of which he disapproved! When they met, each was so sore that no approach to terms was made by them.[118]

As Emily notes here, Louis's conviction that he was right produced some vacillating behavior—first he forbids Emily from seeing the Colonel, and then insists that she does,

[117] Trollope, *He Knew He Was Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008: 635.
[118] Ibid, 104-105.

in order to avoid a scene, when the Colonel won't quietly take the hint. But the overriding mental framework at stake is their opposing convictions. These convictions are not cognitive. Reason proliferates around them in the form of rationalizations, but they were not arrived at with reason. They were insisted, asserted, felt.

The soreness in question is, of course, anger and resentment. But soreness is also, I want to argue, the feeling of this kind of thinking, of conviction itself, what Louis's friend Lady Milborough calls being "self-willed."[119] Louis's clinging to his conviction causes him to become "rather a bore to his friends. He could not divest his mind of the injury which had accrued to him from his wife's conduct, nor could he help talking of the grief with which his mind was laden. And he was troubled with sore suspicions, which, as far as they concerned his wife, had certainly not been merited."[120] Conviction is sore like an overworked muscle, that has been subjected to one way of sitting for too long.[121]

The novel emphasizes the embodied dimension of Louis's conviction, which is referred to as an illness. As he becomes more unshakeable in his rightness, he grows frailer, and his clothes hang off him. In the end, Emily "thought the state of his mind was diseased in a ratio the reverse of that of his body, and that when he was weakest in health,

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[119] Ibid, 130.
[120] Ibid, 176.
[121] To be sure, "soreness" is a favored word of Trollope's, and even in this novel it does not solely refer to cognitive strain. Nora's "heart became sore and her spirit vexed" when her lover fails to appear in a timely manner (595). Emily and Nora's father, Sir Marmaduke, overwhelmed by the situation he finds in London, "was becoming sore with everybody, and very unhappy" (607). He has come to town to testify before a blue-book Committee on issues of colonial governance, a task to which he is profoundly unsuited, and is raked over by the reform-hungry examiner: "Poor Sir Marmaduke remembered his defeat with soreness long after it had been forgotten by all others who had been present" (646). Still, I think there are enough examples of the soreness of thinking to warrant isolating this as the hurt feeling not only of the predictable irritations and frustrations of romance and career, but of the hurt feeling of thought itself.

then were his ideas the most clear and rational."[122] The doctor "admitted that his patient's thoughts had been forced to dwell on one subject till they had become distorted, untrue, jaundiced, and perhaps mono-maniacal; but he seemed to doubt whether there had ever been a time at which it could have been decided that the law should interfere to take care of him."[123] But the medical experts find that he is sicker in body than in mind. "In his case the weakness of the mind has been consequent upon the weakness of the body"—of course, by weakness of the mind we must understand strength of obstinacy.[124] Louis eventually dies from his rightness, though not before he makes a sign to Emily that he does not think her a "harlot." The sign is that he kisses a finger that she holds, trembling, over his lips. Thus he has the satisfaction of not yielding in speech, of never saying aloud that he was not right; she has the satisfaction that he yielded in body, absolving her of the wrong she did not commit.

The illness places Louis is in a mental abeyance: "a man might be in such a condition as to be neither mad nor sane;—not mad, so that all power over his own actions need be taken from him; nor sane, so that he must be held to be accountable for his words and thoughts."[125] He is at once capable and not responsible. Soreness surrounds this suspended cognitive state. When Louis winds up living in a shack outside Siena surrounded by dingy olive groves, his wife follows him and remains in Florence to be near him. "She was his wife, and nothing should entirely separate her from him, now that

[122] Ibid, 866.
[123] Ibid, 900.
[124] Ibid, 924.
[125] Ibid, 902.

he so sorely wanted her aid."[126] Emily can finally recognize Louis's soreness and prioritize it over her own only after she has accepted him in de-idealized form.

> Her husband had shown himself to be weak, suspicious, unmanly,—by no means like a god. …But still he was her husband, and the father of her child; and thought she could not dare to look forward to happiness in living with him, she could understand that no comfort would be possible to her were she to return to England and to leave him to perish alone at Casalunga. Fate seemed to have intended that her life should be one of misery, and she must bear it as best she might.[127]

Emily doesn't exactly take comfort in being near the man whose paranoia has driven both her and him to misery, but she acknowledges that comfort is not to be found anywhere else. She insists on both their bond and their separation. Both Louis and Emily use the child (who is passed between the two like a football) to insist that they cannot be divided. That shared conviction narrows their options, so the only course available to her is to depressively bear with what has happened.

Conviction II: Knowing

There is also a good style of conviction. This is conviction not as zero-sum conviction, associated with being right at another person's expense, nor conviction as a misguided fact-finding mission. Rather, this is conviction as an embodied moment of knowing that is immediate, profound, and truthful. This good conviction is not associated with suspicion, which breeds paranoia, but with instinct, which is bodily, and unable to be put into language. As Stuart Hampshire has it, "it is an overriding truth that deciding what I want, like deciding what I am going to do, is distinguishable from finding the correct

[126] Ibid, 814.
[127] Ibid, 813.

words to say or express what I want."[128] Good conviction does not produce soreness; soreness, after all, is a sign that something in the thinking is wrong. There is a powerful example of good conviction in *He Knew He Was Right* in the character of Dorothy Stanbury.

Dorothy Stanbury is presented with an offer of marriage by the upstanding but entirely unworthy Mr. Gibson, a vacillator who has spent ten years wavering between the affections of the fashionable French sisters. If Dorothy accepts Mr. Gibson's hand, her aunt Stanbury will reward them with two thousand pounds—a sum very necessary to the Stanbury family, who teeter on the brink of respectability.

> And what was she that she should scorn the love of an honest gentleman? She would take him, she thought,—if she could. But then there came upon her, unconsciously, without work of thought, by instinct rather than by intelligence, a feeling of the closeness of a wife to her husband. Looking at it in general she could not deny that it would be very proper that she should become Mrs. Gibson. But when there came upon her a remembrance that she would be called upon for demonstration of her love,—that he would embrace her, and hold her to his heart, and kiss her,—she revolted and shuddered. She believed that she did not want to marry any man, and that such a state of things would not be good for her.[129]

Trollope habitually critiques abstractions and generalities—the universal rules that are all well and good until one must live under them. This is an exemplary moment of excuse. It *would* be proper for Dorothy to marry Mr. Gibson. It would also be revolting to be kissed by him. The bodily instinct—the shudder—is privileged over the reasonable rules that ought to govern marriage. Crucially, this insight "came upon" Dorothy like a headache. It did not flash on her like an epiphany, and it did not appear in language. It appeared in an

[128] Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 1970: 122.
[129] Trollope, *HKHWR*, 393.

involuntary physical resistance that is experienced in the present moment. It does not consider the past or the future, but what is happening right now. Unlike an epiphany, which demarcates a clear moment in time, one can never say exactly when an ache begins. It spreads until it has always been there.

Still, the moment has the air of discovery. (Hampshire again: "Coming to know what one wants is partly a decision and partly a discovery, the proportions varying in different cases."[130] In the case of good conviction, the balance is tipped very far towards the pole of discovery.) Dorothy is, sanely, right: Mr. Gibson is not the man for her. And this insight has remarkable sticking power, even in the face of disapproval from the rather terrifying Miss Stanbury. She cannot be reasoned or argued out of this decision because it is not a decision she made with reason or even with her mind. Dorothy's instincts tell her what is wrong, but also, what is right, as when she finds herself in a conversation with (her future husband) Brooke Burgess that has become rather intimate.

> But there had come something of a personal flavour in their conversation which prompted her, unconsciously, to leave him. She had, without any special indication of herself, included herself among that company of old maids who are born and live and die without that vital interest in the affairs of life which nothing but family duties, the care of children, or least of a husband, will give to a woman. If she had not meant this she had felt it. He had understood her meaning, or at least her feeling, and had taken upon himself to assure her that she was not one of the company whose privations she had endeavoured to describe. Her instinct rather than her reason put her at once upon her guard, and she prepared to leave the room.[131]

Here again we find her unconscious fast at work. We might want to call this a Freudian unconscious of repressed desires. But we could also imagine it as an antenna, an animal instinct. Trollope preserves the word "meaning" for that which is mental or language-

[130] Ibid, 105.
[131] Ibid, 483.

based, and calls what Dorothy has "feeling." Feeling knows more. Nora Rowley's decision to accept Hugh Stanbury is also a decision based on feelings, and is similarly rewarded by the novel.

Of course, sometimes even this valorized, non-paranoiac mode of conviction is misplaced, or wrong. As Dorothy's mother says of Nora's suitor Mr. Glascock: "Her conviction was strong in Mr. Glascock's favour,—thinking, as she expressed herself, that everything was right and proper,—but she could hardly explain why she thought so."[132] Mrs. Stanbury's conviction is *almost* like that of Dorothy's—it is non-symbolic, and unable to be explained—but it lacks that physical proof, that embodied feeling. Absent embodiment, conviction is merely social convention, the universal rule that a woman ought to marry whichever well-to-do gentleman asks. Conventional conviction is the bedrock of material success and social stability. Privileged by class and gender, Trollope's patriarchs possess this style of unshakeable conviction, rooted not in logic or debate but in daily life. As Judge Staveley in *Orley Farm* (1862) says, "On any matter that is near a man's heart, he is convinced by the tenour of his own thoughts as he goes on living, not by the arguments of a logician, or even by the eloquence of an orator."[133] Judge Staveley presents himself as a thinker, but he is a thinker embedded in the routines of living, not one who has stepped back and looked at his life from a detached perspective or from multiple points of view. Judge Staveley is at one with his station in life, and his privilege is to think phenomenologically; his thinking takes the form of his living. Trollope rewards thinking when it is driven by feeling rather than governed by

[132] Ibid, 155.
[133] Trollope, *Orley Farm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008: II, 295.

reason. This is part and parcel of his conservative critique of liberalism, which would favor the well-reasoned choice and the rhetoric of debate.

Vacillation: The Critique of Liberal Thinking

Can You Forgive Her? (1865) tracks the vacillations of three women: Alice Vavasor, who volleys between the unworthy George and the gentleman John Grey; Lady Glencora, who can't decide whether to abscond with Burgo Fitzgerald in the moonlight or remain married to Plantagenet Palliser; and Mrs. Greenow, who toys with the affections of Mr. Cheesacre and Captain Bellfield. It would be neat to find textual evidence of soreness in one of these plots. It seems intuitive—wouldn't ping-ponging back and forth create such a feeling? In this novel, however, Trollope doesn't use the word "soreness" in connection with thinking. (Digital searches of *The Way We Live Now* (1875) and *Barchester Towers* (1857), classics of vacillation, also fail to turn up soreness as a description of cognition.) He instead uses related words, with almost family resemblances—"pain" and "suffering."

When George asks Alice, who has promised herself to him (again) but is treating him coldly, for a kiss, she instead remarks, "I wonder you cannot understand that I have suffered much."[134] In anger he throws a ring he had brought for her into the fire-grate. She picks through the ashes to find it—one of the smaller stones was knocked out by the throw and can't be found—and wraps the ring in paper. "After that she sat herself down at the table to think what she would do; but her head was, in truth, racked with pain, and on that occasion she could bring her thoughts to no conclusion."[135]

[134] Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008: II, 62.
[135] Ibid, II, 63.

"Pain" is vague, almost too broad of a category to signify. But perhaps that very vagueness is at issue with this kind of cognition. There is a diffusion to the vacillating mind: the thinker can't achieve clarity of thought, and can't achieve clarity of feeling. We might also want to conceive of this head racked with pain in terms from Wittgenstein. For Wittgenstein, there is no "I" who can be "in pain"—a subject or soul separate from the body, analyzing the experiences of the body. A Wittgensteinian subject would not say "I am in pain," but rather, "It is pain" — like "It is raining." The condition of being in pain *is* the subject. This is the situation of the vacillator, who toggles in the pursuit of painlessness, but who can't escape, because vacillation itself is the pain.

Vacillation in Trollope occurs when a character is faced with a binary problem—this or that job, this or that spouse—that presents itself as a tactical decision. It is obsessional, logorrheic, and goal-oriented. It is a mechanism of deciding that puts decision in abeyance, a perverted mode of reason and objectivity. Like liberalism, which pursues fairness, it weighs all sides of an option, sees all sides of the case, and is unable to press the thumb on the scale that would tilt the choice one way or the other. Vacillation is abstract and future-oriented—and since the future is continually receding on the horizon, it means that one has a very hard time seizing any moment at all. ("Something, it was said, might be done at some future time," the Rowleys concede in a period of inaction, "but the difficulties were so great that nothing could be done now."[136]) A symptom of vacillation is that the thinker is unable to feel much of anything other than a generalized pain, discomfort, or nervousness. It is thinking as anxiety, which runs on its own steam, floating freely from one fixed reality. Kierkegaard described anxiety as pure

[136] Ibid, 792.

possibility, and Trollope thinks along similar lines, though he is less beholden to the idea of absolutes, including freedom.[137] His characters are placed in circumstances, often beyond their immediate control, that present definite options to them. Engagement is the usual example of this structure: a strategy that keeps one attached but not foreclosed, and is committed but open to be broken if/when something else—not necessarily something better, but often something more suitable—comes along. Restlessness or uneasiness is the constant mental background of vacillation, but the vacillator doesn't jump before there's a new concrete thing to attach oneself to. It's the appearance of new choices, not, strictly speaking, possibility itself, that best describes what's at stake.

Conviction is sticky, sometimes dangerously so. In vacillation, choosing loses its sticking power. Whatever decision occurs is less "made" than reached, momentarily accepted, acquiesced to, or settled on. It is only an interruption from outside the thinker that has the power to force a commitment one way or the other. Hampshire writes that "even if I cannot decide *that* one of the only two courses open to me is right and that the other is wrong, I must decide *to* do either one or the other."[138] In Trollope, the thing that decides is very rarely the vacillator, but is the intrusion of some other person or event. Whatever the vacillator has thought in her own head does not help to make the decision; it only delays it.

Like insane conviction, vacillation isolates the thinker from other people, but it is also dissociating. Alice Vavasor "sat there, thinking of her fate, as though it belonged to

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[137] "Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness." See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1980: 61.
[138] Hampshire, 148.

some other one,—not to herself; as though it were a tale that she could read…"[139] Vacillators see themselves from the outside. This is the negative, the inverse, of sympathy. When the character empties herself, she does not experience life as others lead it, but as *no one* leads it. This paralysis is induced by the point-of-view of the choice itself, which asks the chooser to envision two entirely unlike courses of life, calling to mind Andrew Miller's "lives unled."[140] But whereas for Miller the optative mood is mournful and isolating, for Trollope, it can be anxious, sometimes manic, and inveterately social. A Trollope novel is crowded. It contains not only all the characters and plots that actually occur but also all those potential futures that are continually considered in each present moment.

As Miller writes, this optative situation can produce regret. Nora, for example, regrets rejecting the wealthy Mr. Glascock, the son of a peer—she was already regretting rejecting him while he was still in the room being rejected, though she would do it as many times as necessary to make him go away. But less obviously, Trollope's characters are capable of regretting things they have not yet done. Dorothy puts off accepting Brooke's marriage proposal because she worries "what he would feel ten, twenty years hence, when he would know that his children would have been all provided for, had he not lost his fortune by marrying me."[141] Anticipatory regret is not associated with good outcomes. Dorothy's decision is wrong here, as is her reasoning, and both are corrected when she marries Brooke.

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[139] Trollope, *CYFH?*: I, 382.
[140] See Andrew Miller. "Lives Unled in Realist Fiction." *Representations* 98:1 (Spring 2007): 118-134.
[141] Trollope, *HKHWR*, 552.

Adela Pinch writes that the Victorians believed thinking to be a powerful "mental force."[142] It is intriguing, then, that mental life in Trollope is so useless. Why does it have such little power? Why does it make nothing happen, or, at best, make the wrong things happen? Perhaps the explanation is that Trollope's portrait of vacillation doubles as a critique of liberalism. It is a comic perversion of what Elaine Hadley calls "liberal cognition," an umbrella under which she groups

> disinterestedness, objectivity, reticence, conviction, impersonality, and sincerity, all of which carried with them a moral valence. Included under this category of cognition are also what seemed to [Victorian liberals] quite specific techniques of thought production and judgment, such as "free thought," reflection, abstraction, logical reasoning, and internal deliberation. Such attitudes and techniques produced liberalized ideas in the individual, whose ideas then entered the political domain as "opinion"—liberalism's version of political agency.[143]

It may seem counter-intuitive to claim that the indecision of Trollope's vacillators is an example of the rather dignified habits of abstraction and logical reasoning. But this is my point. Trollope's vacillators show the absurdity of the attempt to logically reason one's way through the world. The deciding mind is characterized as dysfunctional, nigh useless, even obsessional.[144] The attempt at liberal "free thought" leads one in circles. It is a sickness of reflection. As Kierkegaard writes in *The Present Age*, "the urge to decision is precisely what reflection dispels or wants to dispel."[145]

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[142] Adela Pinch, *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2010: 2.
[143] Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2010: 9.
[144] This reading is not entirely incompatible with Hadley's: She balances Trollope's description of mid-century liberal thinking with a recognition of the "oddities" it produces, writing that *The Warden* "define[s] the liberal subject in terms of standardized and therefore replicable practices of cognitive individuation" even as it "charts the… deformations that are attendant on a daily enactment of its requirements." Ibid, 65.
[145] Kierkegaard, *Two Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978): 76.

Like liberals, vacillators always mean well. Intention, particularly good intentions, are a hallmark of both forms. The fickle cleric Mr. Gibson provides a good case of the best intentions. After dithering for ten years between the two French sisters, he at last engages himself to the younger, Camilla—and at once reconsiders. He would have proposed to Arabella had he not taken a dislike to the "abortion" of a chignon that she wore on her head. But now that he has some distance, the chignon seems less offensive. He passes his engagement to Camilla postponing the wedding. When he is obliged to visit the family, he spends more time with the sister than with the fiancée.

> Mr. Gibson, as he walked into Exeter, endeavoured to justify his own conduct to himself. There was no moment, he declared to himself, in which he had not endeavoured to do right. Seeing the manner in which he had been placed among these two young women, both of whom had fallen in love with him, how could he have saved himself from vacillation? And by what untoward chance had it come to pass that he had now learned to dislike so vigorously, almost to hate, the one with whom he had been for a moment sufficiently infatuated to think that he loved?
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> But with all the arguments he did not succeed in justifying to himself his own conduct, and he hated himself.[146]

In what sense did Mr. Gibson "endeavour to do right"? We could say that he intended to do right and was then prevented by something—Arabella's chignon, some distasteful behavior of Camilla's. As Hampshire puts it, "one might believe that someone had seriously and sincerely intended to do something, and at the same time be very doubtful whether he would in fact have done it, or even have tried to do it, if and when the occasion for action occurred."[147] But could we really describe Mr. Gibson's state of mind as sincere and serious? Hampshire claims that if an intention is not put into practice, it

[146] Trollope, *HKHWR*, 625.
[147] Hampshire, 98.

cannot be considered a genuine intention. I suppose we could say that Mr. Gibson's genuine intention is to be engaged to Camilla (he succeeds at that) but to marry Arabella.

One way to think about vacillators is that they suffer from some kind of cognitive defect that creates difficulties in two areas: timing, or when knowledge is produced; and narration, or what knowledge is able to be put into language. Mr. Gibson knows that he will not marry Camilla French, but this knowledge only becomes available to him after he has engaged himself to her. Vacillation is therefore a structure or indirect route for getting to know one's intentions. But *when* does Mr. Gibson know that he will not marry Camilla French? It is impossible to say. As we saw with Dorothy's headache, the knowledge does not arrive in a transcendental flash but comes upon him in lived time. Since, as Hampshire writes, "'knowing' does not necessarily imply 'being able to state correctly,'" it is almost impossible to say when Mr. Gibson knew it.[148] How could we be able to pinpoint it? Even if he was always knowing it, he was not able to state it correctly, or made mistakes about stating it. None of this, by the way, eradicates Mr. Gibson's responsibility. He was not ignorant of his intentions, even if he could not say what he meant. But does "endeavouring to do right" even qualify as an intention? Doesn't that describe a belief Mr. Gibson holds about himself—he's the kind of person who always tries to do what's good—rather than a particular intention, which seems to be wrapped up in a specific thing or achievement? Might it actually be that Mr. Gibson didn't have any intentions—but then how would that be possible? We can judge this as hypocrisy and bad faith or we can chalk it up to some kind of mental damage or impairment. Trollope, I think, does both.

[148] Ibid, 131.

Miss Stanbury assesses Mr. Gibson's situation as such: "Such people can't be happy, and can't be unhappy. I don't suppose it much matters which he marries, or whether he marries them both, or neither."[149] The stakes seem enormous to the vacillator, but this is a way of covering up what is inconsequential about the decision: this woman, that woman, this woman over there. The vacillator makes all objects arbitrary, and after getting stuck with something, he will vacillate over something else the next time. Of course, when one considers the portrait of marriage in *He Knew He Was Right*—insanity, discord, a baby snatched outside cabs and stolen away to Italy—such equivocation seems downright pragmatic. The thing you can count on is not person A or person B but one's own indecisiveness.

Here a picture of vacillation as obsessional neurosis begins to emerge. In his case history of the Rat-Man, Freud wrote, "the truth was not that the patient still had an open mind upon this subject, but that he had two separate and contradictory convictions upon it. His oscillation between these two views quite obviously depended upon his momentary attitude towards his obsessional disorder."[150] Trollope's vacillators are not actually trying to reach new conclusions (with an open mind) but are only moving between previously determined conclusions, and thus can never think but only (fail to) choose. The perspective or choice that the vacillator clings to at any one moment has to do not with the object at stake, but with the vacillator's attitude towards the structure of his own obsessional thinking. The primary relationship is of the thinker to his own mind.

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[149] Ibid, 785.
[150] Sigmund Freud, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis (1909)," *Collected Papers Volume III* (New York: Basic Books), 1959: 365.

What of Trollope's own relation to liberalism? He stood for election on the Liberal ticket in Beverley in 1867, mostly to get back at an uncle whose taunt that post office clerks seldom make Members of Parliament rankled him. (Is liberalism a punitive form, good for showing others that they are wrong?) He found himself out of step with his potential supporters on two issues: the expansion of the franchise, which they wanted and he did not; and the Permissive Bill, which he opposed, favoring "the gradual effect of moral teaching and education" to restraints of law.[151] He lost. He attacked the liberals of Beverley for confusing the means and ends of politics: Instead of tolerating elections for the sake of politics, they tolerated politics for the sake of elections.

The gradual is a privileged mode in Trollope's worldview. Even a correct action cannot be seized suddenly, but must be approached carefully and slowly. When Hugh Stanbury proposes marriage to Nora out of nowhere, it is not a success.

> In truth, had he come more gently to her, his chance of a happy answer,—of an answer which might be found to have in it something of happiness,—would have been greater. He might have said a word which she could not but have answered softly;—and then from that constrained softness other gentleness would have followed, and so he would have won her in spite of her discretion. She would have surrendered gradually… But when she was asked to come and be his wife, now and at once, she felt that in spite of her love it was impossible that she should accede to a request so sudden, so violent, so monstrous.[152]

People react not to each other's ideas or choices, but to each other's manners or styles of proceeding. Gradualism is a strategy, identified with softness. It is not enough to be right,

[151] Trollope, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008: 302.
[152] Trollope, *HKHWR*, 369.

if one wants success. One must be right in the right way. (Of course, if one wants grief—as we are told Louis does—then the violent or monstrous is perversely logical.[153])

Trollope described his political ideology as "an advanced, but still a conservative Liberal,—which I regard not only as a possible but as a rational and consistent phase of political existence."[154] By way of explaining this position, he declares that the "inequality" that gives rise to "some feeling of injustice, some sting of pain" is "the work of God. Make all men equal to-day, and God has so created them that they shall be all unequal to-morrow."[155] His political goal is

> not equality, for the word is offensive, and presents to the imaginations of men ideas of communism, of ruin, and insane democracy,—but a tendency towards equality. In following that, however, he knows that he must be hemmed in by safeguards, lest he be tempted to travel too quickly; and therefore he is glad to be accompanied on his way by the repressive action of a Conservative opponent.[156]

Trollope seems to be talking not only about the unequal distribution of material resources, but about the unequal distribution of talents and gifts. Even if we corrected financial disparities, he writes, men would make themselves unequal. His conservatism privileges things we would want to hold on to—idiosyncrasy and difference—as well as that we would want to rid ourselves of—naturalized hierarchies. It is easy enough to see what is objectionable in this statement. Political progress is fine but not now, exactly; moving slowly towards some future smacks of the eternal moving of goalposts. This is the move of the vacillator, who forestalls the decisive moment. What is a "tendency towards

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[153] Louis has "the hope of the insane man, who loves to feed his grievance, even though the grief should be his death. They who do not understand that a man may be brought to hope that which of all things is the most grievous to him, have not observed with sufficient closeness the perversity of the human mind" (*HKHWR*, 364).
[154] Trollope, *AA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008: 291.
[155] Ibid, 292.
[156] Ibid, 294.

equality," anyway? There is some kind of equivalence at work here between how Trollope imagines human nature—as we will see, people are for him complexes of constitutional essences that we could call dispositions or "tendencies"—and how he imagines history. But the difference between a tendency towards equality and a tendency to loquacity or a tendency to obstinacy is that the former is less guaranteed. A loquacious person by definition will talk a great deal, but a tending towards equality is a kind of asymptotic calculus, a promise that may never arrive.

One potential model of gradual change that could be palatable to this "tendency" comes from Roland Barthes's writing on the ship *Argo*.

