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“Our Weekday Preachers”

Humor in Victorian Literature (1828–1868)

by Glynnis R. Cox

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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis presented for the degree of PhD in English Literature, has

i) been composed entirely by myself
ii) been solely the result of my own work
iii) not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification

Glynnis R. Cox
29 May 2021

Abstract

This thesis investigates the use of humor in realist Victorian novels published between 1828–1868. The main hypothesis of this project is that the novelists of this time period rely on humor as a powerful tool not just to divert and amuse, but often as a central rhetorical device to create complex stories, to evoke compelling characters, to depict social problems, and to persuade. The ideas that my work explores are illustrated by analyses of texts by: Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Meredith, Margaret Oliphant, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, and Frances Trollope.

My research aims have been to answer the following questions: (1) where does humor appear in these texts and how is it employed in the techniques of these narratives? And (2) why is humor used or in relation to which themes is humor employed? In order to answer these questions my first chapter discusses theories of humor and proposes that a version of incongruity theory is the fittest definition to use to understand humor's presence and role in the texts of the Victorian period. Incongruity theory suggests that the essential, if not sufficient, condition for humor is the presence of the juxtaposition between an incongruity and present or implied congruity. To discuss the technical aspects of humor as incongruity and its role in narrative, this thesis also utilizes some of the vocabulary and theories of Narratology, Structuralism, and Formalism.

Chapters two and three seek to use the theories discussed in chapter one to answer (1): where does humor appear in these texts and how is it employed? In chapter two, I demonstrate how different authors of this period introduce humor in their texts and frame incongruity through the focalization of narrators. In chapter three, I discuss the role of humor, both its presence and absence, in texts in relation to central versus peripheral characters and in character development. This chapter particularly highlights the orienting role that humor plays in texts: for or against characters and causes. In chapters four and five, I address question (2): why do authors use humor or what is humor in these texts about? In chapter four, I look at how humor was used to depict conflict within and confused expectations between different social groups. In chapter five, I focus on the use of humor in narrative to critique and persuade. First, I look at various examples of critiques of contemporary ecclesiastical controversy. Second, I compare an example of a critique of Utilitarianism and a critique of the use of literature to persuade. Finally, in my conclusion, I briefly highlight the limits of humor's role and usefulness in humor-dominated narratives by comparing the presence and absence of humor in scenes depicting death and suffering.

Lay Summary

This thesis studies the use of humor in Victorian novels published between 1828–1868. The main argument of this project is that the authors of this time period use humor in their stories as a powerful tool not just to amuse, but often as a central means of creating complex stories, evoking compelling characters, depicting social problems, and persuading their readers. This thesis looks at humor in novels and short-stories written by popular novelists of the Victorian period, including: Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Meredith, Margaret Oliphant, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, and Frances Trollope. Today some of these novelists are still well-known, but others have fallen into relative obscurity.

To conduct my research, I began by asking the following questions: (1) where does humor appear in these texts and how is it employed in the art of story-telling? And (2) why do these authors turn to humor, or, what themes do these authors use humor to depict? In order to answer these questions my first chapter briefly discusses the history of the theory of humor and the three primary theories of humor: superiority, relief, and incongruity. I argue that a version of incongruity theory is the most useful and appropriate definition for humor to bring to an analysis of the novels of the Victorian period. Incongruity theory, as might be expected, defines humor as resulting from the presentation, sometimes unexpectedly, of an incongruity. What audiences perceive as incongruous, however, will be different and this difference points to why audiences, in varied time periods or cultures, may have varied responses to the same jokes. This difference also points to one of the reasons why the humor of the Victorian period, written by and for Victorian audiences, is distinctive.

Chapters two and three turn to the novels of the Victorian period to ask my first question (1): where does humor appear in these texts? In chapter two, I discuss the role of the narrator in the novels in question. I argue that narrators are often the primary source of humor in texts and that they are one of the primary means through which authors encourage their readers to perceive the incongruities in these novels as humorous. In chapter three, I look at how authors use humor in relation to main characters versus secondary characters. In both of these chapters, I argue that humor is central to guiding the readers of these texts in their interpretation of the story's events and characters: encouraging them to empathize with certain characters or ideas and alienating them from other characters and ideas.

In chapters four and five, I address question (2): why do authors use humor? In chapter four, I look at how humor was used to depict the interaction between and within social groups in novels. As a social phenomenon itself, humor is particularly adapted to comment upon social dynamics and the novels I examine frequently turn to humor in scenes of social confusion and conflict. In chapter five, I argue that humor was a key means through which many of the authors I look at sought to persuade their readers on various topics. First, I look at some examples of novels commenting upon contemporary controversies in the church using humor. Second, I compare two novels that present different examples of how to use humor to persuade. Finally, in my conclusion, I look at the presence and absence of humor in scenes depicting death and argue that, although often absent in these scenes, humor is key to preparing readers to be affected by these scenes.

Acknowledgements

The importance of my community of colleagues, friends, and family over the years of this research is too significant to express in these brief paragraphs. Of the many, many people to whom I owe so much, I would like to express my gratitude for a few individually.

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In undertaking this thesis, I have grown in appreciation for my formative education. In so many different ways, it prepared me to undertake this work and shaped the person I am; this I entirely attribute to the example and instruction of my remarkable mom, Susie (1958–2015). I am also indebted to many of my undergraduate instructors for their guidance in my early years in academia, and whose influence I consider central to this research: specifically to Professor Patrick Dolan, whose example as a thinker was somehow both cynical and hopeful—truly Chestertonian—and significant in teaching me how to think; to Professor Elizabeth Karlsgodt, who devoted an extraordinary amount of time and patience to reading and correcting my undergraduate dissertation drafts and, thereby, taught me how to write; and to Professor Adam Rovner, who introduced me to many ideas that are foundational to this thesis, who has given me insightful feedback on my writing over many years, and whose encouragement and optimism about my work and career has been unfailing.

I am profoundly grateful for the support and love of my community and friends, back in Colorado and here in Scotland: especially for Derek and Catriona Lamont and all the dear people at St. Columba's. Above all, I am grateful for the support of my family, my wonderful siblings Anthony, Raymond, Camille, and Lynwood, and for my departed parents: to whom I owe everything.

And lastly, a note of thanks to all those kind friends and acquaintances who generously sought to take an interest in my work over the years. Due to my inadequate descriptions, and despite their earnest attempts, they sometimes failed to grasp what is so particularly funny about the Victorians. In apology, I can only repeat what my insightful friend Ruth Martin observed—I guess you had to be there.

Glynnis R. Cox
Edinburgh, May 2021

For my dad, Gary W. Cox (1951–2020).
A very funny man who was very concerned that I would, perhaps, never finish this thesis—for you I have finished it.

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“It is the greatest incongruity of all to be serious about humour.”

G. K. Chesterton

Introduction: Humor in Victorian Literature

I: The "Weekday Preachers"

At an event to raise money for charity in 1852, William Makepeace Thackeray delivered an address entitled "Charity and Humour." He explained to the assembled audience the enduring connection between humorous literature and the cause of charity. He asked the crowd, "[w]as there ever a better charity sermon preached in the world than Charles Dickens's 'Christmas Carol'?"[1] The cause of charity and humor are perhaps not obvious associates, but Thackeray argued in his address that the two topics could not be more closely aligned:

> Besides contributing to our stock of happiness, to our harmless laughter and amusement, to our scorn of falsehood and pretension, to our righteous hatred of hypocrisy, to our education in the perception of truth, our love of honesty, our knowledge of life, and shrewd guidance through the world, have not our humorous writers, our gay and kind weekday preachers, done much in support of that holy cause which has assembled you in the place; and which you are all abetting—the cause of love and charity, the cause of the poor, the weak, and the unhappy; the sweet mission of love and tenderness, and peace and good-will towards men?[2]

Notably the "weekday preachers" he describes did not include the kind of authors who wrote the moralistic, sermonic novels one might expect to be associated with charitable causes. Many novels published in this period depicting human suffering, moral discipline, and religious sacrifice were best-sellers.[3] But Thackeray does not point to these texts and instead cites texts by such humorous authors as Dickens, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, Henry Fielding, Oliver Goldsmith, and Thomas Hood as those which have contributed to the "holy cause which has assembled you in this place." This speech was the overview of a series of talks on English humorists, parts of which were later published as *The English Humorists of the 18th Century* (1853). Thackeray explains in this culminative address that humor is the means through which this collective of writers promotes charity, love, and virtue.[4]

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[1] William Makepeace Thackeray, "Charity and Humour", in *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, vol. 7, *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq. and The Lectures* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1898), 724. This lecture was first delivered in the United States in 1852 and then re-delivered a number of times, with some variations, in London in subsequent years.
[2] Ibid., 713.
[3] Richard D. Altick, *The Presence of the Present: Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 51. See also John Sutherland, "The Religious Novel", in *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Harlow: Longman, 1988), 529.
[4] Thackeray, "Charity and Humour", 724.

Although it was favorably reviewed in some contemporary papers, this speech is not of especial significance historically or in Thackeray's non-fictional oeuvre.[5] However, Thackeray's speech argued for two important ideas about literature, which are, perhaps, not as prevalent today as they seem to have been when he spoke in 1852. First, he argues that humorous literature has genuine power to persuade its readers. Second, he argues that humor is one of the best and most able modes of representing and explaining real problems and joys. He explains, "[t]he same theme which is urged upon you by the eloquence and example of good men to whom you are delighted listeners on Sabbath-days, is taught in his way and according to his power by the humorous writer, the commentator on everyday life and manners."[6] Hence he calls himself and his contemporaries "weekday preachers." While preachers on Sundays give persuasive speeches and observations about what life is and how to live from the pulpits, the weekday preachers, the humorous novelists of Britain, give persuasive speeches and observations about what life is and how to live from the Victorian's periodicals. Of course it is far from clear how widely Thackeray's exact view of humor's persuasive power to depict real life and promote charity might have been accepted, though the rhetorical framing of his speech does not seem to anticipate an audience skeptical or hostile to his ideas. What is clear, however, from examining the use of humor in the novels of his peers, is that many notable contemporary humorists relied upon humor as the kind of tool that Thackeray describes.

Thackeray describes himself and fellow novelists as writing with a particular aim. He treats humor not as if it were a feature or discrete section of comic relief within the novels to which he refers, but as if it were central to their artistic undertaking. I would like to suggest in the following chapters that authors relied upon humor's distinctive rhetorical attributes to reveal truths, educate, persuade, and engage their readers. Donald Gray suggests two good examples of what I mean by this:

> One reason Dickens laughs at the Circumlocution Office, and Meredith at Sir Willoughby, is that they think these foolish existences both ridiculous and wrong. They want their readers to laugh at them too so that they also will judge these follies to be dangerous and will participate in an indignation which will rectify or destroy them.[7]

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[5] For contemporary reviews of Thackeray's speech see: "Mr. Thackeray on 'Humour and Charity'", *Manchester Times*, March 24, 1855, British Library Newspapers; and "Marylebone Institution", *Times*, March 23, 1855, Times Digital Archive.
[6] Thackeray, "Charity and Humour", 713–714.
[7] Donald Gray, "The Uses of Victorian Laughter", *Victorian Studies* 10, no. 2 (December 1966): 146, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3825187.

These novel-sermons use humor to ask readers to judge and understand characters and fictional undertakings that often represented the real societal ills they sought to critique or personal and social virtues they sought to laud. Thackeray and his colleagues, as he saw it, contributed "to our righteous hatred of hypocrisy [and] to our education in the perception of truth" through their humorous works.[8] Even when humor seems only to divert and amuse, rather than overtly to critique or comment, it plays a powerful role in the artistic rhetoric of the narrative in which it appears by orienting readers toward or against characters and action.

This thesis analyzes the use of humor in a selection of realist novels by some of the weekday preachers from the Victorian period to which Thackeray refers. The two questions I have asked in reading and comparing these novels have been (1) 'how do authors use humor in their narratives?' and (2) 'why or about what?' What this thesis attempts to do is articulate a theory of humor that enables me to bring the texts I have selected into conversation with one another in order to answer both the question of technique, how humor is presented, and the question of content, to compare what the humor in these novels is about.

II: Texts and Approach

"Victorian humor" might to some modern readers, whose vision of the Victorian era is one of a collective of sanctimonious, mustachioed MPs, strait-laced, delicate ladies, and ragged, under-nourished orphans, seem a contradiction in terms. But if output is any indication of consumption, it suggests that the Victorians found themselves very amusing.[9] There was a vast array of humorous material produced in the Victorian period.[10] These varied from short puns,

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[8] Thackeray, "Charity and Humour", 713.

[9] According to Gray in "The Uses of Victorian Laughter", Victorians tended to view humor and the uses of laughter within two main categories. The first "was to ridicule in order to correct, or at least to unsettle, things and ideas which those who laugh take seriously" (146–147). The second was, "to furnish a holiday from taking things and ideas seriously" (147). However, Gray does not show the process through which he derived this generalization. While it might be an easy division to suggest that the puns and short jokes in newspapers or the humor of the pantomime belong to the first category, and most novels and comic plays to the other category, it does not appear clear to me that the former fails to engage with serious ideas or that the latter could not be used as an escape from the serious.

[10] See Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (London: Dent, 1973), 178–179. For more on Victorian book purchasing and reading habits see: Richard D. Altick, "English Publishing in 1852", in *Writers, Readers, and Occasions*: *Selected Essays on Victorian Literature and Life*, ed. Richard D. Altick (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989) 141–158; John Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (Athlone: London University Press, 1976); Graham Law and Robert L. Patten, "The serial revolution", in *The Cambridge History of The Book in Britain*, ed. David McKitterick, vol. 6, *1830–1914*

anecdotes, or jokes published in magazines (many of which, could be described as "groaners"),[11] serialized novels in magazines, three-volume novels, theatrical and music hall performances, and pantomimes. Nineteenth-century theorists and essayists also addressed humor in theoretical terms. While this thesis begins by asking the question, 'what is humor?', the approach to theorizing about and critiquing humor by literary critics in the Victorian period tended to begin by asking the question 'what does humor do?' or, perhaps even more pointedly, 'is the humor effective?' These questions were not only asked and answered in essays by well-known authors such as William Hazlitt, George Meredith, Thackeray, George Bernard Shaw, and Mark Twain, but there are also extended essays in periodicals published, as was common, anonymously that specifically explore the nature of humor.[12]

The argument of this thesis relies upon a version of the theory of incongruity, defined and explained in the first chapter, as the fittest theoretical answer to the question: 'what is humor?' While there is no unified, cohesive theory of what humor is that emerges from Victorian theorizing, humor as related to the incongruous is by no means an anachronistic application to Victorian texts. In the article "Wit and Humour" (1863), the anonymous writer in the *Westminster Review* explains that "[t]he essence of humour is incongruity: as incongruity is

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 144–171; Simon Eliot and Andrew Nash, "Mass Markets: Literature", in *The Cambridge History of The Book in Britain*, ed. David McKitterick, vol. 6, *1830–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 416–442; John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten eds., *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and R. C. Terry, *Victorian Popular Fiction, 1860–80* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

[11] A plethora of such entries between the 1830s and 1880s can be found in the Times Archive Online and British Library Newspapers databases by searching for 'humour' as it appears in titles of articles. Another collection of short Victorian jokes curated by Bob Nicholson and supported by the British Library and Edge Hill University, can be found on the twitter account @victorianhumour. As Richard Altick in *Victorian People* put it, when it came to puns and riddles "the Victorians had an apparently insatiable appetite and an inexhaustible tolerance" (179).

[12] These appear predominantly in the 1860s and 1870s: "Wit and Humour", *Westminster Review*, October 1863, Proquest; "American Humour", *The Graphic*, April 1, 1871, British Library Newspapers; "Street-Humour", *Manchester Times*, September 1, 1866, British Library Newspapers; "American Humour", *The Cornhill Magazine*, January 1866, Proquest; "Traits of American Humour", *The Irish Quarterly*, March 1852, Proquest; "Feminine Humour", *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 32, no. 820 (July 15, 1871), Proquest; "Humour", *The Cornhill Magazine*, March 1876, Proquest; and "Humour", *Labour League Examiner*, November 10, 1877, British Library Newspapers. Some other Victorian era writers who theorize about humor specifically include: Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846); Charles Baudelaire, "On the Essence of Laughter" (1855); and Henri Bergson, "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic" (1900).

increased humour is increased, as it is diminished, humour is diminished."[13] Incongruity's role in humor was an idea with which some authors and readers were familiar. As the twentieth-century critic Robert Martin argues in *The Triumph of Wit: A Study of Victorian Comic Theory* (1974), "[t]hroughout the Victorian era there is a gradual shift towards the acceptance of incongruity and wit as the essence of comedy."[14]

This thesis focuses on a number of humorous novels published between the late 1820s and the late 1860s: a heyday for serial publication.[15] While Edwardian author and critic G. K. Chesterton has argued that "[m]ere chronological order [. . .] is almost as arbitrary as alphabetical order", I seek to show that the texts that I have selected have a comparative relationship that is more significant than merely their timeframe.[16] The texts I have chosen offer a representative and distinctive roster for comparison, both in terms of evidence of comparable technique as well as notable thematic similarities. The novels I analyze in this thesis represent only a small selection from the abundance of humorous novels published during the Victorian period and of the many that I considered in my research.

To discuss humor's technical properties, I rely upon vocabulary and ideas from humor theorists as well as some vocabulary and concepts from Narratology, Structuralism, and Formalism. I introduce some of these terms and how I use them in chapter one. Chapter one outlines my justification for relying upon a version of incongruity theory in this thesis and offers some background on the field of humor studies that informs the discussion of the subsequent

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[13] "Wit and Humour", *Westminster Review*, 446.

[14] Robert Bernard Martin, *The Triumph of Wit: A Study of Victorian Comic Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), viii. Some early to mid-twentieth-century criticism on humor in Victorian literature includes: J. B. Priestly, *English Humour* (1929); U. C. Knoepflmacher, *Laughter and Despair: Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era* (1954); Stuart Tave, *The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (1960); and Donald Gray, "The Uses of Victorian Laughter" (1966). Criticism from the 1970s-1990s includes: Ronald Pearsall, *Collapse of Stout Party: Victorian Wit and Humor* (1975); Robert Henkle, *Comedy and Culture: England 1820–1900* (1980); Robert Polhemus, *Comic Faith: The Great Tradition from Austen to Joyce* (1980); and Don L. F. Nilsen's reference bibliography on humorous works, *Humor in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (1998). And, finally, two recent collections of essays specifically engage with humor in Victorian literature: *The Victorian Comic Spirit: New Perspectives* (2000) edited by Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor; and *Victorian Comedy and Laughter: Conviviality, Jokes and Dissent* (2020) edited by Louise Lee.

[15] A notable contextual detail politically for this timeframe is that it roughly coincides with the passage of the First Reform Bill (1832) and the Second Reform Bill (1867) both of which involved expanding the franchise to include lower socio-economic voters.

[16] G. K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1925), 8.

chapters.

Chapters two and three focus on two foundational technical aspects of the presence of humor in literature: narration and characterization. Chapter two explores the junction of narration, realism, and humor. This chapter discusses the significant role that humor plays in narration in the texts in question and argues that humor in narration is particularly cohesive with Victorian ideas about realism and their standards of novelistic authenticity and relevance. To do so, this chapter focuses on narration in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham: Or, Adventures of A Gentleman* (1828), Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), William Makepeace Thackeray's "A Little Dinner at Timmins's" (serialized 1848), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (serialized 1852–1853), and Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (serialized 1868). Chapter three examines humor as a factor in characterization. This chapter demonstrates humor's significant role in generating and often orienting the reader's sympathies to or away from characters at different levels of centrality and peripherality to the narrative action. This chapter compares characterization in Frances Milton Trollope's *The Widow Barnaby* (1839), Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (serialized 1847–1848), Dickens' *David Copperfield* (serialized 1849–1850), Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857), *Doctor Thorne* (1858), and *Framley Parsonage* (serialized 1860–1861), and Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (serialized 1865–1866).

Chapters four and five shift the focus of the thesis from the technical question of how authors use humor, to the more thematic question of why authors use humor or what the humor in these texts is about. Chapter four addresses the use of humor to depict conflicting expectations around social behavior. Expectations around social behavior were sites where many authors depicted incongruity in their society. This chapter focuses on four texts from the 1860s as a case study and argues that authors use humor to address snobbery, place, manners, and notions of gentility. The texts from the 1860s which this chapter discusses are: *Evan Harrington: Or, He Would Be a Gentleman* (serialized 1860) by Meredith, *Great Expectations* (serialized 1860–1861) by Dickens, *Orley Farm* (serialized 1861–1862) by Anthony Trollope, and *Wives and Daughters: An Every-Day Story* (serialized 1864–1866) by Gaskell. In chapter five I describe how authors use humor as a device of novelistic persuasion. Firstly, the chapter looks at a small group of texts that use humor to comment upon the division between the high versus the low church. Secondly, the chapter compares two texts: one which overtly uses satirical humor and exaggeration within a text to make an argument and the other which engages in a critique of that

novel's use of humorous argument. This chapter examines these themes in: Dickens' *Hard Times* (serialized 1854), Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1855) and *Rachel Ray* (1863), George Eliot's "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton" from her collection *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), and Oliphant's "The Rector" (1861).

Finally, in my conclusion I revisit a number of the novels considered in this thesis to compare the boundaries and limits of humor's use and application in literature particularly with respect to the depiction and discussion of death.

Chapter 1: Humor Studies

1.1 Introduction

The presence of humor in a narrative is typically in the manner in which the narrative is presented rather than the subject of the narrative. In a sense then, studying humor in Victorian novels has more in common, in its approach, with studying something like rhetoric in Victorian novels than it does with a more thematic approach such as studying domesticity or nature. Humor can be examined both for how it is accomplished, i.e. its form, as well as when and in relation to what themes it is employed, i.e. its substance. However, observing this duality in humor, of form and substance, does not demonstrate that it is divided. A similar duality yet unity exists in poetry and a comparison can be made between humor and poetry as art forms; art is the unity of form and content. Form (how) and substance (what) are indivisible; form is empty without substance, and substance is meaningless without a form.[17] This indivisibility is present in humor as well. Humor relies upon its form: timing, order, juxtaposition, and thoughtful word choice. Yet humor is not the result of a formula, and its substance must also appeal to its particular hearer in order to invite engagement. Because of this unity, the two questions I have asked in reading and comparing humorous Victorian novels in this research have been, first, how do authors use humor in their narratives and, second, about what or why? While individual chapters in this thesis may tend to focus on one or the other aspect of substance or form, in doing so I am pointing out a part of the structure or pattern of a larger monument, the substance and form of which are, as A. C. Bradley put it, "one thing from different points of view."[18]

Before this thesis can engage with the questions surrounding the use of humor in Victorian novels, it first defines humor and gestures to some of its formal, rhetorical features. To do so, this chapter provides some background on the philosophy of humor with particular attention to the theory of incongruity. As suggested in the introduction, it is the theory of incongruity, unlike other theories of humor within the philosophy of humor, that is seeking to

[17] Many have observed this before, but perhaps none more effectively than A. C. Bradley in "Poetry for Poetry's Sake", in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 3–34; cf. Susan Sontag also forcefully argues: "Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories." "Against Interpretation", in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), 10.

[18] Bradley, "Poetry", 15.

answer the question 'what is humor?' The answers to this question provide a foundation from which to consider humor's role in Victorian novels. In addition to identifying some important features of incongruity theory, this chapter also indicates the manner in which I have used this theory in the analysis of texts in subsequent chapters.