> A frequent image: that of the ship *Argo* (luminous and white), each piece of which the Argonauts gradually replaced, so that they ended with an entirely new ship, without having to alter either its name or its form. This ship *Argo* is highly useful: it affords the allegory of an eminently structural object, created not by genius, inspiration, determination, evolution, but by two modest actions (which cannot be caught up in any mystique of creation): *substitution* (one part replaces another, as in a paradigm) and *nomination* (the name is in no way linked to the stability of the parts): by dint of combinations made within one and the same name, nothing is left of the *origin*: *Argo* is an object with no other cause than its name, with no other identity than its form.[157]

This is a comforting picture of change—slow, modest, almost secretive—as well as a terrifying one—in the final *Argo,* nothing remains of what was, and the whole world could be changed without you noticing. But maybe not noticing the change is the key to tolerating it. It replaces the elements but preserves the structure. It allows everything to be different and everything to be the same.

Calling liberalism a neurosis may be extreme. Perhaps we should say that Trollope's idea of liberalism is a profoundly ambivalent formation. Here Freud also has

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[157] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (New York: Hill and Wang), 2010: 46.

light to shed. Of the Wolf-Man's ambivalence, he wrote, "No position of the libido which had once been established was ever completely replaced by a later one. It was rather left in existence side by side with all the others, and this allowed him to maintain an incessant vacillation which proved to be incompatible with the acquisition of a fixed character."[158] The ambivalence of conservative-liberalism—its hope for equality, eventually—might be its strength. Even if Trollope is interested in what is essential or constitutional, ambivalence prevents the rigid fixing of reality that makes reform possible. Moreover, whatever the essence is is less important than the ways in which it is incessantly leaned into, refined, or performed.

Consequences for Character

What is here emerging is not the usual picture of character in Trollope. He is often given credit for the credit he gives himself when, in the *Autobiography,* he repeats Nathaniel Hawthorne's praise that his characters are "solid and substantial, written on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale, and just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case."[159] Leaving aside the fact that nothing could be less real than an imaginary giant hewing a lump out of the earth and putting it under a glass case like some episode of the *Twilight Zone*, it is worthwhile to dwell on just what this description privileges. Hawthorne's remark has been enlisted in claims that Trollope's characters are participants in what Amanda Anderson calls Trollope's "vitalist realism," but what is the effect of being a giant looking at a play world through glass? Isn't it true that Trollope's supposedly solid characters are curiously

[158] Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis (1918)," *Collected Papers Volume III* (New York: Basic Books), 1959: 495.
[159] Trollope, *AA*, 44.

slippery and often rather demented? That, rather than being open or dissected or available to us, they are in some way radically inaccessible? It's not the *minds* of Trollope's characters that are substantial—we have already seen that the minds are, in key ways, absent—but two other things: one, their profound adherence to the embodied feelings they insist on; and two, the stuff of their worlds, armchairs and frying pans and potatoes and hearth and dogs. I will address the material stuff at the end of this chapter, but for now I want to consider what it means to privilege feeling as "realer" than thinking.

So much discourse around the novel adheres to the notion that the novel is a form of representing consciousness. In Trollope we find that consciousness, though representable, is somehow unsatisfying or incomplete. He never claims to be able to adequately represent the conscious, vacillating mind. Even at his most dilatory, when he is most dedicated to tracking every turn and bend of the mental churn, he will pause to admit that he has given the reader a mere fraction or taste of thinking, not the full account. Of Mrs. Hurtle's vacillation in *The Way We Live Now,* he notes that it is "impossible to describe adequately the various half resolutions which she formed, and the changing phases of her mind before she brought herself to this conclusion."[160] Feelings have the advantage that if they cannot be described, they can at least be asserted. They often have a surface-level correlate: a blush, a sweat, a convulsion of the body. They brook no argument.

What Trollope values is not the exchange of ideas, but the exercise of power. Characters in Trollope's world acquire significance not because they talk well—talking well is mocked—but insofar as they exert force or pressure on one another. Likewise, the

[160] Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008: II, 378.

"depth" or complexity of a character's thought is not at issue, nor is her independent development, progress, or change over time.[161] Everything is interdependent. Alex Woloch's theorizing of character has made it possible to see how a text "implies" the presence of a deeper (rounder) character off the page, and how space and attention are apportioned to various levels of recognizable psychology. But a spatial model cannot help us understand Trollope. If Trollope's characters are not round or flat, they are also not, in Woloch's updating of Forster, major or minor. Whatever is memorable in his novels has little to do with "ordinary human interiority."[162] Trollope's characters compel one another to act in certain ways, and it is the fact of being compelled or compellable that defines one's importance to the novel. They operate in terms of force; they are not reducible to the marks on the page.

Force cannot be measured quantitatively or "counted"; it is a place where close reading parts ways with computational analysis. A computer can only track words on the page—how often characters speak each other's names, or how often the narrator speaks characters' names, or who thinks about who. Character in Trollope works as a series of collisions that generate affects (often embarrassment) that radiate in the text in ways that may not be reflected quantitatively because the consequences appear in what other

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[161]Adela Pinch uses the term "force" to describe the real-world effects that Victorians ascribed to "thinking about other people," and to explain how forms of philosophical idealism came into literary culture. I am using "force" to describe how character works, and to suggest a formal construct that is more useful than existing geometries of round and flat. I share with Pinch (and Coleridge) interest in consciousness as the action of thinking. But while for Pinch *all* thinking operates as force, I am arguing that in Trollope, most thinking fails as force. This is why feeling matters, because it has both physical existence and real-world effects. See Pinch, *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing*, 46-76.

[162] Woloch, 19.

characters do, not what they say. Can you persist in persuading an aunt to invite your brother to your wedding—not by making a speech, but just by slowly forcing the issue? When does the change occur? What does it look like? That is a problem of force. The ways that characters press on each other is subterranean and roundabout, and defies easy summary.

A theory of character as force will necessarily turn away from a theory of character that is attentive to internal development. Again, this is not to say that force excludes change. Rather, force imagines that whatever change occurs is due to some intersubjective experience. Trollope's remarks on the subject are well-known: "Your Achilles should, all through, from beginning to end, be 'impatient, fiery, ruthless, keen.' Your Achilles, such as he is, will probably keep up his character. But your Davus also should be always Davus, and that is more difficult."[163] But Trollope is also aware of "the necessity, not only of consistency… but also of those changes which time always produces.

> There are, perhaps, but few of us who, after the lapse of ten years, will be found to have changed our chief characteristics. The selfish man will still be selfish, and the false man false. But our manner of showing or hiding those characteristics will be changed,—as also our power of adding to or diminishing their intensity.[164]

Change consists of employing different strategies, more appropriate to this or that circumstance or position, to manage one's dispositions or tendencies or qualities. This is a deeply social process. Dorothy Stanbury, for example, is changed by life at Exeter. "Her character had become changed, as does that of a flower when it opens itself in its

[163] Trollope, *AA*, 139.
[164] Ibid, 183-84.

growth."[165] This cannot happen in isolation. Character can only be revealed in a social field, because Trollope's very notion of reality is social.

An exemplary instance of social reality occurs two-thirds of the way through *He Knew He Was Right*, when Hugh Stanbury arrives at the hotel where the Rowleys have gathered. Hugh has not been formally explained as Nora's lover, and neither he nor she know how to act in front of her family.

> Hugh also [in addition to Nora] felt that conversation was difficult. He had soon come to perceive,—before he had been in the room half a minute,—that the atmosphere was not favourable to his mission. There was to be no embracing or permission for embracing on the present occasion. Had he been left alone with Sir Marmaduke he would probably have told his business plainly, let Sir Marmaduke's manner to him have been what it might; but it was impossible for him to do this with three young ladies in the room with him. Seeing that Nora was embarrassed by her difficulties, and that Nora's father was cross and silent, he endeavoured to talk to the other girls, and asked them concerning their journey and the ship in which they had come. But it was very up-hill work. Lucy and Sophy could talk as glibly as any young ladies home from any colony,—but now they were cowed. Their elder sister was shamefully and most undeservedly disgraced, and this man had had something,—they knew not what,—to do with it. …Stanbury had just determined that he must go, that there was no possibility for him either to say or do anything to promote his cause at the current moment, when the circumstances were all changed by the return home of Lady Rowley and Mrs. Trevelyan.[166]

What is important here is the way in which everyone picks up on—feels out—the discomfort in the air. This feeling—let's call it a vibe—*is* the reality of the situation, which is that Hugh is something of an outsider and something of an intimate, that he had "something to do" with the family troubles, and is intent on making more trouble before he's done. The feelings are transmitted in several ways: through Hugh holding Nora's hand a second longer than would be appropriate, through Nora's formality of address. It

[165] Trollope, *HKHWR*, 911.
[166] Ibid, 598-99.

takes all these player-observers to reveal Hugh's standing with the family to himself. That standing is not a fact that can be stated but only a feeling that can be experienced. Equally important to social reality is how everything is changed by the introduction of new persons—here, Lady Rowley and Emily—into the environment.

Social knowledge is produced collectively, and is more dependable than what is gleaned from going inside a character's mind. Indeed Trollope often refuses to narrate from within a character's mind, or claims that it is impossible to do so. These are two different problems. In the first, Trollope suggests that his own will is at issue when thoughts and conversations seem to threaten tact and congeniality. But at other times, Trollope himself acts like he does not know what his characters are doing—they who he knows so much better than they know themselves. This kind of radical inaccessibility may be granted for narrative purposes to preserve the semblance of interest in the plot. But at other moments it seems a privilege that Trollope bestows on his favorite characters to enhance their life-likeness. The privacy that he permits them insists on an interiority without filling it in: what counts for Trollope is the assertion of that interiority as a fact. The effect is formal, drawing attention to the shape of character as such. Whatever is "inside" comes to the surface and gets represented or made real by social interaction, usually in the form of faux pas.

This is not the same as "ordinary human interiority," because it has no content. Indeed, the lack of content becomes a guarantee that some content is, in fact, there, if forever unknowable. My point here resonates with Hadley's description of the contradiction between abstraction and embodiment in J.S. Mill's liberal subject which, she says, "runs the risk of rendering each subject indistinguishable from other subjects,

generic in his objectivity, not just like everyone else but interchangeable with everyone else." Mill solves this problem by "evok[ing] an embodied and agential, if not exactly personal, dimension in a subject otherwise dedicated to cognitive practices of abstraction."[167] Trollope does this, too: He elaborates feeling as the mark of individuation. He also emphasizes the interactions between the subjects. But Trollope's characters fall short of the ideal of liberal personhood, which Hadley glosses, in Mill's terms, as "a man of decided interests, a man of 'tastes and pursuits,' who can yet view his opinions disinterestedly and calmly see them debated."[168] Disinterest—being outside oneself, examining the position from multiple sides—is a kind of mental illness in Trollope. Characters like Dorothy Stanbury and Judge Staveley acquire moral weight because they act on the basis of feelings that *cannot* be seen disinterestedly or calmly, that *cannot* be debated, that defy circulation as topics or pursuits, that are non-discursive and yet transmittable through touch, tone, and habit.

Conviction III: Doubt

A chart comparing vacillation and conviction might look like this:

	Vacillation	*Conviction*
Mode	Cognition	Feeling
Direction	Oscillation	Deepening
Psychology	Regret	Doubt
State	Indecision	Certainty
Affect	Pain	Soreness

Certainty and indecision are not quite antonyms: the opposite of indecision for Trollope is not decision, but the refusal to participate in the mechanics of choosing. One should

[167] Hadley, 73.
[168] Ibid, 71.

think of vacillation and conviction as existing on a continuum or scale of degrees of certainty. Vacillation is on one extreme, and on the other is insane conviction. In this section, I will discuss a more positive form of conviction, doubt, and try to answer the question of how something called doubt can be contained under something called conviction.

First, doubt serves as a release valve, a way of making the thinker bend by encouraging her to hold two conflicting possibilities simultaneously. This is not merely an example of bad faith, but is a release from the soreness of insanity as well as the pain of vacillation. To be sure, insanity entertains doubts, but these are pro forma. Louis "told himself from hour to hour that he knew he was right; —but in very truth he was ever doubting his own conduct."[169] Louis's doubts, however, never become pronounced enough to change anything. They are not strong enough to counter the pull of the law, which justifies his "rightness" in demanding the vow of obedience from his wife.

Another version of doubt, in which doubt is able to prevent the rigor mortis of Louis's thinking, operates with Miss Stanbury. "She had believed herself to be right, and would not, even now, tell herself that she had been wrong; but there were doubts, and qualms of conscience, and an uneasiness,—because her life had been a failure."[170] In Miss Stanbury's case, doubt is the crack in her conviction, that which allows her to have the conversation with herself that Hannah Arendt defined *as* thinking: "It is this *duality* of myself with myself that makes thinking a true activity, in which I am both the one who

[169] Ibid, 568.
[170] Ibid, 839.

ask and the one who answers."[171] Arendt insists that the "partner" of thought must be a friend; another way to think about Louis's doubts is that they are too antagonistic to be of use. A friend can be critical. For Miss Stanbury, the ability to hold these opposing ideas, even uneasily, provides the flexibility to prevent or soothe soreness. There's some productive friction at work. Vacillation moves between positions but occupies each fiercely and desperately with no wiggling, which causes strain. Good conviction isn't conscious. Bad conviction is illness. Only doubting is thinking.

Orley Farm is a case study in thinking doubt. The plot concerns a secret that its protagonist, Lady Mason, has successfully guarded for some twenty years, namely, that while her elderly husband lay dying, she forged a will that bestowed the land Orley Farm on her infant son. When that son, Lucius Mason, comes of age, he expels from the property the long-term tenant, a penny-pinching attorney saddled with sixteen children tellingly named Dockwrath. Eager for revenge, Dockwrath rustles up a document that he believes will prove that Lady Mason forged the will. For hundreds of pages this guilt is never in doubt, though it is not until well into Volume II of the novel that she confesses the secret to her protector, Sir Peregrine Orme.

Doubt falls under the umbrella of conviction because doubt is a *form* of conviction. Unlike vacillation, which goes back and forth and back and forth again, doubt is unidirectional. It involves a settling into and a deepening of knowledge, not a shuttling between poles. The person who doubts Lady Furnival happens to be the person who is charged with her defense: her lawyer, Mr. Furnival. Doubt in *Orley Farm* means doubt as

[171] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), 1971: 185.

to Lady Furnival's innocence; doubt, in this case, is the knowledge that she is guilty. How does Mr. Furnival come to be aware of his own doubt? Trollope explains:

> But when [his assistant Crabwitz] had gone, Mr. Furnival again raised his eyes from the papers on the table, and leaning back in his chair, gave himself up to further consideration of the Orley Farm case. Crabwitz he knew was a sharp, clever man, and now the opinion formed by Crabwitz, after having seen this Hamworth attorney, tallied with his own opinion. Yes; it was his own opinion. He had never said as much, even to himself, with those inward words which a man uses when he assures himself of the result of his own thoughts; but he was aware that it was his own opinion. In his heart of hearts, he did believe that that codicil had been fraudulently manufactured by his friend and client, Lady Mason.
>
> Under these circumstances, what should he do? He had the handle of his pen between his teeth, as was his habit when he was thinking, and tried to bring himself to some permanent resolution.
>
> How beautiful had she looked while she stood in Sir Peregrine's library, leaning on the old man's arm—how beautiful and how innocent! That was the form which his thoughts chiefly took. And then she had given him her hand, and he still felt the soft silken touch of her cool fingers. He would not be a man if he could desert a woman in such a strait. And such a woman! If even guilty, had she not expiated her guilt by deep sorrow? And then he thought of Mr. Mason of Groby Park; and he thought of Sir Peregrine's strong conviction, and of Judge Staveley's belief; and he thought also of the strong hold which public opinion and twenty years of possession would give to the cause he favoured. He would still bring her through! Yes; in spite of her guilt, if she were guilty; on the strength of her innocency, if she were innocent; but on account of her beauty, and soft hand, and liquid eye. So at least he would have owned, could he have been honest enough to tell himself the whole truth.[172]

Mr. Furnival can identify his opinion because it has been spoken aloud, but it was *already* his own, in non-linguistic form. He does not reach a conclusion in this passage, or deliberate on the subject; he does not come to believe or suddenly seize on a belief that the codicil was forged. He accepts and receives that which was already his. As Hampshire writes, "One might intelligibly speak of oneself as discovering, or realising, that one had for some time believed a certain story to be true, without having explicitly

[172] Trollope, *Orley Farm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008: I, 340-41.

acknowledged to oneself that one did believe it. The acknowledgement is then acknowledgment of an existing state of mind."[173]

The passage begins by referencing the "either-or" mode of vacillation, which consists of "those inward words which a man uses when he assures himself of the result of his own thoughts." Then it moves into a different kind of thinking. A vacillating Mr. Furnival would think "She did it, she didn't do it, she did it, she didn't do it, she did it, she didn't do it." This Mr. Furnival thinks: "*Did* she do it?" and, pen in teeth, *knows* that she did. Trollope, for what it's worth, is very taken with the image of conviction as biting down. Emily Trevelyan describes her sister's refusal of the wealthy Mr. Glascock as follows: "She took the bit between her teeth and would not be turned an inch. Of course she was in love."[174] These teeth are not clenched, or anxiously grinding against each other til the jaw is sore. There's an obvious oral fixation at work. The biter finds satisfaction in meeting another object that is imagined as inert or inanimate. But what are the details? Is the object pliant or resistant, intact or mangled? Is the pen chewed up? He "had the handle of the pen between his teeth." Is he even chewing, or just sitting there drooling?

There's a simple explanation we could turn to: Mr. Furnival deceived himself, and then he becomes undeceived. In his "heart of hearts" he desired his client, and protected himself from that knowledge by averting his eyes and insisting on her innocence. In that light, this passage would not give us a new mode of thinking but rather, as Richard Dellamora might say, a familiar mode of stupidity. Dellamora analyzed Trollope's portrayal of himself as a "slow boy" in the *Autobiography*'s recounting of his trouble at

[173] Hampshire, 158.
[174] Trollope, *HKHWR*, 866.

school over a nameless incident involving three other boys—an incident that is obviously homoerotic in nature. "Incomprehension, an inability to respond, silence, and opacity serve both tactical and strategic purposes," Dellamora wrote in "Stupid Trollope."[175] Trollope *can't* admit that he knows the charges against him, because to have understood the charge would be to "acknowledge that he was not as innocent as a babe." The price of loyalty to the group of boys and to the school itself in this instance is the performance of stupidity, of a willful naiveté that buries the "schoolboy vice" that went into the "production of the English gentleman."[176]

One could follow Dellamora's lead and read Mr. Furnival's silence-to-himself as stupidity, the willful refusal to admit his desire for Lady Mason, a desire that threatens his professional integrity as well as his relationship with his wife. To read Mr. Furnival this way is no stretch: The narrator is very much in on the joke of Mr. Furnival's affection for his client. Moreover, if Mr. Furnival were too ready to proclaim Lady Mason's guilt, he would be no better than Mr. Aram, who delights in getting clients off without Mr. Furnival's high-minded affections—or protestations—as excuse. Mr. Furnival cannot admit his motives, or he would not be able to defend Lady Mason and maintain his integrity in his own eyes. It is better, in Trollope, to be stupid than to be hypocritical.

And yet I think it's worthwhile to read this passage in different terms. My reading dispenses with the structure of repression that underlies Dellamora's analysis, and the defenses as they are usually understood. This moment, after all, lacks any of the trauma

[175] Richard Dellamora, "Stupid Trollope," in *The Victorian Newsletter* 100 (Fall 2001), 22.
[176] Ibid, 23.

that accompanies a real psychoanalytic revelation. Mr. Furnival doesn't confront an unpleasant truth *or* remain in a delusion: Something in-between is happening. Moreover, Mr. Furnival is hardly a neurotic who has been suffering over his repression; his silence toward himself has been asymptomatic, and adaptive. So much energy in Trollope is spent in trying to decide between one thing and its opposite—in this case, innocence and guilt. Mr. Furnival has sidestepped that process and all of its agony of deliberation. He is hardly obsessional, though he is obviously ambivalent. But what about the last lines, that indicate that Mr. Furnival has not submitted his feelings of desire—for the soft hand, for his own gentlemanly self-image—to a full reckoning? Let's resist the impulse to immediately catch Mr. Furnival out as being an uncooperative analysand. We will deal with his desire soon enough.

How does Mr. Furnival evade the traps of either delusional conviction, which would make him refuse Lady Mason's guilt, or vacillation, which would cause him anxious indecision? Kierkegaard wrote, under the name Johannes Climacus, that doubt cannot be "overcome" by reason, since doubt *is* the discovery of the contradiction between reality—let's call it Lady Mason's guilt—and ideality—let's call it her beauty. Doubt represents to the mind the contradictions of consciousness between these two poles. "If there were nothing but dichotomies," he wrote, "doubt would not exist, for the possibility of doubt resides precisely in the third, which places the two in relation to each other."[177] Reason would not help here. "It would be a misunderstanding for someone to think that doubt can be overcome with so-called objective thinking," Kierkegaard writes. "Doubt is a higher form than any objective thinking, for it presupposes the latter but has

[177] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1987: 169.

something more, a third, which is interest or consciousness."[178] I argued earlier that vacillation is bound up with a sense of alienation or removal from one's own subjective experience. For Kierkegaard, the objective reasoning of systemic philosophy is removed from interest, whereas doubt is interested.[179]

James Kincaid, following J. Hillis Miller, has described Trollope's mixed open and closed novelistic form as one of doubt. He quotes Miller to the effect that doubt is "the state of mind [that] refuses to rest in either of the alternate comforts of security or denial."[180] This is a definition that is closer to the vacillation I have been at pains to separate Mr. Furnival from. I am not speaking about doubt as a mixed form or a capacity for toggling on the level of plot; I am speaking of doubt as a capacity for interested thinking and as a quality that belongs to character. This mode of thinking is one way that character can exert force or push on the plot. Doubt in this case is synonymous with certainty.

Doubt does not take shape in language. Mr. Furnival does not narrate or talk through his doubt to himself. This is part of the structure of conviction, and also a refraction of *Orley Farm*'s theme of silence. (One way to think about Trollope's novels is that they are each symphonies organized around a key term or concept—silence in *Orley*

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[178] Ibid, 170.

[179] I am not at all suggesting that Trollope shares Kierkegaard's religious anxiety. While I find Trollope to be keenly interested in doubt, I concur with Ruth apRoberts when she writes that Trollope is "hardly an alienated Victorian, wracked with doubt and the sickness of the century. Some of the critical condescension to Trollope has sprung from a sense that he did not even play a role in the Age of Doubt and Alienation" See Ruth apRoberts, *The Moral Trollope* (Athens: Ohio University Press): 75. Trollope is not "wracked" with anything, least of all with thoughts of God.

[180] James R. Kincaid, *The Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press), 1977: 22.

Farm, forgiveness in *Can You Forgive Her?*, speculation in *The Way We Live Now*, conviction in *He Knew He Was Right*—and ramify and multiply the many meanings generated by that central notion.) If silence is, as Anderson has written, a response to a crisis in rule, silence also presents a crisis of rules. There is no commonly agreed-upon "move," in the Wittgensteinian sense, that an interlocutor or observer can make when someone falls silent in Trollope. The meaning of any given silence, and the behavior that responds to it, is entirely contextual. Trollope finds the possibilities of these new situations immensely appealing.

Kierkegaard helps us see that doubt is not the content of Mr. Furnival's thought—not a representable stream—but a structure, that which makes it possible for him to think at all. Vacillators can't make a relation out of the dichotomy that confronts them, and can only swing between poles; doubt creates the possibility of putting a dichotomy in relation. Mr. Furnival's doubt is a way of letting himself get near to an idea or truth or possibility—or of letting the idea get near to him—without logical parsing, which only produces logical fallacies. The problem in Trollope is never *what* you know, but always how you think. This is why "knowing more" is so useless. When the detective Bozzle looks for "facts" to prove the suspicions of Louis Trevelyan in *He Knew He Was Right*, he only discredits facticity. "Facts are things which may be found out," is Bozzle's mantra, and that's true as far as it goes—but the truth isn't a fact.[181] A fact is that Emily Trevelyan received Colonel Osbourne as a visitor, but a truth is that she did not receive him in the spirit of a lover. Facts can be found for any side, so they can't ever help a Trollope character stick to a course.

[181] Trollope, *HKHWR*, 623.

Instead of reasoning, Mr. Furnival mentally conjures the memory of Lady Mason's soft hand, which pulls, directs, claims, commands, shelters, and instructs him. His thinking is tactile, closer to what we usually call feeling than to speech. Speech is bombastic, empty, formal, and anxious—legalese. Feeling is trustworthy, sensitive. This ought to raise eyebrows, if not hackles, in two dimensions. First, it betrays a clear preference for the unexamined life. If feeling is valorized over speech, how is anyone ever to change their mind? Is life really just a matter of confirming what has already occurred? If thinking consists in receiving an idea you already have, where do new ideas come from? (The ship *Argo* might be the answer again.) Second, Lacanians will note that Trollope disregards the symbolic realm. He is more interested in the observable disruptions of the body, in blushes, sweats, and tics, in shudders and feelings of revulsion and physical pain, than in generating interpretations. The body's material shuts down interpretation, closing the case with irrefutable evidence, rather than opening it to language.

Fairness and Comfort

After Mr. Furnival comes into an awareness of Lady Mason's guilt, he is faced with a practical and ethical question. "What should he do?" What is the right course of action? The choice that faces him does not concern judgment (is she guilty?) but action (how will he proceed?). In fact, to say that Mr. Furnival "decides" to defend a woman he knows to be guilty is to sidestep the truth, which is that Mr. Furnival comes up with reasons to do the thing he is already doing. A vacillator would consider on the one hand Lady Mason's worthiness, and on the other, the fact that the land legally belongs to James Mason. But Mr. Furnival sees only one side of the issue; his vision is limited to Lady Mason's

character. He settles the issue of whether he should defend a woman he knows to be guilty not by reference to the absolute ethical standard of her innocence or guilt of the action in question, and not even by considering her intention at the time she committed her action—notably, not one of his reasons concerns a maternal instinct to provide for her son. He does not deal in motives, or intentions, at all.