1.2 Three Different Questions

Historically, there have been three major theories of humor: incongruity theory, superiority theory, and relief theory.[19] These labels, however, are broadly applied and only suggest the realm of humor writing that each of the subsequently discussed authors traditionally belonged to, rather than a clearly articulated, delineated theory to which they subscribed. None of these theories have successfully edged out the other two as the predominant means through which theorists explain the workings or operations of humor. This coexistence without predominance is perhaps due to the fact that each theory approaches humor with different questions in mind.

Relief or release theory's two primary proponents were Herbert Spencer in "Physiology of Laughter" (1860) and Sigmund Freud in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) and "Humor" (1928). Spencer summarizes the general argument on the nature of humor and relief when he writes that "laughter is a result of the pleasure we take in escaping the restraint of grave feelings."[20] Theories of relief focus on the physiological response to humor and are particularly interesting in the way they comment upon the connection between mind and body. However, relief theory is not really asking the question, 'what is humor?' Rather it is asking, 'what is laughter?' or 'what is the connection between humor and laughter?'[21] So while relief

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[19] Some notable, historical texts that discuss humor include: Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, "Sensus Communis: an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour", in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Time* (1711); Samuel Johnson, "The Difficulty of Defining Comedy" (1751); William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819); Herbert Spencer, "Physiology of Laughter", in *Essays on Education* (1860); and George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (1896).

[20] Herbert Spencer, "Physiology of Laughter", in *Essays in Education* (London: J. M. Dent, 1911), 307.

[21] Even in proposing a theory founded in laughter as the release of pent-up emotions, these theorists are forced to explain humor through incongruity. Freud describes how jokes exploit the expectation of congruity by the reader through "condensation, displacement, indirect representation and so on" to achieve humor. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1960), 95. Similarly, to begin the essay "The Physiology of Laughter", Spencer asks, "[h]ow comes a sense of the incongruous to be followed by these peculiar bodily actions?", i.e. laughter (301). Ultimately, even those who did not place incongruity at the center of their exploration of humor,

theory is often classed as a theory of humor, it is more appropriately categorized as involved in the wider study of humor that focuses on its effects.[22]

While it did not receive any thorough attention from philosophers until the 1900s, superiority theory is the earliest and most perennial theory of humor. It suggests that humor is founded upon ridiculing the ignorance of others. Although neither of them wrote about humor at length, Plato and Aristotle are considered the first major proponents of this theory. Plato argues predominantly in *Philebus* and *The Laws* that humor is dangerous to the health of the Republic because it is primarily used to ridicule. He states that the root of the ridiculous, the object of humor, is when someone does not know himself. If the greatest good in the Republic is to "know thyself" then its opposite is a vice.[23] Even though people may derive pleasure at laughing at the ignorant, to derive enjoyment from the vices of others may also ultimately foster ignorance and vice. Aristotle similarly argues that laughter results from a perception that someone else is inferior. He writes that "the jest is a sort of abuse."[24] Though like Plato, Aristotle devotes very little space to the discussion of humor, what he does write seems to indicate that he considers humor to be by its nature derisive.[25] The next significant philosophers to contribute to the formulation of humor as predicated upon superiority are Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (1651) and René Descartes in his *Passion of the Soul* (1649).[26] In *Leviathan*, Hobbes focuses a few

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acknowledge that incongruity must be present for humor to be present. This supports my argument that relief theorists are in fact asking a different question than 'what is humor?'

[22] As Roger Scruton helpfully distinguishes, "[i]t is not laughter, but laughter at or about something, that interests the philosopher." "Laughter", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 56 (1982): 198.

[23] Plato, "Philebus", in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 438.

[24] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. Sir David Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 104.

[25] Supporting my contention that superiority theorists, like the relief theorists, are asking different questions than simply 'what is humor?", they cannot escape reference to the incongruous in their explanation of superiority. Even in banishing humor from the Republic, Plato describes the root of humor as the perception of the "ludicrous" and the "ridiculous." "Laws VII", in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1483; "Republic V", in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1080; "Philebus", 438.

[26] I do not mean to suggest, however, that superiority theory reigned as the dominant theory from Plato through to Bergson. Between the brief paragraphs on humor by Plato and the few by Hobbes, there were a diversity of thoughts on humor's nature, but, in general, humor received little attention amongst philosophers. Amongst Christian theologians there was some debate about humor as it was related to the promotion of truth and the experience of pleasure. The thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas addresses the objections of fourth century theologians Ambrose and Chrysostom to what he calls the "virtue of games" in his *Summa Theologica* (1265–1273). His conclusion is that games or pleasure are important as outlets of relaxation in attaining a balance in life, but that whenever jests and mirth are

paragraphs upon the ways in which laughing at others is a means of self-aggrandizement and justification—what he calls "self-glory."[27] Descartes' *Passion of the Soul* anticipates relief theory, but with an emphasis on superiority:

> Derision or scorn is a sort of joy mingled with hatred, which proceeds from our perceiving some small evil in a person whom we consider to be deserving of it; we have hatred for this evil, we have joy in seeing it in him who is deserving of it; and when that comes upon us unexpectedly, the surprise of wonder is the cause of our bursting into laughter.[28]

It was not until Henri Bergson's "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic" (1900) that the superiority theory of humor was given lengthy attention. However, while Bergson asserts that humor is predominantly based in a sense of superiority, he also contends that it may yet have positive impact in society when it is used as a tool for shaming the arrogant and ridiculing the foolish into better behavior. Laughter, he contends, "is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. [. . .] It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness."[29] Like many other theorists, Bergson is traditionally associated with one school of thought on humor (in this case Superiority), but his ideas contain elements of more than one theory. His essay also includes interesting insights into theories of incongruity.

While both relief and superiority theories as explanations for humor make important points, there are many good reasons to reject these two theories as the primary explanations for

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unkind or our pleasure in them is inordinate, they are an evil. He writes, "[s]ince, however, mirth is useful for the sake of the rest and pleasure it affords; and since, in human life, pleasure and rest are not in quest for their own sake, but for the sake of operation, as stated in [Aristotle's] Ethic. x, 6, it follows that 'lack of mirth is less sinful than excess thereof." *Summa Theologica: Part II–II (Sucunda Secundae)*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Project Gutenberg, 2006), Fourth Article, Q. 168, Art. 4. Later, fifteenth-century Christian writers Erasmus and Melanchthon, respectively, both note the power of comic devices in the stories of Roman and Greek plays to educate morally: see Magda Romanska and Alan Ackerman eds., *Reader in Comedy: An Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 54.

[27] Hobbes argues that "men laugh at the infirmities of others, by comparison wherewith their own abilities are set off and illustrated. [. . .] for what is else the recommending of our selves to our own good opinion, by comparison with another man's infirmity or absurdity?" "Human Nature", in *The Collected Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: Routledge, 1994), 4:46.

[28] René Descartes, *Passion of the Soul* in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 1: 413.

[29] "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic", in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956), 187.

humor.[30] Simply, relief theorists and superiority theorists are asking fundamentally different questions, and therefore deriving fundamentally different answers about humor than that which this project focuses on. While relief theorists primarily ask 'what is laughter?', superiority theorists are primarily engaged in asking, 'for what purpose is humor used?', or, more often, 'for what purpose should humor be used?'[31] However, the question with which this research is engaged is that which is asked by incongruity theorists: 'what is humor?'

The primary philosophers associated with incongruity theory are Immanuel Kant in *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Arthur Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), and Søren Kierkegaard in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846).[32] Incongruity theory, as it has been defined as distinct from the superiority or relief theories, suggests that humor is derived from an enjoyable perception of an unexpected juxtaposition of incongruous ideas or objects. Schopenhauer puts it well in *The World as Will and Representation* when he writes, "[t]he *intentionally* ludicrous is the *joke*. This is the effort to bring about a discrepancy between another's concepts and reality by displacing one of the two; whereas its opposite, *seriousness*, consists in the exact suitability of the two to each other."[33] The result of perceiving this incongruity is the awareness of an absurdity or paradox that is the stimulus for a state of amusement that often, though not always, results in laughter.

The simplest example of incongruity is perhaps the pun: a form of humor with which, as noted in the introduction, Victorian newspapers were replete. An example of an absurdity that invites amusement can be seen in the report of an exchange between the famous Victorian political rivals Conservative leader Benjamin Disraeli and Liberal leader William Gladstone:

> Gladstone: I understand, sir, that you are a witty fellow.
> Disraeli: Some people are under that impression.

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[30] For example, theorists have challenged the adequacy of superiority theory by questioning how it can be reconciled to playfulness or to laughing at one's self. See John Lippitt, "Humour and Superiority", *Cogito* 9, no. 2 (1995): 59, Proquest.

[31] As Scruton observes "[t]he mistake, of 'superiority' and 'release' theories alike, is to find the meaning of humour in what it does for the subject, rather than in how it represents the object." "Laughter", 210.

[32] Some twentieth and twenty-first century theorists who incorporate elements of incongruity theory in their theories of humor include: John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (1983); and Marie Collins Swabey, *Comic Laughter: A Philosophical Essay* (1961). Other contemporary writers who elucidate how incongruity functions as humor include: Michael Clark, "Humour and Incongruity" (1970); John Lippitt, "Humour and Incongruity" (1994); Andrew Stott, *Comedy* (2005); and Matthew Bevis, *Humor: A Very Short Introduction* (2013).

[33] Arthur Schopenhauer, "On the Theory of the Ludicrous", in *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 2:91 (author's italics).

> Gladstone: I'm told that you can make a joke on any subject.
> Disraeli: That is quite possible.
> Gladstone: Then I challenge you—make a joke about Queen Victoria.
> Disraeli: Sir, Her Majesty is not a subject.[34]

In this example, Disraeli unexpectedly exploits a second possible meaning for the word *subject* and thereby accuses Gladstone of ascribing that second definition inappropriately to Queen Victoria. The contrast between the expected congruity, Gladstone's initial meaning in the word *subject*, and the delivered incongruity, the political meaning of *subject* that Disraeli turns to, is the juxtaposition that humor relies upon to inspire amusement.

Although early theorists like Kant focus on incongruity as the necessary condition for humor, later arguments, such as those made by John Morreall[35] and Roger Scruton,[36] focus on the perception of congruity as an equally necessary condition; neither the congruity nor the incongruity in isolation inspires amusement, but rather it is the two in juxtaposition with one another that are collectively the source of amusement.[37] In the example above, the hearer must already understand that the secondary use of the term subject, in the way in which Disraeli invokes it, is appropriately and conventionally applied to all British people except for the British monarch; this congruity must be in place in the hearer for the incongruity of calling the Queen a subject to have the humorous meaning that Disraeli intends. Therefore, importantly, although the theory of incongruity is named after the incongruity, the expectation and awareness of congruity is as vital an element in humor as the perception of a presented incongruity: without congruity there is no incongruity.

The above example of Disraeli and Gladstone also illustrates that to embrace incongruity theory is not necessarily to discard the theories of relief or superiority. The exchange is one in which Disraeli highlights an incongruity that Gladstone did not intend and thereby is attempting to make Gladstone look foolish. In this particular example, the question of incongruity theory,

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[34] Willard Espy, *Another Almanac of Words at Play* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1981), 313.
[35] John Morreall, "Funny ha-ha, funny strange and other reactions to incongruity", in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, ed. John Morreall (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 197.
[36] Scruton, "Laughter", 201–202. Scruton's ideas are more commonly associated with the superiority theory of humor than incongruity theory: see John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 6, Proquest Ebook Central.
[37] Patricia Keith-Spiegel calls these viewpoints "configurational theories." "Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues", in *The Psychology of Humor*, eds. J. H. Goldstein & P. E. McGhee (New York: Academic Press, 1972), 11–12, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-288950-9.50007-9.

'what is humor?', is the foundational question to ask to understand how humor in this exchange is operating. However, it is also productive to ask the question of superiority 'for what purpose is humor used?', which, in this example, does in fact reveal humor used to assert superiority. However, in many of the examples in later chapters where the latter question is asked, the answer is not always: 'to ridicule.' Thus while the question is often useful, the answer that superiority theory dictates is limited in its usefulness.

Incongruity theory asserts that the essential, if not sufficient, condition for humor is the presence of the juxtaposition between an incongruity and present or implied congruity. This is the understanding of incongruity theory that I principally use in my argument for the presence and significance of humor in the texts in question in this thesis. Because of its centrality to the research that follows, in the next section I explain some important characteristics of the nature of humor as understood through the lens of incongruity theory.

1.3 Incongruity: The Essential Condition

I employ humor as an umbrella term for that which produces amusement and of which the subdivisions of wit, satire, irony, parody, and the like partake.[38] Historically, the term "humors" was used in reference to someone's medical and psychological state. This system explained a person's mental and physical health and character based on the supposed levels of "humors" (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile) in his or her body. Contemporary usage of the term humor has strayed significantly from its original employment.[39] However, in

[38] For the purposes of this thesis the term "humor" has been chosen over "comedy" or other similar cognates. My primary objection to the use of "comedy" or "satire," etc., in examining "what is funny" are their uses as terms to define genres of writing and performance that would confuse what is at stake in my analysis. Comedy, for example, has numerous historical definitions and modern cultural connotations as a genre in television, film, and performance; it is burdened with many tropes of genre that are the outgrowth of specific situations and places. Comedy is, of course, usually humorous, but for the purposes of this research I choose to utilize the term "humor" in order to address as neatly as possible the essential underlying factor that unites or underpins the subdivisions addressing "what is funny" without entangling myself in considerations of genre. If we approach the term humor in this essentialist manner, we might argue, for example, that all parodies are humorous, but all humor is not parody, or that all that is witty is humorous, but all humor does not consist in wit alone. I suggest the term humor as the least historically and culturally encumbered or distracting and, therefore, the most helpful term in suggesting the essence of which all these other terms take part.

[39] Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury is the first writer to use the term "humor" both in its classical, medical sense and its modern, amusing sense: "'Tis in reality a serious Study, to learn to temper and regulate that *Humour* which Nature has given us, as a more lenitive Remedy against Vice, and akin of Specifick and Melancholy Delusion. There is a great difference between seeking how to raise a Laugh

contemporary usage, our understanding of humor still straddles the boundaries between mind and body. Taking our cue from humor's etymology, a contemporary definition of humor must also incorporate its intellectual and physiological attributes. As John Lippitt helpfully reminds us, "[a]ny theory with ambitions to be comprehensive [. . .] must take into consideration both aspects of the object of amusement [. . .], and aspects of the feelings of the laughter."[40] Although this thesis does not by any means attempt to offer a comprehensive theory of humor, because my study is grounded in humor it is important to note briefly what amusement is, that is, how humor is apprehended.

The result of humor that engages its hearer or reader is what we might call amusement. If humor, the object of amusement, is intellectually entertained or appreciated, then it has the capacity to inspire the physical response of laughter. However, laughter is not a definite indicator of humor that has amused. Humans laugh at a joke if they find it amusing, but also sometimes nervously, to hide embarrassment, in response to tickling, in unamused surprise, etc.[41] As has been argued by Henri Bergson, Marie Collins Swabey,[42] and Scruton,[43] amusement, the apprehension of humor, while often proven physically, is ultimately an intellectual apprehension. Swabey calls the apprehension of humor a process of "intellection."[44] Scruton calls amusement "a mode of thought" and argues that amusement is a distinctly human activity and, along with our other pleasures or pains, partakes in that which sets us apart from the animals: reason.[45] Bergson similarly observes that "the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly

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from every thing; and seeking, in every thing, what justly may be laugh'd at." "Sensus Communis: an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour", in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Time*, ed. Philip Ayres (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 1:70 (author's italics). He discusses humor here as both an intellectual and a corporeal phenomenon: a response that is grounded in the body but one that has to be mentally regulated.

[40] Lippitt, "Superiority", 57.

[41] Andrew Stott explains that "laughter, the most immediate meter of comedy's success or failure, does not belong to [amusement] uniquely, and is equally induced by humor but also by embarrassment, fear, guilt, tickling, or laughing gas." *Comedy* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 2.

[42] Swabey outlines the process thus: "Though induced by a relationship of ideas, it gives rise to feeling and marked bodily reactions. While intellection is necessary to determine what is laughable, full appreciation includes affective and motor response." *Comic Laughter: A Philosophical Essay* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 3.

[43] Scruton gives his account in reverse: "[l]aughter is its full expression, amusement its essence, and humour its intentional object." "Laughter", 198.

[44] Swabey: "While intellection is necessary to determine what is laughable, full appreciation includes affective and motor response." *Comic Laughter*, 3.

[45] Scruton, "Laughter", 197; 206.

human."[46] While Swabey argues that the full intellectual engagement with humor involves "affective and motor response", Scruton makes the much more nuanced argument that because humor is intellectually apprehended, laughter is not a necessary response: we can entertain and appreciate a joke intellectually without laughing.[47] Scruton and Andrew Stott describe laughter as the full expression of engagement with humor, but not the necessary evidence of humor.[48]

The process of the intellectual apprehension of humor involves entertaining a juxtaposed congruity and incongruity. In order to engage with a given incongruous object, a hearer or reader must have a contrasting sense or understanding of the congruous or normative: incongruity comes into existence through contrast. One way to explain the role of the congruous is through expectation. For example, a primary reason Lewis Carroll's "The Jabberwocky", in *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), is amusing is because the reader brings to it certain linguistic expectations that, to our surprise, are violated.[49] Alice reads

> 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
> All mimsy were the borogoves,
> And the mome raths outgrabe.[50]

The very unexpectedness of being able to make a kind of sense out of lines that look like poetry and sound like poetry but that are nonsense may be a sufficient cause to arouse amusement. But primarily what is happening is that the reader's congruous expectations of English words are violated and the contrast between the incongruity and the expected congruity is amusing.[51] This factor of expectations is also present in puns in which the sound rather than the meaning of the word is highlighted or, as in the Disraeli example in the last section, the second and unexpected

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[46] Bergson, "Laughter", 62 (author's italics). Hazlitt also argues: "Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be." *Lectures on the English Comic Writers and Fugitive Writings* (London: Dent, 1979), 5.
[47] This distinction by Scruton is important for understanding why after hearing a joke we can laugh about it in the moment and laugh many hours or days later when we remember it. Because our apprehension of it is intellectual, we can recall the juxtaposition later and enjoy it again.
[48] Scruton, "Laughter", 198; Stott, *Comedy*, 2.
[49] This is an oft-cited example, both G. K. Chesterton and John Lippitt use it in their theorizing: Chesterton, "A Defence of Nonsense", in *The Defendant* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1907), 67; Lippitt "Humour and Incongruity" *Cogito* 8, no. 2 (1994), 150–151, Proquest.
[50] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, ed. Martin Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 270.
[51] In Carroll's *Alice*, the humor of "The Jabberwocky" is compounded when, equally unexpectedly, Humpty Dumpty begins to explain the meaning of the poem as if it were obvious and straightforward (270–272).

possible meaning of a word is invoked. The structures of words, sentences, and poems are anticipated by readers to have a certain congruity and direction and when, instead, the audience is surprised with incongruity, they may find this humorous. The neighbor of puns, in terms of visual humor, is when we are amused by someone tripping.[52] To walk without stumbling is congruous: the unexpected incongruity is the sudden fall, the perception of which may engage and amuse.

However, *expectation* of the congruous is insufficient to explain the perception of incongruity because an audience can often engage with humor when they are expecting to or at least when they are not surprised by the introduction of incongruity. Congruity is on the whole what an audience expects, but sometimes a factor such as genre or setting can prepare a reader or watcher to anticipate humorous incongruity: as when reading a poem such as "The Jabberwocky" from a famously humorous story, watching people tripping in a Charlie Chaplin comedy, or when one attends a comedy show. In these examples, the presentation of some kinds of incongruity is anticipated but that does not necessarily lessen the audience's amusement; indeed, in some instances, it may increase it.

The idea that humor has the capacity to persuade or to teach, as Thackeray assumed in his argument about the Victorian weekday preachers, rests upon the assumption that engagement with humor is an intellectual process. When humor engages its hearer or reader, it, in the first instance, thrusts upon them a new idea or a new way of looking at an idea. Humor's potentially educative capacity is particularly obvious in wit. An example of potentially educative wit can be seen in the Victorian novelist Catherine Gore's *Sketches of English Character* (1846). She quotes a "philosopher" who observes that "[t]he success of certain works may be traced to sympathy between the author's mediocrity of ideas, and mediocrity of ideas on the part of the public."[53] This juxtaposition, if the reader engages with it, can be both amusing and instructive. The congruity that this witticism relies upon is that popular works have become popular because of their quality. The idea that Gore introduces in juxtaposition to this congruity, is that popularity is

[52] Bergson gives the following example: "A man, running along the street, stumbles and falls; the passers-by burst out laughing. [. . .] They laugh because his sitting down is involuntary." Bergson describes this failure on the man's part to adapt to his circumstance to prevent his fall as "inelasticity," a key term in Bergson's theory of humor. "Laughter", 66.

[53] Catherine Gore, *Sketches of English Character* (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 1:15. As a popular author herself, Gore's quotation of this joke has self-deprecating poignancy.

instead the product of mutual mediocrity in readers and authors. This incongruous contention essentially offers a possible redefinition of the term popularity in relation to book sales. The process of apprehending the relationship between the congruity that Gore assumes and the incongruity that she asserts has the capacity to be intellectually productive: humor points to ways of understanding through a relationship of contrast that its audience may not have considered before. Juxtaposition might reveal something about the incongruous element, the congruous element, or the two together—but, ultimately, as an intellectual process, humor has the potential to be revelatory.

However, the play of incongruity against congruity can also be enjoyed, and even anticipated, without unseating what we know to be normative and congruous.[54] This delight in revisiting a contrasting congruity and incongruity can be seen in the enjoyment of a joke retold or the "in-joke." If a joke continues to engage us after we have heard it many times, then our sense of congruity must not have been fundamentally altered. To return to Gore's quote, perhaps even after engaging with this observation the reader still basically assumes that popularity tends to correlate to quality. With this congruity still in place, to return to and re-read Gore's quote might be enjoyable again: the conflict between the held congruity and the presented incongruity still exists from the reader's perspective. In a more obvious example, when we anticipate that someone might trip in one or twenty instances in a 'fail video', we do not also presume that people will trip all the time: the 'fail' is still the exception to the normative rule that people walk without tripping. If our sense of congruity had been moved or replaced, the recitation of an old joke would no longer be a joke. Its recitation or contemplation again might instead be the recitation and contemplation of what we had since accepted as a plain fact.

In another context, incongruity can be both revelatory and leave the audience's primary perception of the congruous intact. This form of humor is often present in exaggeration. The incongruity of exaggeration in caricature, for example, can not only amuse, but also, as Scruton argues, "illustrate a deeper congruity between an object and itself."[55] For example, if Jillian

[54] As Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor reminds us, "we must be careful not to assume, as critics after Bakhtin tend to do, that humor is 'always' transgressive or subversive [. . .] during the Victorian period the use of humor is not uniform in either its strategies or its effects. Humor could be employed to conservative ends as well as to radical or transgressive ends." "Introduction: New Perspectives on the Victorian Comic Spirit", in *The Victorian Comic Spirit: New Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), xx.