The passage ends by revealing that the critical factor, the proverbial thumb on the scale, was the literal "soft silken touch of her cool fingers," which Mr. Furnival met some eighty pages back in the library at the Cleeve. When he entered the room, he was "startled by the pallor of her face, but nevertheless he thought [Lady Mason] had never looked so beautiful."[182] Recognizing Sir Peregrine's priority in his own home, he "contented himself at the first moment with touching her hand and hoping that she was well."[183] This is all that we learn of the touch in this scene until the very end, when Mr. Furnival dissuades Sir Peregrine Orme from bringing in his own attorneys, Slow and Bideawhile. (Mr. Bideawhile, by the by, is also Louis Trevelyan's lawyer, and lives up to his name by refusing to help Louis abduct his son from his estranged wife's care.)

> Mr. Furnival feared that [Slow and Bideawhile] were too respectable. They might look at the matter in so straightforward a light as to fancy their client really guilty; and what might happen then? Old Slow would not conceal the truth for all the baronets in England—no, not for all the pretty women. The touch of Lady Mason's hand and the tear in her eye would be nothing to old Slow.[184]

Earlier in the scene, Mr. Furnival has had to choose whether to "lie" to Lady Mason or not. The lie in that case concerns her chance of getting off, not her guilt, though the meditation on Slow substitutes the question of guilt for the question of verdict. But just

[182] Trollope, *OF*, I, 260.
[183] Ibid, 261.
[184] Ibid, 263-64.

who is "getting off"? Mr. Furnival knows that he is susceptible, in a not entirely "respectable" way, to the touch of Lady Mason's hand. This touch acquires more power the longer it lingers in memory. Thinking, we saw earlier, create soreness; here, the hand soothes. (Indeed this hand seems to come straight from Heidegger, who wrote that "what calls on us to think demands for itself that it be tended, cared for, husbanded in its own essential being, by thought."[185]) At first it is just a touch, then it is a touch that compromises respectability, and by the time we get to the post-Crabwitz meditation, it is rich with adjectives, soft and silken, and the workaday hand has become the more suggestive "fingers." As for the beauty that Mr. Furnival is remembering, the library scene characterizes Lady Mason as "soft meekness," "feminine dependence," and "a proneness to lean and almost to cling as she leaned"; "she was a woman to know in her deep sorrow rather than in her happiness; one with whom one would love to weep rather than rejoice."[186] Her beauty itself cries out to be taken care of, sheltered, aided, defended. Her beauty *is* sorrowful, and she makes sorrow beautiful.

Lady Mason's hand is a synecdoche, drawing Mr. Furnival wordlessly in. Her beauty is not to be looked at or spoken of; it is a beauty of promised and prohibited touch—Mr. Furnival is not permitted to feel her hand, nor dry the tears that the "liquid" eye portends. But he clearly longs to do so; if he cannot touch her beauty, he will settle for providing her the service of a defense. For Mr. Furnival the admiration of beauty leads necessarily to administering to beauty, in the sense of giving aid or help. He would doubtless concur with Elaine Scarry that "the fact that something is perceived as beautiful

[185] Heidegger, *Basic Writings: From* Being and Time *(1924) to* The Task of Thinking *(1964)* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1993): 390.
[186] Trollope, *OF*, I, 260-61.

is bound up in an urge to protect it, or act on its behalf, in a way that appears to be tied up with the perception of its lifelikeness."[187] In this case it is Lady Mason's very injury that emphasizes her fragile lifelikeness.

Mr. Furnival shares with Scarry a belief in the necessary relationship between beauty and justice. But *Orley Farm* also poses a challenge to Scarry's *On Beauty.* Scarry's many critics have charged her with vagueness, elitism, and solipsism; indeed, her arguments rest entirely on assuming that what is true for her is true for other people.[188] (In the nineteenth-century Emerson called this genius, but it is not so widely encouraged anymore.) But Trollope presents a conservative critique of Scarry, parting ways over something very different—her aspiration to fairness.

Scarry writes that beauty is related to fairness because it encourages us to distribute attention across the world.

> The structure of perceiving beauty appears to have a two-part scaffolding: first, one's attention is involuntarily given to the beautiful person or thing; then, this quality of heightened attention is voluntarily extended out to other persons or things. It is as though beautiful things have been placed here and there throughout the world to serve as small wake-up calls to perception, spurring lapsed alertness back to its most acute level.[189]

This does not at all describe *Orley Farm*, neither in themes nor form. To be sure, Trollope's form is nothing if not fair: equal parts, plots each evenly paced, the chapters each about ten pages. But rather than planting wake-up calls to perception, Trollope

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[187] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2001: 80.
[188] See Denis Dutton, "Mad About Flowers: Elaine Scarry On Beauty," in *Philosophy and Literature* 24 (2000): 249-60. Once the terrain of solipsism has been carved out, it's tricky to escape. Dutton critiques Scarry's reliance on personal experience by reference to his own. He also, of course, challenges her on historical grounds: Plenty of totalitarians have claimed a love of symmetry for unjust ends.
[189] Scarry, 81.

seems keen to even everything out. Furthermore, this equality of attention is not, ultimately, in the service of fairness. (Besides, could a baggy monster like a Trollope novel ever truly be called "beautiful"?) Mr. Gibson may get just as much narrative time as Mr. Glascock, but we know for sure that Mr. Glascock is decent and Mr. Gibson not. What is achieved by the formal equality is not fairness but comfort. There are no surprises, no ruptures, no dangling sentences to be picked up at a later point. There are no narrative surprises, no suspense. You can set your watch to the reading of Trollope. Comforts, of course, are best delivered in small doses. One feels a kind of rage if one spends the whole day reading Trollope. But the next day, the familiar again takes on a soothing quality; that cycle itself, of irritation and soothing, becomes soothing. Reading Trollope is not only, as D.A. Miller would have it, boring. It may also be comfortable.

Comfort rather than fairness is also the ethical good that Trollope's novels hold up thematically. Lady Mason's beauty marks her as an exception—Mr. Furnival is not now going to seek out other forgers to defend, or even other clients. The justice of *Orley Farm* is entirely bound up in the notion of Lady Mason as exceptional. While Scarry glosses both beauty and justice as "fairness," for Trollope, beauty is something else: weakness or sorrow or woundedness or suffering, not a Scarryan "symmetry." It is tactile (the soft hand), not visual. Symmetry is not of ethical or political interest to Trollope. "Fairness" is, remember, the liberal tendency that gets vacillators into so much trouble: that pathological, paralyzing ability to attend to all sides of an issue, to see both points of view too well. Trollope's narrator is not a Rawlsian judge, negotiating and correcting

imbalances.[190] He assumes, as Trollope himself does, unfairness. He takes this world, the one we have right now, that tends towards an as-yet-unachieved equality, with an unequal distribution of talents, opportunities, inheritances, and gifts, and asks how it is possible to proceed ethically in it.

In this world some people are bound to be better off than others, and exceptions are privileged over rules. Trollope is not sanguine about the state of things. In the *Autobiography* he complains about the prevalence of dishonesty, which he had in mind as a target when he sat down in his "new house" to write *The Way We Live Now*. (He took to writing novels "to make an income so that I and those belonging to me might live in comfort," and it worked.[191]) But he defines progress as an increase of comfort, which is fueled by a trickle-down selfishness.[192] "All material progress has come from man's desire to do the best he can for himself and those around him, and civilization and Christianity itself have been made possible by such progress."[193] Civilized he may be, but he is the least Christian of novelists. His novels offer no horizon or transcendence to look to for hope. The unequal distribution of goods is for him is due not to grace or divine plan

[190] Hadley writes that Trollope's narrator "is depicted as only human, prone to the same sorts of prejudices and longings as the readers of the novel; he even at times declines out of a sense of propriety to intrude on his characters' thoughts. In so doing, he establishes his own position as an interested narrator, but one who aims to render himself disinterested and 'just'" (Hadley, 78). I'm emphasizing the interested side of the narrator, and especially emphasizing that his very understanding of justice is interested, too.
[191] Trollope, *AA*, 108.
[192] Politically he disagrees with the Carlylan notion that the world is getting worse. "The loudness and extravagance of their [Carlyle, Ruskin, and their followers] lamentations, the wailing and gnashing of teeth which comes over them, from a world which is supposed to have gone altogether shoddy-wards, are so contrary to the convictions of men who cannot but see how comfort has been increased, how health has been improved, and education extended,—that the general effect of their teaching is the opposite of what they have intended" (Ibid, 354).
[193] Ibid, 105-6.

but to contingency. Ethics therefore requires that one understand that one has not deserved anything—not because one is a sinner or fallen but because luck rules all. His well-known disregard of "merit" means that hard work and perseverance are all, most famously in the example of his own diligent authorial production.

> In the *Autobiography* Trollope writes that the aim of his realism is to
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> impregnat[e] the mind of the novel-reader with a feeling that honesty is the best policy; that truth prevails while falsehood fails; that a girl will be loved as she is pure, and sweet, and unselfish; that a man will be honoured as he is true, and honest, and brave of heart; that things meanly done are ugly and odious, and things nobly done beautiful and gracious.[194]

His novels, of course, do the opposite of this purported aim: They take a bit of moral cliché or convention, and then produce excuses or justifications that exempt a certain character from judgment for having violated (or tried, or wanted, to violate) the tenet. If they communicate the feeling that these abstract policies are best, it is only to the extent that those policies have not been applied. Perhaps they would be best in other scenarios; or, perhaps the reader learns of how difficult it is get the exemption, and how it may be wiser not to submit to the test. His magnanimous narrator attempts to persuade the reader—imagined, ironically, as a petty stickler for absolutes and rules—by example.

> Everybody will of course say that Felix Graham was base in not telling [Mary Snow] that all this arose, not from her love affair with Albert Fitzallen, but from his own love affair with Madeline Staveley. But I am inclined to think that everybody will be wrong. Had he told her openly that he did not care for her, but did care for some one else, he would have left no alternative… [195]

The narrator is not "everybody"; he is not governed by preconceived notions or inflexible ironclad laws about honesty being the best policy. Sometimes a little white lie is good.

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[194] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 145.
[195] Ibid, II, 146.

"There are circumstances always," Mrs. Orme informs her father-in-law—circumstances in which she could not stand by a friend, and circumstances in which she can.[196]

Yet this theorizing of partiality is not quite the same as "situation ethics," which is how Ruth apRoberts characterized Trollope. The problem with situation ethics is not only, as James Kincaid argued, that Trollope never entirely abandons standards, and instead codifies them in unwritten rules of gentlemanly conduct. Both apRoberts and Kincaid locate ethics in how one acts or behaves, whereas ethics for Trollope have to do with how one thinks. Along with good conviction, the most ethical way to think is to forgive. Trollope is obsessed with forgiveness. He will go so far as to directly plead with the reader to forgive a character, and to explain his own rationale for forgiving. Forgiveness, like doubt, seems to provide a way of escaping the pressure of binary choice—guilt or innocence are no longer the only available options.

Forgiveness is a softening, which is the way that Trollope very often measures moral growth—as a soothing or comforting slackening or relaxing. This is because softening is the prelude to reconciliation, which is what his plots are usually working towards. Of course one wouldn't want to soften to mush or sink like a useless cushion, but a little softening will usually make things easier. So it is that Sir Peregrine Orme softens towards Lady Mason, and Emily Trevelyan softens towards her husband; soon after, Hugh Stanbury declares his belief that if she acts submissive, Louis will soften towards her. (He's wrong, but he has the right idea.) Nora Rowley "softens" to Lady Milborough, and this gratitude is a sign of her maturity; indeed, she copes with the disappointment of missing out on the grandeur of life as Lady Peterborough by saying

[196] Ibid, II, 61.

that she would have been "hardened" by it.[197] *Orley Farm*, not incidentally, pairs the soft hands of a woman with soft men who love her (and are too soft—too old—to have sex with her). A sign of her favored status is that Dorothy Stanbury's life is marked with "soft showers of success."[198]

The comfort of forgiveness is only available if the person in the wrong does not stop experiencing extreme discomfort. Lady Mason is forgiven because she puts on the proverbial sackcloth and ashes. Alice Vavasor is worthy of forgiveness for the same reason: "I think that she may be forgiven, in that she had never brought herself to think lightly of her own fault."[199] This giving of forgiveness is a power game. There is something of Prospero's aggressive, coercive forgiveness in the narrator's stance: a condescending "I forgive you, I forgive you" that nobody asked for and can never be answered and can only be counted on if one is careful not to consider oneself too worthy of it. (It calls to mind Neil Hertz's quip that "it may seem as though the best advice to give someone on the receiving end of George Eliot's narrator's sympathy would be: "Duck!"[200]) The characters are well aware of the power that lies in being the one to forgive rather than the one being forgiven.

> [Louis Trevelyan] felt that in all that she said there was an assumption that [Emily] had been right, and that he had been wrong. She was promising to forgive. She was undertaking to forget. She was willing to take him back to the warmth of her love, and the comfort of her kindness,—but was not asking to be taken back. This was what he could not and would not endure.

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[197] Trollope, *HKHWR*, 909.
[198] Ibid, 910. In *Orley Farm* Madeline Staveley is also described, albeit more ironically, as "soft": "all her movements [were] soft, graceful, and fawnlike as should be those of a young girl… she smiled with her soft cheek" (Trollope, *OF*, I, 184).
[199] Trollope, *CYFH*, II, 311.
[200] Neil Hertz, "Poor Hetty," in Lauren Berlant, ed. *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of An Emotion* (New York: Routledge), 2004: 87.

> … It was for him to forgive;—and he was willing to do it, if she would accept forgiveness.[201]

As the doctor puts it, Louis's fidelity to his "hallucination… did not really consist of a belief in her infidelity, but arose from an obstinate determination to yield nothing."[202] Emily is more pliable. "All feeling of anger was over with her now. There is nothing that a woman will not forgive a man, when he is weaker than she is herself." The shape that her forgiving of him takes is for her to ask for his forgiveness. "She was down on her knees before him instantly. 'Oh, Louis! Oh, Louis! say that you forgive me!' What could a woman do more than that in her mercy to a man?"[203] She later compares her false confession to the tortures of the Inquisition, though she rebukes her sister for being so upset over it: "If I can bear it, cannot you?"[204] Up to a point, comfort can make it easier to bear up under injustices like these. When Emily and her sister Nora arrive at Nuncombe Punty, their first safe-house, where they are cared for by Mrs. Stanbury and Priscilla, she says this: "[Our position] cannot be remedied, but we could not be anywhere more comfortable than we are here."[205]

A good marriage provides comforts:

> In live stock he was not so well provided as the Irish gentleman to whom we allude; but in regard to all other provisions for a comfortable married life, he had, or at a moment's notice could have, all that was needed. … He had already insured his life for a thousand pounds, and, after paying yearly for that, and providing a certain surplus for saving, five hundred a year was the income on which they were to commence the world. 'Of course, I wish it were five thousand for your sake,' he said; 'and I wish I were a Cabinet Minister, or a duke, or a brewer; but, even in heaven, you know all the angels can't be archangels.' Nora assured him that she would

[201] Trollope, *HKHWR*, 744.
[202] Ibid, 921.
[203] Ibid, 884.
[204] Ibid, 899.
[205] Ibid, 139.

> be quite content with virtues simply angelic. 'I hope you like mutton-chops and potatoes; I do,' he said. Then she told him of her ambition about the beef-steak, acknowledging that, as it must now be shared between two the glorious idea of putting a part of it away in a cupboard must be abandoned. 'I don't believe in beef-steaks,' he said. 'A beef-steak may mean anything. At our club, a beef-steak is a sumptuous and expensive luxury. Now, a mutton-chop means something definite, and must be economical.
>
> 'Then we will have the mutton-chops at home,' said Nora, 'and you shall go to your club for the beef-steak.'[206]

Comfort has two powers: First, it ameliorates the soreness and pain that thinking leaves as residue in Trollope's characters. (And in the reader, who must keep up with the twists and turns of thought, and—no small feat—stay seated for the fifteen hours it takes to read the book.) Second, comfort is at the center of a constellation of virtues: regularity, stability, security, the economical. Everyone won't get a mutton-chop, but for everyone who does, a mutton-chop is always a mutton-chop: there is no inflating its value. *That* is what makes it so comfortable. You know what you are in for when you are dealing with a mutton-chop. Also, you eat mutton-chops at home. Comfort is a domestic virtue, so powerful that Nora gives up on the idea of eating the beef-steak at all. This had been a fantasy of hers only dozens of pages back, but she now cedes the beef-steak to the men's club, and contents herself with the homey mutton.

When Trollope dwells on material comforts—cushy armchairs, potatoes, pleasant candlelight, clean caps—he does so with full awareness of the social discomforts that his characters regularly endure. These social discomforts are usually predicated on misunderstandings, as when characters speak across each other, or uncomprehendingly. Thus mutual understanding is grasped as a comfort. "I think that you take it as it is meant,

[206] Ibid, 896-97.

and that makes me quite comfortable," Lady Milborough says to Nora Rowley.[207] But when understanding is not on hand—and it often is not—the "good things of the world" can go some way for him towards setting discomforts right. Trollope has no conception of noble poverty. (Hugh Stanbury, bohemian thought he may be, has more money than Nora's father.) Wealth is not the same as comfort—comfort is not aristocratic excess. But even so, the critique of material wealth we get in *He Knew He Was Right* is put into the discredited mouth of an American poetess.

Acknowledging material comforts permits the softening of principles that are necessary to create reconciliation. Sir Marmaduke never expressly gives his permission for Nora to marry Hugh. But he talks about where Nora will live, and how comfortable she will be there, and that is a way of bending while maintaining his principles. These practical considerations create the context for a stubborn individual to be "brought round by degrees."[208] To be sure, a deus ex machina appears to bring Sir Marmaduke round all the way: Emily Trevelyan sends a telegram saying she needs Hugh Stanbury's help in Italy. Trollope's maxim is as ever, to "take the goods the gods provide you."[209] Take the chairs and the tables, and take the twists and turn of fate—which show up as demands pressed by other people—too.

I will close with a scene from *Orley Farm* in which comfort is symbolically threatened by two forces: greedy miserliness and shoddy craftsmanship. The former is represented by Mrs. Mason, wife of James Mason, who hogs the meat for herself and cheaply rations out food and drink to the rest of the family and servants. The latter is

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[207] Ibid, 892.
[208] Ibid, 857.
[209] Ibid, 756.

represented by Mr. Kantwise, a travelling salesman intent to off-load a set of cheap metallic furniture on behalf of the dubious Patent Steel Furniture Company. Could his name be an invocation of Kant, the bearer of the categorical imperative, the very notion of universal ethical conduct that Trollope is so keen to overturn? Mr. Kantwise, at any rate, is a peddler of cheap tricks, of mass-produced goods that by being good enough for everyone are worthy of—and comfortable for—no one.

These two forces come together when Mrs. Mason purchases the furniture and gives it as a present to the curate's wife. When the time comes to give the gift, Mrs. Mason doesn't want to part with the set, even though the table is broken, and its top will not screw on properly. It is worthless but she clings to it.

> She knew that the table would not screw on; she knew that the pivot of the music stool was bent; she knew that there was no place in the house in which they could stand she must have known that in no possible way could they be of use to her or hers,—and yet she could not part with them without an agony. …She knew in her heart of hearts that they could never be of use to anybody, and yet she made up her mind to keep back two out of the eight chairs.[210]

The hour draws nearer, and Mrs. Mason pays a visit to the furniture, deciding to keep one more chair for herself. She presents the insult to her guests, and the curate insincerely compliments the pile while "wondering in his mind for what purpose such utter trash could have been manufactured, and endeavouring to make up his mind as to what they might possibly do with it."[211] The Christmas dinner fares no better: Mrs. Mason has subtracted a mince pie and "mutilated" the sirloin of beef, so as only to serve a meager portion of it.[212] "The comfort" of the guests "was limited."[213] Lady Mason is a forger and

[210] Trollope, *Orley Farm*, I, 234.
[211] Ibid, 235.
[212] Ibid, 236.

a liar, but Mrs. Mason and Mr. Kantwise are the real villains of *Orley Farm.* The harm they perpetuate is social and bodily; that is, real. They wring soreness from the very things that are on hand to alleviate it.

[213] Ibid, 237.

"What Is It You Don't Like In Him?": Dislike in *Jude the Obscure*

Midway through Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Sue Bridehead confesses to her cousin Jude Fawley, who has long suffered from love for her, that she is miserable in her marriage. Only eight weeks after marrying Richard Phillotson she loathes the man and shrinks from contact with him. It isn't entirely Phillotson's fault. She is, the narrator drily informs us, "quite unfitted by temperament and instinct to fulfill the conditions of the marital relation with Phillotson, possibly with any man."[214] The marital relation outside of marriage, however, is another story: She derives guilty satisfaction from holding Jude's hand, and confesses so her to husband, asking his permission to leave him and live elsewhere with Jude. Phillotson allows her to move into a separate part of the house, but one night, dazed from hours of reading on Roman antiquities, he forgets the arrangement and enters the room they used to share, a room from which he is now forbidden.

> He entered, and unconsciously began to undress.
>
> There was a cry from the bed, and a quick movement. Before the schoolmaster had realized where he was he perceived Sue starting up half-awake, staring wildly, and springing out upon the floor on the side away from him, which was towards the window. This was somewhat hidden by the canopy of the bedstead, and in a moment he heard her flinging up the sash. Before he had thought that she meant to do more than get air she had mounted upon the sill and leapt out. She disappeared in the darkness, and he heard her fall below.[215]

By the end of the novel, Sue will have returned, a broken melancholic, to the very man that she threw herself out of the window to avoid, just as Jude will have found himself remarried to Arabella, with whom he has nothing in common, who derailed his education,

[214] Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (New York: Penguin Classics), 1998: 218.
[215] Ibid, 226.

and who, wherever she goes, seems to leave a trail of dead pigs in her wake. In between, Sue and Jude will lose jobs, wander homeless from town to town, and resort to selling cookies in the shape of the city of learning to which they both came with hope. Most bleakly, the son of Jude and Arabella will kill himself and all his half-siblings. It is an understatement to say that Hardy's last novel is one that many readers have found difficult to like. On first reading, one's reaction may not be so different from Sue's when confronted with the sleepy Phillotson—only the reader is more likely to throw the book, not herself, out the window.

I begin by thinking about Sue's distaste for Phillotson because it is the argument of this chapter that *Jude the Obscure* is a novel that is fundamentally about dislike. This dislike is concentrated in Sue's character, in her inarticulable, insistent, bodily sensations. Her dislike is the mechanism of individuation, a crucial function in a novel that is so concerned with conventions and how to survive them. How, *Jude* asks on every page, is it possible to be unique or true to one's own self—to maintain a self at all—in a world of crushing conformity? Dislike is the resounding answer. Dislike does not produce "agency," per se, but only because Hardy has no use for agency. It produces an attenuated subjectivity.

This notion of an individuating or character-constituting dislike is a throughline in Hardy's work. In *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) he wrote of Bathsheba Everdene that

> Her emblazoned fault was to be too pronounced in her objections, and not sufficiently overt in her likings. We learn that it is not the rays which bodies absorb, but those which they reflect, that give them the colours they are known by, and in the same way people are specialized by their dislikes

> and antagonisms whilst their goodwill is looked upon as no attribute at all.[216]

In the first sentence the narrator describes Bathsheba's objecting temper as her own conspicuous and individual fault, a unique attribute. But by the end of the second sentence a different idea has come into focus: that *people*, across the board and generally, are "specialized by their dislikes," which are more specific and personal than their "goodwill." This has something to do with how dislike operates as a reflection: While goodwill takes in or absorbs the world, dislike rejects and reflects back, marking the disliker with known attributes (and perhaps blinding on-lookers) in the process. Dislike provides "color" or life, a range of hues in the "grayish" world of "neutral tones."[217] In other words, a character is a composite of the things she dislikes—by their dislike ye shall know them.

In recent years the critical conversation around taste has become overtly sociological, largely due to the influence of Pierre Bourdieu. In Bourdieuian readings, taste is that by which we instantiate, emit, or perform a socio-economic or class position. It is not *personal* at all, but impersonal; not a matter of expressing one's embodied preferences, but of reproducing relations of power. "Taste classifies," Bourdieu writes in *Distinction*. "And it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the

[216] Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (New York: Penguin Classics), 2000: 131.
[217] See Hardy, "Neutral Tones" (1898): "Since then, keen lessons that love deceives, / And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me / Your face, and the God curst sun, and a tree, / And a pond edged with grayish leaves."

beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed."[218]

My argument is adjacent to Bourdieu's aesthetics. Like Bourdieu, I am interested in the power of taste to classify subjects, but my reading does not assess how the novel assigns "objective classifications" to its field of players. Mine is not a sociological analysis insofar as I am not writing about how taste, in Bourdieu's words, "legitimate[s] social differences."[219] Nor am I writing about the faculty of judging or justifying one's tastes; my reading highlights the *interested* and embodied, not the *disinterested* and contemplative. I am not, for example, concerned with how Hardy treats aesthetic objects like the icons, stone masonry, and photography that figure prominently in the novel. To use Kantian terms, I could say that I am writing about the agreeable and disagreeable rather than the beautiful and ugly. What matters for me is how this rather crude phenomena of liking and disliking operates in a formal or literary sense: how Hardy uses like and dislike to create character itself. I am looking not at the *motive* for certain tastes—why a Bathsheba or a Sue dislikes a given thing—but at the phenomenology and effect of dislike. What does dislike feel like for Sue? What does it get her? If we say that character itself is the effect of dislike for Hardy, does that open ways of thinking about realism and naturalism? Does that open ways of thinking about reading?

Likes and dislikes involve what objects one will take into one's own body—think of Jude inhaling Christminster from afar, or Sue's panic about "taking in" the body of Phillotson sexually. I anticipate that for some readers, dislike may not be a strong enough

[218] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1984: 6.
[219] Ibid, 7.

term to justify jumping out a window. Some might want to say something stronger—that Sue is repulsed by Phillotson, or disgusted by him.[220] But according to Sianne Ngai, disgust aims to negate its object; what is disgusting "is always that which is insistent and intolerable."[221] In what follows, we will see that Sue does not want to negate Phillotson—she *requires* Phillotson to exist so that she may define herself against him. What's more, Phillotson does *not* insist; Sue runs after him in pursuit, attracted by the promise of becoming herself through dislike of him. She is attached to him and invested in his survival. She *must* be in relation to him.