[55] Scruton, "Laughter", 202. Here, Scruton also points out that if we understand incongruity theory as suggesting that it is the incongruous element in the juxtaposition between a congruity and incongruity that

always falls asleep on the couch during parties and her perpetually drifting off is a source of humor in our community, the fact that we always find her asleep on a couch before the end of a party is congruous to her nature. However, this deeper congruity in her character does not unseat our communal expectation that people ought to stay awake during social gatherings—Jillian's behavior will always be generally incongruous even if the joke gives us information about what is specifically congruous to her character and choices.

Thus far I have primarily focused on humor's formal aspects of the juxtaposition between a congruity and an incongruity. What should be increasingly clear through these definitions and exclusions is how inadequate all of these formal details are to explaining humor. Following the principles outlined above will not necessarily result in the production of an engaging joke. For one thing, the reliance upon incongruity comes with a significant caveat as George Santayana points out, "it cannot be the logical essence of incongruity or degradation that constitutes the comic; for then contradiction and deterioration would always amuse."[56] Rather than exclusively humorous, sometimes confrontation with an incongruity might be considered tragic or merely curious.[57] Kierkegaard observes this relationship between humor and tragedy: "The tragic and the comic are the same, in so far as both are based on contradiction; but *the tragic is the suffering of contradiction, the comical, the painless contradiction*."[58] It may be incongruous to find a rat swimming in one's soup or to find a dead body on one's lawn, but it is not necessarily also amusing. However, while the source of the incongruity may be sad, or upsetting, or outrageous, that also does not necessarily make it unamusing; this is what is called black comedy or gallows humor, which delights in deriving humor from seemingly inappropriate subjects and scenarios. Thus, humor cannot be classified as merely "pleasant" incongruity and tragedy "unpleasant" incongruity.

The factors that are absent in the formal definition of humor that I have offered thus far are a principle for the determination of (1) what is congruous and what is incongruous and (2)

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is the humorous element, incongruity theory is an inadequate theory. However, I would suggest that we define incongruity theory more broadly as deriving the object of humor from the interplay between congruity and incongruity, rather than incongruity exclusively.

[56] George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory*, eds. William Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), 153.

[57] See Paul Lewis, *Comic Effects: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Humor in Literature* (New York: State University Press of New York, 1989), x.

[58] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. Walter Lowrie, trans. David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 459 (author's italics).

how to determine whether a juxtaposition is tragic or humorous. In other words, the most crucial and elusive factor absent from my discussion of humor so far is its audience: those who perceive or fail to perceive, and engage or fail to engage, with the presented incongruity. The next two sections of this chapter address the question of how to define and understand humor taking into account the elusive variable of its audience.

1.4 Audience: The Elusive Variable

An overreliance upon formal elements is a central criticism brought to bear upon different versions of incongruity theory. According to Stott, critics of incongruity theory "point out that it over-privileges structural aspects in the production of laughter as if the formula of juxtaposition alone were the trigger."[59] Because humor is a phenomenon that is engaged with intellectually, whenever we suggest that something is perceived as incongruous against a particular congruity, we imply a specific, intellectually apprehending, audience. Thus a theory of humor that emphasizes incongruity cannot ignore or leave out the role of the audience which perceives the incongruity. As R. G. Collingwood argues in *The Principles of Art* (1938), the audience is present to the artist as

> an aesthetic factor, defining what the problem is which as an artist he is trying to solve—what emotion he is trying to express—and what constitutes a solution of it. The audience which the artist thus feels as collaborating with himself may be a large one or a small one, but it is never absent.[60]

The audience is similarly central to the creation of humor: there is, to use Collingwood's description, something like a collaboration between the humorist in his or her creation of a joke and the audience in their ability and willingness to engage with it. But the likelihood or limits of audience engagement cannot be easily defined in formal terms: what works in one context with one audience may not in and with another.

One example of the relativity of audience engagement is the difficulty of translating humor into other languages and cultures. An illustration of this can be seen in the varied reception of the Victorian comic operas of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan in Europe in the late-nineteenth century. After enjoying enormous success in London, there was a demand for an adaptation of *The Mikado* (1885) in Europe. Various adaptations of *The Mikado* were staged in

[59] Stott, *Comedy*, 137.
[60] R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 315.

Germany, Russia, Belgium, and Italy in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. However, in Europe the reputation of Gilbert and Sullivan was ultimately to be solely based upon *The Mikado* because, after its generally tepid reception, there was little or no call for their other works to be translated and staged. Clearly there are many factors in addition to translation that might have been relevant to the success or failure of Gilbert and Sullivan abroad. However, considering how reliant the humor of Gilbert and Sullivan is upon word play and turns of phrase, it is perhaps unsurprising that some instances of failure in the examples that Jana Polianovskaia gives can be attributed to particularly "bad translation."[61] The exception was in Germany and in German-speaking regions of Europe where adaptations of both *The Mikado* and subsequent Savoy Operas were relatively successful.[62] But, according to Polianovskaia, in one particularly successful production of *The Mikado*, another kind of translation was at play. In order to appeal to local taste, the director added unauthorized song numbers and scenes including "additional waltz numbers in both acts, which although considered as indispensable for Viennese performance, [had] little congruence with the plot."[63]

However, even where translation is not a potential issue, other, less predictive factors can inhibit engagement with humor. Victorian joke researcher Bob Nicholson gives an example of a joke from the 1860s: "Why is Lord Overstone like a Britannia-metal teapot? Because he's a-Lloyd with lots of tin!"[64] The joke relies upon the reader to know that Lord Overstone, Samuel Jones Loyd, was a wealthy banker (had "lots of tin", i.e. money) and its punchline relies upon a pun: the homophonous relationship between *a-Lloyd* and *alloy*. In Nicholson's account, a version of this joke is recorded as having been told "at a dinner of *Punch* contributors in March 1859 (apparently Thackeray laughed 'heartily')."[65] Thackeray evidently engaged with the incongruity of this joke and various publishers anticipated their readers would similarly; throughout the 1860s this joke, or a version of it, appeared in a number of jokebooks and British periodicals as

[61] Jana Polianovskaia, "'See how the Fates Their Gifts Allot': the Reception of Productions and Translations in Continental Europe", in *The Cambridge Companion to Gilbert and Sullivan*, eds. David Eden and Meinhard Saremba, Cambridge Companions to Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 217, doi:10.1017/CCOL9780521888493.016.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 220.
[64] Bob Nicholson, "The Victorian Meme Machine: Remixing the Nineteenth-Century Archive", *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 21 (2015): 6, https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.738.
[65] Ibid., 8.

well as a magazine in Canada and one in Australia.[66] To share a cultural background with this joke would likely supply the reader with the necessary information to engage with it: as to Lord Overstone's vocation and as to the composite material out of which Britannia-metal teapots were made. However, even if twenty-first century readers were supplied with the requisite background information, it is doubtful whether this joke would have the same degree of success. There is some cultural factor that seems to have been present for nineteenth-century audiences in the perception of incongruity in this particular joke that is, seemingly, absent for twenty-first century audiences.[67]

Of course there are many factors that are relevant to differences in engagement with humor between communities or at different eras in history. One significant implication of different patterns of reception between nations or between different time periods is that these groups engage with humor on the basis of a distinct perception of what might constitute incongruity. In other words, what communities in different nations or time periods generally perceive as normative or congruous, and therefore incongruous, is different. Matthew Bevis observes that "[t]he surprise that accompanies getting a joke can prompt us to wonder about the expectations that were toyed with to get us there, and what these expectations may tell us about ourselves."[68] In other words, what a joke reveals, if one "gets" it, is certain knowledge, expectations, or attitudes that the hearer entertains about the topic or situation in which the incongruity is addressed or foregrounded. Humor might not be able to indicate exactly what people think or believe, but it can point to generalized patterns in perception across different time periods and in different societies.

It is not possible to engage in an analysis of humorous Victorian texts on the basis of who read and laughed at them: that would carry this research out of the remit of literary studies into the realms of the sociological or ethnographic. Moreover, moving from audience engagement to text would be working backwards: from the outcome of humor to humor as an object itself.

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[66] Ibid.

[67] cf. Jerry Palmer observes: "the nature of the occasions on which comedy and humour were created has varied so greatly across European history that we must ask whether the jokes in question would mean the same thing even if they were literally word-for-word repeated. To take [. . .] the example of *Lysistrata*: when we laugh at it in the twentieth century, does our laughter have the same meaning as the laughter which greeted it in Aristophanes' time, when ribald obscenity may have had a religious significance?" *Taking Laughter Seriously* (London: Routledge, 1994), 52–53.

[68] Matthew Bevis, *Comedy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

Instead, I propose to work from the object to its implied outcomes—to look at incongruities present in texts and the congruous assumptions or perspectives they imply or require. Within this methodology humor in the texts in question is approached not with the question, 'how was this text read?', but rather with the question, to paraphrase Harry Shaw, 'how does this text ask to be read?'[69]

In comparing the answers to the question 'how does this text ask to be read?' in different texts from the period, what I am sketching out particularly in relation to engagement with humor is a version of what the structuralists and narratologists call the implied or ideal reader.[70] Umberto Eco, in his *Role of the Reader*, outlines the attributes of any implied reader. Two attributes of primary importance are the information and attitudes this reader has. Using the roughly equivalent title 'model reader,' Eco takes Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* as his example. To begin, he points out that "[m]any texts make evident their Model Readers by implicitly presupposing a specific encyclopedic competence" in terms of what is referred to without extended definition or explanation.[71] Importantly, however, the texts in question can also instruct their readers as to how to read them. Eco gives an example from *Waverley*'s opening, "whoever approaches *Waverley* [. . .] is asked to *assume* that certain epithets are meaning «chivalry» and that there is a whole tradition of chivalric romances displaying certain deprecatory stylistic and narrative properties."[72] These definitions at the start of *Waverley* indicate how texts ask implied readers to understand certain terms and interpret certain ideas going forward. Therefore, information and attitudes can both be expected of an implied reader and concurrently taught to them throughout the text.

Eco's observations are particularly significant to an analysis of humor as incongruity. Firstly, the ideal reader brings with him or her the requisite information to perceive incongruity and a willingness or ability to entertain the proposed incongruity. Secondly, the ideal reader can be taught how to read the text by the text itself. This latter observation is particularly significant

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[69] Harry E. Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 36.
[70] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan offers a straightforward explanation of the implied reader in *Narrative Fiction*: "The advantage of talking of an implied reader rather than of 'textual strategies' pure and simple (as Doležel does, 1980, p. 182) is that it implies a view of the text as a system of reconstruction-inviting structures rather than as an autonomous object." *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 120.
[71] Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London: Hutchison, 1979), 7.
[72] Ibid. (author's italics).

to the question of how texts ask readers to interpret incongruity as humorous rather than tragic.

1.5 The Humorous Dominant

That a reader can be taught to interpret a text by the text itself is an important concept that informs the analysis of humor in the chapters that follow. This final section briefly discusses how the author instructs their implied readers to interpret incongruities humorously as opposed to tragically. A significant means through which readers are encouraged to engage with incongruity as humorous is through a dominant interpretive framework.

Formalist Roman Jakobson writes that, once established, a dominant "rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure."[73] One focus of formalist theory is on the question of how art that is constituted of language, that is literature and poetry, distinguishes itself from other uses of language, such as technical writing, everyday speech, or grocery lists. The question that Jakobson is attempting to answer here, in proposing this definition of a dominant, is: which formal features of a text indicate whether it is verse or prose? The dominant that he proposes as the distinguishing feature for verse, for example, is the use of language that brings attention to the words being used. This dominant framework distinguishes verse from prose by highlighting what he calls the "literariness" of the text.[74] For example, in the first stanza of the poem "Faithless Nelly Gray", the Victorian humorist Thomas Hood writes:

> Ben Battle was a soldier bold,
> And used to war's alarms:
> But a cannon-ball took off his legs,
> So he laid down his arms![75]

Adopting Jakobson's definition for verse, it is evident that the above is a poem as opposed to prose because the dominating factor in the arrangement and selection of words is adherence to the rhythm of the lines and a rhyme scheme: i.e. the word choice highlights the words

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[73] Roman Jakobson, "The Dominant", in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, trans. Herbert Eagle (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1971), 82.

[74] The theories of the formalists are limited in their usefulness for this thesis because, as their name implies, their analysis disproportionately focuses on literature's form. As any novitiate poet will know, to write within a poetic structure, which brings attention to the language you are using, will not result in a poem; poetry is greater than the sum of its parts.

[75] Thomas Hood, "Faithless Nelly Gray", in *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hood*, ed. Walter Jerrold (London: Henry Frowde, 1906), 68–69.

themselves.

However, the secondary significant interpretive framework that Hood is relying upon to produce meaning in this poem is humor: i.e. Hood's secondary priority in word choice in this stanza is to introduce incongruity. There are at least two incongruities in this stanza. The first incongruity is that Ben's legs have been "took off" by a cannon-ball. To lose one's legs is incongruous—it is not normative—and, moreover, it is unusual to lose one's legs via cannon-ball. This incongruity, in that it depicts loss, could be read as tragic. But Hood's word choice in introducing and describing Ben's loss in this line is informal: an attribute more likely to encourage a humorous than a tragic interpretation. It is, however, the second incongruity that precludes a tragic interpretation of Ben's situation. The second incongruity is accomplished through the juxtaposition of the third line and the fourth: "But a cannon-ball took off his legs, / So he laid down his arms." The fourth line is innocuous on its own, but in its direct relation to the third line, the word "arms" is activated. The phrase "laid down his arms" is colloquial referring to the setting aside of weapons, but in relation to the third line in which Ben lost his literal legs, the idiomatic use of the word "arms" is diminished and instead suddenly takes on a ludicrous, corporeal connotation. In other words, the incongruous image that is evoked by Hood's word choice and placement is that, having lost his legs, Ben also takes his actual arms off and puts them down.

What the dominant of humor does when it is established at the outset of a text, as in Hood's poem, is to set a precedent for the interpretation of subsequent incongruities. Commencing a text in a humorous manner is significant for the rest of the narrative's reception because, as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan states,

> The text can direct and control the reader's comprehension and attitudes by positioning *certain* items before others. [. . .] Thus, information and attitudes presented at an early stage of the text tend to encourage the reader to interpret everything in their light. The reader is prone to preserve such meanings and attitudes for as long as possible.[76]

One application of Rimmon-Kenan's observation is in the operation of a dominant interpretive framework. In the example of Hood's poem, the humorous dominant established in the first stanza, to use Jakobson's phrase, "rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components."

The subsequent chapter discusses at length how the framework of a humorous interpretive dominant is established. However, the theory of the dominant is necessary to define

[76] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative*, 121 (author's italics).

at this introductory stage as a component of establishing how humor as incongruity works within texts. As is evident in the example from Hood above, prose or verse are the foundational dominant frameworks for interpretation of text. Humor can be established early on as a subordinate framework that encourages the perception of humor when incongruity is introduced. If the reader has been asked to receive incongruity as either humorous or serious initially, i.e. a dominant framework has been established, this lays the groundwork for the reception of subsequent incongruities.

Conclusion

This thesis seeks to study humor as a concept that encompasses both the formal attributes of the juxtaposition of incongruity and congruity, as well as considering the content of that juxtaposition as perceived by its implied audience. Focusing on humor as incongruity in the novels in question promotes this dual focus: on the techniques that authors use to introduce incongruity into their texts and on the more contextual, cultural question of the implications of incongruities. With this definition and understanding of the role of incongruity in humor in place, the subsequent chapters turn to the questions: (1) 'how is humor in Victorian novels used?' and (2) 'why or about what?' As the analysis of incongruity in novels in the subsequent chapters demonstrates, the authors of Victorian novels used humor not simply to divert and amuse, but often as a central rhetorical device to create complex stories, to evoke compelling characters, to depict social problems, and to persuade.

Chapter 2: Humor, Realism, and Narration

2.1 Introduction

"Marley was dead, to begin with."[77] This first line of the first "stave" of Dickens' humorous novella *A Christmas Carol* (1843) is a striking example of the coexistence of two of the primary points of interest for this chapter: humor and narration. Within that first line, the narrator announces his presence through the conversational phrase "to begin with." In this phrase the narrator does not offer up a sad pronouncement or a description of woe at the admission of Marley's death. Instead, his tone is informal and the parenthetical clause reflects casual presence rather than formal, composed syntax. Moreover, since death is a kind of ending, the gap between the sentence's meaning and the phrasing "to begin with" also presents an incongruity. Further on, clues suggest this unexpected and chatty presentation of death ought to be perceived humorously, as the narrator continues his casual, conversational description of events in the next paragraph:

> Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail. [. . .] Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. [. . .] But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; [. . .] You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.[78]

Presumably, the reader expects death to be described seriously, so when the narrator discusses it so casually, the reader's expectations are upended and incongruity is created. The use of humor by the narrator, his joking commentary on Marley's death, highlights his presence as an observer and commentator on events and thereby highlights the literariness, the story-telling act, at the outset of *A Christmas Carol*.[79] Dickens' narrators are certainly distinctive. However, this chapter argues that the attributes of the narrator in the above example—that he is particularly highlighted as a character and that his characterization is particularly accomplished through humor—are shared by many narrators in humorous texts of the Victorian period.

These chatty, witty narrators belong on a continuum of emerging and evolving realism.[80]

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[77] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, in *Christmas Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7.
[78] Ibid.
[79] In his discussion of the relationship between realism and *A Christmas Carol*, Simon Hay argues that "[f]rom the start [. . .] the story draws attention to its own narrative procedures." *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 65.
[80] Humor was also used in the romantic genre of nineteenth-century literature. However, romantic texts by George MacDonald or Robert Lewis Stevenson also relied upon incongruity in other ways—to create a sense of otherworldliness through the introduction of the wildness of adventures or the presence of fairies.

Often, realism is defined in terms of the kinds of stories that it is used to tell: the joys and sorrows of the lives of ordinary people.[81] Under the definition of realism as a particular kind of story the co-existence of humor and realism may not seem either obviously at odds or obvious associates. There is one sense in which humorous incongruity is particularly suited to use in a realist framework. For one thing, humor exists in the real world and is, therefore, to be expected in realist accounts. But on a more theoretical level, when considering humor as incongruity, realism takes on a particular significance in relation to humor. Within a realist framework the contrast of introducing an incongruity is heightened because realism depicts that which is expected, familiar, or congruous. As the previous chapter explained, humor as incongruity pushes against some form of congruity, often the reader's expectations. The more normative and expected the framework, the starker a violation or challenge to that framework is bound to be. Thus, the familiarity of a realist framework provides, in some sense, a useful boundary against which incongruity can be highlighted.

However, realism and humor are also at odds in the same way that, in a sense, realism and the novel as fiction are already at odds. In order to achieve its realist aims, realist fiction has a tendency to seek to disguise its status as fictive or to down-play its more literary characteristics. Realism and the use of humor by the narrator seem to come into conflict when we consider not the themes that realist novels rely upon, but the technical aspects of how realist themes are depicted versus how humor is achieved. For example, N. John Hall notes that comedic names, such as Dickens' Mr. M'Choakumchild in *Hard Times* (1854) or Anthony Trollope's Mr. Prong and Mr. Comfort (ministers with opposing religious convictions) in *Rachel Ray* (1863), have the effect of reminding people that they are reading a novel. A technical choice to introduce humor in this way conflicts with the realist text's orientation toward downplaying or

[81] Caroline Levine explains that "realism strove to capture a social totality that could not be experienced directly [. . .] realist writers developed techniques of omniscient narration: narrative perspectives not lodged in any single consciousness but able to move in and out of multiple spaces and minds and to present connections among people which they themselves might not be aware of." "Victorian Realism", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Deirdre David, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 98. For discussions of concepts of realism see also: Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis* (1946); George Levine, *Realistic Imagination* (1981); Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance" (1938); Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (1970). On Victorian realism particularly see: Francis O'Gorman, "Realism", in *The Victorian Novel* (2002); Pam Morris, "Literary Realism in Nineteenth-Century Britain", in *Realism* (2003); Harry E. Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (1999); Audrey Jaffe, *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and The Subject of Omniscience* (1991); and Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (2005).

disguising its fictive status.[82] Narratologists offer a technical definition for realism that describes how textual accounts can maintain the effect of mimesis. Gerard Genette suggests that the two primary factors that foster mimesis in narrative are an abundance of detail and "the absence (or minimal presence) of the informer—in other words, of the narrator."[83] In the above lines by Dickens, the narrator's position in the text, the effect of his use of humor, asserts the maximal presence of the informer by further characterizing and individualizing the narrator. The chattiness of the account evokes an individual: a teller. And the presence of a narrator, particularly a humorous narrator commenting upon the action and characters to hand, brings attention to the novel's literariness—its not real-ness.[84]

What some Victorian critics defined as realism Richard Altick describes as art that is, above all, "faithful to human experience."[85] On the one hand, within some Victorian criticism there is an impulse to demand a kind of scientific accuracy. Altick explains how some Victorian authors devoted time to investigating and column space to explaining the evidence and facts that supported the accuracy of the details in their novels. For example, according to Altick, Dickens "taxed with the unlikelihood of Krook's death from spontaneous combustion in *Bleak House*, replied that there were 'about thirty cases on record' of such greasy demises, including 'the recorded opinions and experience of distinguished medical professors.'"[86] But this kind of evidence was not always particularly interesting or important to Victorian critics. Margaret Oliphant, for instance, in a critique of *Bleak House*, explains, "[i]t is not of the slightest importance to us if a case of spontaneous combustion occurs somewhere every week or every day." Instead what Oliphant objects to more staunchly in *Bleak House* are the Smallweeds, the "revolting" family that she describes as "worthy of [combustion]." She considers the pages used

[82] N. John Hall, *Trollope: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 147.
[83] Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 166.
[84] Jonathan Culler says that the "naturalization" of narrators is "the creation of a narrative *personae*" in order to "reduce [the text's] strangeness by reading it as the utterance of a particular narrator so that models of plausible human attitudes and of coherent personalities can be made operative." *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2002), 171 (author's italics). The narrators of the Victorian texts discussed in this thesis are, generally speaking, crafted to encourage readers to derive these personalities.
[85] Altick, *Victorian People*, 274.
[86] Ibid., 276.

to describe the Smallweeds wasted because they are both unrealistic and uninteresting.[87] The assessment of many texts by Victorian critics seems often to have been reduced to a question of their own personal engagement or the failure of the novel to engage them.[88]

This Victorian notion of literary realism, rather than prioritizing a scientific accuracy, instead seems to prioritize what H. Porter Abbott describes in his *Introduction to Narrative* (2002) as narrative truths:

> Aristotle called this kind of truth philosophical or universal truth and compared it favorably to the kind of truth found in history [. . .] This has been, over time, the commonest accounting of the kind of truth conveyed by narrative fiction. It is the truth of *meaning* rather than *fact*. [. . .] The facts all belong to a fictional world, but the narrative is meaningful for us as we think and act in our own world.[89]

A typical review for the texts considered in this research might include words, phrases, and sentiments that evaluate character and plot such as "truth",[90] "elementary truths",[91] "graphic reality",[92] "faithfulness of the picture",[93] "air of reality",[94] "perfect reality and truth",[95] "great

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[87] Margaret Oliphant, "Charles Dickens", in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Elisabeth Jay, vol. 1, *Part I: Literary Criticism and Literary History. Volume 1: Literary Criticism, 1854–69*, ed. Joanne Shattock (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 74.

[88] One example of personal engagement by a Victorian writer is in an anecdote about Dickens' friend Lord Francis Jeffery, "The hard critic of *The Edinburgh*." He was, one day, found weeping inconsolably in his study by Mrs. Henry Siddons, a friend and neighbor. The alarmed lady inquired if someone had died, to which the tearful Jeffery replied, "'Yes indeed [. . .] You'll be sorry to hear that little Nelly, Boz's little Nelly is dead.'" Julian Charles Young, *A Memoir of Charles Mayne Young, Tragedian, With Extracts from His Son's Journal* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1871), 313; 314.

[89] H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 153–154 (author's italics).

[90] Unsigned review of *A New Spirit of the Age*, edited by R. H. Horne, *Westminster Review* 41, March–June 1844 (London: Samuel Clark), 376, HaithiTrust, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112075842234; unsigned review of "The Chimes", by Charles Dickens, *Christian Remembrancer* 9, no. 47 (January 1845): 302, Proquest; Oliphant, "Charles Dickens", *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 1:62; [George Henry Lewes] review of *The Book of Snobs*, by William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Morning Chronicle* (March 6, 1848): 3, British Library Newspapers.

[91] *Westminster Review*, review of *A New Spirit of the Age*, 376.

[92] Unsigned review of "The Chimes, A Goblin Story", by Charles Dickens, *The Times* (December 25, 1844): 6, Times Digital Archive.

[93] "Boz *versus* Dickens", in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Philip Collins (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 176.

[94] "Charles Dickens and David Copperfield", *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country, 1830–1869* 42, no. 252 (December 1850): 704, Proquest.

[95] Oliphant, "Charles Dickens", *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 1:62.

truthfulness",[96] "fidelity",[97] "drawn them to the life",[98] "legitimate, natural, and possible",[99] "photographing",[100] "the characters are real creatures",[101] "a piece of genuine truth",[102] and "we find it difficult to believe that so real an individual is simply a creature of the imagination."[103] Sometimes, using these descriptors, critics suggest the authors have failed to achieve these standards, sometimes these descriptors are the praise that critics lavish on an author.[104] These standards were not the only ones to which texts were held, but they were evidently of significance to many critics. So while the role of the narrator in the texts considered in this chapter challenge some twentieth-century definitions of realism, the following chapter argues that the humorous narrators of the texts under examination were serving a different kind of realist impulse: one that used humor rather than scientific accuracy as one of the means of achieving the effect of realistic faithfulness in fiction.

The nineteenth-century narrator is perhaps most often associated with omniscience: the voice of God offering moral assessment on the behavior of characters. The nature of this heterodiegetic narration is that it provides its narrators with more effective scope and grounds for judgment of and commentary on the narratives they present.[105] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan notes

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[96] Unsigned review of *Vanity Fair*, by William Makepeace Thackeray, *Times* (July 10, 1848): 8, Times Digital Archive.
[97] "Literature", *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, August 20, 1848, British Library Newspapers.
[98] Unsigned review of *Vanity Fair*, by William Makepeace Thackeray, *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country, 1830–1869* 38, no. 225 (September 1848): 321, Proquest.
[99] Margaret Oliphant, "Sensation Novels", in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Elisabeth Jay, vol. 1, *Part I: Literary Criticism and Literary History. Volume 1: Literary Criticism, 1854–69*, ed. Joanne Shattock (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 250.
[100] Unsigned review of *Miss Marjoribanks*, by Margaret Oliphant, *The Spectator* 39 (May 26, 1866): 579, Proquest.
[101] Unsigned review of *Doctor Thorne: A Novel*, by Anthony Trollope, *The Athenaeum*, no. 1597 (June 5, 1858): 719, British Periodicals.
[102] Unsigned review of *Cranford*, by Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Examiner* (July 23, 1853), British Library Newspapers.
[103] Margaret Oliphant, "Bulwer", in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Elisabeth Jay, vol. 1, *Part I: Literary Criticism and Literary History. Volume 1: Literary Criticism, 1854–69*, ed. Joanne Shattock (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 42.
[104] For an introduction to some trends in Victorian literary theory see Anna Maria Jones "Victorian Literary Theory", in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 236–254.
[105] An autodiegetic narrator is one who is not just a participant in the story, but is the story's protagonist. Examples of autodiegetic narration can be found in *David Copperfield, Great Expectations*, and half of *Bleak House*. Other levels of narration include:
Extradiegetic and heterodiegetic—highest level of narration and not in the story in any sense
Extradiegetic and homodiegetic—highest level of narration and also a participant in the story

"[i]t is precisely their being absent from the story and their higher narratorial authority in relation to it that confers on such narrators the quality which has often been called 'omniscience.'"[106] However, the term omniscient is not entirely appropriate to describe heterodiegetic narrators in general nor of this period in particular. While some narrators seem to have access to the intentions and actions of every character at any time in the narrative "history" and at any place in the story world, others seem to restrict themselves to certain characters, places, and timeframes; some narrators have access to character's "inner lives" and others do not, etc. There are examples of a great variety of types of narration from the period. For example, although the epistolary format was not as popular as in the eighteenth century, it persisted as did homodiegetic narration, particularly the autodiegetic form.

In addition to Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* introduced above, this chapter compares the humorous narrator-characters in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham: Or, Adventures of A Gentleman* (1828), William Makepeace Thackeray's "A Little Dinner at Timmins's" (serialized 1848), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (serialized 1852–1853), and Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (serialized 1868). These narrators and the humor with which they are characterized are integral to establishing the Victorians' version of literary realism in each of these texts. What this chapter shows is not only humor's role in characterizing these narrators, but also humor and the narrator's central role in demonstrating or establishing that Victorian standard of authenticity or faithfulness defined above. This chapter argues that when faithfulness is being held up as a standard or when incongruity should be received predominantly as humorous, these frameworks of interpretation are indicated to the reader by the voice or focalization of the narrator. As discussed in the previous chapter, a useful way of describing these frameworks is as dominants: that which, as Jakobson defines it, "rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components."[107] As this chapter demonstrates, it is usually through the narrator that a particular dominant framework is established in a text. Humor established as the (or a) dominant

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Intradiegetic and heterodiegetic—a secondary level of narration and not in the story
Intradiegetic and homodiegetic—a secondary level of narration and in the story
These definitions are derived from Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (Lincoln Nebraska: Nebraska University Press, 2005), 80–90. Examples of the heterodiegetic narrator include most of Jane Austen's narrators, most of Walter Scott's, most of Thackeray's, all of Dickens' other major novels, all but one of Anthony Trollope's, all of George Eliot's major novels, Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, etc.

[106] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative*, 96.

[107] Jakobson, "The Dominant", 82.

framework for interpreting incongruity at the beginning of a narrative leaves the door open for subsequent humorous observations. And the narrator is key both to introducing the tone set for the incongruities and, subsequently, transitioning into and out of humorous interpretation of scenes.[108]

2.2 "To Begin With": Establishing the Humorous Dominant

To discuss humor as a dominant interpretive framework, this section compares brief examples of narration in the opening sections of *A Christmas Carol*, *Cranford*, "Little Dinner", and *Pelham* before moving on in subsequent sections to look more carefully at the interaction between humor, reliability, and authenticity in the narrator. Opening lines and sections of these texts are remarkable for the work that they do to establish the character of the narrator, to introduce the humorous framework through which incongruity is interpreted, and to lay the groundwork for the narrator's reliability and authenticity.

Death might not seem like the most obvious topic with which to commence a humorous story, such as Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, but according to philosopher Ted Cohen, death is one of the more widely accessible sources of humorous incongruity. Cohen shows how humor relies upon shared attitudes and perspectives between the teller and the hearer of a joke, thus, "[i]f you wish to tell a joke to the largest possible audience, you need a presumed background shared by everyone, and you cannot do better than to presume that everyone in your audience has thought about death."[109] Indeed, in spite of the fact that people continue to die, death is often, on some level, also unexpected, perhaps due to uncertainty as to when a person's death will occur or perhaps due to a reluctance to think about it. Life would seem to be normative and death incongruous: when a character is introduced the immediate expectation tends to be that he or she is a "live" character rather than a dead one.

However, just because death is incongruous does not also mean that it is inherently an amusing incongruity. When death is introduced as a topic in a text, there is a particular burden

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[108] Notably, whereas narrators must maintain a dominant of realism or authenticity for these attributes to be effective (a momentary dip into fantasy, for example, changes the genre of the text from realism), when the framework of humor has been introduced, that does not indicate that the entire subsequent text should therefore be devoid of shocking or tragic content.

[109] Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 43.

upon the narrator to focalize that information for the reader as humorous, tragic, or merely curious. For, as noted in the first chapter, most humor theorists argue that there is no such thing as an intrinsically amusing incongruity. John Lippitt explains:

> The incongruity theorist need not necessarily make the dubious claim that anything is *objectively* incongruous; that there are inherent incongruities which transcend cultural boundaries. What matters [. . .] is that something should be *perceived* or *thought of* as incongruous.[110]

What Lippitt emphasizes is that the audience of a given text brings with it the necessary attitudes to perceive a scenario as incongruous and, potentially, therefore, a willingness to perceive it as humorous. Death, as incongruous with the expectation of life, is an example of an incongruity that needs to be focalized by the narrator: for the narrator to ask the reader to interpret it humorously. For the joke to engage, before the narrator makes it, the implied reader *must* be predisposed to consider death a possible topic for humor. If they are unwilling or incapable of entertaining an incongruity regarding death as humorous, they may be a text's actual reader, but they are not the text's implied reader—they cannot, or are not disposed to, read the text in the way it is asking to be read. For those who are open to considering incongruous presentations of death as humorous, the narrator bears the burden of framing Marley's death as a humorous rather than tragic incongruity.

The narrator does not frame Marley's death as something to be understood as primarily sad and this is the first clue that neither should *A Christmas Carol*'s implied reader. There is no tone of pity, nor a hint of the curious, but instead the incongruity is emphasized by the narrator through a familiar colloquial expression that juxtaposes a dead man to a structural metal stud. The incompatibility between the narrator's tone and the facts of the story he relates immediately alert the reader that it is acceptable to receive the incongruities presented as humorous rather than alarming, offensive, or blasphemous.

Here the reader can also observe that in the narrator's treatment of death and the corresponding use of humor, he is, in a sense, setting the stage for how the real will be understood: through his chatty focalization. The faithfulness or authenticity of the text cannot be established in the first line, rather the tale will prove to be faithful or unfaithful gradually. At the outset, however, by emphasizing his characterized presence, the narrator establishes that his personality will be the source of information on the characters and events in the story. As a

[110] Lippitt, "Incongruity", 149 (author's italics).

characterized presence, the reader may anticipate that this narrator will have an individualized perspective rather than an omniscient, truth-telling perspective. It is within these parameters that the authenticity of his focalization will ultimately be assessed by Victorian critics and readers. As a consequence, humor, as the narrator establishes in this first line with this first incongruity, will be a factor or a framework of interpretation through which he presents and interprets the story, and, by extension, a means through which the story's faithfulness to reality or not will be judged.

At the opening of Gaskell's *Cranford*[111] the narrator makes a move remarkably similar to Dickens' narrator[112] in both presenting incongruity and also establishing the personality of her narrator through the conversational tone in its very first line: "In the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons."[113] Like Dickens' "to begin with", Gaskell's "[i]n the first place" introduces a characterized narrator who appears to be mid-conversation. Although the narrator begins by signaling the text's openness to being interpreted humorously through her nonchalant tone, the primary humor of the passage is derived from the juxtaposed comparison of Cranford's inhabitants to Amazonian warriors. Gaskell goes on to indicate to her readers that the inhabitants of mythic Scythia have not actually invaded the imaginary English town of Cranford. The people in possession of Cranford turn out to be a population of middle-aged and elderly women. The contrast between the image of the Amazons and the prim ladies described is made more ludicrous with every ensuing detail; descriptions of them chasing geese from the yards of their rented cottages and their afternoon teas affirm the fact that to take the description of them as Amazons literally would be inaccurate.

But Gaskell's narrator is also using incongruity to point towards, to use Scruton's phrase, a deeper congruity in describing these women as Amazonian. These mild Englishwomen are of course not Amazonian, but the power structure in the community is matriarchal. Moreover, there is a notable absence of men in the community: "all the holders of houses, above a certain rent,

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[111] Kate Flint explains that *Cranford* "grew from a couple of pieces in which [Gaskell] recollected life in Knutsford, 'The last generation in England' (1849) and 'Mr Harrison's confessions' (spring 1851), followed by what she initially thought would be a one-off piece, 'Our Society at Cranford,' published in Dickens's magazine *Household Words* late in 1851. The Cranford episode continued in *Household Words* until May 1853." *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995), 31.

[112] Or perhaps this similarity is not so remarkable given that *Cranford*'s editor in *Household Words* was Dickens.

[113] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 1.

are women." Gaskell's narrator facetiously explains that "[i]f a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentleman disappears."[114] The opening line introducing the juxtaposition of these women as Amazons is an incongruity that the narrator builds upon through a few individual details to point to the nature of these women and the kind of community to which they belong.

In addition to the Amazonian standard of matriarchy, the corresponding dearth of men in the community, since the women are not actually Amazons, is a curious incongruity. However, the narrator reframes this curiosity into a humorous incongruity, explaining that there are no gentlemen because they are "frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties."[115] This latter joke revolves around the phrase "frightened to death" —a fairly common and innocuous phrase, but an incongruity worth briefly examining. The incongruity of death has, as suggested before, something of the inherently incongruous about it; it is odd that this fairly large community lacks men, but it would be odder if their absences were actually because every one of them were dead. Once again, like Dickens' implied reader, Gaskell's reader has to be open to the possibility of jokes being made about death. However, the humorous framework provided by the already established Amazonian joke encourages the reader to receive this subsequent incongruity as humorous also. The Amazonian joke "activates" the humor in the incongruous absence of men. Furthermore, the conversational, idiomatic phrase "frightened to death" that the narrator uses is an incongruity that arises from the mismatch in gravity between cause (trivial) and supposed effect (death). The reader is later assured that all of the men are not in fact dead from being frightened, and that there are other, various reasons for their absence.

Both Gaskell's and Dickens' opening sections illustrate a number of similar attributes in their narrators. As noted above, the opening lines of their texts—the "to begin with" and the "[i]n the first place"—assert the narrator's characterized, conversational presence. This presence highlights the "told" or literary nature of the text. As pointed out in the introduction, this attribute of literariness, gestured to in these first lines, is not consistent with more modern notions of establishing the realism of a narrative. The narrators' presence is clearly asserted—neither narrator disappears into the details, but rather they highlight the individuality of their perspectives on events by using first-person pronouns. Subsequently, these characterized

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

narrators also guide their readers to accepting a humorous tone and premise for their respective stories. A key element in both Gaskell's and Dickens' opening sections is to use their narrators' focalization of events to emphasize the incongruities of the situation and to use the humor of those focalizations, in turn, to enhance their narrators' individuality as characters.

Thackeray's approach to introducing his narrator and to establishing the humorous dominant in "A Little Dinner at Timmins's" contrasts, in terms of technique, with the two previous examples. "A Little Dinner" begins, "Mr. and Mrs. Fitzroy Timmins live in Lilliput Street, that neat little street which runs at right angles with the Park and Brobdingnag Gardens."[116] Notably, unlike the examples from Dickens and Gaskell, the presence of Thackeray's narrator is not particularly highlighted in this first line, though in subsequent lines the narrator is more present in terms of conversational word choice and phrasing. This narratorial absence, however, plays a role in Thackeray's larger purpose in the text—a trick on the reader involving the narrator's position and role in the text (as will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this chapter). To re-cite Rimmon-Kenan's observation from chapter one of this thesis, "information and attitudes presented at an early stage of the text tend to encourage the reader to interpret everything in their light."[117] Thackeray relies upon the straightforward account of the facts in the first line to establish the impression of the narrator's absence from within the story he tells.

The presence of humorous incongruity is also not as obviously present in this line as it was in Dickens and Gaskell. However, the explicit mention of these two unlikely street names, Lilliput and Brobdingnag, are not idle references. In the most modest sense, the two names are incongruous to the reader's expectations of where these Timmins's people might live, as they are unusual and sound like nonsense words. But in addition, Thackeray is making a deliberate parallel with and association between his short story and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Viktor Shklovsky notes the significance of invoking another author in a fictional text in this way: "'The work of art is perceived in relation with other artistic works and by means of the associations the reader makes with them. [. . .] Not only parody and pastiche, but every work of

[116] William Makepeace Thackeray, "A Little Dinner at Timmins's", in *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, vol. 6, *Contributions to "Punch" Etc.* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1898), 707.
[117] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative*, 121.

art is created in parallel with and in opposition to some model.'"[118] The shades of meaning activated through this kind of reference is an example of influence exerted by intertextuality. In *Gulliver*'s *Travels*, the Brobdingnags are giants and the Lilliputians are tiny people with whom Gulliver is stranded at different points during his travels. Thackeray's inclusion of these details invokes a satirical comparison. The Timmins's are subsequently shown to be people of modest means, with little social currency, living on the little Lilliput Street. Nearby, in Brobdingnag Gardens, reside some of the wealthy and socially connected "big" people who Mrs. Timmins invites to dinner. This humorous reference to the Timmins's as adjacent to money and success is the first of many allusions to the narrative's themes of class and wealth, and the Timmins's dearth of quite enough of either.

In this example from Thackeray, therefore, it is not the juxtaposition between narratorial tone and narrative content that establishes the dominant of the passage as humorous. Instead, it is through the narrator framing the text with a humorous intertextual reference. In a similar manner to the examples from Dickens and Gaskell, this reference also relies upon existing information and attitudes in the implied reader. Minimally, in the passages by Dickens and Gaskell the reader must (1) have normative attitudes about death and (2) be open to jokes about death. In Gaskell's case the reader must, additionally, (3) have basic information about Amazons and (4) provincial English ladies. Whereas in Thackeray's case, the implied reader must (1) have read *Gulliver*'s *Travels* and (2) appreciated the humor of that text.

The three preceding examples illustrate the narrator's use of the first line in setting a humorous tone as the dominant of a work and setting a precedent for subsequent incongruities to be received humorously. Two out of the three examples also indicate the intersection in the use of humor with establishing the presence and character of the narrator. In the three preceding examples, the opening lines are presented heterodiegetically; there is an implied narrator, but the extent of his or her presence in the narrative action is not as yet indicated. Only Dickens' narrator will turn out to be properly heterodiegetic (that is not involved in the action of the story in any way), but that is not clear from the opening pages of any of the texts.

The narrator of Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham*, in contrast, presents his homodiegetic presence

[118] Viktor Shklovsky quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction to Poetics*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University Press of Minnesota, 1981), 23.

immediately by asserting in his opening line, "I am an only child."[119] Beyond asserting his presence in the text, this line also points to the centrality of his homodiegesis: that is, as the narrator. The use of the first-person singular pronoun "I" serves to indicate that the narrator is likely extra-autodiegetic: the highest level of narrative authority and a character in the narrative he relates. Having demonstrated that his role is autobiographical, *Pelham*'s narrator takes on a different kind of authority and influence over the text from the narrators examined so far. What is notable for the purposes of this section are the ways in which Bulwer-Lytton subsequently exploits the relationship of homodiegetic narration to the story he tells for humorous purposes: Pelham as a character and a narrator serves both as a vehicle for incongruity in itself as well as a means to contextualize incongruity as humorous.

Much like the other narrators, as the opening passage develops, Pelham the character-narrator provides increasingly bizarre details to establish a dominant humorous tone. He gives some background on his parents, moving from informing readers of their peerage to some of their defining characteristics: Lady Frances, noting the dullness of the London season, "after having looked over her list of engagements, and ascertained that she had none remaining worth staying for, agreed to elope with her new lover" Seymour Conway.[120] Just as she was about to depart to that end, she remembered, "her favourite china monster, and her French dog, were left behind" and returned to the house to procure them.[121] Unfortunately, as she did so, she encountered her husband who had heard through the servants of the indecent intent of her departure. The narrator-son remarks: "I have heard that the servants were quite melted by his grief, and I do not doubt it in the least, for he [Pelham senior] was always celebrated for his skill in private theatricals."[122] Because of this undesired and unlooked for reunion on the staircase, the pair are forced to ignore the incident: "nothing farther was said upon that event. My father introduced Conway to Brookes's, and invited him to dinner twice a week for a whole twelve-

[119] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Pelham: Or, Adventures of A Gentleman* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1852), 7. Preceding the first line is an epigraph: Où peut-on être mieux qu'au sein de sa famille?—French Song. "Where is it better to be than in the bosom of one's family?" This line is satirical in terms of the family subsequently described, but it also appears to be a line from a song perhaps associated with the Ancien Regime (which may add to the satirical dominant considering the Pelham family are described as aristocrats).
[120] Ibid., 8.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

month."[123]

Incongruity abounds in these opening passages, and functions in a similar fashion to the previous passages that have been examined. Choosing to elope for the lack of anything else to do presents an unexpected and preposterous scenario. Lady Frances' choice to have an affair with Conway is described unexpectedly as predicated on boredom rather than on passion, or dislike of her husband, or desperation to escape the boundaries of her social existence. The husband also acts incongruously. Instead of demonstrating any sincere anguish over his wife's intention of infidelity, he is rather annoyed that she had not been able to get away "since Seymour Conway was immensely rich, and the damages would, no doubt, have been proportionably high."[124] Mr. Pelham's response to finding that his wife is intending to have an affair betrays no sorrow or anger, except that which he performs for his impromptu audience. Instead, his machinations suggest that his response is dispassionate self-interest with an aim to exploit the situation he unwillingly discovered. To perceive these scenarios as incongruous requires that the implied reader (1) have normative attitudes toward marital fidelity and (2) simultaneously be open to humorous observations that allude to violations of that fidelity. If the implied reader only fulfills the first condition, they may perceive the incongruity but will not perceive it as humorous. It is only if both conditions are fulfilled that they can receive the passage in the humorous framework through which the narrator presents it.

The narratorial situation in *Pelham*'s opening passage is a useful contrast to the three examples preceding it because of Pelham's clear autodiegetic position. Pelham as narrator does not explicitly invite the reader to decry his parent's fallen moral standards. In part, it is his dispassionate focalization of the events that heightens the incongruity and the framing of these incongruities as acceptably humorous for the reader. The implied reader's strongest evidence that these scenes are not to be received as tragedy is that the narrator, the son of this lady, relates no inner turmoil or discontent at his mother's wandering eye and casually attempted elopement, nor at his father's lack of care respecting her actions. The implied reader is assured of *Pelham*'s status as a humorous text because of Pelham's perspective as participant in his own tale and through his narratorial focalization; these perspectives assure the narratee that no one has been or

[123] Ibid., 9. Brookes's was a well-known club in London for men in society—a piece of information the reader would need to bring to this humorous reference to fully entertain its humor.
[124] Ibid., 8.

is being meaningfully harmed by these events. Moreover, in addition to providing the incongruities, the reactions of the couple are simultaneously clues that the reader should not be upset by these events. The wife's flippant reasons for departure coupled with her husband's dispassionate reaction to that departure are signals that neither party is particularly emotionally invested in the situation nor have they harmed one another by their actions. Neither party's reaction demands a pathetic response from the reader—consequently, a humorous interpretation of this passage is both permitted and encouraged. In contrast to the other three examples, Pelham's particular position as narrator also activates much of the humor in the incongruous contrast between his perspective on events and what we may reasonably presume is the reader's perspective. Much of the humor, in other words, is satirical; and the object of much of the satirical criticism or exposure is predicated upon Pelham's own unexpectedly dispassionate perspective on events.