Perhaps, instead of dislike, we should say that she is irritated by Phillotson? As Ngai notes, "irritation is a mood, distinct from emotion in that it lacks an explicit occasion or subject."[222] Indeed Sue's negative feelings are mobile, and seem to emanate as much from her as from whatever she happens to be looking at; like a mood, they come from both inside and outside.[223] Irritation is a bodily state as well as a mental one, which invokes Sue's nearly pathological nervousness. Ngai writes, "In addition to 'inflammation,' 'rawness,' and 'chafing,' for example, 'irritation' qua 'soreness' also signifies 'hypersensitivity,' 'susceptibility,' and 'tenderness,' words with explicitly

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[220] For a reading of *Jude* that puts the novel in the context of a Victorian ideology of disgust and the legal controversy around obscenity, see Zachary Samalin, "Rotten Atmospheres: *Jude the Obscure* and the Victorian Obscene." Samalin's dissertation, *The Masses are Revolting: Victorian Culture and the Aesthetics of Disgust*, reads the Victorian novel as a rejection of 18th and 19th century aesthetics, which revolved around beauty; he finds *Jude* to be an example of the boundary confusion of disgust that is integral to Victorian aesthetics.

[221] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2007: 333.

[222] Ngai, 179.

[223] "A mood assails us," Heidegger writes. "It comes from neither 'outside' nor from 'inside,' but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being." See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 176.

affective dimensions easily turned, as we have seen, into signifiers of social distinction in the late nineteenth-century discourse of 'nerves.'"[224] Irritation, for Ngai, is an excess of anger but also a deficiency and misdirection of it, so that an irritated person will have the same experience of a chipped teacup and a major social injustice. Sue's negative affects are mobile but—this is where she parts ways with Ngai's irritation—they are not arbitrary. Her ire is focused around a set of related social complaints. She is a misanthrope, alienated from the reigning gender norms, religious conventions, and social beliefs, but her feelings are not out of proportion to their cause. Furthermore, while the word irritation captures something of how Sue feels, it doesn't get at the structure of character that feeling produces. The word dislike is useful because it contains the idea of likeness—of resemblance, form, and differentiation. Unlike Ngai's "ugly feelings," which muddle the subject-object divide, dislike creates it.

Dislike and Individuation

Roland Barthes has offered one way to think about how the individuation of the body occurs through taste. In *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, the author lists his likes and dislikes in the style of a celebrity questionnaire.

> *I like:* salad, cinnamon, cheese, pimento, marzipan, the smell of new-cut hay (why doesn't someone with a "nose" make such a perfume), roses, lavender, champagne, loosely held political convictions, Glenn Gould, too-cold beer, flat pillows, toast, Havana cigars, Handel, slow walks, pears, white peaches, cherries, colors, watches, all kinds of writing pens, desserts, unrefined salt, realistic novels, the piano, coffee, Pollock, Twombly, all romantic music, Sartre, Brecht, Verne, Fourier, Eisenstein,

[224] Ngai, 184. As Christopher Lane has shown, Victorian doctors and psychologists were known to characterize misanthropy as a "nervous disease" or outright insanity, and prescriptions included slow eating and a diet free of salty, fatty foods. See Christopher Lane, *Hatred and Civility: The Antisocial Life in Victorian England* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2004: 21.

> trains, Médoc wine, having change, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, walking in sandals on the lanes of southwest France, the bend of the Adour seen from Doctor L.'s house, the Marx Brothers, the mountains at seven in the morning leaving Salamanca, etc.
>
> *I don't like:* white Pomeranians, women in slacks, geraniums, strawberries, the harpsichord, Miró, tautologies, animated cartons, Arthur Rubinstein, villas, the afternoon, Satie, Bartók, Vivaldi, telephoning, children's choruses, Chopin's concertos, Burgundian branles and Renaissance dances, the organ, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, his trumpets and kettledrums, the politico-sexual, scenes, initiatives, fidelity, spontaneity, evenings with people I don't know, etc.[225]

The repeated etcetera is a clue that these lists could go on forever; there is no reason for them to stop or start where they do. In the aggregate, the list is arbitrary—every item could be substituted and, like the ship *Argo*, the list would be the same.[226] But each like and dislike is specific, and if they are arbitrary as a whole they are irreplaceable as particulars. Barthes really does like Handel, slow walks, and the Marx Brothers; he really does dislike evenings with people he doesn't know.

With the exception of walking and "having change," Barthes' likes are *things*—nouns. His dislikes introduce the social: women in slacks, initiatives, "the politico-sexual." And indeed the social is what is at stake in liking and disliking. The passage continues:

> *I like, I don't like:* this is of no importance to anyone; this, apparently, has no meaning. And yet all this means: *my body is not the same as yours.* Hence, in this anarchic foam of tastes and distastes, a kind of listless blur, gradually appears the figure of a bodily enigma, requiring complicity or irritation. Here begins the intimidation of the body, which obliges others to endure me *liberally*, to remain silent and polite confronted by pleasures or rejections which they do not share.

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[225] Barthes, 116-117.

[226] Barthes compares his work studies, one in the country and one in the city, to the *Argo*. "These sites are identical. Why? Because the arrangement of tools (paper, pens, desks, clocks, calendars) is the same: it is the structure of the space which constitutes its identity. This private phenomenon would suffice to shed some light on structuralism: the system prevails over the very being of objects" (46).

> (A fly bothers me, I kill it: you kill what bothers you. If I had not killed the fly, it would have been *out of pure liberalism:* I am liberal in order not to be a killer).[227]

Liking and disliking produce the individual, social body, and they produce the body politic. Liking and disliking is a structure of power in that the body that likes and dislikes intimidates other bodies into tolerance. Notice, too, that irritation appears not as the affective corollary of disliking but as how one's disliking affects the other people who have to put up with it. Since we are beyond the realm of argument—literally, there is no accounting for taste—others must be silent and polite and endure what they themselves do not share. As Kant put it, "To one person the color violet is gentle and lovely, to another lifeless and faded. One person loves the sound of wind instruments, another that of string instruments. It would be foolish if we disputed about such differences with the intention of censuring another's judgment as incorrect if it differs from ours, as if the two were opposed logically. Hence about the agreeable the following principle holds: *Everyone has his own taste* (of sense)."[228]

Sue's dislikes also produce her body as singular. But Hardy parts ways with Barthes, interested in a different fate of "*I like, I don't like*." Sue's dislikes are not really on the order of Vivaldi or Pomeranians, white or otherwise. They are social problems: She doesn't like marriage laws, or divorce laws. They are also premonitory or predictive: She doesn't like the thought of sex with her husband, or with the person she leaves her husband for.[229] (Dread is very deeply connected to disliking in *Jude.*) What's more, while

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[227] Ibid, 117.
[228] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), 1987: 55.
[229] Aaron Matz's reading of Hardy emphasizes that the irony of *Jude* is that "characters are compelled to have sex; they have no contraception; they find themselves in a novel

to some extent Phillotson and Jude must endure Sue's dislikes, these dislikes do not produce her as a liberal subject; her body is intimidated, not intimidating. Her body diagnoses and suffers, but cannot adequately address her complaints. And while she attaches herself to what she dislikes, she is not really able to *tolerate* it. Tolerance, both in a political sense and a psychological one, is a quality of Jude's. Jude is a liberal, unwilling to hurt a fly. Sue is a killer.

Barthes does not bother to explain or account for the origins of his likes and dislikes. They are presented on the order of facts or first principles, starting premises. Throughout *Jude*, though, Sue struggles to explain the reasons for her dislikes. These reasons are legion, and often contradictory. Sometimes she says that her dislike is caused by the other person making claims on her, demanding her to be responsive: "What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally!—the dreaded contract to feel in a particular way, in a matter whose essence is it voluntariness!"[230] Sometimes she blames temperament: "Domestic laws should be made according to temperaments, which should be classified," she says. "If people are at all peculiar in character they have to suffer from the very rules that

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that seems hostile to procreation." See Aaron Matz, "Hardy and the Vanity of Procreation," 10. I do not deny that Sue and Jude have sex, and perhaps a lot of it, and I will turn to compulsion as an idea later in this chapter. However, despite the sexual coupling with Jude that Sue is, however furtively, compelled to, the fact remains that she does everything in her power to put this coupling off—to delay it. Hardy does not narrate sex; when Sue jumps out the window, he jumps, too. This is a meaningful choice, because we know from *Tess* that he was more than capable of writing sex and sensuality. My conclusion is that there is something about sex that Sue seems to dislike, at least intellectually, and that the novelistic world of *Jude* must expel to the sidelines along with the representations of nature and agricultural labor that characterize Hardy's other novels. Thus we can speak of compulsion and repetition in *Jude*, but not of fulfillment or gratification.

[230] Hardy, *Jude*, 212.

produce comfort in others!"[231] Sometimes she says that her dislike is caused by the law itself: "I have just the same dread lest an iron contract should extinguish your tenderness for me, and mine for you, as it did between our unfortunate parents."[232] Following the death of Father Time, it seems that the fault is the universe itself: "There is something external to us which says, 'You shan't!' First it said, 'You shan't learn!' Then it said, 'You shan't labour!' Now it says, 'You shan't love!'"[233] As she points her finger at various causes, the ground of her identity moves. Her dislike is constant but various, a shifting space of relatively useless resistance, no foundation for reform or even survival, seeming to come from everywhere at once.

Barthes has no problem articulating his likes and dislikes; if anything, the threat is that he will speak them too well, and will become unable to stop speaking them. But in *Jude*, dislike is fundamentally inarticulable. On Sue's second wedding night to Phillotson, the Widow Edlin asks her, "What is it you don't like in him?" Sue responds, "I cannot tell you. It is something… I cannot say. The mournful thing is, that nobody would admit it as a reason for feeling as I do; so that no excuse is left to me."[234] While there would be some utility to a common or shared feeling—it would serve as a rule or excuse to spring her from her marital duties—Sue's dislike isolates her. It can't be spoken; it can only be experienced. What's more, it is actually unreasonable—if she could state it, which she can't, no one else would concede to its claims. This may be another explanation for her inability to come up with a justifying reason: Something in the nature of dislike actually

[231] Ibid, 222.
[232] Ibid, 259.
[233] Ibid, 337.
[234] Ibid, 394.

excludes reason. This is not to say that dislike is irrational or hysterical, only that is embodied and non-discursive.

This incommunicability of dislike participates in *Jude*'s wider suspicion of language and representability. Though Hardy's narrator makes plain that motivation and interior thoughts can never be known to others, Sue holds onto the belief that she will be transparently known without speaking. Take her and Phillotson's habit, before they marry, of doing arithmetic in the evenings. "Sometimes as she figured… she would involuntarily glance up with a little inquiring smile at him, as if she assumed that, being the master, he must perceive all that was passing in her brain, as right or wrong." Phillotson is not thinking of math, but of *her*, but where she stands in relation to his desire is not clear: "Perhaps she knew that he was thinking of her thus."[235]

This is clearly an epistemological problem, and on multiple levels: First, the narrator himself is unable to explain what is transpiring inside Sue's mind. She smiles *as if* she thinks Phillotson knows her thoughts: Does she actually think this is the case? If not, why does the narrator read her face as such? *Perhaps* she knows that he's actually thinking of her and not math: Which is it? Are Sue and Phillotson experiencing a communication breakdown, in which a) she thinks he knows what she's thinking, and he doesn't, and b) she doesn't know he's thinking of her? Or is Hardy suggesting that desire itself is radically unknowable—that the *narrator* can't even know what's happening here?

When Trollope denies the reader access to a mind or conversation, the feeling that is evoked is often tact. We have been excluded from something that we are not meant to

[235] Ibid, 105.

see, that no one is meant to see. But something is *there*, even if it must remain hidden. Hardy is up to something else, which involves a wide-scale refusal of first causes. Despite the invocations of cosmic or deterministic rationales, Hardy is never really interested in explaining why anything happens the way it does, or why humans do any of the things they do. He characterizes motives as always once overdetermined and unknowable. This does not necessarily lead to nihilism, however. It leads outward. He is interested in consequences—how people treat and mistreat each other, given the limits of our ability to know each other's states of mind.

The multiple possible sources of dislike also suggests that dislike is continuous and ongoing, and necessarily so. There is no end to the project of creating oneself as a subject who is different from other subjects. Dislike is a motor or life force. As William Hazlitt wrote,

> Nature seems (the more we look into it) made up of antipathies: without something to hate, we should lose the very spring of thought and action. Life would turn to a stagnant pool, were it not ruffled by the jarring interests, the unruly passions, of men. …But so it is, that there is a secret affinity, a hankering after, evil in the human mind, and that it takes a perverse, but a fortunate delight in mischief, since it is a never-failing source of satisfaction. Pure good soon grows insipid, wants variety and spirit. Pain is a bittersweet, which never surfeits. Love turns, with a little indulgence, to indifference or disgust: hatred alone is immortal.[236]

Dislike and Disidentification

Dislike is a mechanism of expulsion. But what exactly is Sue getting rid of? One possible reading is that she is an example of Harry Stack Sullivan's theory of the "not-me." Sullivan, who developed his theory of interpersonal psychiatry in the mid-twentieth

[236] William Hazlitt, "On the Pleasure of Hating," in *The Plain Speaker: The Key Essays* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell), 1998: 103.

century, argued that the infant experiences three "personifications": the good-me, the bad-me, and the not-me. Each of these are wrapped up in her increasing awareness of "my body," which is "an organization of experience…distinguished from everything else by its self-sentient character.

> *Good-me* is the beginning personification which organizes experience in which satisfactions have been enhanced by rewarding increments of tenderness… *Bad-me*...is the beginning personification which organizes experience in which increasing degrees of anxiety are associated with behavior involving the mothering one in its more-or-less clearly prehended interpersonal setting.[237]

These lay the foundations for adult consciousness—for the adult's awareness that there are aspects of herself that are good, and other aspects that she is better off not showing. The not-me is a special category, familiar to schizophrenics, that most people only access in nightmares. It is inaugurated by an extremely anxious situation and is "practically beyond discussion in communicative terms."[238] The not-me is the consequence of an experience that is entirely overwhelming to the infant, who later in life will have an "uncanny" feeling of "awe, dread, loathing, and horror" whenever triggers are present.[239] It can eventually lead to dissociation and the inability to learn from experience.

The not-me is an enticing concept, particularly in its separation from communicative possibilities and its connection to repetition, but there are a few problems with using Sullivan to think about Sue. One of these problems, it's worth stating, *isn't* the fact that the not-me isn't explicitly political or social. I would be happy to adopt the not-me metaphorically and say that the anxious situation Sue faces is institutional, or is, more

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[237] Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (1953) (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 1997: 161-62.
[238] Ibid, 164.
[239] Ibid, 163.

precisely, the overlap between institutional and private life. The problem is that Sullivan encourages us to think in terms of originary traumas, which is not Hardy's interest in this novel. Secondly, it's really the issue of *likeness* and not *essence* that is at stake in *Jude.* While Sue clearly displays signs of anxiety about being taken over or swallowed up by Phillotson, Jude, and the institution of marriage, there is far more talk in the book about who or what is like something else than about who or what *is* something else.

It is more useful to think of Sue vis-à-vis a different term, disidentification. Disidentification is not a thoroughly theorized concept, but it's often used to describe the process of separating from a group, race, or gender identity. One recent article in the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* connected disidentification to a patient's move from relating to herself as an object to relating to herself as a subject. The analyst described that case as follows:

> Our feeling to exist does not derive only from the way others see us, irrespective of how important they are, but also from our subjectivity, from our perception of ourselves as agents….
>
> The crises that broke out during analysis made this identification alive again and again. The fact that we were able to overcome the crises favored a process of *disidentification*, restoring the capacity of experiencing oneself as both a subject and an object, moving back and forth between these two perspectives of the self and integrating them into the representational world, as it has been stressed by the authors who have elaborated a model of the mind based on self-reflexivity (among many others: Bach, 1985, 1994; Auerbach, 1993; Auerbach and Blatt, 1996; Aron, 1998, 2000).[240]

In the above example, disidentifying meant abandoning an over-identification that had caused the patient to experience herself from an externalized perspective. By disidentifying, she was able to gain the ability to experience herself as both a subject *and*

[240] Carlo Bonomi, "Fear of the Mind: The Annihilating Power of the Gaze," in *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 68: 173

an object, and to move across that divide. This seems an apt description of Sue's situation. By disliking marriage laws, religion, and the work opportunities available to her, she is able to experience herself as both the object the law and other people make her out to be, and as a subject.

Disidentification is not accomplished once and for all. It is a constant process of relating to self by changing relations to others. Indeed, dislike in *Jude* is deeply relational. Even the aggressive rejection of another person, for Hardy, is a way of holding onto that person, and of coloring oneself. This is not to say that Sue achieves an "interiority"; the characters of *Jude the Obscure* are among the least psychologically "deep" that Hardy ever wrote. But Sue achieves difference, from Jude and Phillotson and the Widow Edlin, and from the reader.[241] She holds tightly to an essential or absolute nugget of self, a kind of proto-modernist or Lawrentian gem, as a bulwark.

Sue's aggression, which seems to attack her even as she lashes out, calls up something Kleinian. We would not want to be too literal about this: Sue is not rejecting parts of her own psyche that she has projected onto the world.[242] She is rejecting social forms, and even if she is also rejecting her own desire for those conventions, to simply

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[241] I have company in my reading of Hardy in relational terms. See Alicia Christoff, "Alone with Tess," forthcoming in *Novel.* Christoff pairs *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* with D.W. Winnicott to argue that Hardy's notion of solitude is inherently interpersonal, and that the character of Tess is structured by a "diffusion" of self. "The question of whether we can ever truly be alone has a special urgency for psychoanalytic thought concerned with object relations, and for Winnicott in particular," she writes. "If our psyche is structured on a set of identifications—if we are composed of internalized images of others—is there such a thing as a non-relational existence?" (Christoff, 8) For Winnicott, non-pathological solitude is only possible after a person has experienced aloneness in the watchful presence of another, like the child does with her mother. "The personal," Christoff writes, "*is* a set of interpersonal relations" (Christoff, 10).

[242] See Melanie Klein, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms (1946) in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works: 1946-1963* (New York: The Free Press), 1975: 1-24.

call her a paranoid-schizoid would be to reduce the power of that political critique. In broad strokes, though, the Kleinian positions illuminate what is at stake for each of them. Ruth Stein sums up the situation as follows: "In the paranoid-schizoid position, the anxiety is fear for the *survival of the ego* (or the self): it is the fear that persecutors will destroy the ego and its ideal object. In the depressive position, anxiety is of the *loss of the object* or the injury done to it."[243] As we have seen, Sue is anxious to survive a world that is hostile and inhospitable to her; dislike and disidentification are her means. The paranoid-schizoid position may be a thoroughly rational way of meeting a world whose institutions are so deforming.

Sue's aggression also has Winnicottian echoes of "testing" objects. In his work on transitional objects, Winnicott found that in order for objects to be meaningful, they must have their own reality, not simply be projections from the subject herself. Instead of "relating" to the object as a projection, the infant learns to "use" the object by placing it outside of her power. This means that she must destroy it; if it survives, then it is autonomous, and an object that she can relate to, or use.

> The subject says to the object: 'I destroyed you', and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: 'Hullo object!' 'I destroyed you'. 'I love you'. 'You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you'. 'While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*. Here fantasy begins for the individual. The subject can now *use* the object that has survived."[244]

Sue never gets to the stage of loving Phillotson—she remains in the stage of aggressively destroying him, a project that all the while creates her difference from him. We shouldn't discount Phillotson's participation in Sue's subject-creation; he is the context or

[243] Stein, 505.
[244] D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge), 2005: 120-21.

environment that permits it. He receives the full blast of her hatred, again and again, and survives.

Dislike and disidentification are important ways to think about literary character because they complicate the conversation around so-called "sympathetic realism." While contemporary scholars rarely speak of identification, a supposedly naïve reading practice, theories of sympathy continue to percolate. In *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, Rae Greiner writes that for nineteenth-century writers, "reality would depend on the practice, and the central proposition, of sympathy—that what is true in a given moment is that which is collectively thinkable and can be felt as such."[245] Through sympathetic mechanisms, a character and a reader acquire new knowledge about themselves, coming to see themselves from the other's point of view. A capacious term for Greiner, sympathy ultimately has to do with "going along with" the other and with the novel; it's something like theory of mind. "Sympathetic realism" is bound up in a theory of the subject that privileges rationality, deliberation, judgment, and moderation. None of these terms seems appropriate to a discussion of Hardy.

Idealization and Identification

"Lonely and impressionable" Jude shares with Clym Yeobright, Dick Dewy, and Angel Clare a habit of turning like into idealization, especially with respect to female love objects.[246] When he meets objects of desire—including Phillotson, Arabella, Sue, and the city of Christminster—he is not practiced at dealing with them as anything other than the

[245] Greiner, 50-1.
[246] Hardy, *Jude*, 92.

projections of his own imagination.[247] Indeed, the relationship with Sue begins as one in which Jude makes a still image speak words he wants to hear. Thus inspired by his own animation of the picture, he finally moves to Christminster. When he meets her, he experiences her as not only belonging to him in the way of kin, but as somehow emanating from his own self. (This indicates not the reflective process of dislike but rather introjection.) "She was so pretty that he could not believe it possible that she should belong to him. Then she spoke to one of the two older women behind the counter; and he recognized in the accents certain qualities of his own voice; softened and sweetened, but his own."[248] As time passes, "she remained more or less an ideal character, about whose form he began to weave curious and fantastic day-dreams."[249] Fatally, he decides that "so would she be to him a kindly star, an elevating power, a companion in Anglican worship, a tender friend."[250] The narrator and reader share the knowledge that "she was almost an ideality to him still." Jude does not desire to overcome this ideality: "Perhaps to know her would be to cure himself of this unexpected and unauthorized passion. A voice whispered that, though he desired to know her, he did not desire to be cured."[251]

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[247] Distance from Phillotson causes Jude's childish misreading of the schoolteacher's ambition and power: Jude "was not among the regular day scholars, who came unromantically close to the schoolteacher's life" (Ibid, 10). This idealization is transferable; Christminster "acquired a tangibility, a permanence, a hold on his life mainly from the one nucleus of fact that the man for whose knowledge and purposes he had so much reverence was actually living there; not only so, but living among the more thoughtful and mentally shining ones therein" (Ibid, 22).
[248] Ibid, 88.
[249] Ibid, 89.
[250] Ibid, 91.
[251] Ibid, 98.

Simple idealization can be shattered, as in Tess's confession of her affair with Alec. She felt her confession was appropriate because she had wrongly identified her and Angel's shared experience—they both had affairs—with a shared social position: "He seemed to be her double."[252] Angel explains the break as follows: "You were one person; now you are another." He goes on to say that "the woman I have been loving is not you," and when Tess asks who he has loved, he responds, "Another woman in your shape."[253] When the ideality turns to reality, the transformation is so total that the object is not the same, even if is in the same shape; the change, of course, is in Angel. Likewise, Jude is able to overcome his idealization of Phillotson: "That after all these years the meeting with Mr. Phillotson should be of this homely complexion destroyed at one stroke the halo which had surrounded the schoolmaster's figure in Jude's imagination ever since their parting."[254] Jude is even able—and rather quickly—to overcome his idealization of Arabella. In none of these cases did Angel or Jude mistake the object for their own self, falling, as Tess did, from idealization into identification. That's what is fatal, and that's what happens between Jude and Sue.

Freud first explored identification in the essay on Leonardo da Vinci: "The boy represses his love for his mother: he puts himself in her place, identifies himself with her, and takes his own person a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love."[255] Richard Wollheim has explained that the identifying subject has constraints on his imagination, so that when imagining doing something, he draws not on his own

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[252] Hardy, *Tess*, 224.
[253] Ibid, 229.
[254] Hardy, *Jude*, 101.
[255] Freud, "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood" (1910) in *The Freud Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 1995: 462-3.

"repertoire" but upon another's. This other repertoire does not necessarily have anything to do with the psychic reality of the other person: "It is likely that identification will follow directly upon some other psychic mechanism, such as projection or idealization," Wollheim writes.[256]

> Identification makes its first appearance [in Freud's writings] as a mechanism of defence: as a means by which the ego deals with objectionable, or (an expression with changing meaning) "incompatible," wishes or desires. Soon, however, identification assumes a further role. For it becomes a method by means of which a trait or feature of the personality is fixed. Nor are these two functions unrelated: on the contrary, the most intimate connection between the two may be observed. For a defence which is constantly iterated conditions or constitutes the character.[257]

Dislike produces singularity by disidentifying, so Sue's "*I don't like you*" becomes a way of saying "*I am not like you.*" But identification binds the identifier to his projection and then onto the other person. The personality gets "fixed," and becomes static. Even when Sue rejects her own theories of marriage and turns from atheism to Christianity, Jude is still a faithless radical. He has become Sue. For Wollheim as for Hardy, identification is a (futile) effort "to change the real world through the resources of the psychic world"—an effort that fundamentally "misconceives" the "efficacy" of "psychic mechanisms."[258] The over-identifying character and the disidentifying character are both stubbornly non-developmental. In both cases, a "defence which is constantly iterated" is what constitutes the character, rather than a socially "normal" temporal progression, with appropriate milestones at apprenticeship, trade, marriage, children, and grandchildren.

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[256] Richard Wollheim, "Identification and Imagination: the Inner Structure of a Psychic Mechanism," in *Freud: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City: Anchor Press), 1974: 189.
[257] Ibid, 172.
[258] Ibid, 194-5.

Jude is eager to communicate his identification. After Sue's first marriage to Phillotson, Jude pays her a visit. Waiting for her in the schoolroom, he plays the hymn that moved him so the week before—on the piano, the very instrument Phillotson never learned in Marygreen. Jude refuses to play in front of her, so they switch roles: she plays the song for him.