These four different opening sections provide some distinctive examples for how the opening lines and scenes establish a framework for the interpretation of the rest of the text. A humorous dominant is established in a text in such a way that it asks the reader to be open to entertaining or interpreting subsequent incongruities as humorous. And the role of the narrator, how his reliability and authenticity should be assessed, is also introduced in these opening passages. These dominants, established early on, exert influence over subsequent information given in the text thanks to their privileged position at the beginning.

2.3 The Narrator of Irony and "The Conspiracy of Intellect"

> According to the narratologist Gerald Prince,
>
> > Without the assistance of the narrator, without his explanations and the information supplied by him, the narratee is able neither to interpret the value of an action nor grasp its repercussions. He is incapable of determining the morality or immorality of a character, the realism or extravagance of a description, the merits of a rejoinder, [or] the satirical intention of a tirade.[125]

While the reader may not always be *told* directly by the narrator how to evaluate the text, the information needed to assess these qualities is still predominantly derived from the narrator. The framework for interpretation, implied or offered directly, humorous or otherwise, is derived from

[125] Gerard Prince, "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee", in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 10–11.

the focalizer of the information—usually the narrator.[126]

The influence a narrator exerts over a text remains significant whether the narrator is homodiegetic, heterodiegetic, characterized, or is without any notable characterization. A narrator is characterized when, as defined in the introduction, his or her presence as an observer is conveyed so as to highlight the personality and presence in the act of narration. To some extent, when discussing the focalization of a narrative by a narrator, if that narrator is characterized, the discussion is about focalization as characterization. The elements of the narrator's gradually revealed character are the relevant elements of focalization. The reader is asked to read the text through the narrator's perspective however that has been characterized. Humor is a significant means through which narrators are characterized in the texts in this chapter. As examples, this section discusses two different highly-characterized narrators: one homodiegetic, in *Pelham*, and one heterodiegetic, in *A Christmas Carol*. These examples demonstrate two different ways in which characterized narrators can use humor to invite the reader to share their perspective and interpretation of the narrative. In particular, these two narrators reveal their individual, characterized perspectives by focalizing the events they recount with particular reliance upon irony, that is, a form of satire.

Schopenhauer explains that if a "joke is concealed behind seriousness, the result is *irony*."[127] Irony is a distinctive form of humor in that it involves concealment. Thus, in addition to the requisite willingness to entertain incongruity and perception of incongruity, irony requires its audience to discover its presence behind the concealing seriousness. Like other forms of humor, the outcome of irony used by the narrator, if read as it asks to be read, is to invite the reader to accept the narrator's framework of interpretation: to perceive the ludicrous behind the seriousness. Robert Polhemus, in discussing irony in the works of Jane Austen, writes that "[i]rony depends upon its audience to detect and complete meaning extending beyond the literal sense of the language. Austen's habitual irony distances her from appearances and behavior in her society, but it unites her with her readers by drawing us into a conspiracy of intellect. Whoever does not perceive it becomes its target."[128] Polhemus highlights a few important things

[126] The narrator and the focalizer of text-events are not always one and the same. See Rimmon-Kenan, "Text: Focalization", in *Narrative Fiction*, 72–86.
[127] Schopenhauer, *World as Will*, 99 (author's italics).
[128] Robert M. Polhemus, *Comic Faith: The Great Tradition from Austen to Joyce* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 53–54.

about irony here. If the readers 'get' the joke and perceive what is not written but implied, they are drawn into, as Polhemus beautifully puts it, a "conspiracy of intellect."[129] As Polhemus also helpfully points out, this conspiracy of common perception defines a boundary between those who get it and those who do not. The conspiracy is a union between the narrator or focalizer and the reader—it has a uniting effect. A part of the use of irony in the following texts is to cultivate a perception of the focalizer as a truth-teller. In *Lectures on the English Comic Writer* (1819), William Hazlitt highlights the kind of indirect referentiality irony relies upon. In irony "it is the contrast between the appearance and the reality, the suspense of belief and the seeming incongruity, that gives point to the ridicule."[130] The reliance on irony by the narrator suggests to the reader that the narrator, in particular, perceives and is conveying the real, as opposed to the appearances or artifices that are the object of irony's ridicule.

The basic narrative of *A Christmas Carol*, of all of Dickens' novels, is probably the most well-known and hardly needs to be recounted. *A Christmas Carol* may not come to mind amongst Dickens' oeuvre as one of his more realist texts given the appearance of ghosts and the absence of strictures on movement through time.[131] However, in the Victorian sense of the authentic, *A Christmas Carol* asks to be taken as addressing real issues seriously and was met with reviews that took its contentions seriously.[132] In *The Westminster Review*, an anonymous critic does not object to the ghosts and the dreams in *A Christmas Carol*. Instead he objects that "we might almost suppose the feudal times were returned" with Scrooge hurling coins at boys, sending turkeys in cabs, and handing round the punch for his employees.[133] This critic engages with Dickens' texts as if they were arguments and asserts that the charity of employers is not the

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[129] Polhemus' argument is akin to those discussed in chapter one of this thesis which describe engagement with humor as an intellectual process: see Swabey, *Comic Laughter*, 3; and Scruton, "Laughter", 197; 206.

[130] Hazlitt, *Lectures*, 10–11.

[131] According to Hay it was in the Victorian period that many of the "tropes and tricks of ghost stories" as well as the ghost story's association with the Christmas period were standardized. Hay particularly attributes these developments to Dickens' stories as well as "his editorship of *All the Year Round*." *Ghost Story*, 57; 75.

[132] Rachel Ablow discusses Dickens' critical reception at the time citing *The Saturday Review* which asserted that Dickens' characters, "'were not studies of persons, but persons. And yet they were idealized in the sense that the reader did not think that they were drawn from the life. They were alive; they were themselves.' Lacking in verisimilitude, it seems, Dickens' characters possessed something far more crucial: life itself." *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 18–19.

[133] Unsigned review of *A New Spirit of the Age*, *Westminster Review,* 376.

means to redress inequity. Rather than alms, he argues, "the poor require justice [. . .]. Destroy the misery by earnest care in the early training of men and women, the disease will be eradicated, and the symptom-soothing process of charity [. . .] will not be needed."[134] Despite Dickens' multitude of ghosts and doorknockers transformed into the faces of men, the narrative framework of *A Christmas Carol* is one that claims a relevance and authenticity that reviewers responded to and addressed. And those claims to relevance are largely framed by the narrator's focalization and characterization.

Like most of Dickens' heterodiegetic narrators, the narrator of *A Christmas Carol* at times brings attention to his presence as such by making observations about the narrative that he recounts. In *A Christmas* Carol, these observations are often ironic and invite the reader to adopt his characterized framework of interpretation for the characters and events he describes. For example, characterizing both Scrooge and the clerk (later revealed to be Bob Crachit), the narrator describes the former's tightness with the coal and how, for lack of it, "the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed."[135] Here Dickens achieves humor through constructing a euphemism for impossibility: a strong imagination can make one believe one is warm. This is blatantly incongruous with what the implied reader must know about the nature of warmth as (barring a hallucination) a physically responsive, rather than an intellectually dependent, experience. Scrooge's lack of generosity toward his employee needs the reader to already believe that generosity trumps parsimony: this is a foundation of common belief upon which the narrator relies for the irony of the text to succeed.

The example above is one of many instances of commentary that culminate in a clear sense of the narrator perspective. As the story progresses, in the first "stave" as Dickens calls his chapters, Scrooge's nephew appears and walks past the frozen Mr. Crachit to his uncle's office. After Scrooge repudiates and despises his nephew's Christmas well-wishes, "His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially."[136] Here, Dickens' narrator uses wordplay to exploit the second possible

[134] Ibid., 375.
[135] Dickens, *Christmas*, 9.
[136] Ibid., 11.

meanings of "cold" and "warm" to comment upon on the scene. From the context of the rest of the action and details of this first chapter—Scrooge is described as sitting by a meager fire, while Crachit is shivering in front of a mere candle—Crachit could not be physically warmer than Scrooge. The narrator's wordplay indicates that though the cold refers to Crachit's temperature, the warmth refers to his temperament: in ironic opposition to Scrooge who is perhaps warm of body but most certainly cold of heart. The humor of this scene serves a larger didactic purpose. Rather than merely laying out his judgment—Scrooge is selfish and unfeeling and Crachit is kind and long suffering—the narrator prompts the implied reader to arrive at these juxtaposed "values" of warm versus cold using puns.

The narrator continues to build upon the dichotomy between Crachit and Scrooge as opposite repositories of value. At the end of the day, Scrooge begrudgingly acknowledges that Crachit will be allowed to have the next day, Christmas, off:

> The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas Eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, to play at blindman's-bluff.[137]

The undignified image of the adult man wrapped in a comforter fleeing from his cold job to go down a slide and then play blindman's bluff is certainly incongruous. However, this humor is also engaged in furthering the internal value system of the text. Scrooge's actions have been established as representing the cold and unkind as opposed to Crachit who acts with warmth and kindness. Because Crachit engages in these childish activities, therefore, and Scrooge disapproves of him, these activities are allocated in association with Crachit as "good." Internally, the narrator has defined childlikeness and the importance of play as either a virtue or a manifesting trait of someone who is virtuous.

No value can be defined exclusively internally to a story world, but texts can generate their own definitions, schemas, and connotations over the course of the narrative. As Eco points out, the text relies on both the information the implied reader brings to it while simultaneously building upon that information through the text. He writes, "a well-organized text on the one hand presupposes a model of competence coming, so to speak, from outside the text, but on the

[137] Ibid., 14.

other hand works to build up, by merely textual means, such a competence."[138] An internal system of competence in *A Christmas Carol* emerges in the way in which the narrator uses humor to define childlikeness. As a concept external to this text, childlikeness, unlike parsimony or selfishness, is not definitely virtuous. Consequently, the use of childlikeness within the text could be positive or negative. We can imagine in another sense or story how a kind of childlikeness in adults might be destructive and "immoral:" as for example in *Bleak House* and Mr. Skimpole's morally suspect version of childlikeness.[139] But in Dickens' story world of *A Christmas Carol*, childlikeness is internally represented and defined as a good; the narrator does not necessarily rely upon his reader to assume that it is a good. And the means through which he attributes this virtue of childlikeness to Crachit is predominantly through irony. Thus, Scrooge exists outside the companionable world in which play is possible until, as the narrative progresses, Scrooge's gradual moral reformation is signaled by the thawing of his cold heart and his adoption of Crachit's childlike joy for life.

Significantly, toward the end of stave two and into stave three humor chiefly disappears. With the ghost of Christmas present, Scrooge observes merriment and joy and is excluded from it. While he takes pleasure from the merriment he sees, he and the narrator largely refrain from further cynical observations. In stave four, the story is handed over entirely to the frightening tropes of the ghost of Christmas future. When humor reappears in stave five, Scrooge's relationship to the moral of the story, as conveyed by the narrator's focalization and the humor used to establish said moral, has altered. The narrator's depiction of his dour parsimony has been replaced with joyous generosity and his cynical laughter from stave one has been replaced with a childlike love of jokes: "'I'll send it [the large turkey] to Bob Cratchit's!' whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh. 'He sha'n't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as sending it to Bob's will be!'"[140] Here Scrooge rubs his hands with good natured delight instead of avarice.

Scrooge delights in the incongruity and surprise of the Crachits not knowing where the turkey came from, and its extravagance in contrast to their meagre expectations for their

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[138] Eco, *Role*, 8.
[139] Skimpole is also an amusing character. But an examination of the incongruities used in describing Skimpole suggest that the humor is oriented toward alienating the reader from Skimpole's perspective rather than fostering empathy with him.
[140] Dickens, *Christmas*, 73.

Christmas. Then the narrator illustrates the extent to which Scrooge is reformed and his alignment to the values of the story by describing how, with childlike enthusiasm, he plays a trick on Crachit. The day after Christmas, as Crachit enters their office, Scrooge accosts him:

> "Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice, as near as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?" "I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I *am* behind my time." "You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please." "It's only once a year, sir," pleaded Bob, appearing from the Tank. "It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir." "Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again; "and therefore I am about to raise your salary!"[141]

Scrooge's ability to make this joke, to act warmly and childishly, signals the extent of his moral reformation and reveals that he has gone over to Crachit's side of virtue, warmth, and childlike joy. The narrator's juxtaposition of Scrooge as representing a kind of "bad" and Crachit representing a kind of "good" is a story "truth" that has to be accepted by the implied reader initially for the narrative to progress and make sense. The value system is one that the implied reader is called upon to accept for the functionality of the story logic: Scrooge's movement from conflict to unity with "the good." What is notable is how the humor of *A Christmas Carol*, with which the ideal reader must engage for the narrative to function, is central to conveying Dickens' story logic. This story logic is predominantly focalized by the narrator: he guides the reader by highlighting Crachit's behavior and contrasting that to Scrooge's. These ironic juxtapositions originate from the narrator's perspective, inviting the reader to join his framework of interpretation which results in the cohesion of the story and its moral.

Pelham by Edward Bulwer-Lytton is certainly not as well known today as Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. But in the late 1820s and early 30s, according to Don L. F. Nilsen in his *Humor in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, "*Pelham* was such a successful novel that the protagonist's wearing of black as the color of his evening dress revolutionized men's fashion."[142] *Pelham* belonged to the early nineteenth-century genre of fashionable or "silver-fork" novels that depicted, often satirically, the manners and mores of high society. As

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[141] Ibid., 75 (author's italics).

[142] Don L. F. Nilsen, *Humor in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1998), 155. This claim about *Pelham*'s influence on men's fashion is also made by his grandson Victor Alexander George Robert Bulwer-Lytton, the second earl of Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer First Lord Lytton* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 1:348.

the opening lines quoted in the last section indicate, Pelham, the homodiegetic narrator, was born into an aristocratic family. The novel is in many ways a classic bildungsroman. Pelham, who is instilled with the cynical, aristocratic attitudes exhibited by his parents at a young age, quickly recounts the details of his upbringing. In the opening sections, there is little evidence that there is any difference in perspectives between Pelham and his parents. His earliest education was taken up by his mother, who instilled in him such useful lessons as never "to read above half an hour at a time for fear of losing my health."[143] After that, the details of his time at Eton and then at Cambridge are dispatched in a matter of a few pages. As he is leaving Cambridge, he has little to recount about his education, but explains that "I had a pianoforte in my room, and a private billiard-room at the village two miles off; and, between these resources, I managed to improve my mind more than could reasonably have been expected."[144] His tutor congratulates him, without sarcasm, for success at Cambridge and as having been an honor to his college on the basis that he never came drunk to chapel, never walked "wantonly" on the college lawns, and never "set [his] dog at the proctor."[145] After Cambridge, the novel moves on to the primary focus of Pelham's narrative: his experiences in society, travels abroad, and life in London. As he has experiences, some ridiculous, some terrible, he gradually reevaluates the lessons of his formative years and grows as a person. At the close of the narrative he is rewarded with marriage to the virtuous, wealthy, and titled Ellen Glanville.

Because *Pelham* is a homodiegetic narrative, the narrator's perspective and Pelham's are one and the same. However, because of this union, as Pelham grows as a person, the narrative focalization shifts and develops. For example, at the opening of the narrative, the titular narrator expresses what are represented as ostensibly the values of the very rich. These values are ironic and the implied readers are surely neither expected nor likely to identify with them. On his first page, for example, Pelham claims that unlike himself and his family, "[v]ulgar people know nothing of the necessaries required in good society, and the credit they give is as short as their pedigree."[146] When Pelham's already very wealthy parents suddenly receive twenty thousand pounds left to them by "a sixteenth cousin", the decision of what to do with this inheritance comes down to either paying off creditors and setting up Mr. Pelham in manufacturing in Melton

[143] Bulwer-Lytton, *Pelham*, 10.
[144] Ibid., 12.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid., 7.

(Mr. Pelham's suggestion) or redeeming the diamonds that were in hock and re-furnishing the house (Mrs. Pelham's suggestion).[147] As the least practical investment, the creditors are left to their own devices, while the diamonds are redeemed and "my mother received nine hundred people in a Turkish tent."[148] Some of the money was used by Mr. Pelham to "run his last horse at Newmarket." After that horse lost, the narrator informs us, Mr. Pelham "pocketed five thousand pounds" perhaps indicating that he was involved in betting against his own horse.[149] It is while Mr. Pelham is engaged in dubious practices at the racecourse, that Mrs. Pelham arranges to run away and have an affair with the aforementioned Seymour Conway. The incongruities in these scenarios are doubtless manifest: the expectation for people who have "good values" is that they would not (1) fail to pay money they owe, (2) host parties for which they cannot pay, nor (3) engage in rigged betting. But, violating the reader's expectations and furthering their characterization, that is precisely what the Pelhams do. The reader is not supposed to sympathize with their decisions or attribute their decisions to what constitutes "good values"—instead the irony of the passage means the reader should appreciate the exact opposite. If a reader were so eccentric as to agree with Pelham's parents that they should pocket this money or host parties instead of paying creditors, this opening would be received as a serious rather than a humorous—intended to be received as ridiculous—opening.

Complicating this example is Pelham's focalization and reporting of these events as both son and narrator. Pelham's narration in these early sections does not indicate any distance between the ridiculous attitudes of his parents and his own. Indeed, it is the incongruity between Pelham's completely serious narration of these events and the ridiculous nature of the events themselves that is the passage's most significant source of incongruity. Jonathan Culler explains:

> Given our knowledge of the world and our knowledge of the world of the novel, we are in a position to detect irony whenever the text appears to offer judgments with which we would not concur or whenever, with apparent disinterestedness, it does not pass judgment where we think a judgment would be appropriate.[150]

Relying upon basic knowledge about nineteenth-century British social values, all of the Pelhams' decisions violate "normative" ideas of what constitutes valuable or useful behavior. Pelham's failure to distance himself from his parents' attitudes and, in some instances, his condoning their

[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid., 8.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 183.

elitist notions renders him an equal object of the text's ironies. Pelham as narrator of these events alienates his perspective from that of the implied reader, and in doing so fosters a "conspiracy of intellect" from which he is excluded.

As Pelham grows up and his thinking is developed by his experiences, there is a shift in the orientation of the satire. Gradually his narration demonstrates a kind of depth and thoughtfulness that distance him from the other caricatured aristocrats in his narrative. Simultaneously, however, Pelham's focalization of events continues to be as a character who is a fop and one who never loses his aristocratic condescension. He writes of his mother midway through the text:

> Yet, if her letters have given my readers any idea of her character, they will perceive that the very desire of supremacy in ton, gave (God forgive my filial impiety!) a sort of demi-vulgarism to her ideas; for they who live wholly for the opinion of others, always want that self-dignity which alone confers a high cast to the sentiments.[151]

This relatively mild critique gestures to the ways in which Pelham's values have shifted from the familial standard of self-orientation toward a kind of principled, if pompous, rejection of vulgarity and elevation of noble feeling.

Because Pelham continues to be, himself, somewhat the object of the text's satire through his aristocratic airs, perceiving the division between the irony of which he is an object and the irony that he purveys as the narrator is complicated. One critic for the *Edinburgh Review* objects,

> Even under the guise of satire, there was a visible anxiety to engage our sympathies, and enlist our prejudices in behalf of the man of fashion. [. . .] All this Mr Bulwer protests is meant for satire; but really the satire, if such it be, is so impalpable, so bland, that nine out of ten mistake it for eulogy.[152]

This reviewer seems not to have been able or willing to engage with the shifting framework for interpreting *Pelham*. However, Oliphant in her overview of Bulwer-Lytton's career as a novelist

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[151] Bulwer-Lytton, *Pelham*, 325.

[152] Unsigned review of *Eugene Aram; a Tale*, by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Edinburgh Review, 1802–1929* 55, no. 109 (April 1832): 210, Proquest. However, Bulwer-Lytton, writing in 1840, explains that even if readers took Pelham's characteristics seriously, he found that preferable to the reigning Byronic virtues. Byronism as Bulwer-Lytton described it was: "the Satanic Mania" where "young gentlemen without neckcloths, and young clerks who were sallow", were engaged in "playing the corsair, and boasting that they were villains." He suggests that, "[i]f, mistaking the irony of Pelham, they went to the extreme of emulating the foibles which that hero attributes to himself, those, at least, were foibles more harmless, and even more manly and noble, than the conceit of a general detestation of mankind, or the vanity of storming our pity by lamentations over imaginary sorrows, and sombre hints at the fatal burden of inexpiable crimes." *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1883), 1:195.

particularly points to the character development in *Pelham* as a source of its greatness. She writes, that "the superficial character of Pelham is sustained, and [. . .] his deeper and true character unfolds and expands" over the course of the narrative. Some readers, she goes on to explain, "complain that our hero is a cox-comb, and cannot see how nicely assumed is this mantle of superb foppery, nor how smilingly and good-humouredly aware of it is its wearer himself."[153] While the writer for the *Edinburgh Review* and Oliphant were both readers of the text, it is Oliphant who was *Pelham*'s ideal reader: able to engage with the shifting focalization in the text. But the writer for the *Edinburgh Review* is not without justification for his objections: use of irony in this text runs the risk of alienating its readership through Pelham's shifting and developing focalization.

Humor can be used to develop shared perspectives between narrator and reader and to orient the reader's understanding and interpretation of the characters and events depicted in the text. The consistent characterization and ironic commentary of Dickens' heterodiegetic narrator establishes and develops a vocabulary that provides a straightforward framework for interpreting *A Christmas Carol*. In contrast, the shifting orientation of the irony and the development of *Pelham*'s narrator as a character results in a more uncertain framework for interpretation.

2.4 *The Moonstone*: Competing for Authority and Authenticity

One way in which the standards of realism were invoked in the Victorian period was in opposition to other genres. Romances were often adventures dominated by their plots: peopled by unrealistic heroes and villains and improbable events and coincidences. When critics use the language of truth and reality in assessing a text then, a purpose in doing so may have been to signal to their audience whether a given realist text had fulfilled its generic promise in opposition to the available body of romance literature. For realist texts, in opposition to the unlikely scenarios of romance, the goal was representation not of marvelous adventures but rather a faithful account of things as they were. Somewhere in between these two genres was the sensation novel. Sensation novels were a genre that contained inexplicable and mysterious elements that might place them in the romance genre. However, for a novel to be entitled to the sensation genre label rather than romance, generally its resolution and conclusion were expected

[153] Oliphant, "Bulwer", *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 1:42.

to offer realist solutions to the mysteries posed.[154] For example, Altick explains that "[i]n the prefaces to *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins assured his readers that the 'physiological experiment' and the crucial legal points respectively involved had been checked out with the experts."[155] Although some events depicted in sensation novels might have at times seemed marvelous, they were generally ultimately explicable.

As noted above, many standards of realism in this period were less concerned with the plot specifics of novels than with a sort of authenticity in whatever scenario was depicted. Consequently, faithfulness to reality was also looked for and either praised or condemned in novels that were perhaps more classically realist like *Cranford*, as well as sensation novels like Collins' *The Moonstone*, and festive ghost stories such as *A Christmas Carol*. Anthony Trollope points to this in his posthumously published autobiography when he writes,

> I am realistic. My friend Wilkie Collins is generally supposed to be sensational. The readers who prefer the one are supposed to take delight in the elucidation of character. Those who hold by the other are charmed by the construction and gradual development of a plot. All this is I think a mistake, [. . .] A good novel should be both—and both in the highest degree. If a novel fails in either, there is a failure in art.[156]

The neatness of many a realist novel's happy ending or the ironic heights of many a novel's tragedy are evaluated not in terms of likelihood—Victorian critics were not so naive as to suppose that every inter-class love story ended either in lauded marriage or tragic death—but in terms of truth, of plausibility of character, and insightfulness on the part of the author.