> 'It is odd,' she said, in a voice quite changed, 'that I should care about that air; because—'
> 'Because what?'
> 'I am not that sort — quite.'
> 'Not easily moved?'
> 'I didn't quite mean that.'
> 'O, but you *are* one of that sort, for you are just like me at heart!'
> 'But not at head.'
> She played on, and suddenly turned round; and by an unpremeditated instinct each clasped the other's hand again.
> She uttered a forced little laugh as she relinquished his quickly. 'How funny!' she said. 'I wonder what we both did that for?'
> 'I suppose because we are both alike, as I said before.'
> 'Not in our thoughts! Perhaps a little in our feelings.'
> 'And they rule thoughts… Isn't it enough to make one blaspheme that the composer of that hymn is one of the most commonplace men I ever met!'
> 'What—you know him?'
> 'I went to see him.'
> 'O you goose—to do just what I would have done! Why did you?'
> 'Because we are not alike," he said drily.
> 'Now we'll have some tea,' said Sue…. [259]

Jude wants Sue to be like him. He is a bad reader, over-sympathizing and putting himself in her place to such an extent that he squeezes her out. She rejects that sympathy haltingly but firmly, changing the subject when other options are exhausted. Significantly, the thing she changes the subject to involves a physical sensation—thirst—that *cannot* be shared. Even if she and Jude do the same things, she finds a way to make herself different.

[259] Hardy, *Jude*, 202.

Drinking, eating, and what happens after: There are things, as Sancho Panza told Don Quixote, that no one can else can do for you.

Such long and tortured exchanges of dialogue are typical in *Jude*, as are negative syntactical constructions. Silences, hyphens, and repetition express or serve as placeholders for feeling and enact the deformation language and social conventions do to experience. If this is the kind of conversation that results when one tries to discuss likes and dislikes, it is no wonder that Barthes settles for silence. In another novel, the scene could read as farce—the playful banter of a Trollopian swell and heroine, or a bit of Beckettian absurdity spoken from trash cans. In Brontë the exchange would have ended in some kind of frenzied embrace. But there is no play in Hardy. Indeed, play would require a different mode, something along the lines of playacting—the easy inhabiting and discarding of another role, trying someone else on for size, or a lark—in short, a game.

According to Sue, she and Jude may be a little alike in their feelings and their actions, but not in their thoughts. Their simultaneous reaching for and clasping of one another's hands expresses their likeness; what they share is a mutual attraction, what they call a matter of heart. Sue insists that her "head" and her thoughts are different and her own because she places a high priority on defining herself as an intellectual. But what does it mean that feelings are the source of identity or likeness in this scene? In Hardy, what rules thought is not "feelings" but temperament, bloodlines, the cosmos, the weight of history. And if the novel's plot is any indicator, they rule thoughts only to tragic ends; it would be better if they did not.

When it is convenient—when it serves the greater function of disidentifying from Phillotson—Sue permits Jude to identify with her, even at the price of his misunderstanding. When the three visit an architectural model of Jerusalem, Sue first complains that the model must be historically inaccurate; she then dismisses it as too different to be of interest: "I fancy we have had enough of Jerusalem, considering we are not descended from the Jews."[260] Phillotson tells Jude that his cousin is "terribly clever," which raises Sue's hackles.

> 'No, Mr. Phillotson, I am not—altogether! I hate to be what is called a clever girl—there are too many of that sort now!' answered Sue. 'I only meant—I don't know what I meant—except it was that you don't understand!'
>
> '*I* know your meaning,' said Jude ardently (although he did not). 'And I think you are quite right.'
>
> 'That's a good Jude—I know *you* believe in me!' She impulsively seized his hand, and leaving a reproachful look on the schoolmaster turned away to Jude…[261]

Jude, the narrator makes clear, does not know what Sue means anymore than she does. In all the flux of over-identifying and dis-identifying, Sue has still been spared the burden of being known. Back in the classroom, Phillotson is surprised to find on the chalk-board a skillfully drawn perspective view of Jerusalem, with every building shown in its place. Sue claims to have "hardly" looked at the model, and yet she apprehended it powerfully. Disliking must be a profound way of knowing, a way that preserves distinctiveness and uniqueness while still intimately capturing the world. A dislike attributed to difference—"we are not descended from the Jews"— has produced a likeness. One might take this as a suggestion that mimesis, which is so often characterized as either representing or

[260] Ibid, 106.
[261] Ibid, 107.

invoking likenesses, continuities between the world of life and the world of the text, has some deep stake in dislike. It produces necessary fictional boundaries.[262]

Jude's identification with Sue is based on misreading and misunderstanding, and the novel makes plain that it is a failure. What about Jude's identifications with animals?[263] Hardy regularly suggests that humans may know through animals more successfully than they know through other humans: Consider how Tess becomes aware of her own injury through an encounter with pheasants, or how Jude frees the trapped rabbit.

> He who in his childhood had saved the lives of the earthworms now began to picture the agonies of the rabbit from its lacerated leg. If it were a "bad catch" by the hind-leg, the animal would tug during the ensuing six hours till the iron teeth of the trap had stripped the leg-bone of its flesh, when should a weak-springed instrument enable it to escape, it would die in the fields from the mortification of the limb. If it were a "good catch," namely, by the fore-leg, the bone would be broken, and the limb nearly torn in two in attempts at an impossible escape.

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[262] For another reading of representation in *Jude*, see Samalin, "Rotten Atmospheres." Samalin observes that "Hardy often suggests that any artistic creation might at any moment claim powers in excess of its author's expressive agency" (Samalin, 5). In this analysis, the artwork has an animistic power over its creator and also its consumer. Of the figures of Venus and Apollo, he writes, "By highlighting Sue's physical trembling and nearly hallucinatory anxiety over her purchase, Hardy suggests that aesthetic evaluation does not fully abolish the pollutant presence which destructive iconoclastic gestures acknowledge more openly" (Ibid, 11).

[263] For Elisha Cohn, Hardy differentiates between "an aesthetic that can explore becoming-animal" and one organized around the production of sympathy. In *Jude*, she writes, kindness to animals makes a case for a moral agency that pushes back against discourses of pessimism and determinism. See Cohn, "'No insignificant creature': Thomas Hardy's Ethical Turn," in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 64:4 (March 2010): 494-520.

Many critics have taken Hardy's unique preoccupation with the limits of autonomy as an invitation to think about where one being ends and another begins. Suzanne Keen has been especially important for studies of empathy in Hardy (see Suzanne Keen, "Empathetic Hardy: Bounded, Ambassadorial, and Broadcast Strategies of Narrative Empathy," in *Poetics Today* 32:2 (Summer 2011): 349-389). For more on how novels produce particular modes of readerly identification, see Lesley Goodman, "Rebellious Identification, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Arabella," in *Narrative* 18:2 (May 2010): 163-178.

> Almost half-an-hour passed, and the rabbit repeated its cry. Jude could rest no longer till he had put it out of its pain…. The faint click of the trap as dragged about by the writhing animal guided him now, and reaching the spot he struck the rabbit on the back of the neck with the side of his palm, and it stretched itself out dead.[264]

At this point Sue pops her head out of the window: She, too, has been unable to sleep, thinking of the rabbit's suffering. But she did not put it out of its misery. The metaphor here is obvious—there is no freeing oneself, or another, from the traps set by the more powerful; the best Jude can hope for himself is the kind of quick death that he grants the quivering animal. (Indeed the last line of the novel will mirror the rabbit "stretched out dead," when the circling plot comes to an end with Jude's corpse laid out "straight as an arrow" under the bed sheet.[265]) But there is no one able to strike him down.

Or is Sue the one who is trapped? She speaks from within the marital home in Shaston, where she lives unhappily with Phillotson. When Jude eventually springs her from that situation, she will continue to drag the past behind her, unable to ever shake it, and eventually will return to the trap of her own volition—as if once you are deformed by conventional marriage, you are no longer suited for life outside of its confines. (One is reminded of the old jokes about prisoners trying to get sent back jail, where at least you get three meals a day.) Sue doesn't admit to identifying with the rabbit, but its cries disturb her. Her statement ironically points to her own condition: "They ought not to be allowed to set these steel traps, ought they!"[266]

My point in introducing the rabbit is to highlight that characters in Hardy can more readily identify with or otherwise relate to the animal world than they can to other

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[264] Hardy, *Jude*, 213-14.
[265] Ibid, 407.
[266] Ibid, 214.

humans. This seems to have something to do with the silence of animals, who do not contest identifications or reinscriptions into new contexts. (If this rabbit could speak, would it tell Jude that it was "not like" him at all?) In this scene nature reflects the human predicament, but only for the reader. And yet the humans identify in the terms that characterize their tempers. Jude "pictures the agonies," imaginatively inhabiting the suffering.[267] Sue does the opposite: She puts the rabbit into a social and legislative context that she can understand, one of institutional rules.[268]

Jude's instinct toward nature is reparative: "Nature logic was too horrid for him to care for," the narrator says. "That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony."[269] Jude identifies with the individual suffering animal but not with nature qua nature; indeed, *Jude* contains the least amount of descriptive writing on nature of any of Hardy's novels. It is a novel of towns and villages

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[267] It was Phillotson who first instructed Jude in the importance of compassion for the non-human. The schoolmaster's parting instructions to the child were, "Be a good boy, remember; and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can. And if ever you come to Christminster remember you hunt me out for old acquaintance' sake" (Ibid, 10-11). We know that the advice to "read all you can" turns out badly, and that coming to Christminster and hunting up Phillotson turns out badly, too. So why does the advice to be kind to animals and birds come from this dubious source? I don't think we are meant to read against Jude's ethical interest in the non-human; Hardy's work as a whole is far too invested in an animal-human relation for that. But it is peculiar nonetheless that Phillotson serves as the mouthpiece for this bit of practical wisdom. It seems to establish another link or doubling between Jude and the schoolmaster. Both are foolishly compassionate, and both are ultimately failures.

[268] Saul Kripke writes, "My suggestion is that it [Wittgenstein's 'image of pain'] enters into the formation and quality of my attitude toward the sufferer. I, who have myself experienced pain and can imagine it, can imaginatively put *myself* in place of the sufferer; and my ability to do this gives my attitude a quality that it would lack if I had merely learned a set of rules as to when to attribute pain to others and how to help them." See Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1982: 140. Only Jude is Wittgensteinian in this sense; Sue's rule-bound response to pain lacks the power of imagination.

[269] Hardy, *Jude*, 18.

and cities and humans, and absent of agricultural labor. Elaine Scarry's essay "Work and the Body in Hardy," which argues that "human character has for [Hardy] its deepest registration in the activity of work," describes perfectly nearly every Hardy novel *except* this one.[270] Work in *Jude* is *not* a rhythmic, reciprocal activity in which man makes nature and nature makes man. In fact, one might say that *Jude* figures the consequences of a professionalization that has splintered man and nature. When one cannot *use* nature or work with it in a meaningful way, "being kind" to its animals is all that remains.

This kindness, though, carries a whiff of failure. It was Phillotson, after all, who first instructed Jude in the importance of compassion for the non-human. The schoolmaster's parting instructions to the child were, "Be a good boy, remember; and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can. And if ever you come to Christminster remember you hunt me out for old acquaintance' sake."[271] We know that the advice to "read all you can" turns out badly, and that coming to Christminster and hunting up Phillotson turns out badly, too. So why does the advice to be kind to animals and birds come from this dubious source? We aren't meant to read against Jude's ethical interest in the non-human; Hardy's work as a whole is far too invested in an animal-human relation for that. But it is peculiar nonetheless that Phillotson serves as the mouthpiece for this bit of practical wisdom. It seems to establish another link or doubling between Jude and the schoolmaster. Both are foolishly compassionate, and both are ultimately failures.

[270] Scarry, "Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth-Century Novelists," in *Representations* 3 (Summer 1983): 94.
[271] Hardy, *Jude*, 10-11.

Repetition and Remarriage

The nineteenth-century novel is born in the marriage plots of Jane Austen and reaches fulfillment—its final destination—in the remarriage plots of *Jude the Obscure*. In this history the female protagonist loses some of her power. Unlike Austen's "regulated haters," fierce social critics and tacticians who try to transform a hostile world by assessing it correctly and diplomatically, Sue is an impotent neurotic, unable to accommodate to the rules of the game. Her targets are deserving, but her hatred is *un*-regulated; its form of sociality is exile.

Sue's two late returns, her conversion to Christianity and her remarriage to Phillotson, should both be read as forms of dislike. The conversion is not a moral choice, but a spasm of frustrated grief. We should understand it not as a turn *to* an identification with Christianity, but as a turn away the world—a repudiation, not an embrace.[272] More important, Sue does not remarry Phillotson because she has *overcome* her distaste for him (a dynamic from to the Austen marriage plot); she remarries him *because* of this distaste. (As for Jude, he is tricked into his remarriage, a repetition of the fall into his first.) Sue makes explicit that this final rejection of Jude is not due to her dislike of him: "You don't see that it is a matter of conscience with me, and not of dislike to you," she says, before the two share a frenzied moment of passionate parting.[273] It is typical in this novel that Sue becomes most attracted to Jude when she is leaving him, which suggests that there is pleasure inherent in separation.

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[272] Christopher Lane has suggested that the Victorians saw a connection between Christianity and hatred. One reverend even argued that hatred of the world was a sign of spiritual faith: "A strong, universal, and an ever-deepening hatred of the world is essentially the sign of the disciple" (Lane, 19).
[273] Hardy, *Jude*, 354.

When Freud observed the little boy playing "fort-da" with the wooden reel attached to the string, throwing it away and then dragging it back, he identified a few possible moments of pleasure in the game. There was the reclamation of the object, which represented joyful reunion with the mother who had gone away. However, the boy would often enact just the first part of the game—the throwing away. In that case, Freud thought, it could be that the child felt pleasure at mastering his unpleasurable experience. But Freud doesn't linger on this explanation. He suggests that throwing the object away was a form of symbolic revenge against his mother, who had left him in the room. "'All right, then, go away!'" he imagines the boy thinking. "'I don't need you. I'm sending you away myself.'"[274] We could imagine Sue saying something a bit different: "All right, then, go away! I don't need you. I'm myself." It's not agency that is at stake but individuation.

Tess's attachment to her infant Sorrow is also ambivalent, and marked by moments of closeness and rejection:

> When the infant had taken its fill [of breast milk] the young mother sat it upright in her lap, and looking into the far distance dandled it with a gloomy indifference that was almost dislike; then all of a sudden she fell to violently kissing it some dozens of times, as if she could never leave off, the child crying at the vehemence of an onset which strangely combined passionateness with contempt.[275]

In Hardy, ambivalence is far from milquetoast indecision; nor is it, as in Trollope, disembodied rationalization. It's indifference, difference, and violent attachment, all at once. The baby's crying as a reaction to the vehemence is all too appropriate. At such moments of crisis in Hardy there is often nothing to say; no language can suffice,

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[274] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 1989: 15.
[275] Hardy, *Tess*, 90.

communicate, or hold up under this extreme psychic pain. What can a rabbit do when its leg is caught in a gin but cry? What can a baby do when its mother expresses her rage of love but cry? What can Jude say when Sue leaves him, again, for Phillotson?

> He clasped her, and kissed her weeping face as he had scarcely ever done before, and they remained in silence till she said, 'Good-bye, good-bye!' And then gently pressing him away she got free, trying to mitigate the sadness by saying: 'We'll be dear friends just the same, Jude, won't we? And we'll see each other sometimes—Yes!—and forget all this, and try to be as we were long ago?'
>
> Jude did not permit himself to speak, but turned and descended the stairs.[276]

Raymond Williams links identification and marriage in his reading of Hardy when he describes marriage as a "choice primarily of a way to live, of an identity in the identification with this or that other person."[277] It's important to remember that in the marriage vow taken by the two parties, one does not promise to *be like* the other person; one promises an identity of behavior: to love, honor, serve, obey the same regardless of the variety of circumstances, namely wealth, poverty, health, and sickness. If a couple acquires an identity based on identification, it is in the eyes of the law and society—an identity assigned by how others behave towards the unit. In *Jude* this is most apparent in the reaction of Jude and Arabella's landlord. At first, the landlord doubts that the two are married, and observing Arabella kissing Jude one night only makes him more suspicious. "He was about to give them notice to quit, till by chance overhearing her one night haranguing Jude in rattling terms, and ultimately flinging a shoe at his head, he recognized the note of ordinary wedlock; and concluding that they must be respectable,

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[276] Hardy, *Jude*, 354.
[277] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1973: 210.

said no more."[278] This example demonstrates that what passes as marriage is dictated by the outside world.

Sue resists this identity-making function of marriage by preserving her difference, emphasizing the self as greater than or in excess of the union. Her remarriage does so doubly. Sue's great fear is that she will not be recognized and read correctly—that she will be mistaken for being other than who she is. Repetition, paradoxically, is a defense against the possibility of misinterpretation: She can keep reminding Phillotson, and herself, who she is only by continually rejecting him. Her repeated disliking produces the possibility of representation in a conventional world.

Often narrative repetitions take the form of symbols that add up—the color blue in *Madame Bovary*, the color red in *Tess*—or a Dickensian description that tags a character. Those repetitions seem to be for the reader, whether as memory aides or interpretive richness. In *Jude* the fabula itself repeats. This seems excessive—is the reader in danger of forgetting what happened last time? Actually, yes: *Jude* goes to show that readers are precisely in this danger. The point of the repetitions of the plot in *Jude* seems to be to create a situation in which misinterpretation is not possible: within the novelistic world and between the novel and reader. The plot as well as the character of Sue are driven by an anxiety of being misread. By repetition, *Jude* ensures that no one has to rely on faulty memory. No one has to "learn" anything about Sue, because she continuously issues new reminders of what and who she is.

Jude is not governed by a seasonal or cyclical logic. Nor are its repetitions a matter of Proustian habit or what Gérard Genette calls the iterative. Neither does it deal in

[278] Hardy, *Jude*, 384-85.

the kind of historical repetition that is a concern in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, in which we learn that for the resident of Weatherbury, "the citizen's *Then* is the rustic's *Now*… his present is futurity."[279] Repetition in *Jude* is not about habit or narrative series or historical time. It has to do with the repetition of discrete actions—marrying the same wrong person twice, as both Jude and Sue do; moving back to Christminster; crossing and recrossing the same paths on different errands. These are repeated acts, but they are not "repetitive."

In an iterative narrative, the reader will have the challenge of figuring which singulative (occurring once) events are determinative and which are merely there—what matters, in other words, and what doesn't. (Genette: "We should not, however, infer too quickly from this notion of internal determination that the interposition of a singular event always has the effect of 'determining' the iterative series."[280]) In an oscillating structure like *Jude*'s, all the repeated acts acquire equal importance. This means that the plot is not characterized by a dynamic of "filler" and scenes of climax, but by scenes that pile on with no peaks or valleys. The reader feels that things are happening, but nothing is changing.

Repeated acts also interfere with diachrony—in plain terms, how is the passage of time marked? In a *bildungsroman* we will know roughly "what time it is"—within the world of the novel and also how close the book is to completion—based on "where we are," if the protagonist has identified the proper love object, courted or married, achieved social status, and so forth. But were it not for the fact of the narrative's length, any

[279] Hardy, *FFMC*, 127.
[280] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1983: 131.

number of plot points could be a conclusion to *Jude*. While iterative repetition covers up the passage of time, the repetition of discrete acts draws attention to it without in any way clarifying it. It is like the structural equivalent of the many chiming clocks in Casterbridge, which ring six o'clock for a quarter of an hour. A listener knows without doubt that *time is happening*, but that same listener could not really say exactly what time it is.

One should distinguish *Jude* from the problems of repetition that J. Hillis Miller investigated in *Fiction and Repetition* (1982). Miller's deconstructive readings of Conrad, Emily Brontë, Thackeray, Hardy, and Woolf circle around the "aporia" of the absent center, gaining special power when they are in dialogue with characters who are set up as interpreters in endless signifying chains, like Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*. But Jude Fawley is not an interpreter of texts; he is a failed translator. This sets up a different critical paradigm. There *are* authoritative texts in *Jude*. The problem is not that they are un-interpretable or prey to multiplying and spiraling meanings; the problem is that they are first, inaccessible and second, irrelevant. *Jude* does not present a hermeneutic riddle. Miller puts the question of Hardy's late novels this way: "Why is it that most human beings go through life somnambulistically, compelled to repeat the same mistakes in love, so inflicting on themselves and on others the same suffering, again and again?"[281] This is undoubtedly the question behind *Tess*; it is, however, not the question behind *Jude*. The question behind *Jude* is something like, "Why is it impossible to live according to the world's rules, but also impossible to live outside of them?" Repetition and dislike are both consequences of this social problem.

[281] J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1982: 150.

Repetition is also a sign of naturalist compulsion, though Hardy wears the label of naturalism uneasily. Unlike Gissing, Zola, or Dreiser, he is not concerned with either commodities or urban life; nor does he take Zola's strictly sociological or scientific approach. Naturalists were attentive to themes of consumption and specularity, with the consequence that the naturalist body has either been theorized as brutish (as in *McTeague*) or so shot through with desire and drive as to be scarcely coherent as a body at all (as in *Sister Carrie*). Neither body properly characterizes Hardy, even at his most sensual.[282] Certain aspects of his work—his interest in the New Woman and degeneration—lumped him in with the "French realism" of his day, but he is a naturalist in really only one sense: in his investigation of, in Zola's words, "temperament, not character."[283]

What does it mean to prioritize temperament? One may be tempted to read Hardy's knowing, distant narrator as indeed "looking down," like *Tess*'s President of the Immortals, on the players below. But I want to resist the simplifications of the so-called "spectator-brute dynamic," which puts characters through the paces of a downward spiral. As Jennifer Fleissner has observed of the American context, rather than subjecting characters to cosmological forces, naturalism explores the participation of individual characters in their own failure. She writes, "Naturalism's disturbing quality is not that it

[282] Scarry writes that "The human creature is for him not now and then but habitually embodied: it has at every moment a physical circumference and boundary. Thus it is, in its work and its play, in the midst of great yearning and in the moment of great fatigue, forever rubbing up against and leaving traces of itself (its blood) on the world, as the world is forever rubbing up against and leaving traces of itself (its paint) on the human creature" (Scarry 90). This sense of the body as a terrain of crossings with the world of work and nature is more complex and mediated than the typical naturalist body that rotely feeds its cravings and urges for alcohol, sex, and sleep.

[283] Émile Zola, Preface to the Second Edition of *Thérèse Raquin* (New York: Penguin Classics), 2005: 4.

removes agency, plain and simple, but that it ties the agency we desire, that hope of mastery and completion, to repetition and failure."[284] Indeed, to understand the characters in *Jude* as determined is to miss the many ways in which they assert responsibility for their actions. (This is why James Wood's notion that Hardy was "consumed by a theological bitterness that made the freedom necessary to successful narrative almost impossible" and that he turned to poetry because "he could see that he had perforce abandoned narrative itself" is inadequate.[285]) No one could deny that the narrative is shot through with contemporary determinist discourses, but the form the determinism takes is unusual: It doesn't take the form of genetic destiny or some kind of human automation; it takes the form of a conscious, and self-aware, inability to learn or change.

Hardy is, like Zola, concerned with characters who are physiological. But to imagine that alcohol or sexual desire or Jude's family history are "responsible" for Jude's actions is already to have imagined that a taste for drink or feelings of desire or family were apart from or somehow *put upon* an authentic or unmarked rational subject named Jude Fawley. Jude *is* prone to drink, raised by an unsympathetic aunt because his parents disastrously wed, governed by sexual desires. I understand these characters in the way that Bernard Williams understands Agamemnon: as making decisions about how they will accept or live out their fate—as "put[ting] on the harness of necessity."[286] Sue

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[284] Jennifer L. Fleissner, *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2004: 50.
[285] James Wood, "Thomas Hardy," in *The Fun Stuff and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux), 2012: 255.
[286] Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2008: 135. Jude himself understands his situation as akin to Agamemnon's. "Nothing can be done," he says of the children's death. "Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue" (339). Interestingly, Sue immediately interprets this quotation not for what it says about their most recent tragic episode, but for what the very fact of

dislikes compulsively, but there is no other, more agreeable version of her that we can imagine. Critics who invoke the possibility that everything would have worked out fine if this couple had only used contraception miss the point.

Repetition due to not-learning does not necessarily indicate mental deficiency or stupidity. As Avital Ronell writes, "Stupidity never admits to fault or error; it is dependent upon prejudicial entanglements and epistemological illusions."[287] Jude and Sue, however, frequently admit errors and mistakes. They entirely lack what Ronell calls stupidity's "own satiety." Repetition has to be done from scratch every time; it is the product of thinking. When Jude goes out to court Arabella instead of studying the New Testament, for example, the narrator calls him "the predestinate Jude," giving credence to a reading that would privilege a preordained cosmic fall. Yet one sentence later we learn that "foreseeing such an event [going out with Arabella] he had already arrayed himself in his best clothes."[288] The same structure of decision applies to Jude's drinking, after Arabella leaves him: "What could he do of a lower kind than self-extermination; what was there less noble, more in keeping with his present degraded position? He could get drunk. Of course that was it; he had forgotten."[289] In both cases Jude *decides*, but the definition of a decision is somewhat unusual: in the first instance he plans, and in the second, he remembers.

Fleissner argues that repetition indicates an excessive attachment to developmental stages, which might indicate that Hardy's remarriages are a way of

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knowing the reference reveals about Jude's *life* as tragedy: "My poor Jude—how you've missed everything!—you more than I, for I did get you! To think you should know that by your unassisted reading, and yet be in poverty and despair!" (Hardy, *Jude,* 339)

[287] Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 2002: 44.

[288] Hardy, *Jude,* 44.

[289] Ibid, 71.

"getting it right" or achieving "completion." But as *Jude* makes clear, some developmental stages are more like formal constraints or ontological categories than actions or events one can get past. The repetition of action indicates some difficulty around completion, but I think Hardy's point is not that Jude and Sue are uniquely bad at marrying, but that something about marrying resists finishing: How can you be done with it? (He also shows that divorce, as the dialectical other of marriage, is just as interminable.)