The overall narrative of *The Moonstone* conforms to the pattern of sensation novels in that it contains mysterious elements but explains away the mystery into realist simplicity by the end of the narrative. The art of producing sensation in a novel like *The Moonstone* is in the ordering and construction of competing narrative focalizations. Humor does not play an enormous role in *The Moonstone*. However, as a point of comparison to the other texts in this chapter where humor is the significant dominant, this section discusses how humor is introduced and used as an important, but not primary, interpretive framework. This section briefly considers where Collins does use humor to influence the competing focalization that is so central to the

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[154] Interestingly, Sutherland describes Dickens as "[t]he father of sensation fiction [. . .]. His habit of fixing on a particular abuse, his interest in topical crime, the disruptive immediacy of his style and devices were clearly influential." *Longman*, 563.
[155] Altick, *Victorian People,* 276.
[156] Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, eds. Michael Sadleir and Frederick Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 227.

narrative structure of *The Moonstone*.[157]

The first two primary narrators are Gabriel Betteredge and Miss Drucilla Clack. These two narrations are the most humorous of the six primary narrators of *The Moonstone*. This section briefly points out humor's centrality to the competition between these two primary introductory narrative voices in *The Moonstone* for authority and reliability. Miss Clack and Betteredge's disagreement in their perspectives is not the conflict upon which the discovery of the eponymous moonstone hinges. Instead, the tension between their perspectives on the individuals and events around them is a part of the larger program of competing perspectives that heightens the mystery of *The Moonstone*. As Sue Lonoff in *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers* (1980) explains, "the characters do not merely present the truth or function as eye-witnesses; they also color and distend their narratives by the force of their personalities."[158] The differences in Betteredge's and Miss Clack's personalities as prisms for their focalization mean that the text's readers must evaluate the comparative value and credibility of either character's narrative perspective. Readers, in a sense, then act as detectives in undertaking a "continuous process of forming hypotheses, reinforcing them, developing them, modifying them, and sometimes replacing them by others or dropping them altogether" in reading and comparing the different perspectives of the narrator-characters in *The Moonstone*.[159] For these two narrator voices in particular, humor is a key factor to the reader's process of detection.

Much like the texts considered in the first section of this chapter, *The Moonstone*'s opening is significant for establishing the dominant of the text.[160] However, the prologue begins

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[157] William Tinsley, the first publisher of the three-volume edition of *The Moonstone*, writes, *The Moonstone* "perhaps did more for [*All the Year Round*] than any other novel that was printed in it as a serial before or since, not excepting 'Great Expectations,' [. . .] when the serial was nearing its ending, on publishing days there would be quite a crowd of anxious readers waiting for the new number, and I know of several bets that were made as to where the moonstone would be found at last." *Random Recollections of an Old Publisher* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1900), 1:114–115.

[158] Sue Lonoff, *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 201–202.

[159] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative*, 122. Sensationalist fiction like *The Moonstone*'s is a good example of Roland Barthes' observation that "meaning does not lie 'at the end' of the narrative, but straddles it" and is, therefore, constantly being formulated by readers as they read. "An Introduction to Structural Analysis", *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (winter 1975): 243, doi:10.2307/468419.

[160] The first installment of *The Moonstone* was published on 4 January 1868 in *All The Year Round* and *Harper's Weekly* simultaneously. This installment included the "Prologue" through "Chapter 3." This first section therefore introduced both the mysterious and investigative dominant as well as the humorous dominant of Betteredge's focalization in the first few chapters. Lonoff, *Wilkie*, 231.

not with a humorous dominant, but by establishing mystery as the primary dominant. Subsequently, *The Moonstone* is made up of competing narratives explaining the, sometimes overlapping, sometimes sequential, events that brought about the loss and recovery of the heirloom moonstone or yellow diamond. The brief prologue sets out the problem—how the diamond came into the possession of an English family and the exotic, Indian origin myth that surrounds it. However, its first lines are, significantly, not mythical and read like a non-fiction account: "I address these lines—written in India—to my relatives in England. My object is to explain the motive which has induced me to refuse the right hand of friendship to my cousin, John Herncastle."[161] This frame, which identifies the narrator, his motivation, and his locale, sets the scene for a tale of facts that provides heightened contrast with the story's mysterious and sensational elements.[162] Thus the primary framework offered for interpreting the text is both realist and mysterious: it presents itself as a chronicle of true events that will contain a surprising departure from the expected.

This tone of historicity contrasts significantly with the discursive and chatty voice of Gabriel Betteredge, steward to the house of Verinder, introduced in the next document included in this "history" or evidence around the investigation into the loss and recovery of the diamond. As Kenneth Robinson, one of Collins' biographers, points out, the use of a servant as a primary narrator was a choice that signaled *The Moonstone*'s realist associations and demonstrated Collins' "genuine interest in the lives of those who live 'below stairs.'"[163] Betteredge as a source, partly because he is a servant, was met with mixed reviews at the time of *The Moonstone*'s publication. As usual, these reviews took the form of assessing him within a standard of Victorian realism. A reviewer for the *Spectator*, for example, suggests that Betteredge is an improbable figure, for he is "a butler like no butler the world ever saw, now a garrulous old goose, now shrewd enough to detect the effect of several educations on his interlocutor."[164] But beyond accepting Betteredge as a particularly insightful butler, the reader must also engage with his confiding, humorous focalization. Betteredge's success as a narrator and character is again

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[161] Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone: A Romance*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.
[162] Altick also notes Collins' use of specific dates in *The Moonstone* to cultivate a sense of authenticity. *The Presence*, 156.
[163] Kenneth Robinson, *Wilkie Collins: A Biography* (Bodley Head: London, 1951), 221.
[164] Unsigned review of *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins*, The Spectator* 41 (Jul 25, 1868): 881, Proquest.

described in terms of his realism. The reviewer in *The Athenaeum*, Geraldine Jewsbury writes, "we fancy we should recognize old Betteredge if we were to meet him, even without a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* in his hand!"[165] Betteredge's narration comes directly after the mysterious prologue under the title, "First Period. The Loss of the Diamond (1848)", and begins: "In the first part of *Robinson Crusoe*, at page one hundred and twenty-nine, you will find it written: 'Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost, and before we judge rightly of our own Strength to go through with it.'"[166] Beginning this section with a quote from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is a curious incongruity that alerts the reader to a significant shift in the mode of narration. That shift in mode, which will be developed over the following paragraphs, is toward humor.

Humor is established as a dominant secondary to realism and mystery within Betteredge's narrative, especially in the early chapters, through his reflective commentary on his chronicle of events that is framed and interspersed by observations from *Robinson Crusoe*. His use of humor serves some significant functions. Lacking a heterodiegetic overview of characters and events, humorous asides and commentary in his homodiegetic narrative serve as his primary characterization. He explains that after having been asked to write his chronicle, "I did what you would probably have done in my place. I modestly declared myself to be quite unequal to the task imposed upon me—and privately felt, all the time, that I was quite clever enough to perform it."[167] These humorous asides to the reader occur with regularity and break up the events he relates and serve to flesh out Betteredge's character. Betteredge demonstrates through the admission of false humility a certain level of self-awareness and self-criticism to his audience. As to the behavior of others, Betteredge also shows, through humorous asides, insight into the characteristics of the people around him and in his narrative. In describing his mistress' husband, for example, he writes that Sir John Verinder was an

> excellent man, who only wanted somebody to manage him; and, between ourselves, he found somebody to do it; and what is more, he throve on it, and grew fat on it, and lived happy and died easy on it, dating from the day when my lady took him to church to be married, to the day when she relieved him of his last breath, and closed his eyes for ever.[168]

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[165] [Geraldine Jewsbury] review of *The Moonstone: Romance*, by Wilkie Collins, *The Athenaeum* no. 2126 (July 25, 1868): 106, Proquest.
[166] Collins, *Moonstone*, 7.
[167] Ibid., 8.
[168] Ibid., 9–10.

For the next one hundred and eighty pages, Betteredge's voice is the only focalizer. And as the primary focalizer, his use of humor, in addition to setting the dominant tone of the section and expressing his own personality, is also significant to establishing trust and empathy in him as a narrator. [169] If the reader engages with humor, it invites agreement and association through laughter with Betteredge's perspective. This invitation to empathy becomes particularly significant when Betteredge's narrative and perspective of events is challenged by the narrator whose perspective is presented in the next section. As Lonoff writes, whereas Betteredge "befriends the reader and confides in him through twenty-three garrulous chapters", the humor present in the subsequent focalization section, narrated by Miss Drusilla Clack, "antagonizes" the reader.[170]

To introduce herself and her narrative, Miss Clack begins:

> I am indebted to my dear parents (both now in heaven) for having had habits of order and regularity instilled into me at a very early age. In that happy bygone time, I was taught to keep my hair tidy at all hours of the day and night, and to fold up every article of clothing carefully, in the same order, on the same chair, in the same place at the foot of the bed, before retiring to rest.[171]

While Betteredge's quipping, self-satisfied narration might not be to the taste of all readers, Miss Clack's narrow view of herself and the world around her is not oriented to lend her credibility or invite empathy. Despite how grating some reviewers found the "horrible Miss Clack",[172] Collins in writing about *The Moonstone* described her narration as "that portion of *The Moonstone* which has since proved most successful in amusing the public."[173]

Miss Clack intends to depict herself as pious, but ultimately demonstrates that she is instead self-righteous. A great source of humor throughout her narration is the way she goes about proselytizing. When she takes a cab to her aunt Lady Verinder's home, she "paid the cabman exactly his fare" —in other words without a tip—and the cabman "received it with an

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[169] Moreover, he is the first extended narrator, therefore, his observations have a weight or "primacy" that other, subsequent narrators have to fight against. See Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 121; cf. Menakhem Perry's discussion of the "primacy effect" in "Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates Its Meanings [With an Analysis of Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily']", *Poetics Today* 1, no. 1/2 (1979): 53–54, doi:10.2307/1772040.
[170] Lonoff, *Wilkie*, 206.
[171] Collins, *Moonstone*, 186.
[172] Unsigned review of *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins, *Pall Mall Gazette* (July 17, 1868), British Library Newspapers.
[173] Collins, "Preface to a New Edition", *The Moonstone*, xliv.

oath." She recounts that she "instantly gave him a tract." But as this only inspired him to drive off with an additional curse, she "sowed the good seed, in spite of him, by throwing a second tract in at the window of the cab."[174] Having brought a suitcase of religious literature with her, Miss Clack urges all of it upon Lady Verinder who accepts only one book. Miss Clack describes to her readers how, feeling burdened for her aunt, she awaits her opportunity and when unobserved sneaks through the house depositing tracts in all of the rooms. Finally,

> But one book was now left at the bottom of my bag, and but one apartment was still unexplored—the bath-room, which opened out of the bed-room. I peeped in; and the holy inner voice that never deceives, whispered to me, "You have met her, Drusilla, everywhere else; meet her at the bath, and the work is done."[175]

With solemnity, Miss Clack deposits her final tract in Lady Verinder's bathroom and takes leave of her missional service to her aunt for that day. In all of these details recounted by Miss Clack, the humor of the situation is heightened by the incongruity between what Miss Clack seems to intend to convey through her narration and what the reader is able to apprehend about her from the narrative. She unwittingly depicts herself throughout her narrative as a nosy, preachy, easily-offended figure whose appearance upon any scene is tolerated by the other characters rather than enjoyed

The accounts of Betteredge and Miss Clack do not conflict significantly in the facts and details they convey regarding the discovery of the stolen moonstone, but their views and interpretations of the behavior and significance of the people around them do. Notably, the orienting power of the humor that they inspire or invoke is key to guiding the reader to know which perspective to privilege. For example, while sitting in the hall waiting to be admitted to see the Verinders, Miss Clack reads one of the wonderfully named tracts that she always carries around with her in her bag: "'A Word With You on Your Cap-Ribbons.'" She explains that this selection "was one of a series addressed to young women on the sinfulness of dress" and that it "proved to be quite providentially applicable to the person who answered the door."[176] As Miss Clack later leaves the Verinders, she waits for the door to close behind her and puts the tract through the letter box in the hope that the questionably dressed maid who had already declined to accept the tract would be edified by receiving it in that manner. The maid with the immoral

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[174] Collins, *Moonstone*, 209.
[175] Ibid., 219.
[176] Ibid., 188.

excess of ribbons is, in fact, Betteredge's daughter, Penelope.

In contrast to her father's affectionate characterization of her, Miss Clack describes Penelope as insolent. Miss Clack also casts aspersions on Betteredge's character, writing that Penelope was "the daughter of a heathen old man named Betteredge—long, too long, tolerated in my aunt's family."[177] Here, Miss Clack and Betteredge's narrative focalizations come into direct conflict. Humor may not have rendered Betteredge's account flawless, but it demonstrated a self-awareness that Miss Clack lacks. If the reader has engaged with the humor of Betteredge's account, then Miss Clack's characterization of him as a heathen, particularly considering her own holier-than-all attitude, provides humor that is at her expense rather than his. By aligning herself against Betteredge, Miss Clack alienates herself from the humorous empathy ostensibly established by Betteredge's narrative.

Even though this difference in judgement regarding Penelope is a relatively minor detail, Miss Clack's opposition to Betteredge may also lend his character greater credibility. If the reader has engaged with the humor of Betteredge's account, Miss Clack's indication of her different perspective to Betteredge may serves to increase the likelihood that his perspective of the text's events will be accepted and Miss Clack's rejected or given less credence. As Menakhem Perry points out in "Literary Dynamics" (1979), "any reading of a text is a process of constructing a system of hypotheses or frames which can create maximal relevancy among the various data of the text."[178] The shoring up of the credibility of Betteredge's perspective, when contrasted with Miss Clack's, as a means of reading and interpreting the details of the loss and recovery of the moonstone, is particularly significant since he returns very briefly as the final narrator before the text's epilogue.

Betteredge's early account includes humor as a primary dominant, but leaves humor aside at significant points, for example when the suicide of the maid Rosanna Spearman is discovered (as will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis). However, because Miss Clack's account is unceasingly self-referential and judgmental, her narrative is predominantly characterized by humor. The two narratives contrast sharply not in terms of the details they provide regarding the loss of the diamond and of the Verinder family, but in terms of the kind of authenticity either narrative provides. Whereas the humor of Miss Clack's narrative asked the

[177] Ibid.
[178] Perry, "Literary Dynamics", 43.

reader to deduce some things despite her narration, the humor of Betteredge's account asks the reader to share Betteredge's perspective on the events he recounts. In a sense, therefore, with the appropriate expectations brought to either narrative, they are equally dependable and authentic, but the uninterpreted perspective of one is reliable and the other is not— and a key indicator of this distinction in reliability is humor.

2.5 The Implications of Empathy

In homodiegetic narratives like Betteredge's, the narrator can encourage the reader to assume a common perspective in which they both comprehend the incongruities of the world and the other characters together: a kind of reader-narrator relationship of empathy. A narrator's use of humor can be particularly powerful in inviting the reader into this relationship akin to the "conspiracy of intellect" described above. As the first chapter outlined, engaging with humor is an intellectual process. The empathy in perspective that humor encourages between teller and hearer or narrator and reader is not divorced from that intellection. This section looks at empathy as a specific outcome of the unity of perspectives that the intellectual entertainment of humor encourages. This section compares the narrators and their use of humor in Thackeray's "A Little Dinner at Timmins's" and Gaskell's *Cranford*. *Cranford* and "Little Dinner" are particularly useful to compare because of the similar positioning of their narrators and the very different ways in which the positioning of the narrators is revealed in the course of the narrative. Thackeray's narrator initially presents himself as extra-heterodiegetic: a figure with particularly elevated authority because he is not a part of the events he describes. In contrast, in *Cranford*, the narrator frankly indicates through frequent use of first-person pronouns, singular and plural, her presence as an extra-allodiegetic member of Cranford's community. Comparing these two narrators reveals how the position of the narrator changes the orientation of the humor in relation to its audience. Gaskell's narrator is positioned within the text to invite empathy not just with her perspective, but with the concerns of the larger community described. Thackeray, however, positions his narrator to first establish a shared perspective with its readership and then to offer up an implied critique of the text's amused readership.

In *Cranford*, Mary as narrator relies upon humor throughout her affectionate, wry

characterization of the often ridiculous doings of her fellow townsfolk.[179] Because *Cranford*'s narrator is within the action, it is fair to assume she has a limited vision of events and the implied reader can receive her judgment of events as an individual person's perspective rather than as that of a figure with any level of omniscience. As Rimmon-Kenan notes, any homodiegetic narrator has distinct limitations: "The main sources of unreliability are the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme."[180] Essentially, in spite of her narrator status, Mary has the same level of credibility as the other characters who gossip about one another; she has no special knowledge of any character's interior motivation other than her own and she is personally involved in the action she describes.

However, it is her position as community member as well as narrator within the narrative that lends itself to this particular privilege of humorous observation—not as one looking from the outside in, but as one, sometimes in exasperation, speaking from within. Mary, in discussing the way of life in this female-dominated community, highlights a multitude of humorous incongruities. She explains that the primary business of Cranford was:

> keeping the trim gardens full of choice flowers [. . .] frightening away little boys who look wistfully at the said flowers [. . .] rushing out at the geese that occasionally ventured into the gardens [. . . and] for deciding all questions of literature and politics without troubling themselves with unnecessary reasons or arguments.[181]

Mary's focus on the inconsistencies and the littleness of their concerns could be read as condescending. She gives a ludicrous example of what is considered good manners in Cranford. Convention in that community is that guests should stay no longer than fifteen minutes when calling on a neighbor. A young member of the community asks an elder:

> "But am I to look at my watch? How am I to find out when a quarter of an hour has passed?" "You must keep thinking about the time, my dear, and not allow yourself to forget it in conversation." As everybody had this rule in their minds, whether they received or paid a call, of course no absorbing subject was ever spoken about. We kept ourselves to short sentences of small talk, and were punctual to our time.[182]

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[179] A fair amount of the criticism of *Cranford* centers around the power dynamics in the depiction of this female community, see Audrey Jaffe, "*Cranford* and *Ruth*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 46–58; Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, "Left Documents and Illegitimate Children: 'Lizzie Leigh,' *Cranford*, and *Ruth*", in *Victorian Publishing and Mrs. Gaskell's Work* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1999), 68–95; and Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 57–64.
[180] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative*, 101.
[181] Gaskell, *Cranford*, 1.
[182] Ibid., 2.

The effect in this example of the elevation of the rule of politeness over all else—do not overstay your welcome—results in something like a zero-sum game in which the point of visiting one another— to know your neighbors better—is undercut by everyone's inability to pay attention to each other as they focus on keeping track of time. Mary highlights the incongruity by her narration: "As everybody had this rule in their minds, [. . .] of course no absorbing subject was ever spoken about."[183] The irony is that due to their well-intended care for one another, this rustic community is only able to have the most superficial, disinterested interactions, with neither party taking any heed or interest in what the other is saying.

However, while the behavior of the townspeople is slightly ridiculous, the way that Mary invites the reader to laugh is conditional. The homodiegetic Mary not only focalizes these scenes but includes herself among these ladies and is recounting her own behavior as well as theirs: "*We* kept ourselves to short sentences of small talk."[184] Mary's narration makes clear that she perceives the behavior she describes as incongruous. But when she invites the reader to laugh, their laughter is alongside her own: it is a shared laugh. Both Mary and the reader perceive the irony of the situation while the townspeople, seemingly, do not. And yet while the laughter is at their expense, Mary's homoediegetic involvement in the scenario renders the humor empathy building rather than alienating.

Much like the character-narrator Pelham, Mary's relationship to the people whose stories she divulges gives her a kind of authority. While she may not see everything, it is implied that she has relationships and first-hand involvement with all of the people who she describes. Mary, particularly early on, asserts her presence in the text through the use of first-person pronouns: "I will answer for it"; "I can testify"; "I have described"; "I imagine"; "I never shall forget."[185] These assertions of her presence highlight her lack of omniscience and her status as narrator. However, more than first-person singular pronouns, she often uses first-person plural pronouns: "We had a tradition"; "We none of us"; "we were all aristocratic"; "we all believe that"; "though she knew, and we know, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew"; "How naturally one falls back into the phraseology of Cranford."[186] These first-person assertions serve to invoke her status as a member of the community, and, although she has less authority

[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid. (my italics).
[185] Ibid., 2; 2; 2; 3; 3.
[186] Ibid., 2; 3; 3; 3; 3; 3.

than an omniscient narrator, she has a distinct authority as a community member to say her piece about the goings on.

Balanced with these jokes that highlight the trivialities of the cares of the women of Cranford, Mary also includes examples of the community's concerns that warrant respect and praise. Perhaps cares like flower-bed tending seem unimportant, but the way in which the women of Cranford enforce their laws is as Amazons. Mary points out that these ladies used their Amazonian powers to enforce rules within the town that ensure no one was shamed: "it was considered 'vulgar' [. . .] to give anything expensive, in the way of eatable or drinkable, at the evening entertainments" ensuring that even the very poor amongst them could participate as hostesses in the community.[187] Beyond geese chasing and little boy shooing, Mary emphasizes that Cranford was also known "for kindness [. . .], and real tender good offices to each other whenever they are in distress."[188] It is Mary's presence within the narrative that simultaneously enables her humor, without cynicism, to both mock and endear the community of which she is a part, and, as narrator, she invites the reader to join her within that friendly circle. The relative quality of her reliability, authority, and authenticity largely derives from her embedded position within the narrative.[189]

In contrast to *Cranford*'s Mary, Thackeray's narrator, though similarly placed and similarly relying upon humor, uses that placement and humor for a radically different function in "Little Dinner." Part of Thackeray's humor in "Little Dinner" is to play a trick upon his readers as to his narrator's placement. Throughout the majority of the text, the narrator implies that his presence is heterodiegetic through his seemingly omniscient commentary and in observations on and into various characters' motives and thoughts. The narrator makes his perspectives on the characters known particularly through the use of conversational, parenthetical statements: "Rosa, you may be sure, jumped with joy at the sight of this sweet present; called her Charles (his first name is Samuel, but they have sunk that) the best of men."[190] This kind of comment intentionally invokes the extra-heterodiegetic narrator type established by eighteenth-century writers and

[187] Ibid., 3.
[188] Ibid., 1.
[189] Kate Flint writes of Mary: "Her role is above all that of a mediating friend, linking the world of *Cranford* with the presumed knowledge and values of her readers. The sense of intimacy which is created [. . .] is a bold creation of a woman's voice confident in her capacity to act as an objective social commentator." *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 34.
[190] Thackeray, "Little Dinner", 708.

fairly standard in the nineteenth century: narrators characterized by all-knowing, didactic benevolence. William West explains the character of the heterodiegetic narrator: "The presence in a novel of a benign narrator who stands in a sympathetic relationship to his creation can certainly be seen as an obvious fictional method of representing the reassuring comic view that things turn out well in this world because we are protected by kindly forces."[191] Thackeray takes advantage of this expectation, and he intentionally invokes and characterizes his narrator as a heterodiegetic presence.