Even in remarriage, Sue does not accept that a transformation has occurred; rather, she insists that *no* transformation has occurred—that things are just the same. She denies the passage of time altogether.[290] This is important to the mood of the novel. According to Stanley Cavell, for a remarriage to be a comedy, the remarriers must accept the paradox of difference in sameness. "The concept that underlines both the classical problem of comedy and that of marriage," he writes, is "the problem and concept of identity." He argues that in certain Hollywood comedies, identity is figured through difference—"either the difference between men and women, or between innocence and experience, or between one person and another, or between one circumstance and another—all emblematized by the difference, hence the sameness, between a marriage

[290] Again, Sullivan is suggestive but ultimately not the final word. He writes that the "selective inattention" that is the result of dissociated motives means that "we don't have the experience from which we might profit—that is, although it occurs, we never notice what it must mean; in fact we never notice that a good deal of it has occurred at all" (Sullivan, 319). This is a tempting way to explain Jude and Sue's not-learning. But it *over* explains it, by returning us to trauma, and imagining that Jude and Sue are absent or empty or damaged. Some of the responsibility for their not-learning lies in the things they are trying to learn, which, Hardy shows, resist a traditional model of development or achievement.

and a remarriage."[291] In the remarriage comedies he studies, the remarriers undergo profound changes so that their ceremonial repetition contains the possibility of new meaning. Sue refuses this possibility: She is not going to marry Phillotson *again,* thereby signifying some transformation; according to her, she is *already* married to Phillotson. She insists that not only is she not doing anything new, but she's not doing anything at *all*, except formalizing the existing status quo. Her participation in her fate is to accept it.

The first marriage to Phillotson is nearly elided, raced through without dialogue and dispensed of quickly.[292] We learn only that Sue's face was "nervously set," and "Phillotson seemed not to notice, to be surrounded by a mist which prevented his seeing the emotions of others."[293] Jude is the witness to this event, necessary to complete the union from which he is excluded. Indeed throughout *Jude*, again and again, things can be spoken in the presence of third parties that cannot be spoken with just two.[294] After the death of the children, Sue and Jude circle in fruitless exchanges about their own status as a couple. Only in front of Arabella is Sue able to make the fatal pronouncement, "I am not his wife."[295] A denial, like a vow of commitment, is something that gathers force from being performed and witnessed. The necessity of speech here is related to the fact

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[291] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1981: 55.
[292] Hardy similarly races through the wedding in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and narrates not the exchange of vows but the chattering of the Casterbridge poor outside the church, who function as witnesses at a remove.
[293] Hardy, *Jude,* 175.
[294] Eve Sedgwick describes performatives, including marriage, as moments of crisis, in which authority exposes its potential weaknesses and opens a space, no matter how small, to be challenged in any number of ways, by the one who is directly interpellated and, crucially, by the witnesses to the scene. Hardy, of course, is significantly less optimistic about the possibility of disinterpellation—or at least less sanguine about its costs. Still, my reading in Sedgwick is what has caused me to take interest in the triangles of witnessing that structure the novel.
[295] Hardy, *Jude*, 347.

that being someone's wife or not being someone's wife is a social category: to tell your husband that you are no longer his wife has no force unless someone else hears you say it.[296]

After marriage is made official, its consensual powers grow stronger and are reinforced by new and ongoing acts of witnessing. As we saw in the case of Jude and Arabella's landlord, the meaning of a marriage resides in what is known or appears to be for others, or is performed in front of them. Even Sue, who does not admit the power of the world even as she reacts to it continually, says that her remarriage to Phillotson is also "for form's sake, and to satisfy the world, which does not see things as they are. But of course I *am* his wife already. Nothing has changed that" (360). She knows that others will, and must, see the facts differently. "I am going to marry him again, as it would be called by you," she says.

The social confusion Sue recognizes—what is repetition for you is nothing for me—is also a form of social remedy. As Phillotson explains to his friend Gillingham (who, like Anny for Arabella, is always on hand to offer the world's cheap wisdom) he hopes the remarriage will restore his standing in the community: "It will set me right in the eyes of the clergy and orthodox laity, who have never forgiven me for letting her

[296] A wonderful passage on the problem of living a category is found in Erving Goffman. "In our society, to speak of a woman as one's wife is to place this person in a category of which there can be only one current member, yet a category is nonetheless involved, and she is merely a member of it. Unique, historically entangled features are likely to tint the edges of our relation to this person; still, at the center is a full array of socially standardized anticipations that we have regarding her conduct and nature as an instance of the category 'wife,' for example, that she will look after the house, entertain our friends, and be able to bear children…. (Surely it is scandalous to speak of marriage as a particularistic relationship)." See Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.), 1963: 53.

go."[297] After the ceremony, he assures Sue that she needn't fear that he will attempt to consummate the union sexually: "It is for our good socially to do this, and that's it's justification, if it was not my reason."[298]

In other words, there's no need for her to jump out the window again. For a moment it seems that in the repetition of her dislike through remarriage, Sue has moved from being an intimidated body to an intimidating one, acquiring some of the privileges of Barthes' liberal subject. After all, Phillotson says he is prepared to endure her celibacy. But after Jude comes to visit her and her passion for him is rekindled, she punishes herself by entering Phillotson's bedroom to do her duty. "Weddings be funerals 'a b'lieve nowadays," the Widow Edlin observes, and the witness to the marriage becomes a mourner.[299]

The pre-marriage—the scene when, before the first ceremony with Phillotson, Jude walks Sue down the aisle in a nearly empty church—also occurs in the presence of a witness.

> [Jude] passively acquiesced with her wish to go in [to the church], and they entered by the western door. The only person inside the gloomy building was a charwoman cleaning. …Sue still held Jude's arm, almost as if she loved him. …They strolled undemonstratively up the nave towards the altar railing, which they stood against in silence, turning then and walking down the nave again, her hand still on his arm, precisely like a couple just married.[300]

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[297] Hardy, *Jude*, 365.
[298] Ibid, 370.
[299] Ibid, 398. This is not the only time Hardy links remarriage to death. Not only does Alec meet his end in his reunion with Tess, but *The Mayor of Casterbridge* casts Henchard and Susan's remarriage as a funeral: Death is the subject that the Casterbridge poor discuss outside the church.
[300] Ibid, 172-73.

It is difficult to say just what occurs in this bit of "unceremonious companionship" at the church. Certainly the ceremoniousness of the wedding day has the power to spread, and turns their idling into something more than rehearsal or prospective parody; they walk down the aisle without walking down the aisle. It doesn't mean what it would if they were marrying, but it doesn't *not* mean that, either—instead of mocking or parodying the marriage to Phillotson, it precedes it, displaces it, and challenges it, casting what follows as the repetition or copy. Just about the only thing it *isn't* is a joke. It is playacting free of playfulness.

What does it mean to do the things that everyone else does? How is it possible to do something without "really" doing? Can you perform a norm privately, without activating its social meaning? This walk down the aisle is a moment of imitation: the imitation of a known convention as well as the imitation of one's own life, a kind of mimetic "trying on" that fails to meet the official standard. And "precisely" this pose—arms touching, "like a couple"—will be referenced again when Jude, after Sue's divorce, is eager to "strut arm in arm, like any other engaged couple."[301] Crucially, the pre-enactment is not a space of resistance or potential. It only brings sorrow: "The too suggestive incident, entirely of her making, nearly broke down Jude."[302]

The Tail of Hair

I have been pursuing an argument centering on Sue, Jude, and Phillotson. But what of our fourth remarrier, Arabella? She too is part of this story, principally as an object that others dislike. Of course, when Arabella first throws the "characteristic part" of her

[301] Ibid, 258.
[302] Ibid, 173.

father's pig at him, Jude's attention is drawn to what he *does* like: a "round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial female human—no more, no less."[303] But then comes their wedding night.

> A little chill overspread him at her first unrobing. A long tail of hair, which Arabella wore twisted up in an enormous knob at the back of her head, was deliberately unfastened, stroked out, and hung upon the looking-glass which he had brought her.
>
> 'What—it wasn't your own?' he said, with a sudden distaste for her.[304]

Arabella turns out to be both more and less than a complete female human. Her hair does not become visible until it was taken away, revealed as a part horribly detachable from the whole. She hangs the hair on a mirror, so that whoever stoops to examine himself must also confront her presence and difference in the form of the tail, this real fake thing that will not go away. And if hanging the hair in the mirror makes Arabella a less "complete" woman—does this mean she is made masculine, or is there a third term here between woman and man?—it also feminizes Jude, who sees himself and the hair in the same image.

Hair is a common synecdoche for a woman—one's a blonde, one a redhead, the other a brunette. (If the hat makes the man, does the hair makes the woman?) Elisabeth Gitter has studied the deep interest Victorians took in hair, which was portrayed as a trap as well as an art, and a sign of duplicity. "Victorian writers were fascinated not only by the problem of 'reading' women's hair—interpreting its meaning and exploring its symbolic value—but also by the hair itself," she writes. "No other writers have lavished

[303] Ibid, 38, 39.
[304] Ibid, 58.

so much attention on the physical properties of women's hair: texture, color, style, curliness."[305] Arabella's hair is a forgery, and Jude is a poor reader of it. But what matters more is that Arabella's hair is not discredited once and for all time. It is a repeated reference; it can never be put down, or up, for good.

Hanging the hair on the mirror gets to be a habit. When Arabella shows up in Aldbrickham, Sue refuses to let her into the house. Then she goes to visit Arabella in the dirty public-house. Jude's first wife has not removed from the bed. The scene is depressing. "Sue looked out at the rain, and at the dirty toilet-cover, and at the detached tail of Arabella's hair hanging on the looking-glass, just as it had done in Jude's time; and wished she had not come."[306] When Arabella sucks her cheek in her dimple appears; when she stops, it vanishes without a trace. But the hair always has to be somewhere, and when it's "away" it's most present, dangling in one's self-reflection. It takes up so much space that there isn't room for anyone else's hair in Arabella's life: Anny tells her that in mourning she ought to wear a lock of Cartlett's hair, but Arabella hasn't got one. Perhaps she's only returning Cartlett's dislike for her hair. At the agricultural fair we learn that "her charms and her idiosyncrasies, her supernumerary hair-coils, and her optional dimples, were becoming as a tale that is told."[307] There is only one person who likes Arabella's hair—Arabella.

But Arabella is not to be dismissed. In this world of idealizations, she has a privileged relationship to the real. She is the only person who is able to tell when Sue and Jude are "really" married. She knows, when she first comes to the house at Aldbrickham,

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[305] Elisabeth Gitter, "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," in *PMLA* 99.5 (1984): 941.
[306] Hardy, *Jude*, 269.
[307] Ibid, 291.

that they have not had sex; she knows, when Sue visits the next day, that they have. She understands Jude more than anyone, including Sue, even if this understanding is paired with disrespect: "Never such a tender fool as Jude is if a woman seems in trouble, and coaxes him a bit! Just as he used to be about birds and things."[308] Arabella is false in appearance, but this very falseness makes her able to penetrate it. She never idealizes—Jude is exactly as handsome as she believes—and so is able to manipulate. She works towards the future uncompulsively.

Arabella is a flexible being who is always adapting and yet always herself—she never grows or changes, but she comfortably plays different roles, all of which are a version of the same role. Significantly, the only role she cannot play is that of mother. But she participates in narrative development: She moves the plot. Her marriage to Jude is the first consequential event and prevents him from his studies; her return jealously provokes Sue to consummate the non-marriage with Jude; she sends Father Time to Jude and Sue; she remarries Jude; she refuses to send his letter to Sue, which leads to his death. For Hardy, there is something crude about this flexibility and adaptability, something as distasteful as the tail of hair itself. But there is also something compelling, some efficacy, some truth. It is Arabella, after all, who gets the novel's last word.

How to Read **Jude**

My argument has been woven through with references to the tragic aspects of *Jude the Obscure,* to its disturbing mood, its depiction of suffering, and to how difficult it is to like. And yet, according to the novel, its most-abused characters are not as bad off as all that. Hardy even makes a fleeting and curious reference to something unexpected—their

[308] Ibid, 270.

happiness. When Jude and Sue fail to get married, Sue "whisper[s] nervously" that Jude is not to tell Father Time the truth about their legal status. "If we are as happy as we are," she asks, "what does it matter to anybody?" The next line of the novel begins a new chapter.

> The purpose of a chronicler of moods and deeds does not require him to express his personal views upon the grave controversey above given. That the twain were happy—between their times of sadness—was indubitable.[309]

Indubitable happiness? In *Jude the Obscure*? Really?

This happiness arrives at the midpoint of the novel, when Sue is divorced from Phillotson and Jude from Arabella. The two cousins are living together, passing as married, caring for the child of Jude's first marriage. Work and accommodations have been difficult to keep, but they are holding on outside the law. Sue has nervously put their mood in a conditional: "*If* we are as happy as we are."

The question, of course, is not one of degree, of rating Sue's happiness on a scale of one to ten to determine how happy they are. It is not even a question of whether or not we agree with Sue that she is "really" happy. The problem has to do with the nature of her happiness as it is claimed. Sue's dislike, we saw in her exchange with the Widow Edlin, cannot be expressed; it can only be experienced. The opposite is true of happiness. Happiness in this novel cannot be experienced—it can *only* be expressed. The narrator asserts it confidently ("indubitable"), but Sue can only pose it as a conditional and as a question.[310] One might say that the "happiness" referred to here is the sexual relationship. Matz puts it this way: "Hardy is at once coy and suggestive about their fornication. To

[309] Ibid, 288.
[310] One could read the "indubitable" ironically, I suppose, but it's so much more interesting to take it at face value.

take one example: in one scene in Part Fifth, after Jude kisses Sue and bolts the door behind them, Hardy cuts to a line-break (an unusual typographical occurrence in the novel, and therefore all the more prominent here) and then this line: "The next morning it was wet."[311]

But Sue never claims to know happiness first-hand; she is explicitly more concerned with what their happiness has to do with others than with how it feels. I think that Hardy is suggesting something more, or in addition to, the elision or refusal to narrate sex. I think he is suggesting a theory of happiness itself: that happiness is always a bit apart, something that is impossible to experience.[312] It is recognizable from the outside, but uninhabitable from within, something one might remember but never really feel. As Schopenhauer put it, "For only pain and want can be felt positively; and therefore they proclaim themselves; well-being, on the contrary, is merely negative."[313] This is different than happiness in Brontë, which can be absorbed from the outside like "a divine dew."[314] Here it really can't be. The suggestion is that the only thing that Sue *can* experience with confidence, even if that confidence is shaky, is dislike.

One final question: How is this novel to be read? Sue's hostile disliking, I think, has implications for our position vis-à-vis the text. She refuses to be identified with by Phillotson or Jude—or the reader. Thinking about what kind of reading practice *Jude the Obscure* proposes, we should use as a model the triangles in the novel, in which a witness's presence allows a scene to be performed in a certain way. We do not read *Jude*

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[311] Matz, 34, n25.
[312] This is somewhat different than what D.A. Miller calls the "nonnarratable," which has to do with the novel's necessary resistance to closure. I think that Hardy is making a point about life, not just literary form.
[313] Schirmacher, 26.
[314] Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics), 2008: 250.

the Obscure in the spirit of a sympathetic going-along-with, or the consensual construction of reality—we readers are the necessary third party to Sue's ongoing trials. Or could it be that *Jude the Obscure* asks us to think about reading as an act of dislike and disidentification akin to Sue's own? Disidentifications, like a vows of commitment, gather force from being witnessed. Such an idea returns us to Barthes, casting the novel itself as the textual body that intimidates *us*, the readers. There is nothing to *do* with this book—it teaches no lessons and has no formal heirs. In *Jude the Obscure*, the marriage plot—and the nineteenth-century novel itself—comes to an end. We cannot instrumentalize our reading or put it to use. All we can do is endure it.

And endure it, and endure it some more. To be sure, the repetitions of *Jude* make a repetition of reading it a somewhat unappealing undertaking. (It is difficult to imagine anyone rereading *Jude* every year, as Gilbert Ryle is said to have done with all six of Jane Austen's novels.) And yet it seems that to read *Jude* well—to read it in the terms that it sets forth—one would have to be continually reading it. It operates outside the commonly understood *raison d'être* of narrative, what William Flesch summarizes as "being able to learn through the experiences that others narrate."[315] If *Jude* contains "lessons," they are not about content. They are not, that is, lessons that *could* be learned from one reading.

Nabokov thought that it was only through rereading that one could take in a book as a whole. "When we read a book for the first time the very process of laboriously moving our eyes from left to right, line after line, page after page, this complicated physical work upon the book, the very process of learning in terms of space and time what the book is about, this stands between us and artistic appreciation," he wrote. For

[315] William Flesch, Comeuppance: Costly Signaling, Altruistic Punishment, and Other Biological Components of Fiction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2007: 8.

him rereading was a technique of familiarization, a way of learning the book so that one can move around in it easily. "In reading a book, we must have time to acquaint ourselves with it."[316] As if we are putting on a pair of glasses, the less one is aware of the eyes, the more one sees.

It is the very experience of doing it again—and again, and again, and again—that is at stake in *Jude*. In the case of Jude and Sue, repetition does not yield more knowledge, more fluidity, or more flexibility; Hardy does not see a necessary relation between habit and comfort. Hopefully a reader will gain something in the endeavor. The most profound way a reader can inhabit and take up the accumulated dislikings of *Jude* is through her own rereading. To get to rereading, one must, of course, first put the book down, just as Sue had to divorce Phillotson before she could remarry him. Perhaps that termination is the pleasure that gets compounded on repeated readings of *Jude*, an inversion of *fort-da*: the pleasure of putting it down, disliking it, rejecting it, once more.

[316] Vladimir Nabokov, Lectures on Literature (New York: Harvest), 1980: 3.

That Burning Clime:
Play and Pedagogy in Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë and her critics code realism as the crowning stage in a developmental narrative.[317] This is often taken up in the terms she set out in her good-bye letter to her youth, the brief piece "Farewell to Angria," which spelled out her fatigue with the variety of that changeable landscape itself. "I long to quit for a while that burning clime where we have sojourned too long," she wrote. "Its skies flame—the glow of sunset is always upon it. The mind would cease from excitement & turn now to a cooler region, where the dawn breaks grey and sober & the coming day for a time at least is subdued in clouds."[318]

This chapter challenges the teleological account of Brontë's oeuvre and suggests a new way of reading her career: not as a series of stages accomplished, overcome, and surpassed, but as a field of play in which an intermediate form—the school composition, or *devoir*—has a privileged place. The devoir helps us connect her juvenilia and novels, and reveals that what seemed to be left behind was in fact carried along and transformed, both formally and thematically. I argue that the devoir is best understood as a transitional text, which Brontë wrestled with, rejected, and disavowed, and ultimately used to give her novels their distinctive flavor and motifs.[319] The hatred that circulates and seethes in

[317] See, for example, Meg Harris Williams, "Aesthetic Conflicts in Charlotte Brontë's Juvenilia," in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 42:1 (June 1987): 29-45.
[318] "Farewell to Angria," in Brontës, *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics), 2010: 314.
[319] I owe the idea of disavowal to Kate E. Brown, who described Brontë's juvenilia as disavowing her grief over her siblings' deaths. My idea of *what* is being disavowed is different, but I'd like to preserve her idea of disavowal as the structure for thinking the relationship between the juvenilia and realism. Brown's argument is rooted in the material objecthood of the juvenilia, not its content, as well as its collaborative method of production. "To put them away as childish things is not, then, a repudiation. Rather, it is the disavowal by which material objects are converted to psychic treasure, a treasure whose ongoing, if secret, availability motivates and enables a construction of 'the real'"

her novels, which Christopher Lane memorably characterized as an "aggression…inseparable from society," is the residue of an ongoing struggle to put down the juvenile and adolescent impulses and structures.[320] To begin, I examine the juvenilia in light of theories of play; then I take ideas of play and use them to analyze the devoir. It is the devoir, which permits Brontë to maintain a connection to her juvenilia, that makes it possible for her to engage with realism at all.

Play

"Play" has a rich history in literary criticism that follows a line of thinking from Romanticism through Derrida and Barthes.[321] From Romanticism, play became

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(Brown 415). See Kate E. Brown. "Beloved Objects: Mourning, Materiality, and Charlotte Brontë's 'Never-Ending Story,'" in *ELH* 65: 2 (Summer 1998): 395-421.

[320] See Christopher Lane, "Charlotte Brontë on the Pleasure of Hating," in *ELH* 69:1 (Spring 2002): 199.

[321] See "Rhetorics of the Imaginary" in Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1997.

Jeffrey Franklin has also analyzed the nineteenth-century novel in terms of play, specifically vis-à-vis discourses of gambling, theatricality, and aesthetic theory. I am not as interested in analyzing *scenes* of play—the trope of the theater in *Villette,* for example—as I am in thinking about play as part of an authorial strategy across works. See Jeffrey Franklin, *Serious Play: The Cultural Form of the Nineteenth-Century Realist Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 1999.

Clinician Michael Parsons has warned of the difficulty of pinning down a definition of play: "The problem of trying too hard for a single, inclusive definition is illustrated by a statement like 'playing a game by the rules may be derivative of play, but it is not play' (Solnit, 19871, p. 215). It is true that rules may be used defensively to prevent more exploratory sorts of play, but nevertheless 'games' are 'played'. Rather than seeking definitions, it is more helpful to think in terms of a family of concepts, in the Wittgensteinian sense, which includes play, plays, playfulness, games, sports, and so on" (Parsons 872). See Michael Parsons, "The Logic of Play in Psychoanalysis," in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 80 (1999): 871-884.

Finally, though this chapter theorizes play, it does not do so in terms from "play studies." For a reading of the Victorian period that does so, see Matthew Kaiser, "The World in Play: A Portrait of a Victorian Concept," in *New Literary History* 40:1 (Winter 2009): 105-129. Kaiser argues that play was a defining experience for the Victorians and part of their exposure to modernity, and outlines seven rhetorics of play from the time.

associated with autonomy, originality, innocence, and freedom, and a notion that *all* art is play, just as all humans possess capacities for play—and, indeed, according to Friedrich Schiller, are most human when they are most at play.[322] I mean to describe something different, and to insist on a separation between play and the rule-bound art of realism. For even if the novel is the freest of forms—there is no authority who has laid out the proper rules—Brontë clearly experienced it in terms of rules or putting on some kind of restraint. As she wrote to George Lewes in 1847,

> You warn me to beware of melodrama, and you exhort me to adhere to the real. When I first began to write, so impressed was I with the truth of the principles you advocate, that I determined to take Nature and Truth as my sole guides, and to follow to their very footprints; I restrained my imagination, eschewed romance, repressed excitement; over-bright colouring, too, I avoided, and sought to produce something which should be soft, grave, and true.[323]

And yet, she continues, the publishers told her that though she had been "faithful to nature," her novel (*The Professor*) was "deficient in 'startling incident' and 'thrilling excitement.'" What do they want? What counts as real?

> Dear sir, is not the real experience of each individual very limited? And, if a writer dwells upon that solely or principally, is he not in danger of repeating himself, and also becoming an egotist? Then, too, imagination is a strong, restless faculty, which claims to be heard and exercised: are we to be quite deaf to her cry, and insensate to her struggles? When she shows us bright pictures, are we never to look at them, and try to reproduce them? And when she is eloquent, and speaks rapidly and urgently in our ear, are we not to write to her dictation?[324]

Brontë's frustration resides in the rules she has internalized, the opposition between "real

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[322] "Man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays." Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, in Charles W. Eliot, ed. *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, Vol. XXXII, The Harvard Classics (New York: P.F. Collier & Son), 1909-1914: Letter XV.
[323] *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence*, Volume II (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980): 152.
[324] Ibid, 153.

experience" and "imagination," which, she argues, *is* real experience. It is the very injunction to be only "real" that Brontë finds disabling. The demarcating line between make-believe and reality had a creative function for her. As Michael Parsons has explained, play is a framework that draws attention to the difference between what happens inside the area of play and the reality outside of it. Play signifies a willingness to make use of something as real and not real, and thus requires a degree of self-consciousness: "Play becomes possible when organisms…are able to think and communicate about the nature of their behaviour and about its context."[325] That self-consciousness is on display in Brontë's "editorship" of the "Young Men's Magazine," for example. The boundary of play makes it possible for the juvenilia to be open.

For Barthes, play is bound up with the distinction between the text and the work. The work is associated with "maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation," but "the logic regulating the Text is not comprehensive (define 'what the work means') but metonymic; the activity of associations, contiguities, carrying-overs coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy."[326] The juvenilia are a good example of what Barthes could mean by text. They are irreducibly plural, defy genre, and they "cut across the work, several works" by reappearing within the novels.[327] They show up in imagery, in the devoirs, in plot turns, and even in character—one way to understand Jane Eyre is as a fantastical creature extracted from the juvenilia and subjected to a marriage plot.

Of course, though Barthes describes the text as playing, he is more interested in

[325] Parsons, 875.
[326] Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes. "From Work to Text," in *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill and Wang), 1978: 158.
[327] Barthes, 157.

the reader's play with the text.

> In fact, *reading*, in the sense of consuming, is far from *playing* with the text. 'Playing' must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself *plays* (like a door, like a machine with 'play') and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which re-produces it, but, in order that that practice not be reduced to a passive, inner *mimesis* (the Text is precisely that which resists such a reduction), also playing the Text in the musical sense of the term.[328]

In the next section, we will see that Brontë becomes the reader who plays both when she writes her devoirs, which often take off from reading another text, and then when she incorporates the devoir form into her novels. For now, Barthes helps us see that the juvenilia is open to certain kinds of interpretive moves due to its nature as text or play rather than work. We can then discard, first, the idea of finishedness or completion or past-ness that defines "a work" as that which is *done*; and secondly, an association of work with moral action.

For psychoanalysis, play extends to the field of signification that is daily life. Play is not related to content (a taxonomy of nonsense or carnivalesque) but is a structure of thinking or a way of approaching reality. Productive playing—that which might yield insight rather than be simply "playing around"—must be spontaneous; the child (or patient) must be able to surprise herself. Playing is impossible without trust and the ability to bring in external reality; escapism is not play. Play is open and incomplete and amoral. It is symbolic but it not sublimated, and so while it can be interpreted and analyzed, it is not a replacement for another libidinal activity. It is itself the activity[329].

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[328] Barthes, 162.

[329] For a critical treatment of Freud's division of work and play, see David Riesman, "The Themes of Work and Play in the Structure of Freud's Thought," *Psychiatry* 13:1 (1950): 1-16. While I generally draw on Freud's division of work and play throughout this chapter, I do part ways with him over the status of art in this division. According to

Play is also collaborative, and cannot be reduced to either of its players: Winnicott wrote that "psychotherapy is done in the overlap of the two play areas, that of the patient and that of the therapist."[330] If we grasp the juvenilia as this kind of play, then we must commit ourselves to a somewhat different picture of Brontë's childhood than the gloomy mournful stereotype: to a picture of the juvenilia as "essentially satisfying."[331] This is not to say that play is *fun*, or that Brontë's childhood was *good*; play can be frightening or unpleasant, and Brontë's childhood, as everyone knows, was filled with illness and death. But play also draws on rich resources, and is evidence of diverse emotional and cognitive capacities.

The fact that Brontë's playful juvenilia is a childhood production has theoretical implications. Children, as Brian Sutton-Smith puts it, "have their own distinctive forms of phantasmagorical play."[332]

> Children's play fantasies are not meant only to replicate the world, nor to be only its therapy; they are meant to fabricate another world that lives alongside the first one and carries on its own kind of life, a life often much more emotionally vivid than mundane reality. …Their play is not based primarily on a representation of everyday real events—as many prior investigators have supposed—so much as it is based on a fantasy of emotional events. …biologists… tell us that animal play also is not about realistic representations, that is, rather, fragmentary, disorderly, and exaggerative, which are not forms of "realism."[333]

Sutton-Smith helps us understand the juvenilia not as merely reflective of Brontë's biography but as an emotionally vivid and complex construction. It also gives us a way to think about the plot twists and general disorder of Glass Town and Angria—not as bad

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Riesman, Freud saw art as free from rules. It is a key component of my argument that, on the contrary, the art of realism—at least as Brontë perceived it—is rule-bound.

[330] Winnicott, 54.

[331] Ibid, 70.

[332] Sutton-Smith, 171.

[333] Ibid, 158.

realism that she will learn to do better, but as governing rules for a non-realist aesthetic.

The juvenilia *is* play but it also contains moments of represented play. The siblings' writings consists of multiple sets of texts: the Glass Town saga and the Angrian stories, written by Charlotte and Branwell, and the Gondal saga, written by Emily and Anne. It began in literal plays, the acting-out of stories with a set of toy soldiers Patrick Brontë brought to Haworth from Liverpool. Then the children began to write down stories, first with the characters they claimed from the soldiers and then with new characters. Charlotte experimented with a wide range of genres, including a spoof magazine (the "Young Men's Magazine," a parody of *Blackwood's*), scripts, poetry, and prose fiction. Some scholars describe Branwell as the political strategist and Charlotte as more romantic-minded, with her many plots concerning the Duke of Wellington (Zamorna)'s mistresses and wives. And yet Charlotte also practiced political rhetoric, and much of the Angrian material takes the form of speeches, exhortations, or attempts at persuasion.

Brontë's juvenilia plays with the rage that would later characterize her novels. That is, she *first* plays with aggression, and then later develops it "seriously." (It falls outside the scope of this chapter to think deeply about the consequence of this for readings of her novels, but it may involve some relaxation around her use of anger and aggression. Might there a bit more playfulness in the depictions of fiery William Crimsworth and icy Lucy Snowe than we think?) Textual affects may come from many registers, including plot (suspense, for example) and syntax. But rage is a character-based affect, and unlike Trollope, who contains anger in minor characters and defuses it, Brontë situates rage in the narrator, and diffuses it. The habit of direct address, canonized in

"Reader, I married him," took hold early. To be sure, as Ivan Kreilkamp, Amanda Anderson, and others have argued, Brontë's narrators distance themselves from the reader and other characters, refusing bodily presence and registering new possibilities for female authorship. But it is undeniable that their way of speaking and passionate commenting on events is one of Brontë's novelistic hallmarks. (This interest in speech also informs her interest in dialogue and dialect.) Indeed, the heat of Brontë's novels—as opposed to the cooler register of an Eliot or Austen—resides to some extent not only in her exclamatory prose, Biblical incantations, sudden flashes of prophesy and anger, but in the intimacy of having her speak directly to you, though from on high.

In the juvenilia, playful rage shows up most often in the narrator Lord Charles Wellesley, also known as Charles Townshend, the Duke of Wellington (aka Zamorna)'s much-maligned brother. Wellesley is positioned between upstairs and downstairs—a despised and kicked-around son of the elite, he is privy to the servants' gossip. He is a permanent child, insofar as he lacks power but has access to those who wield it. A drama queen, he allows Brontë to at once give full expression to aggression while mocking it.

"An Interesting Passage in the Lives of Some Eminent Men of the Present Time" (1830) begins like so:

> I beleive [sic] that in great houses few know more of family concerns than servants, & even in middling establishments the case is the same. As I am generally kind to grooms, valets, footmen, lackeys, &c., &c., they often make me their confidante, entrusting me with many important secrets, which by degrees has enabled me to amass such a quantity of information respecting almost every grandee in Glass Town that if I chose I could unveil a scene of murders, thefts, hypocrisy, perjury & so forth which can scarcely be paralleled in the annals of any other city.
>
> There are also many who have not waded so far or deep in the slough of criminality but are nevertheless filthily bespattered with more petty sins, such as deceit, meanness, toadism, underhand dealings, evil speaking, envy, &c. Of this latter class I purpose to make a selection,

> reserving the remainder for some future period, when I shall no doubt avail myself of the wonderfully extensive miscellaneous information I possess to enlighten the public mind still further on this pleasant subject.
>
> I am aware (to use a cant phrase) that my disclosures will cause a very considerable sensation among those who are implicated in the various transactions to which I shall allude, but as I care about them, their views & actions just as much as my monkey, all their censures will pass by me with as little effect as the zephyrs in a hot summer's day fanning a sea-surrounded rock. I shall now proceed to the subject of my present volume.[334]

Wellesley establishes knowledge of two kinds—criminal knowledge, of murder, theft, and the more minor sins; and literary knowledge, of cant. He threatens to deploy the former and has, he says, already made use of the latter. Wellesley hopes his disclosures cause a sensation, which he imagines as a wind that will blow around the indifference that is his person. (Though he is angry and partial, he is steady and immutable in his anger.) The world around Wellesley is indeed a sea, changeable, but he—or, more precisely, his vengefulness—is steady.

Wellesley is an attention-seeker. In text after text he desires to be recognized by Zamorna, but is instead insulted and punished by him. He embodies in embryo something that will become an obsession for Brontë—the idea that dependence of any kind is shameful. This is a theme that Gilbert and Gubar identify as belonging to the knowledge of female oppression, but in the juvenilia as well as in *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre* (1847), Brontë situates it in a familial context.[335] Because he narrates from the first person, Wellesley's plea for recognition seems to be directed as much at the reader as it is

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[334] Brontë, "An Interesting Passage in the Lives of Some Eminent Men of the Present Time," in *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Writings*, 31-32.
[335] See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* Second Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. "Caroline Helstone's case history provides proof that the real source of tribulation is simply the dependent status of women" (380).

at Zamorna. But although Wellesley wants to receive recognition, he withholds it from others; resentment makes him deeply contrarian. In the first section of "An Interesting Passage," he perversely tells a valet de chambre who happens to be walking by that he finds the burning heat of summer to be "tolerably cool," because he is "not wishing to coincide with" the valet's remark about the weather.[336] When the valet laughs it off, Wellesley becomes "disgusted." Two paragraphs later, however, the valet is telling stories about his master. Wellesley's hatred does not shut down the possibility of storytelling. He overcomes it enough to inquire after the valet's master, and to "consent" to hear the story.[337]

Wellesley's self-professed vengeance, and the nesting of the valet's storytelling, which is itself a betrayal of his employer, suggests that there is something vengeful in the act of storytelling itself. (The valet "slily" offers to speak.) Consider the preface to "The Spell" (1834):

> The Duke of Zamorna should not have excluded me from Wellesley House, for the following pages have been the result of that exclusion. Does he think I can patiently bear to be wholly separated from my sister-in-law, a lady whom I love & honour more than any other in Verdopolis? Does he think I can calmly endure that she, by his orders, should turn from me if I chance to meet her in public places, & when I beg a seat in her carriage that she should, smiling & shaking her head, deny me with sweet reluctance & (the unkindest cut of all) offer me the indignity of ordering a footman to remove me when I commence, by tears & cries, to give vent to my indignation in the open street? I say, does he think I am to lie down like a flogged spaniel under all this?
>
> If such are his ideas, let him be undeceived. Here I fling him my revenge. He will not like the morsel.[338]

Wellesley wants not only access to Zamorna and his intimates (to be permitted in the

[336] Brontë, "An Interesting Passage," 32.
[337] Ibid, 32.
[338] Brontë, "The Spell," in *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Writings*, 67.

house), but acknowledgement from them. He compares his treatment to that of a dog that is expected to lie down and "take it." (This image of the flogged spaniel has a curious premonitory power; later in "The Spell," in a scene I will return to below, Wellesley seems to become this dog.) Notably, he tells us that he has been known to "give vent"—like the wind—to his hurt feelings in the "open street" (or, maybe, *en plein air*). The prologue sets up the story to follow as vengeance, which is already imagined as so much hot air.

Likewise, the preface to "Albion and Marina" (1830) informs the reader that "I have written this tale out of malignity for the injuries that have lately been offered to me."[339] From a young age, then, Brontë crafted a narrator driven by resentment and retribution, for whom writing was a corrective to lived injustice, and compared to something like a gale force. Though we can produce motives for William Crimsworth, Jane Eyre, and Lucy Snowe, those explanatory or meliorative backstories are secondary. For Brontë, narration is, primarily, a form of aggression, or a way of masking/shaping aggression; Wellesley's excess and ridiculousness make his anger safe, something that she can manipulate and mold—something that she can play with.

Consider the example of Wellesley's becoming-dog in "The Spell." At this point in the story, confusion around Zamorna's inconsistent behavior has grown, and everyone is waiting for some explanation. It turns out Zamorna has a secret twin, a substitute brother that renders Wellesley even more superfluous than he already is. Perhaps it is this superfluity that allows Wellesley to function as a kind of floater and bearer of excess.

> I believe General Thornton will never forget that day. The trials of Job were nothing to what he suffered during its slow, hideous, leaden progress.

[339] Brontë, "Albion and Marina," in *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal*, 55.

> A thousand times did I beg him to pull out his watch & tell me the hour. Ten thousand times did I run to the door, open, look out, & then shut it. Towards night my impatience became incontrollable. I rolled on the carpet, gnawed the fringe of the rug, screamed, kicked, &, when he attempted to chasten me with the little stick he keeps beside him for that express purpose, I seized it in my teeth & fairly bit it in two.[340]

The biting of the stick and gnawing of the carpet could be the actions of either an angry dog *or* a friendly, excited puppy. When General Thornton reaches for a stick to "flog" Wellesley the spaniel with, he bites it in two, refusing the chastisement just as the text "The Spell" refuses Zamorna's chastisement. This refusal is performative. When a dog grabs and growls in play, there is no question of whether he "means it." There is a framed-off area of context that determines that this growling and grabbing, though identical to other incidents of growling and grabbing, has a different meaning. Similarly, with Wellesley, the question is not if he is "really" playing or not. To be playing is to change the register of such questions altogether.

Wellesley's vengeful play can be interrupted by Zamorna's direct recognition of him. At the end of "An Interesting Passage," Zamorna, here called the Marquis of Douro, takes hold of Wellesley's hand and leads him away from a conversation he has rudely interrupted.

> I was going on, but Arthur restrained me with, 'Charles, Charles, hush love.' He then took hold of my hand & hurried me away from the walk.
>
> It was now evening & by the time we reached the palace, a flaming South African occident cast a transcendency of light over all the vast city that resounded with a loud murmur, & gloriously irradiated its stupendous tower, which rose encompassed with magnificent oaks now standing in undefined masses of darkness agains[t] a sky of gold. Far off the broad harbour lay dotted by innumerable white-sailed vessels. The ocean heaved in terrible beauty. Its mighty voice deepened with the hush of evening. A hundred streams of the vale pouring forth their emulous song were

[340] Brontë, "The Spell," 136-37.

> unheard amid that awful thunder, which rolled over the fading earth through an atmosphere of balm & fragrance. My brother & I stood on the terrace for a long time wholly absorbed in admiration, till at length Finic came to remind us that the dew was falling & colds abroad in the air.[341]

Wellesley's mood has entirely shifted. He has been subdued—restrained—by the presence of Arthur, and has achieved complete satisfaction. The prologue to "An Interesting Passage" established storytelling as the power to disrupt and offend, and the imagery of the text began with him alone in nature—hot, uncomfortable, stifling—and out of joint with an interlocutor he finds there. But the conclusion has him in deep contemplation of nature's grandeur in the company of the person he loves. Whereas it was far too hot when the story began and he feigned to be cool, now the wind really is cold. Thunder is gathering but it is characterized as "balm & fragrance"; the storm releases the tension and calms him.

Wellesley's desire for Zamorna is intermingled with his desire for power. But as Eve Sedgwick notes, power does not necessarily mean omnipotence; there is relief in establishing limited power. Sedgwick writes, glossing Klein,

> For the Kleinian subject, however, unlike the Freudian one, omnipotence is a fear at least as much as it is a wish. …Instead of the undifferentiatedly blind, pleasure- and power-seeking drives of the Freudian infant, which encounter no check but the originally external ones of prohibition or lack, the Kleinian infant experiences a greed whose aggressiveness and envious component is perceived as posing a mortal threat both to her loved and needed objects and to herself. Thus the perception of oneself as omnipotent is hardly less frightening than the perception of one's parent as being so.
>
> In fact, this all-or-nothing understanding of agency is toxic enough that it is a relief and relaxation for the child to discover a different reality. The sense that power is a form of relationality that deals in, for example, habits, negotiations, and small differentials, the middle ranges of agency—the notion that you can be relatively empowered or disempowered without annihilating someone else or being annihilated, or even castrating or being

[341] Brontë, "An Interesting Passage," 37.

> castrated—is a great mitigation of that endogenous anxiety, although it is something that requires to be discovered over and over.[342]

Brontë does not quite arrive at the notion that power is a form of relationality vis-à-vis Wellesley and Zamorna, though she begins to explore it via questions of aggression and restraint between the brothers. This ideal of power residing in submission and mutual sexual recognition will, of course, be a strong element of her novels.

My reading goes against what John Kucich identifies as the juvenilia's abstraction of desire itself.[343] For even if Angrian characters do not erotically desire particular sexual objects, rendering romantic couplings arbitrary and replaceable, the key narrator Wellesley is single-minded in his fixation on Zamorna. This affective and social through-line also complicates what Kate E. Brown has described as the proliferation of plot in Angria, its "difference without change, substituting one enchanting lover for another, staging one more insurrection whose outcome will be the status quo." Brown writes:

> Precisely because actions of the will are always efficacious in Angria, they are equally reversible. The characters' plots are at once inevitably successful and curiously irrelevant to the unfolding of the narrative, whose events are propelled instead through chance encounters… If the plot of "the real" compares to an ascent of the hill of difficulty—a plot marked both by hardship and by the certainty of reward—the Angrian plot is "never-ending": contingent rather than causal, episodic rather than progressive, without impediment to desire and without principle of closure.[344]

Brown's analysis of plot complements my sense that the juvenilia separates agency from character. I do not mean to say that Brontë's characters are "passive"; rather, that a

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[342] Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2011: 20.
[343] See John Kucich. "Passionate Reserve and Reserved Passion in the Works of Charlotte Brontë," in *ELH* 52: 4 (Winter 1985): 913-937. Kucich makes an even stronger point than simply that characters in the juvenilia turn each other into ideas that animate themselves when he claims that Brontë imagines a self that exists outside of all relationality. I hope that my chapter shows why that cannot be the case.
[344] Brown, 403.

vocabulary of active/passive will not describe the kinds of power they exercise (or don't) and the way plot is shaped by and around them. We might notice that while Angrian events have a zany quality, the human actors in them aren't zanies—even though the chaotic whirl of activity around them might lead us to think so. Sianne Ngai describes zaniness as that which "promotes a sense of character as nothing but a series of projects and activities."[345] My reading privileges Brontë's characters as moods, winds almost, that do not have the agency necessary to elaborate projects and activities in the first place. They are quite busy with a wide number of practical and political tasks that are, at any moment, subject to change. But they are not fundamentally working or laboring beings.

But Brown, like most scholars, reads the juvenilia as explicitly and solely a form of mourning or grieving, a response to the death of the Brontës' mother and older siblings.[346] Even Terry Castle imagines the juvenilia in terms of lack. In "The Juvenilia of Charlotte Brontë," she writes, "Yet one cannot help but sense the element of wish fulfillment in these marvelous revivals. Brontë had discovered at an early age that the writing of fiction was a way of making the dead live again—if only on the page."[347] But despite—or really, because of—the aggressive style of play in the juvenilia, we ought to read the juvenilia not in terms of *wishes*, but in terms of *fulfillment*. The juvenilia is not (or not only) an emotional prosthetic but a space of humor and exuberance.

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[345] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2012: 196.
[346] See Susan Carlson, "Fantasies of Death and Violence in the Early Juvenilia of Charlotte Brontë," in *Brontë Studies* 27 (July 2002): 101-111.
[347] Terry Castle, "The Juvenilia of Charlotte Brontë" in *Boss Ladies, Watch Out! Essays on Women, Sex, and Writing* (New York: Routledge), 2002: 158.

The Devoir as Transitional Text

The biographical details are well known: the time in Belgium at the Pensionnat Heger, the failed attempts to found a school in Haworth, the discovery of her sister's poetry and the publication of *Poems of Currer, Acton, and Ellis Bell* (1846). But does a writer write "Farewell to Angria" one day and a novel the next?

Amanpal Garcha's work on the sketch argues for the novel's formal reliance on and incorporation of a transitional period of training or apprenticeship. He writes that the time Gaskell, Dickens, and Thackeray spent writing (and publishing) journalistic sketches "produced certain critically overlooked ideological sensibilities that inhere not in novels' now frequently studied plots but rather in their plotlessness."[348] In other words, the sketch is a piece of plotless writing, and the fact that sketch-masters became novelists meant that novels also contain significant portions of plotlessness. For Garcha, sketches are significant because they enact the novel's interest in time that is fragmented and whole, but also because they are stylistic calling-cards. He writes that

> the formal elements and content of their sketches reappear in their novels—and they reappear as among the most central, distinguishing characteristics of these authors' fiction, as Dickens's vibrant, lengthy descriptions, Gaskell's detailed representations of impoverished domestic spaces, and Thackeray's melancholic, essayistic digressions, all clearly linked to their sketch-writing, become key to these novelists' aesthetic and ideological appeals in their most successful works.[349]

Brontë never wrote sketches. But she did have a significant period of learning a non-novelistic writing craft that became her own stylistic marker: the school compositions or devoirs she wrote and revised under M. Heger. About a dozen and a half

[348] Amanpal Garcha, From Sketch to Novel: The Development of Victorian Fiction (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2009: 4.
[349] Ibid, 8.

of these texts have been translated and compiled by the scholar Sue Lonoff. They have titles such as "Sacrifice of an Indian Widow," "The Sick Young Girl," "The Immensity of God," and "Human Justice." In some cases, the compositions were based off of dictations that Heger asked the students to do. For example, the earliest surviving devoir, "The Sick Young Girl," drafted in 1842, was inspired by Alexandre Soumet's "The Poor Girl" (1814); Lonoff writes that "it may have been one of several poems about mistreated maidens that [Heger] read to them."[350] Brontë's reimagining of the girl's fate is suffused with the fairy-tale temporality and exclamatory enthusiasm of Angria, as well as a dollop of Protestant feverishness. It begins "Sleep is the friend of the fortunate, it seeks the bed of roses, but it rarely approaches the bed of thorns; alas! to me it is almost unknown," and builds to a feverish prayer: "I have suffered long, I am weary of suffering. Oh God, have pity on me! Jesus heal they son healed the young daughter of Jairus; may he also heal me. Christ grant my prayer!"[351]

Lonoff observes that writing compositions for Heger forced Brontë to expose herself, to move from the private, closed world of juvenilia into a more public, evaluative space. She emphasizes the formal modalities that the students were asked to master: the epistolary, the analytic, the descriptive, and the meditative. But even as Brontë practices rhetorical forms, and sheds, when necessary, descriptions of forests, glens, and fairies, her rhetorical style is immediately recognizable. She has what we now call a strong voice: She is not able to operate in a wide number of stylistic registers. "Dear Sir," begins the assignment to write a "Letter of invitation to a clergyman":

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[350] Sue Lonoff, in Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë, *The Belgian Essays: A Critical Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1996: 20.
[351] Brontë, *The Belgian Essays*, 12-14. In my quotations from the devoirs, I have incorporated Heger's proofreading corrections.

> In fulfilling your duties as a pastor, have you never found yourself obliged to write a letter to a rich miser, to entreat him to contribute to a charitable fund? If you have found yourself in this circumstance you may very well imagine my feelings in addressing you at this moment.
>
> 'But,' you say, 'I am not a miser.' Yes, sir, you are, and so much so that until now it has always been impossible for me to wrest from you the least part of that treasure you guard with such vigilance. That treasure, sir, is not money; it is time. I beseech you, be generous once more. Next Thursday I am giving a small party at home, and I entreat you to honor it with your presence. Be sure that in granting me a few hours of your so precious time, you will turn it to better account than by remaining at home, or perhaps even by visiting the poor of your parish. I need not tell you how much the presence of a pious and respectable clergyman in a society contributes to curbing all vain and idle remarks, nor how much the conversation of a learned man adds to the pleasure and profit of the gathering. Neither need I tell you that my friends share my feelings toward you, and that if you come your arrival will be a pleasure for all, whereas if you do not come your absence will be for all a disappointment.
>
> Begging to remain, Sir, yours sincerely,
>
> &c……[352]

Brontë completes the assignment—she writes a letter to a clergyman. But she is very nearly derailed before she begins; it is not so hard to imagine that she would far rather write a scene about the rich miser that she introduces to fill out this fictive world than just ask the clergyman to tea on Tuesday at four o'clock. The letter implies a whole world—friends unseen, fundraising campaigns sweated over, the poor, and a community falling into laxity, in need of a stern authority. The voice of the letter-writer is familiar from Angria: it hectors, quarrels with, and insults the very interlocutor it seeks to woo.

Brontë also wrote the reply to this letter, in which Inclination and Duty converse, with the result that the clergyman refuses the invitation: "If I do not beg you to pardon me, it is because I am convinced that in obeying him [Duty] I only do what I have to do."[353] When Heger introduced her to abstractions, she handled them by personifying

[352] Ibid, 144.
[353] Ibid, 146.

them, turning them into high-strung characters as idiosyncratic and demanding as Zamorna himself—a device that nearly overtook her novels, where sometimes the capitalized concepts of Imagination, Will, or Genius are more present than any humans who serve as their vessels. So though there is a temptation to read the devoirs as examples of Brontë's passion for Heger—her desire to please, and her attempts to mold herself to the image he demanded—there is more to be gained by tracing the continuities, what she made her own.[354] Brontë's voice is remarkably consistent. And what is most interesting is not what she wrote in school, but how what she wrote in school—and the fact of academic writing at all—shows up in the scenes and plots of her novels.

The devoir is a transitional text or transitional object: the toy that the child grasps as being at once me and not-me, part of the external and internal world. By calling the devoir a transitional text, I am arguing that it is part-juvenilia and part-novel; part-fantasy and part-reality. I am also calling attention to the devoir as an instrument of play, formulated in a play relationship. In M. Heger Charlotte met for the first time an external authority with the power to push back against her vision of the world; however, he did not overtake it or demolish it. He only offered some limits on it through his role as a circumscribed authority. The final devoirs were a result of an area that existed in the overlap between student and teacher, one in which each had an assigned role. (I am not here commenting on Brontë's desire to perhaps transgress or surpass or change those

[354] It may be true, as Lonoff writes, that "each assignment becomes an invitation to reach, however awkwardly, beyond her limitations [of the French language] to gain the treasure of her master's comments," but given the desire for approval that animates nearly all writerly output, this hardly seems the most interesting aspect of the Belgian period. See Lonoff, 149.

roles, except to say that it may be the very fact of the roles in the first place—of roles as such—that created the conditions for whatever fantasies became attached to them.)

Winnicott explained that the transitional object has to do with "the problem of the relationship between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived of… *the [transitional] area is allowed to the infant between primary creativity and objective perception based on reality-testing.*"[355] I propose that the devoir be understood in terms of formal or generic "reality-testing." And just as Winnicott stressed that it is not the object or toy that is transitional but the child's relationship to the mother (as being internalized or separate) I would like to stress the relational context of the writing of the devoir as being as important as the formal qualities of the genre. Remember that the juvenilia were collaborative and the devoir, as we will see, dialogic. Of course, the relationships and overlap areas that Winnicott was theorizing were not peaceful, easy, or harmonious. The transitional object exists *in order to survive aggression*. Its whole reason of being is that it can receive and withstand hostility, rage, and destruction. We must see the devoir as serving this same purpose, and from both parties (Brontë and Heger).

There are three ways in which we might discuss this period with respect to Brontë's novels. The first is biographical and character-based. Paul Emmanuel and William Crimsworth are obviously pedagogues in Heger's mode—fiery, dramatic, disciplinary, stern, charismatic, sexist. (Lonoff cites Brontë's mocking of sentimentality and her anti-Catholicism as potential jabs at Heger; that seems plausible enough.) The second is to track Brontë's evolution as a writer. It is hard to see that Brontë internalized

[355] Winnicott, 15; italics in original.