In "Little Dinner" this seemingly benign narrator tells the story of Mr. and Mrs. Fitzroy Timmins who have not very much money, little pretense to elevated class, and a relatively small home, but who decide to spend a lot of money to invite their betters to a little dinner. The majority of the short tale explains all of the planning, purchasing, and inviting undertaken by the Timmins's in anticipation of the dinner. The narrator rattles off an account of events in the Timmins's house and describes the politics of inviting, explaining that

> There are—People who are offended if you ask them to tea whilst others have been asked to dinner; People who are offended if you ask them to tea at all; [. . .] That there are people who are offended if you don't ask them at all, is a point which I suppose nobody will question.[192]

As in this example, the narrator occasionally uses a first-person pronoun. The narrator even goes so far as to assume physical presence in the story later on: "It was, in her opinion, the comfortablest room in the house (we all thought so when we came down of a night to smoke there), and the handsomest kitchen in Lilliput Street."[193] However, this incursion onto the scene is not necessarily outside an omniscient narrator's purview.[194] Moreover, these first-person

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[191] William West, "*The Last Chronicle of Barset:* Trollope's Comic Techniques", in *The Classic British Novel*, eds. Howard M. Harper Jr. and Charles Edge (Athens: Georgia University Press, 1972), 125.
[192] Thackeray, "Little Dinner", 713–714.
[193] Ibid., 720.
[194] Anthony Trollope's narrators, for example, occasionally make similar comments without revealing any further homodiegetic presence in the narrative. In the opening of *The Small House at Allington*, Trollope's narrator explains: "I remember to have dined at a house, the whole glory and fortune of which depended on the safety of a glass goblet. We all know the story. If the luck of Edenhall should be shattered, the doom of the family would be sealed. Nevertheless I was bidden to drink out of the fatal glass, as were all guests in that house. It would not have contented the chivalrous mind of the master to protect his doom by lock and key and padded chest. And so it was with the Dales of Allington" (2). Again later, he explains that "uncle Christopher had been very good to the girls in his own obstinate and somewhat ungracious manner. There were two ponies in the stables of the Great House, which they were allowed to ride, and which, unless on occasions, nobody else did ride. I think he might have given the ponies to the girls, but he thought differently" (17). Despite these assertions of his personality and

pronouns are never characterized as embodied further than the above line until the closing of the penultimate chapter. Gradually, the narrator reveals the extent of his presence within the narrative: "The two friends of the house, young gentlemen from the Temple, now arrived in cab No. 9996. We tossed up, in fact, which should pay the fare"; "Some fellows who had the luck, took down ladies to dinner. I was not sorry to be out of the way of Mrs. Rowdy, with her dandified airs, or of that high and might county princess, Mrs. Topham."[195] Following these sudden, embodied intrusion into the narrative, the last chapter reveals that the narrator is not a judicious heterodiegetic pundit. Instead he was an allodiegetic invitee to the eponymous dinner, and, moreover, an offended invitee. The closing chapter thus begins and ends with his list of complaints as both a guest of their house on this occasion and as a longstanding acquaintance: "Why, in fact, did the Timminses give that party at all? It was quite beyond their means. [. . .] I know for a fact that Fusby's bill is not yet paid; nor Binney and Latham's the wine-merchants [. . .]; that every true friend of Timmins has cried out against his absurd extravagance."[196] This unexpected shift in position and authority over the text is, without doubt, the text's most notable incongruity—though not necessarily an amusing one. What Thackeray has done is to lay out the clues that lead a reader to assume the narrator is heterodiegetic. Once this authority level has been established, he exploits what would appear to be a heterodiegetic narrator's privilege of commenting on conversations and motivations that he could not, as a homodiegetic figure, have access to. Once he exploited all of the privileges of this position, he then reveals the narrator's actual homodiegetic position.

The result of this switch is that the reader has to revise and reconsider the validity and benevolence of the judgments and observations the narrator has made about his friends and their dinner party. At the end, in an irony laden chapter of unreflective complaint, the narrator explains and expounds upon his judgment of the Timmins's. In doing so, he reveals a value system that is far from disinterested and benevolent and that limits the credibility and authority of his perspective:

> Of course it does not become the present writer, who has partaken of the best entertainment which his friends could supply, to make fun of their (somewhat ostentatious, as it must be confessed) hospitality. [. . .] I hate a man who goes and eats a

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presence in the story-world, the narrator is not a homodiegetic character in the text. *The Small House at Allington* (London: Trollope Society, 1997).

[195] Thackeray, "Little Dinner", 728.

[196] Ibid., 731.

> friend's meat, and then blabs the secrets of the mahogany. Such a man deserves never to be asked to dinner again.[197]

In the guise of narrative omniscience, the entire narrative of "Little Dinner" is devoted to "blabbing the secrets of the mahogany." Moreover, although the narrator claims that "Fitz is my closest friend", by the narrator's own account he does nothing to assist the Timmins' in their social or financial straits and instead partakes as one more guest in what he evidently knows is a financially ruinous dinner party.[198]

On the one hand, Gaskell is intentional and upfront about the position of her narrator and the limitations implied by her homodiegetic position, and she relies upon the qualities these limitations provide. Thackeray, on the other hand, sets out to rely upon the tropes established by omniscience to trick his reader. The initial presentation of an external narrator in "Little Dinner" provides a commensurate distance in the implied reader's identification with the narrator's removed perspective. The effect Thackeray seeks to achieve through this deception is that when the narrator reveals his position to the events he has narrated, this proximity has implications for the reader. The narrator's initial representation of his position places him and his sneering remarks above and outwith the story. The implied reader has ostensibly joined this narrator in laughing at the Timmins's vain efforts. Once the narrator's true hypocritical position has been revealed, if the implied reader has laughed along with the narrator's descriptions, the shared humorous perspective has brought the narrator and reader into a complicity of hypocrisy.

Philosopher Ted Cohen describes the unity implied in sharing humor as a process that indicates where the boundaries of community and belonging are. He explains,

> you need to begin with an implicit acknowledgement of a shared background, a background awareness that you both are already in possession of and bring to the jokes. This is the foundation of the intimacy that will develop if your joke succeeds, and the hearer then also joins you in a shared response to the joke. [. . .] And just what is this *intimacy*? It is the shared sense of those in a *community*. The members know that they are in this community, and they know that they are joined there by one another.[199]

If the narrator is proved to be a hypocrite, then the narratee takes some part in that hypocrisy by colluding with him in laughter. The narrator's reveal at the end seeks to emphasize that Thackeray's tale is not a parable about another place and time; it could be a story told by

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[197] Ibid., 728.
[198] Ibid., 729.
[199] Cohen, *Jokes*, 28 (author's italics).

someone in the reader's immediate community.

The satirical, cynical laughter that "Little Dinner's" narrator is relying upon is distinct from the affectionate, companionable chuckle that Mary's involved descriptions of Cranford call for. In *Cranford*, the humor is used to invite the implied reader further into the story world: each smile solicited by the descriptions of its narrator-character seeks to further endear the trivial and mundane causes in the community the story depicts to the implied reader. In contrast, the laughter that Thackeray has called for is turned back on his reader as well as the text's narrator.[200]

Comparing the humor and role of the narrator in *Cranford* and "Little Dinner" points to two different purposes and approaches to Victorian authenticity and realism. Both Thackeray and Gaskell's stories are based on real communities: the township of Cranford was based upon Knutsford and Thackeray's story takes place within London society. In terms of incidents, Gaskell was intentional in imbuing her chronicle with plausibility. She explains in a letter to John Ruskin that there were some anecdotes from the town of Knutsford that "I did not dare to put in, because I thought people would say it was too ridiculous, and yet which really happened."[201] And the praise offered *Cranford* in reviews focuses more on the insightfulness of characterization rather than the abundance of plausible detail. An anonymous reviewer in the *Examiner* in 1853 writes that "[t]he real truth is that Cranford contains hardly a bit of formal description from first to last, that not a single person in it is thought worth a page of the regular drawing and coloring which is the novelist's stock in trade."[202] Despite this, the reviewer asserts *Cranford*'s remarkable sense of authenticity, claiming that "[i]t is all a piece of genuine truth." The reviewer suggests that it is the characters' relationships and the provincial scenarios they find themselves in that make the novel genuine.[203]

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[200] George Henry Lewes wrote in his review of Thackeray's *Book of Snobs* in 1848, "[o]ther satirists flatter their readers, by implication at least,—but he ruthlessly arrests the complacent chuckle, and turns the laugh against the laugher." *The Morning Chronicle*, 3. Lewes' observation is equally manifest in the structure of "Little Dinner" in which the purpose of the seeming reversal of the narrator's position at the end was not merely to play a trick on the reader, but to convict the reader.

[201] Gaskell to Ruskin, February 24, 1865, in *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. John Chapple and Alan Shelston (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 268.

[202] Unsigned review of *Cranford*, *The Examiner*.

[203] Highlighting, once again, the significant differences between notions of realism held and developed by Victorian critics versus critics of the latter twentieth century, some critics such as Aaron Matz suggest that a key component of realism is an "extraordinary pressure on the detail." *Satire In an Age of Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5; cf. Barthes' concept of *l'effet du réel* in which he

Thackeray's authenticity is less concerned with depicting genuine relationships than it is with holding a mirror up to his audience to show them their potential for complicity in the shallow pursuits of contemporary London life. This difference between the narrator's purpose and use of humor in Thackeray's and Gaskell's texts is pointed to in a letter that Charlotte Brontë wrote to Gaskell in 1852. She writes that "Mr. Thackeray ought to take a series of articles such as these [*Cranford*]—retire with them to his chamber, put himself to bed, and lie there—till he had learnt by diligent study how to be satirical without being exquisitely bitter."[204] In a sense, both Thackeray and Gaskell's humor is playing a kind of trick on their readers. In Thackeray's case, his trick is to use humor to enact scathing social criticism. Whereas Gaskell's trick is to position her narrator in such a way as to bring the reader into community with Mary, and by extension, with the rest of Cranford. The laughter of that community is one that seeks to endear itself to the reader from within rather than looking on, from above or outside of it. While Thackeray's story demands that the reader should despise him or herself for laughing at the real people upon whom this social tale is based, Gaskell seems to be urging the reader to laugh in empathetic communion with the real people upon whom this provincial community, with its simple ways, is based.

Conclusion

It is through the narrator, primarily, that the "relentless micromanagement of reaction in nineteenth-century narrative", as Garrett Stewart describes it, is achieved.[205] The role of the narrator in humor is foundational to that "micromanagement" in the literature that is under review in this thesis. This chapter has set out to sketch some of the attributes of that foundation: the role of the narrator as a character, the role of humor in that characterization, and humor and the narrator's relationship to a Victorian conception of realism. The character of the narrator is key to the interpretation of these texts and to engaging with their humor. This chapter has focused on particular details: the opening of texts that establish a humorous dominant and the

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suggests physical details are of great significance to establishing a sense of realism. "The Reality Effect", in *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900–2000*, ed. Dorothy J. Hale (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2006), 230–234.

[204] Brontë to Gaskell, 22 May 1852, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, vol. 3, *1852–1855* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 47.

[205] Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 21.

comparison of narrative voices. Subsequent chapters, though exploring other themes, return to and build upon this foundational relationship between the Victorian narrator and humor. The next chapter considers the wider role that humor plays in the dynamics between characters, in characterization, and in the larger narrative arc of character development.

Chapter 3: Humor and Characterization

3.1 Introduction

Humor is relational at its core and is clearly a productive means authors turn to for generating interest in and sympathy for characters. As Henri Bergson points out "[h]owever spontaneous it seems, laughter always implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary."[206] The use of humor in a text seeks to establish that "freemasonry" between the implied reader and the narrator or character's perspective or, alternately, to alienate the reader from a particular character's perspective or actions. In narratives in which humor is a dominant, the omission of humor in a particular characterization can suggest how that character is excluded from the relational community that the humor in the text is fostering.

Throughout the serialization of Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (February 1865 to May 1866), Oliphant and her publisher John Blackwood corresponded about the characterization of the eponymous main character, Lucilla, and her potential for generating sympathy. At this stage in Oliphant's career, she had been working with Blackwood for a number of years and they had developed a friendly, personable correspondence.[207] Oliphant was by then a regular contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine* (known as *Maga*), both of fiction and literary criticism.[208] Blackwood writes about the early installments of *Miss Marjoribanks* with high praise and particularly of his enjoyment of the character Lucilla. In December 1864 he wrote in response to some advance chapters, that he was "delighted with Miss Marjoribanks. It is a perfect picture true to nature as can be. Your heroine is beyond price + if you can keep that up you will have made a most valuable addition to the great portrait gallery of Fiction."[209]

However, as the *Miss Marjoribanks* story unfolded in the spring of 1865, Blackwood again wrote to Oliphant,

I enclose an extract [. . .] from the Saturday Review [. . .] The main reason why I send

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[206] Bergson, "Laughter", 64.
[207] Oliphant had by 1865 published eight novels with Blackwood and would go on to publish another ten including *Miss Marjoribanks*. For more on Oliphant's relationship with Blackwood, her contributions to the *Blackwood's Magazine*, and a comprehensive list of her fictional publications see Elisabeth Jay, *Mrs Oliphant: 'A Fiction to Herself' A Literary Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
[208] Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 15; 36.
[209] Blackwood to Oliphant, December 12, 1864, Papers of William Blackwood and Sons, National Library of Scotland, MS 30361:210.

> you this extract is [. . .] that the author has not the remotest sympathy with [your] heroine + it may be worth your consideration to get in a feminine character with whom the author does sympathize.[210]

Later, in September, as this conversation continues about Lucilla and whether or not she will generate sufficient sympathy as heroine with the readership of *Blackwood's Magazine*, Oliphant writes:

> I am afraid it was scarcely to be avoided. I hate myself the cold-blooded school of novel writing, in which one works out a character without the slightest regard to whether it is good or bad, or whether it touches or revolt's one's sympathies. But at the same time I have a weakness for Lucilla, and to bring a sudden change upon her character and break her down into tenderness would be like one of Dickens's maudlin repentances, when he makes Mr Dombey [toast] with Captain Cuttle. Miss M. must be one and indivisible, and I feel pretty sure that my plan is right.[211]

As the narrative of *Miss Marjoribanks* drew to a close some months later, Blackwood again expresses resistance to the direction of Oliphant's narrative. Particularly, he questions the romantic conclusion Oliphant has granted her heroine, and she replies,

> Most unreasonable and exacting of editors, what would you have? Was it not only the other day you were abusing me for Lucilla's want of heart, and now, when the poor soul finds herself guilty of caring for somebody, you think she has too much! It is the sad fate of gifted women in general never to be appreciated. For my own part, I think my poor dear heroine always had a very good heart, and though it was silly of her to like Tom, still we never set up of inhuman consistency, neither Lucilla nor I.[212]

This back and forth between writer and editor, particularly with Blackwood's focus on Lucilla's reception, is interesting for our purposes because Lucilla is characterized predominantly through humor. This dialogue between author and editor illuminates some important expectations that the reviewers, editor, and author had for the heroine of the piece. Lucilla's wit is praised and, as discussed in the last chapter, Blackwood holds her characterization up to that pervasive Victorian standard of reality: "a perfect picture true to nature as can be." But the substance of their discussion is over Lucilla's ability to generate sympathy from her reading audience. The reviewer Blackwood cites suggests he or she cannot have sympathy with Lucilla, and Blackwood also questions whether Lucilla is too hard and then whether she is too soft to generate sympathy.

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[210] Blackwood to Oliphant, March 5, 1865, Papers of William Blackwood and Sons, National Library of Scotland, MS 30361:296.
[211] Oliphant to Blackwood, September 20, 1865, in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Elisabeth Jay, vol. 6, *Part II: The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs M. O. W. Oliphant*, ed. Linda H. Peterson (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 142.
[212] Oliphant to Blackwood, May 17, 1866, in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 6:145–146.

Oliphant's defense of Lucilla is, significantly, based upon her relatability and realism as a character, which, in Oliphant's interpretation, are significant to avoiding inconsistency in characterization.

Oliphant and her publisher's concerns about Lucilla illuminate the kinds of deliberate choices authors made around characterization in such a way as to generate sympathy for and to maintain interest in characters. Rae Greiner, in her argument relating sympathy to realism in nineteenth-century fiction, explains that "[f]ellow-feeling generates forms of intellectual and affective engagement."[213] The previous chapter introduced some ideas about humor's orienting power in the discussion of the narratorial aims to establish empathy. This chapter discusses the relationship between establishing a sense of relatability or sympathy and the process of characterization. [214] Humor plays an important role in characterization and character development in these texts. The orientation of the humor, its relation to "affective engagement", to use Greiner's phrase, is particularly important for how a text asks to be read and how it fosters its own interpretive framework in relation to characterization.

The characters compared in this chapter appear in texts published between 1839 and 1866: Frances Milton Trollope's *The Widow Barnaby* (1839), Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (serialized 1847–1848), Dickens' *David Copperfield* (serialized 1849–1850), Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857), *Doctor Thorne* (1858), and *Framley Parsonage* (serialized 1860–1861), and Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (serialized 1865–1866). To consider how humor can be used to characterize and generate sympathy for and interest in characters, the first section of this chapter compares humor's use in characterizing central female versus male characters. What this section discusses are the ways in which some authors seem to avoid humor as a tool that compromises the central interests of the narrative, whereas other authors use humor

[213] Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2012), 10.

[214] Core to Greiner argument about sympathy is to situate it within nineteenth-century debates about its meaning and importance. Rather than engage in the complexities of that historical conversation, I am relying upon a contemporary definition for sympathy: "[t]he quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling." *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "sympathy (*n.*)," accessed 5 August 2021, https://www.oed.com. Relatedly, it is worth noting that the term empathy is one that emerges in 1895, i.e. later than the texts under discussion in this thesis. Once again, I am relying upon the term empathy in its contemporary definition: "[t]he ability to understand and appreciate another person's feelings, experiences, etc." *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "empathy (*n.*)," accessed 5 August 2021, https://www.oed.com.

to establish readerly sympathy with the central interests of their narratives. The second section looks at female antiheroes. In this section, humor, on the one hand, helps the author ameliorate the problem of the central character's wickedness, but, on the other hand, complicates the conventional comeuppance these antiheroes are ultimately given. Finally, the third section compares a variety of kinds of characters that are technically peripheral to the narrative's focus and discusses why humor is used or not used in each example, as well as the role that humorous characterization at the peripheries plays in each narrative. What these three sections explore is how humor has the potential to reorient readerly sympathies away from the interest engendered by a conventional hierarchy of characters, putative moral conclusions, or the anticipated structure of narrative action.

3.2 Humor at the Heart and Hearth of the Narrative

In Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598–1600), the humorous Benedick lists the qualities in a woman that would induce him to place himself under the yoke of marriage:

> One woman / is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am / well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all / graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in / my grace. Rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, / or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her; / fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not / near me; noble, or not I for an angel; of good / discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair shall / be of what colour it please God.[215]

Of course, his resolute listing is all to no purpose when confronted with the rumor of Beatrice's love for him. But his list is instructive in what it includes and what it excludes as long-standing ideals of feminine traits. Notably he insists on "mildness" and emphasizes beauty and virtue twice. Although Benedick ultimately marries one of Shakespeare's most witty, incisive, and jolly heroines, the characteristic of humor is not one that he lists as necessary in the mate of his connubial bliss: indeed, this ideal woman does not sound like she would be particularly humorous.

Benedick's list is not of special historical significance in its exclusion of humor as a virtue. Instead it is a useful frame from which to consider which ideal virtues would be likely to appear in representative lists produced by writers of other periods. In a general sense, a representative list of archetypal virtues derived from an examination of heroines of Victorian

[215] William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. F. H. Mares (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 82.

novels is unlikely to diverge significantly from Benedick's thorough inventory. Besides perhaps the musical requirements, Benedick could be describing Coventry Patmore's mid-Victorian archetype of the *Angel in the House* (1854) and many attributes shared by Dickens' typical heroines.[216]

Moreover, a list like Benedick's, which excludes humor, belongs in a long-standing pattern of undervaluing humor as an ideal quality in both men and women that first appears in philosophical writing with Plato's argument for banning humor from the Republic. In the larger project of, as Stott puts it, "cultivating the ideal person in the ideal state", Plato suggests in book XI of the "Laws" that "[n]o composer of comedies, or of songs or iambic verse, must ever be allowed to ridicule either by description or by impersonation any citizen whatever, with or without rancor."[217] Reason, rather than ridicule, promotes understanding according to Plato. And as Plato develops his ideas around this exclusion it becomes clear that as he conceives of it humor, by nature, partakes in ridicule.

Evidently, some Victorian authors concurred with Plato's conception of humor as predicated upon condescension or a sense of superiority, and some would concur with a version of superiority theory such as discussed in chapter one. But when considering a roster of central characters from the novels of the Victorian period, there is some significant divergence in how the usefulness of humor is weighed and balanced by different authors. If humor could be interpreted as degrading in some way, to present that which is central as also humorous is to compromise the potential laudability that the privilege of centrality often implies. Sometimes then, to preserve the reader's sympathies with a narrative's central goal and ethos, humor seems to be kept away from the central concerns and characters of an otherwise humor-dominated narrative. Northrop Frye argues in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) that this exclusion is common particularly in relation to the archetypal hero and heroine of theatrical comedies.[218] More

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[216] Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920).
[217] Stott, *Comedy*, 19; Plato, "Laws XI", in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1588. Although Plato dismisses humor from the Republic, he cannot totally reject humor as valuable because Socrates utilizes it so often and so effectively, particularly in the form of irony. Perhaps this bad will for comedy is related to the fact that a comedy, Aristophanes' *The Clouds* (423 B.C.), played a part in the destruction of Socrates' reputation, which led to his sham trial and subsequent death.
[218] Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). He explains that the "technical" central hero and heroine "are not always very interesting people" and "[f]ictional comedy, especially Dickens, often follows the same practice of grouping its interesting characters around a

broadly, George Santayana observes that "[e]ven in farces, the hero and heroine are seldom made ridiculous, because that would jar upon the sympathy with which we are expected to regard them."[219] For example, while Beatrice and Benedick provide some of the greatest levity in *Much Ado About Nothing*, their romance plays a secondary role to the romance plot of the younger much less humorous pairing of Hero and Claudio whose narrative carries the primary moral of the story. Usually, the reader is invested in the goals or sympathizes with the feelings of the hero and heroines and Frye and Santayana suggests that this invitation is betrayed if the reader is simultaneously invited to laugh at incongruous aspects of those goals and feelings.

While the Victorian period abounds with examples of humorous male characters at every level of centrality or peripherality to the plot, authors writing humor-dominated narratives display some notable omissions in the use and application of humor in relation to female characters: particularly those who lie at the heart of the narrative. To compare the interaction between protagonists and humorous incongruity, this section compares the central women of Dickens' *David Copperfield*, Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, *Doctor Thorne*, and *Framley Parsonage* (three installments from the story world of Barsetshire), and Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks*. There is not an obvious pattern between the 1830s and 1860s of progress from an unwillingness to characterize women using humor to a willingness—and earlier examples of female characters in the works Jane Austen would belie such an assertion. Instead, what comparing these characters illustrates is that each author has different but distinguishable boundaries between which kinds of figures they will and will not characterize using humor. By focusing on the central female characters of narratives, this section considers the intersection of how individual Victorian authors view the virtues of their heroines and whether or not they perceive humor as compromising or enhancing those virtues.

In many of Dickens' works there is a straightforward boundary between the heroine as the object of romantic interest and humor: where the one appears, the other flees. This is evident in contrasting the two leading women of Dickens' "favourite child" *David Copperfield*: Agnes

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somewhat dullish pair of technical leads" (167). Moral comedies, he explains, are "often the kind of melodrama that we have described as comedy without humor, and which achieves its happy ending with a self-righteous tone that most comedy avoids", whereas in old comedy archetypes the hero is "rather neutral and unformed in character" and the heroine is "generally a stage prop" (173).