Heger's values of "unity, economy, placement, proportion, consistency of tone, and plausibility."[356] If her tone as a novelist is consistent, it is consistently jagged, moving from erotically charged descriptions to Biblical exhortations to thundering critique and back to exposition. Economy, placement, and proportion do not describe her.

In fact, it is very difficult to put one's finger on just what it is that Brontë learned under Heger. More than any writerly *skill*, she seems to have learned mental habits. She learned, first, that writing is a dialogue or conversation, as well as a way of reaching beyond the family circle. Second, she learned that writing is a process of transformation—of taking received texts, internalizing them by memorization or writing, and recreating them by inhabiting them from multiple points of view. Finally, she practiced some version of literary criticism, which led to her ability to articulate her creative values. In "An Essay on Style: The Fall of the Leaves" (1843), she asks,

> "What impression strikes one on reading the piece entitled 'The Fall of the Leaves'? It is not easy to shed light onto his question in a single answer, because one does not always feel the same impression. The first time one reads it, the effect is vivid; the second time, and forever after, sorrowful."[357]

Verbosely, she tries to analyze how it is that a single literary work can produce multiple impressions in the reader. She first panders to Heger's love of "the principal of Unity," then boldly suggests another explanation for the poem's power: the genius of the poet.[358]

> I believe that all true poetry is but the faithful imprint of something that happens or has happened in the poet's soul… I believe that genius, thus awakened, has no need to seek the details, that it scarcely pauses to reflect, that it does not think about unity. I believe that the details come quite naturally without the poet's seeking them, that inspiration takes the place of reflection. …If Millevoye had been a cold, phlegmatic, and unfeeling

[356] Lonoff, xlvi.
[357] Brontë, *The Belgian Essays*, 240.
[358] Ibid, 242.

> man, no matter that he had had the instruction of a hundred academies, the wisdom of a thousand philosophers; he would never have composed "The Fall of the Leaves."[359]

And so on. My point is that the compositions were intellectual as well as grammatical exercises, in which Brontë forcefully articulated the aesthetic principles that are germinal in her juvenilia. Her early obsession with genius evidenced in the heroes of the juvenilia here becomes an authorial principle that she will develop thematically in *Shirley*.

The third way of understanding the devoir is generic: to define the devoir as a genre that appears within and shapes the genre of the novel.[360] It is, after all, impossible to understand *The Professor* (1845-46)*, Shirley* (1849)*,* or *Villette* (1853) without interpreting the passages that are lifted straight from composition books; much of the plot of those novels hinges on how characters correct and interpret these passages. Like the sketch, they suspend time. The machinery of the narrative grinds to something of a halt when confronted with the tale of, for example, "The Genius and the Goddess" in *Shirley.* However, the compositions and the pedagogical apparatus around them are not "plotless" in Garcha's sense; in fact, they contain an abundance of fairy-tale, once-upon-a-time plot.[361]

Moreover, school composition and devoir are figured *as* plots. Consider how

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[359] Ibid, 246.

[360] A different reading might emphasize the Bible as performing a similar generic function. Brontë was, as Heger said to Gaskell, "nourished on the Bible," and she mined it in her juvenilia, essays, and novels as a source of insight and analogy on everything from history to daily life (Lonoff lxi). Indeed, the last sentence of *Jane Eyre* may *only* be legible if the novel is understood as somehow fungible with the Bible, if not an outright rewriting or overwriting of it. As productive as such inquiry would be, it falls outside the scope of this chapter.

[361] Northrop Frye and Harry Levin, among many others, have analyzed the relationship between fairy-tales and realism. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2000 and Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1963.

William Crimsworth in *The Professor* conspires with himself over how to respond to Frances's work and shape her future writing. If the sketch has as its principle "a faithful, if not exhaustive, realism," the school composition has other aims: didacticism, allegory, the elaboration of moral values, and erotic play.[362] The school composition is a form of dialogue, not complete until it is corrected. As Louis says about Shirley, "I worship her perfections; but it is her faults, or at least her, foibles that bring her near to me… these faults are the steps by which I mount to ascendancy over her."[363]

William approaches Frances's homework as an opportunity to see inside her; it is a form of eavesdropping, and a way of making the hidden exterior: "'Now,' thought I, 'I shall see a glimpse of what she really is; I shall get an idea of the nature and extent of her powers."[364] He is ostensibly speaking of her language skill, but he seems to also be speaking of something greater: of the composition's expressiveness, of it serving as a window into Frances's interior. Frances has impressed William as being worthy of these attentions because of her writing—but what sort of writer is she? William describes one of her compositions, which he reads aloud to the entire English class, as "powerfully written in language at once chaste and choice, in a style nerved with vigour and graced with harmony."[365] Clearly this is high praise—the composition has power; it exercises self-restraint; and it is pleasing, like a symmetrical face. (Jane Eyre describes her own plain face as lacking harmony.)

Yet it is telling that Brontë herself is not able to produce the chaste, vigorous, graceful (masculine?) prose that Frances is said to have acquired. The absence of this

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[362] Garcha, 9.
[363] Brontë, *Shirley* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics), 2008: 437.
[364] Brontë, *The Professor* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics), 2008: 110.
[365] Ibid, 124.

devoir is related to *The Professor*'s investment in the problems of description. This is a problem that is staged as one of ordinariness versus extraordinariness. There are three kinds of objects in this text: things that are ugly, things that are ordinary, and things that are extraordinary. The ordinary cannot be described. When William Crimsworth says that "there is no use in attempting to describe what is indescribable," he is talking about the ordinary (in this case, his friend Hunsden's face).[366] The extraordinary, however, *can* be described—and yet it cannot be reproduced. Frances's improved writing can be pointed at but not given.

Brontë *does* give us Frances's first writing, which we are encouraged to read in terms of ugliness. Crimsworth describes that early style as "short and somewhat rude sentences, and the style stood in great need of polish and sustained dignity."[367] It is strange that he calls the sentences "short," because in the passages quoted, they spill to three, four, or five lines, and are divided with multiple semicolons. Moreover, the language is florid, not "rude." Or is there another composition, one that we have not read, to which he refers? Is this not the ugly composition at all? Are we reading a translation—smoothed over, reworked, prettified—of Frances's poor English? The devoir seems to activate these anxieties about representation and description. What is quoted is a story narrated by a stranger, a secret nobleman who has taken shelter in a poor herdsman's cottage. It bears some resemblance to chapter five of Brontë's "Tales of the Islanders," written in 1829, when she was 13 years old. That section of "Islanders" concerns some fairies who have disguised themselves as mortals and taken up residence in "a small thatched cottage which had once been the pleasant abode of a flourishing husbandman

[366] Ibid, 168.
[367] Ibid, 112.

who was now dead & his children had one by one forsaken it & the sweet spot where it stood each to pursue his own fortune till it was no entirely deserted & had fallen into a state of ruin & decay."[368] Both stories have to do with the classic hero's situation of secret glory fallen on hard times, though Brontë filters it through Christian themes in both cases. In "Tales of the Islanders," a man appears in a "moan[ing]" wind to tell a story about falling from the Church of England into Roman Catholicism; in Frances's devoir, the hero turns, in Crimsworth's words, to "the scriptural Jehovah for aid against the mythological Destiny."[369]

In *The Professor*, the devoir is not present as a stand-alone text but as an occasion for the cognitive and affective structures of surveillance and aggression that Wellesley embodied in the juvenilia. Those structures are here recoded as explicitly sexual. William gets Frances's attention by not returning her devoir in class, but by keeping her after and forcing her to observe as he corrects each and every one of her mistakes. What would be humiliation in Dickens is here foreplay. At the end he rewards her by recognizing that she possesses (feminine) "taste and fancy"—not the "highest" virtues, but they're better than nothing. In order to "best foster" the "proud and shy" Frances, whose feelings are "susceptible" and "deep-vibrating" William employs these means:

> Constancy of Attention—a kindness as mute as watchful, always standing by her, cloaked in the rough garb of austerity and making its real nature known only by a rare glance of interest, or a cordial and gentle word; real respect masked with seeming imperiousness, directing, urging her actions—yet helping her too and that with devoted care.[370]

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[368] "Tales of the Islanders" in Brontës, *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics), 2010: 27.
[369] Brontë, *Professor*, 113.
[370] Ibid, 124.

The result is that Frances becomes herself a better, because more confident, sewing teacher. This is, of course, how Rochester treats Jane, and how Louis treats Shirley, and how Paul treats Lucy Snowe. This is Charlotte Brontë's ideal: a game in which a strong, older man, with an invisible hand, guides the intellectual and sexual development of a younger woman, employing critique, chastisement, and judicious, hard-won praise. Playing is not pretending—there really is intellectual and sexual growth at stake—but playing enables plausible deniability, thereby making the reality palatable. All of these men will be referred to by their lovers, blasphemously and often mockingly, as "Master." As John Kucich has written, Brontë's "reciprocal combat defines passion as an aggressive opposition to others, rather than as an unguarded relaxing of personal boundaries."[371] I would add that reciprocal combat takes place within or, better, is generative of, the play framework that she first explored in the juvenilia.

The Devoir as Transitional Text: **Shirley**

The devoir has a prominent role in *Shirley*. Shirley's former tutor Louis arrives, now in the employ of her uncle, just as two eligible men are unsuccessfully courting her. The devoir functions as both the location and the form of aggressive play—Louis and Shirley reminisce about what she used to write for him; he asks her to recite the texts he made her learn; he remembers her compositions and recites them back to her. This is a way of sneaking the classroom into the novel, but because the devoirs in question are so closely tied to themes from the juvenilia, also a way of keeping Angria alive. Furthermore, this nexus is central to *any* reading of the novel, because Brontë uses the

[371] John Kucich, "Passionate Reserve and Reserved Passion in the Works of Charlotte Brontë," in *ELH* 52: 4 (Winter 1985): 919.

pedagogical play framework to resolve the national and regional differences that percolate throughout the story. On the one hand, then, the devoir in this novel can be read in terms of genre; on the other, it is integral to an analysis of the novel's themes.

Critical literature by Sally Shuttleworth, Judith Williams, and others has characterized *Shirley* in terms of the protagonist's "capitulation" or "taming." As Rosemarie Bodenheimer has noted, "paternalism is an assumption central to Brontë's imagination of human relations."[372] Paternalism, in other words, is the frame within which power oscillates, the outside limits that "check" the play of authority and submission. It creates "the conditions for reciprocal feeling," what Bodenheimer describes as the oscillation between order and violence.[373] We might think of it as violence of order—the fertile or productive, but wounding, dynamism of regulation itself. Phrasing it as such highlights that the resulting order isn't static but shifting; the firm hand trembles slightly. Shirley's desire for a governor controls Louis, forcing him to act as one. He sometimes refers to her as his "pupil," but sometimes as his "mistress," indicating her social superiority. They both take pleasure in the oscillation of their roles. This peculiar relationship of governor to governed is premised not on stationary, prescribed modes of authority but on the self-conscious exploration and adoption of subject positions—the framework of play, in other words, that the relationship conjured by the devoir makes possible.

Shirley and Louis continually goad each other, playing the roles they once had of tutor and student, and find erotic satisfaction in a power struggle that, like play, can exist

[372] Rosemarie Bodenheimer. *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1988: 37.
[373] Ibid, 42.

because it is framed—it is real affectively and emotionally but not real *actually*. Shirley has material power. The roles of student (Charlotte) and teacher (Heger) are here *just* roles, that can be put on and taken off. The past roles exist in the present as shadows of another world, imperfectly applied to their current selves. The classroom in Brontë is not a place but a relationship. It promises liberation (from family) and mobility (into employment). Nor is the classroom limited to actual children, as *Shirley* makes plain: The adults become juveniles, suggesting that childhood is itself a form of play that can be taken up and put down. The tutor relationship is in fact a transitional space between childhood and adulthood, where adults play at being children and children play at being adults. Since in Brontë's novels dependency itself is the source of shame, and since dependency is a condition of childhood, childhood itself comes to be tainted. She makes pedagogical relationships playful and mutual and sexual in part, I think, to separate childhood from dependency: Her heroines are secret equals or superiors to their masters.

I have been at pains to put the textual and generic play across Brontë's writings in a Winnicottian frame, but it must be acknowledged she imagines the relationship between Louis and Shirley in terms that are strikingly Freudian. Louis and Shirley, by repeating and revising what happened earlier, come to master the past. To make it perfectly clear, Brontë drops a reference to Shirley's old exercise—memorizing Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's "Le Cheval Dompté," or "The Horse Tamed." Still, even though there is talk of mastery and taming, there isn't quite the sense of compulsion or neuroses between Louis and Shirley that characterizes Freud's fort-da game; if there is a trauma, what was it? Perhaps the trauma is simply unconsummated desire—if anyone would find that traumatic, it would be Brontë. Yet this isn't entirely satisfying: Something more theatrical

and less neurotic seems at stake. Someone bound by classical repetition-compulsion is, by definition, unaware; one repeats *because* one doesn't know. Louis and Shirley are almost arch in their knowingness. What's more, their game of repetition *succeeds*. To me, this suggests that under the game there is not a trauma that must be analyzed and worked through, but another game—play all the way down.

While we're on the subject of obviousness, what should we make of that reference to the horse tamed? There's something embarrassing, almost tasteless, about the lack of subtlety in Brontë's schoolroom scenes. Shouldn't a novelist try to cover up what's happening, make us guess a little? Rules of literary tact seem to call for more symbolism, or at least symbolism that is slightly less... juvenile. This is a hallmark of Brontë's style, from the juvenilia through the devoir and the novels: moments when an extremely innocent, extremely self-aware, or oddly immature image erupts that over-explains a narrative tension. These are risky, unaesthetic moves, but they appear coherent when we understand them in toto, as part of a register of meaning that intersects with the novel but doesn't belong to it. Whether or not it's intentional, it becomes part of her rebellion against the perceived rules of realism.

Louis recites Shirley's composition to her after she has repeated his words; "she caught his accent in three minutes."[374] The play framework, which calls into being a conversation about accent, is what enables the flux around nationalism and regionalism. The "Yorkshire roughness" (in George Lewes's phrase) of the novel was a way for Brontë to, in James Buzard's reading, "denature" English—show that what is standard is in fact dialect, and has no special claim. Buzard concludes that Brontë's ultimate aim is

[374] Brontë, *Shirley*, 404.

to show that regionalism is a *supplement*, not a threat, to national identity, and that local customs and dialects are equally valid ways of being English. The problem with Yorke, for instance, is that his locality and cosmopolitanism isn't mediated by the nation—though he can speak standard English, he refuses, instead switching between perfect French and broad Yorkshire dialect. He refuses to be part of the shared national culture that Buzard claims Brontë is imagining.

And no wonder. Brontë can only imagine this shared culture arising in a context of courtship—in a context established by the devoir specifically—in which custom and accent and literary texts are exchanged and made malleable. Brontë's French is not perfect, but perfection isn't the aim. She has a conversation partner. (If she spoke fluently, she would have no need of tutoring.) Interpersonal unions, and not trade agreements or political bodies, are the structures in which nationality and national difference can be preserved and yet subsumed to greater unity, where a kind of dialectical synthesis can be stabilized. But it must be stressed that in *Shirley*, "French" is a marker not of class, but of cosmopolitan or European identity. Shirley aspires to speak in Louis's accent, but the unity they ultimately seek is not satisfied in being French; they must be English, robust, hearty English:

> Perhaps a simultaneous feeling seized them now, that their enthusiasm had kindled to a glow, which the slight fuel of French poetry no longer sufficed to feed; perhaps they longed for a trunk of English oak to be thrown as a Yule log to the devouring flame.[375]

Unlike in other novels, Brontë reproduces her heroine's student writing in *Shirley*—at least, she reproduces what Louis says, which we are told is the real thing. The treatment of the essay in/as the text creates an effect like nesting dolls, with the layers of

[375] Ibid, 413.

the narrator's voice, character's speech, translation and transcription, the oral and the written, all stacked inside one another. Something like how Thomas Pavel describes "existentially creative" salient structures is at work here: "those dual structures in which the primary universe does not enter into an isomorphism with the secondary universe."[376] Multiple possible relationships exist between past people, present people, and a text that was once written, memorized, and now recited. Deploying the devoir in the context of a recital creates a multi-level structure where one is both aware of the lack of the "real" text and yet assured of its reality.

Louis recites Shirley's youthful devoir, "La Premiere Femme Savante," in response to Shirley's challenge that he will not be able to recall every line. Reading aloud is a throughline in Brontë's writing: As children, the Brontës read their work aloud; in Belgium, however, M. Heger would have read the compositions, corrected, and returned them. (If *The Professor* is any guide, the students might have read their own work out loud, but the teacher would not have done so.) It is therefore significant that Louis's way of praising Shirley is by reciting her work.

The style of "La Premiere Femme Savante" is more like the juvenilia than what Brontë wrote for M. Heger. To be sure, Brontë wrote frequently on the theme of genius. But her Brussels writing is analytical, and even its prefatory remarks are focused on the theme. Her essay "The Death of Napoleon" begins "How should one envision this subject? With a great pomp of words or with simplicity? That depends on the idea that one has of Napoleon, or rather the idea of him that one is capable of having."[377] Compare that with the beginning paragraphs of "La Premiere Femme Savante":

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[376] Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1986: 57.
[377] Brontë, *The Belgian Essays*, 270.

> This was in the dawn of time, before the morning stars were set, and while they yet sang together.
>
> The epoch is so remote, the mists and dewy gray of matin twilight veil it with so vague an obscurity, that all distinct features of custom, all clear line of locality, evade perception and baffle research. It must suffice to know that the world then existed; that men peopled it; that man's nature, with its passions, sympathies, pains, and pleasures, informed the planet and gave it soul."[378]

Now, the beginning of "The Twelve Adventurers," from 1829, when Charlotte was 13 years old:

> There is a tradition that some thousands of years ago twelve men from Britain, of a most gigantic size, and twelve men from Gaul came over to the country of Genii, and while there were continually at war with each other and, after remaining many years, returned again to Britain and Gaul. And in the inhabited [parts] of the Genii country there are now no vestiges of them, though it is sad that there have been found some colossal skeletons in that wild, barren land, the evil desert.
>
> But I have read a book called 'The Travels of Captain Parnell', out of which the following is an extract.
>
> 'About four in afternoon I saw a dark red cloud arise in the east, which gradually grew larger till it covered the whole sky. As the cloud spread the wind rose and blew a tremendous hurricane. The sand of the desert began to move and rolled like the waves of the sea.[379]

The paragraph continues and the narrator discovers the bones of a skeleton, "one of the evil genii chained in these deserts by the fairy Maimoune."[380]

The writing in the *Shirley* composition, of course, surpasses that in the juvenilia in its sophistication and elegance. But the texts that *Shirley* are referencing are *not* the devoirs; they are the imaginary stories of supernatural occurrences and extraordinary anointings that Brontë pursued in "The Twelve Adventurers," "The Spell," "The Islanders," and elsewhere. Moreover, while the devoirs answer prompts and formulate

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[378] Brontë, *Shirley*, 405.
[379] Brontë, "The Twelve Adventurers," in *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Writings*, 5.
[380] Ibid, 6.

arguments, the juvenilia, like the *Shirley* composition, tells an imaginative or fictional story. To be sure, Brontë's Napoleon essay reaches lofty heights. "There he is—exiled and captive—bound to an arid rock," she writes. "He has committed the crime of Prometheus, and he undergoes his punishment."[381] But this breathless imagining of the scene of Napoleon's death is quite different than the description of a setting for a narrative, which is what the other two texts do.

The *Shirley* text does share content from the juvenilia and the devoir. In addition to the theme of genius, there is Brontë's typical interest in hermitage, which she analyzed in the devoir on "Peter the Hermit" and which is featured in "Tales of the Islanders" and elsewhere. As in "La Premiere Femme Savant," many of her stories feature lonely cottages and huts nestled in isolated forests that offer shelter and magical opportunities to their inhabitants, special or chosen individuals that are masquerading, known to themselves or not, in nature. Like the devoirs, it is filled with rhetorical questions. It enacts a moment of learning, coded as divine inspiration: "I receive a revelation. The dark hint, the obscure whisper, which have haunted me from childhood, are interpreted."[382] It is, of course, far more explicitly sexual ("the bridal-hour of Genius and Humanity") than the devoirs.[383] But it is not really more sexual than the juvenilia, which merrily, if innocently, features a string women falling in love with Zamorna. The Duke's wife during "The Spell," Mary, remembers when she was only the Duke's mistress: "He was a wild dream a superhuman vision, a rain-bow apparition which I chased & chased over hill, & plain, & valley, ever unwearied, never successful, wholly absorbed in the

[381] Brontë, *The Belgian Essays*, 270.
[382] Brontë, *Shirley*, 408.
[383] *Ibid*, 409.

vain yet delicious pursuit."[384]

Why embed a text like "La Premiere Femme Savant" in the confines of the novel? It serves, to be sure, as a metatext, in which the theme of education and female genius—in Shirley Keeldar as well as Brontë herself—is refracted. It is also a maneuver that preserves the genres of devoir and juvenilia, acting as a kind of glue, while establishing them as clearly inferior or dependent on the novel form itself. "La Premiere Femme Savant" is a communication between Louis and Shirley: He proves his love by reciting it from memory, having treasured it for all these years. What it does between them is as important as what the words say. The recitation sets up the theme of speaking in another's accent or voice, which is also what the devoir does, when it mimics or tries to mimic. All of this is the form of their flirtation. If Shirley remembers Louis returning that composition so covered in pen ink that she couldn't see to correct it, Brontë does a similar thing by at once including the text and disavowing it.

Louis is Shirley's master just as realism is the master of the juvenilia/devoir—and the master of romance. The famous stoicism of *Shirley* follows Caroline Helstone's early disappointment that "bonnie Robert" does not treat her with the love that she expects to find:

> Rude disappointment! Sharp cross! At first the eager girl would not believe in the change, though she saw and felt it. It was difficult to withdraw her hand from his, till he had bestowed at least something like a kind pressure; it was difficult to turn her eyes from his eyes, till his looks had expressed something more and fonder than that cool welcome.
>
> A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation; a lover feminine can say nothing: if she did the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery. Nature would brand such

[384] Brontë, "The Spell," in *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Writings*, 85.

> demonstration as a rebellion against her instincts, and would vindictively repay it afterwards by the thunderbolt of self-contempt smiting suddenly in secret. Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions; utter no remonstrances: it is your best wisdom. You expected bread, and you have got a stone; break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyrized: do not doubt that your mental stomach—if you have such a thing—is strong as an ostrich's—the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind: in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob.[385]

The passage goes on in this spirit for another paragraph. That qualification of the mental stomach ("if you have such a thing") seems to enact the correction the passage prescribes, qualifying the narrator's flight into metaphor. However, the very length and passion of the passage raises doubts that it has been effective in its prescriptions.

The play of and around "La Premiere Femme Savant" is a way that *Shirley* evades the stoicism and the brutal crushing of the scorpion in one's hand that this passage advocates. This passage is speaking the voice of reality and realism: the stifling of the romantic impulse, and the bitterness and rage that accompanies it. But this attempt is a failure, as the novel *Shirley* makes plain. For one, romance *does* win in the end, in the marriage plots. But more importantly, generically, the novel does not ultimately exclude fantasy, which turns stones into bread. Instead, it valorizes play.

The voice of the passage above seems to be in the grip of a vision, something like Shirley's youthful vision of the island in her composition. "It is no sandy plain, nor any circumscribed and scant oasis I seem to realize. …Here, indeed, dwell human beings, but so few, and in alleys to thick branched and overarched, they were neither heard nor seen.

[385] Brontë, *Shirley*, 89-90.

Are they savage?—doubtless."[386] The last paragraph of "La Premiere Femme Savant" is a lament that the writer, the child Shirley, is unable to tell the rest of the story of the union between Genius and Humanity. "Who shall rehearse the tale of their after-union? Who shall depict its bliss and bale?... Who shall, of these things, write the chronicle?" The story acknowledges that it cannot be written; it cannot occupy the vantage point of eternity that would be required, the place when "Time's course closed."[387] "La Premiere Femme Savant" is mythological and prophetic. What *can* be written is the novel we have: not a story of faithful Seraphs and Time and Dreadless Angels but of a manufacturing crisis, daily life, marriages between mortals.

And yet the novel's conclusion evokes Shirley's juvenile devoir. As if through the mists of time, the narrator's old housekeeper recalls a long-ago past. Different temporalities swirl. The narrator first declares that it is the day of the double wedding. Then we're told that "the other day" the narrator passed up the Hollow. Immediately following, Martha says that she "can remember the old mill being built," and seeing "Mrs. Louis" and "Mrs. Robert" at that time. We seem to have suddenly jumped at once forward and backward in time. The effect is bewildering. When Martha remarks that "there is no such ladies [as Mrs. Louis and Mrs. Robert] now-a-days," she cannot possibly mean that today, in the present (whatever that is), there are no women as there were in the days of Mrs. Louis and Mrs. Robert. Those days *are* these days. Not enough time has elapsed for any other reading. But the effect is that of placing Shirley and Caroline into a mythic past, as if we have gone from Technicolor to sepia tones.

[386] Ibid, 405.
[387] Ibid, 409.

We, supposed readers of the 1840s, suddenly look back on the events of 1811-12 with all the benefits of hindsight. Those mists of time that obscured all tribal, regional and even national differences are lifted. In the parting of that veil we see that "in the Hollow there was neither mill, nor cot, nor hall, except Fieldhead, within two miles of it."[388] Fieldhead, it seems, was always there, has always been there, was always already there. The estate of Shirley and Louis has become the land before time where Genius and Humanity met. The sting of realism has become bearable, transformed by play into something juvenile. Brontë never left "that burning clime" entirely behind—she brought its atmosphere to the cooler regions, and made them habitable.

[388] Ibid, 542.

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