[219] Santayana, *Sense of Beauty*, 158. Santayana is not an advocate of the superiority theory of humor nor particularly of the incongruity theory. He suggests within his broader argument that incongruity is sometimes based upon highlighting the inferiority of the object of humorous incongruity.

and Dora.[220] Like most of Dickens' beautiful leading ladies, Agnes, David's second wife, is entirely humorless. She is characterized predominantly by her wisdom and beauty; indeed, David regards her as his moral and personal guide for most of their long friendship. His relationship with Agnes he characterizes from the outset as mature and calm:

> I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards.[221]

Even as a child, Agnes is presented as a model of behavior and wisdom.

While Agnes is a typical Dickensian heroine in many ways, David's characterization spans the gap between Dickens' greater variety of heroes. In terms of characterization of central male figures with humor in Dickens' works, the delightful and ridiculous Pickwick stands at one end of the spectrum while at the other stands, perhaps, a character like Sidney Carton, with his grim smile but abidingly serious function in the narrative. Esther Summerson, the only female character who is given narratorial centrality in Dickens' novels,[222] belongs with characters, like Sydney Carton, Paul Dombey, and John Harmon, on the extreme end of the spectrum of serious characterization.[223] David, however, is not unlike Pip in *Great Expectations* in that many aspects of their childhood are characterized humorously. A factor in this commonality between Pip and David are that they are homodiegetic narrators. While they narrate the events of their childhood, they do so with some nostalgia and humor, but as their characters grow into adults that maturation is depicted decreasingly through humor. Dickens was evidently open to characterizing his central male figures humorously, but as his career progressed his central male characters, with the significant exception of Pip,[224] generally had less in common with Pickwick and more with Sydney Carton in terms of their association with humor.

In terms of Dickens' heroines, Dora, David's first wife in *David Copperfield*, is characterized in stark contrast to Agnes. Agnes, with her attributes of self-sacrifice, simplicity,

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[220] Charles Dickens, "Preface to the Charles Dickens Edition (1867)", in *David Copperfield*, ed. Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 870.
[221] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 217.
[222] This is also only a partial designation because Esther shares her narratorial privileges with one of Dickens' omniscient heterodiegetic narrators.
[223] The satirical characterization of Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times* is a special case in Dickens' oeuvre that will be discussed in chapter five.
[224] The role of humor in Pip's characterization will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

and purity, is one of Dickens' archetypal heroines: humorless beauties like Florence Dombey, Amy Dorrit, and Lizzie Hexam. The thing that makes Dora tremendously different from these typical Dickensian women is her silliness.[225] She has an equally immediate, but deeply different, effect upon David from Agnes. As soon as David meets Dora, he is enthralled by her and his narration describes this enthrallment in humorous terms: "All was over in a moment. I had fulfilled my destiny. I was a captive and a slave. I loved Dora Spenlow to distraction!"[226] In the flush of first love, David "lived principally on Dora and coffee. In my love-lorn condition, my appetite languished; and I was glad of it, for I felt as though it would have been an act of perfidy towards Dora to have a natural relish for my dinner."[227] Although clearly affected by his memories, the older, more serious narrator David describes this youthful passion as somewhat ridiculous. Looking back from the security of his present marriage to Agnes, he also presents the silliness as reasonable in the context of his youth.

After they are initially married, David and Dora's home life is described humorously with the kind of disheveled disorder that Dickens usually reserves for his peripheral comic figures. For example, David invites his friend Traddles over for a dinner and describes their housekeeping thus: "I made no allusion to the skirmishing plates upon the floor; or to the disreputable appearance of the castors, which were all at sixes and sevens, and looked drunk; or to the further blockade of Traddles by wandering vegetable dishes and jugs."[228] David is embarrassed by their housekeeping, but delighted to hear that Dora had gone to the trouble to purchase oysters for their supper. However, upon examination they discover that the oysters she purchased had not been opened by the seller and, lacking the proper implements, were therefore unassailable by the Copperfields and their guest. So they "looked at the oysters and ate the mutton."[229] In spite of all these problems, they have a joyous evening. This scene has many parallel scenes in the novel involving peripheral characters like the Micawbers or the Peggottys who are described as lacking in refinements, assets, and to whom ridiculous things happen, but who are happy despite their afflictions and shortcomings.

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[225] With perhaps the addition of Bella Wilfer in *Our Mutual Friend*. Bella is not silly like Dora, but she is more complex than Agnes and her ilk.
[226] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 379.
[227] Ibid., 399.
[228] Ibid., 625.
[229] Ibid., 626.

Much of Dora's characterization is accomplished through these kinds of scenes of exaggerated description. In the evenings, as David worked, Dora would sit next to him in

> her old place with a spare bundle of pens at her side. [. . .] I occasionally made a pretense of wanting a page or two of manuscript copied. Then Dora was in her glory. The preparations she made for this great work, the aprons she put on, the bibs she borrowed from the kitchen to keep off the ink, [. . .] and the way in which she would bring it to me, like a school-copy, and then, when I praised it, clasp me round the neck, are touching recollections to me.[230]

Dora's ridiculousness in this scene is presented as an endearing trait by David. As with all his recollections of Dora, this scene is recounted with a hazy affection engendered by the endearment of his subsequent loss of Dora. But this affection does not diminish the humorous juxtaposition of seriousness and care with which Dora regards her mission and the irrelevance of the mission itself.

The humor in this episode between Dora and David is highlighted by comparing it to a corresponding but remarkably different scene David recounts involving Agnes. She too is described sitting of an evening by David's side. David narrates,

> I turn my head, and see [Agnes], in [her] beautiful serenity, beside me. My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company. Oh Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed.[231]

The language David uses to describe Agnes is reverential and quasi-religious. It is almost unthinkable to imagine Agnes running around scolding the dog, putting on aprons to cut pens, or being so foolhardy as to buy unopened oysters. Correspondingly it is hard to imagine Agnes and David having an evening filled with as much fun as Dora and David had the evening in which the oysters were left unopened or the pens were cut. David the narrator is no longer writing with gentle, amused affection about the hazy past, but devotionally about the clear present. Moreover, he is also writing about a different David. As David grows up, he transitions from a youth whose naiveté his grown self can look back upon with a sense of the ridiculous as he measures the distance between his present and past self. He had grown beyond the limits of that small house with the disreputable castors and also beyond the limits of Dora.

Dora's characterization through humor, however, is oriented toward exposing her ridiculousness in an endearing rather than alienating fashion. A shrewd reviewer in *The*

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[230] Ibid., 631.
[231] Ibid., 855.

Athenaeum notes how Dickens has carefully threaded that particular needle, asking, "but has every one sufficiently admired the unobtrusive skill with which we are made to allow for the child-wife's folly without granting her a fool's pardon, —to feel that she is a mistake in the hero's fortunes, yet love her and weep for her early withering away?"[232] As the narrative drew to a close and caught up with the narrator-author David's "present" maturity, Dickens was evidently considering what was to be done with David's silly child-wife. This uncertainty is mentioned in an exchange between Dickens and his friend John Forster. Midway through the serialization of *David Copperfield*, Dickens wrote to Forster, "[s]till undecided about Dora, but MUST decide today.'"[233] This question, much like Blackwood's feedback to Oliphant detailed in the opening to this chapter, is engendered by the conflict between the sympathy Dora generates as a character and her relationship to the resolution of the plot. Dickens writes again to Forster, "I have been very hard at work these three days, and have still Dora to kill. But with good luck, I may do it to-morrow."[234] Forster writes later in his *Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-1874) that his initial uncertainty and then hesitation was because, "the child-wife Dora, [. . .] had become a great favourite as he went on."[235]

David, the narrator, characterizes both Dora and his younger self with silliness in the early days of their marriage. But while David grows into a serious man, who looks back with fond condescension on his past self, Dora, his silly child-wife, is not granted the privilege of growing into a serious woman. Having been predominantly characterized through silliness, Dora does not seem to have been created with the capacity for character development—there is no indication that she will ever stop leaving the castors at sixes and sevens. Dora's characterization through silliness is compromising for the mature, serious narrator David, who the young married David grows to be. As Chesterton puts it, because Dora was David's wife, Dickens could not banish her to Australia at the end of the novel as he did the inconvenient Micawbers: "Dora is a nuisance. [So] Dickens the despot condemns her to death."[236] Dora's ridiculousness jars with the

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[232] Unsigned review of *David Copperfield*, by Charles Dickens, *The Athenaeum*, no. 1204 (November 23, 1850): 1210. British Periodicals.
[233] Dickens to Forster, May 7, 1850, in *The Pilgrim Edition, The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, vol. 6, *1850–1852*, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, and Nina Burgis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 94.
[234] Dickens to Forster, August 20, 1850 in *Letters*, 6:153.
[235] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. A. J. Hoppé (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1966), 2:90.
[236] G. K. Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (London: Dent, 1911), 134.

standard of sympathy, seriousness, or purity around which Dickens constructs his romantic heroines. Because humor had rendered Dora an unfit partner to the hero of the novel, the hero David grows to be by the end of the narrative, she had to die.

While *The Athenaeum* reviewer suggests that Dickens successfully keeps Dora from foolishness, Dickens himself would seem to have viewed the situation somewhat differently. Killing off a character like Dora, a fairly singular figure in Dickens' work, to make way for Agnes, a fairly typical figure in Dickens' work, suggests that for Dickens the use of humor in relation to his female characters in particular involved an edge of ridicule that compromised the central concerns of his narratives. Dickens' female figures do on the whole fit into the Shakespearean mold pointed to by Santayana and Frye, in which principal characters are predominantly isolated from humor and thereby the possibility of ridicule. By the end of the narrative, Dora must go because she is a living reminder of David's own youthfulness, silliness, and frivolity. Dickens choses to close the narrative with a serious, mature narrator sitting beside his angelic Agnes, immured from ridicule. Grown-up David matches his grown-up wife. He can recount the ridiculous aspects of his youth, but is also no longer ridiculous himself—his marriage to the humorless Agnes distances him from youth and the dead wife of his youth. David, and Dickens in his writing, progresses from a sort of Pickwickian childhood to a Sydney Carton-esque adulthood.

The boundaries around female characters and humor are much less starkly drawn in Anthony Trollope than in Dickens. The centrality principle Santayana and Frye describe is somewhat applicable to Trollope's women, but the consistency of the characterization of Trollope's humorous narrator dictates that they cannot escape humorous description entirely. A typical example of the minimal humor used in characterizing Trollope's heroines in the Barsetshire Chronicles can be seen in the following example from *Framley Parsonage*. The narrator explains that though Lucy had been blasé to her sister-in-law after meeting Lord Lufton, "Lucy had been a hypocrite, for she had confessed to herself, while dressing, that Lord Lufton had been very pleasant; but then it is allowed to young ladies to be hypocrites when the subject under discussion is the character of a young gentleman."[237] In this scene, the narrator uses humor to pretend to reproach his romantic heroine for her unwillingness to be honest in acknowledging herself to be falling in love. In a sense, Lucy is here exposed to ridicule for her ignorance or

[237] Anthony Trollope, *Framley Parsonage* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1994), 101.

naiveté. Failure to know one's self is perhaps the most longstanding theorized source of humor—Plato observes that one is ridiculous if he fails to live up to the famous inscription at Delphi: "know thyself." [238] However, this small display of human weakness is forgivable and does not make Lucy a fool. The humor of the above example serves to hint at Lucy's feelings rather than to expose her ignorance or unworthiness, asking the reader to find her shyness endearing and laudable rather than absurd.

From the novels in question, *Framley Parsonage*, *Doctor Thorne*, and *Barchester Towers*, Mary Thorne of *Doctor Thorne* is probably characterized with the least amount of humor and Eleanor Bold of *Barchester Towers* is probably characterized with the most. To some extent, these minor distinctions could correspond to each character's relative place within the action of their narrative. Whereas Lucy and Lord Lufton's romance is a part of *Framley Parsonage*, it is not the exclusive focus of the narrative which is also largely concerned with the socially and fiscally irresponsible choices of Lucy's brother-in-law Mark Robarts. Similarly, *Barchester Chronicles* is a narrative broadly concerned with questions of hierarchy and dominance within a small cathedral community. Eleanor and Dr. Arabin are a part of this community but not necessarily the center of the narrative conflict. The union of Mary and Frank and the various obstacles they overcome, however, are at the heart of what is at stake in *Doctor Thorne*, though it is Mary's uncle who is the titular hero of the piece. Their romance most closely aligns with the argument Santayana makes; they carry the weight and moral of the tale and are most likely to be preserved from humorous characterization.

However, another potential factor in the comparative characterization of these women is their socio-economic status. Mary Thorne is an illegitimate child and orphan who is, initially, without any prospect of a significant inheritance. In *Framley Parsonage*, Lucy is the daughter of a doctor and sister of a clergyman, but without any title or wealth. In terms of wealth and status, therefore, both women are unequal to their landed and titled romantic counterparts, Frank Gresham and Lord Lufton. In the value scheme of these novels, the narrator emphasizes that Mary and Lucy's moral virtues and personal beauties are more significant than their social and monetary limitations. However, the disparity between their wealth and influence and that of their suitors is likely relevant to the limits placed on their interaction with humor. Lucy and Mary, even more so, are pitiable due to the financial and social disparity that jeopardizes a union

[238] Stott, *Comedy*, 19; Plato, "Philebus", 438.

between them and their lovers. This disparity makes Lucy and Mary vulnerable in a way that Eleanor, who is financially independent, a widow, and a mother, is not. Therefore, ridiculing them, or making them a party to humor, particularly given their centrality to the narrative, is a more difficult and undesirable goal. When it is necessary to regard a character with pity, interaction with humor can compromise that goal.[239]

Lucy and Mary's relative isolation from humorous characterization becomes even more clear in comparison to the narrator's characterization of their suitors. Trollope's narrator uses a tone of relative scorn to characterize young Frank Gresham of *Doctor Thorne*. After his hasty and ill-executed proposal is initially rejected by his friend and future wife Mary Thorne, the narrator remarks,

> so the interview had ended. Frank, of course, went upstairs to see if his new pocket-pistols were all ready, properly cleaned, loaded, and capped, should he find, after a few days' experience, that prolonged existence was unendurable. However, he managed to live through the subsequent period; doubtless with a view of preventing any disappointment to his father's guests.[240]

In *Framley Parsonage*, perhaps summing up his attitude toward romantic heroes on the whole, the ever-chatty narrator sarcastically discusses the disparity in emotional fidelity between Lord Lufton and Lucy Robarts:

> I know it will be said of Lord Lufton himself that, putting aside his peerage and broad acres, and handsome, sonsy face, he was not worth a girl's care and love. That will be said because people think that heroes in books should be so much better than heroes got up for the world's common wear and tear. I may as well confess that of absolute, true heroism there was only a moderate admixture in Lord Lufton's composition; but what would the world come to if none but absolute true heroes were to be thought worthy of women's love? What would the men do? and what—oh! what would become of the women?[241]

The failures of these heroes are not failures of vice or wickedness, but the narrator seems to take a particular relish in exposing the inability or unwillingness of these men to appropriately

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[239] Bergson explains that "I do not mean that we could not laugh at a person who inspires us with pity, for instance, or even with affection, but in such a case we must, for the moment, put our affection out of court and impose silence on our pity." "Laughter", 63. Because of Bergson's argument about the relationship between superiority and laughter, he argues that neither affection nor pity can coexist with laughter. I would argue, however, that superiority is not always implied with humor and that affection and humor can and do co-exist.

[240] Anthony Trollope, *Doctor Thorne*, ed. Simon Dentith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 74–75.

[241] Anthony Trollope, *Framley Parsonage*, 194.

understand and appreciate the women they love.[242] The effect in exposing these defects humorously is not to denigrate the heroes particularly, rather, by contrast, it seems to be oriented toward highlighting the greater worthiness of the heroines, as is particularly evident in the Lord Lufton example above. These examples suggest that Trollope is open to characterizing his central male characters humorously and, indeed, even with humorous ridicule.[243]

The characterization of Eleanor Bold and her suitor Mr. Arabin are much more equal, in terms of humorous treatment by the narrator, than the preceding couples. The character of Eleanor Bold in *Barchester Towers* was first introduced in Trollope's *The Warden* as Eleanor Harding before her marriage to John Bold. Her characterization by the narrator in *The Warden* shares the qualities of gentle mockery exhibited toward Lucy in *Framley Parsonage*. While Trollope's narrator's tone does not vary particularly in his humorous characterization of the now widowed Eleanor Bold in *Barchester Towers*, humor is applied with greater frequency to her characterization in *Towers* than in *The Warden*. The narrator's tone is teasing as he mirrors the emphatic repetitions of Eleanor's own mind in his narration, by positively and repeatedly stating: "Eleanor was not in love with [Mr. Arabin . . .] Eleanor, in truth, was not in love; neither was Mr. Arabin [. . .] But let it be clearly understood that Eleanor was in love with no one, and that no one was in love with Eleanor."[244] Obviously, all of these assertions that no one was in love with anybody, tend to have the opposite effect from assurance on that point. And, in a similar fashion to that of his treatment of the other romantic heroes in the series, the narrator takes a more pointed shot at his educated, highly literate, cultured, and savvy hero, exclaiming, "[p]oor Mr. Arabin—untaught, illiterate, boorish, ignorant man! That at forty years of age you should know so little of the workings of a woman's heart!"[245]

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[242] The exception to this generalization in the Barsetshire Chronicles is probably Adolphus Crosby throwing over Lily Dale in *The Small House at Allington*, but neither Adolphus nor his decisions are treated with sympathetic, inviting humor by the narrator.

[243] The narratives of the other installments of the Chronicles of Barsetshire, *The Small House at Allington* and a fair portion of the narrative of *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, revolve around the unworthiness of Lily Dale's suitors — one for his worldliness and the other for his greenness. The kind of unflattering assessment Trollope offers of his heroes fits into what Frank O'Connor describes as Trollope's version of realism: "It was not merely that Trollope sympathized with so-called 'weak' people in situations that were merely ambiguous", he had, rather, a "loyalty to a certain attitude to the facts, to a humility and passivity in the face of life" that led him to present the details with a kind of unromantic clarity. *The Mirror in the Roadway* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 171; 172. These qualities in Trollope's narration will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five of this thesis.

[244] Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*, ed. Robin Gilmour (London: Penguin, 2003), 211–212.

[245] Ibid., 287.

One character, however, stands out from the others in these three novels in terms of humorous characterization: *Doctor Thorne*'s Miss Dunstable. She, unlike the other three women described, is most obviously peripheral in the sense that her romantic plot is secondary in terms of text-space and cardinal narrative impact to the other romance plots of the novels in which she appears: that of Mary and Frank in *Doctor Thorne* and Lucy and Lord Lufton in *Framley Parsonage*.[246] Miss Dunstable is not entirely unlike Eleanor Bold in some notable ways. They are both financially independent and are both more mature women with agency to choose who they will marry. These characteristics are in contrast to Mary and Lucy who are, as noted above, portrayed instead as relatively vulnerable. But whereas the humor used in relation to Eleanor presents her as slightly silly or endearing, Miss Dunstable's most notable attribute is not that she is ridiculous: rather she is herself an agent of humor.

In relation to Miss Dunstable's looks, the narrator explains:

> Since she had been brought out into the fashionable world some one of her instructors in fashion had given her to understand that curls were not the thing. "They'll always pass muster," Miss Dunstable had replied, "when they are done up with bank-notes." It may therefore be presumed that Miss Dunstable had a will of her own.[247]

A writer for the *Saturday Review* suggested that the scene containing Miss Dunstable's conversation was one of the two "wittiest scenes in *Framley Parsonage*."[248] And this wit distinguishes her as much or more than the narrator's passing comment upon her does or would as there is no parallel to Miss Dunstable in the other characters of the Barsetshire Chronicles: there is no other character who is endearing and relatively attractive, and who also surpasses her in distinctive wit and insight. When she arrives at Gatherum Castle in *Framley Parsonage*, the Duke of Omnium exclaims: "'Oh, Miss Dunstable [. . .] now I feel for the first time that Gatherum Castle has not been built for nothing.' 'Nobody ever supposed it was, your grace,' said Miss Dunstable. 'I am sure the architect did not think so when his bill was paid.'"[249] What is remarkable in this and other examples of Miss Dunstable is her comic agency—the humor does not arise from the narrator's depiction and juxtaposition of events. Instead, it is derived from the

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[246] Miss Dunstable, by then Mrs. Thorne, also makes a final appearance in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*.
[247] Anthony Trollope, *Doctor Thorne*, 160.
[248] However, this reviewer is less convinced that Miss Dunstable is worthy of centrality, arguing that "[a]bout [her] inner life we have long known all that Mr. Trollope is able to tell us." Unsigned review of *Framley Parsonage*, by Anthony Trollope, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 11, no. 288 (May 4, 1861): 452, Proquest.
[249] Anthony Trollope, *Doctor Thorne*, 66.

narrator revealing Miss Dunstable's perspective on events and people. Miss Dunstable has both humorous self-awareness and awareness of others. These attributes protect her from ridicule even as she is one of the most humorous characters in *Doctor Thorne* and *Framley Parsonage*.

Despite this distinctive characteristic, Miss Dunstable is notably excluded from heroine status despite the fact that she is, ultimately, the love interest of the titular Doctor Thorne. Their relationship is relegated to the margins and lulls during and between the romances of Mary and Frank in *Doctor Thorne* and Lucy and Lord Lufton in *Framley Parsonage*. Comparing their relationship to the characteristics of a typical Trollope love-story, there are some attributes that might push it to the periphery of a narrative's focus. For one thing, Miss Dunstable is vastly wealthier than her intended. Because of this, the lady is forced, in a sense, to declare her love before the Doctor has realized he is in love with her. Despite their warm friendship, it never occurs to the good Doctor that Miss Dunstable would be interested in marrying him partly due to her wealth and position. Their marriage is only brought about by Mary Gresham (née Thorne) first wresting an admission of love from Miss Dunstable in a scene from *Framley Parsonage*.

Moreover, in comparison with Trollope's other heroines, although Miss Dunstable is good, kind, and terrifically wealthy, she is neither young nor exceptionally beautiful. Because of her wealth, Miss Dunstable is initially offered up to Frank Gresham as an eligible candidate to marry in order to save the family estate. However, given their age disparity, young Frank is disinclined:

> "Is she thirty?" asked Frank, who looked upon an unmarried woman of that age as quite an old maid. "I dare say she may be about that age," said the countess, who regarded the subject from a very different point of view. [. . .] "What does it signify whether Miss Dunstable be twenty-eight or thirty? She has got money."[250]

Miss Dunstable's other fault in Frank's eyes is that she is not quite as beautiful as a typical Trollope heroine. In addition to those unfashionable, crisp curls, the narrator writes that "[s]he had a very high colour, very red cheeks, a large mouth, big white teeth, a broad nose, and bright, small, black eyes."[251] Frank, encountering the physical merits of Miss Dunstable, "began to think of Mary Thorne. As he did so, and as his eyes fell upon Miss Dunstable's stiff curls, he almost shuddered."[252] Of course, Frank's heart already belongs to Mary Thorne. So although he deigns

[250] Ibid., 94–95.
[251] Ibid., 160.
[252] Ibid., 166.

to flirt with Miss Dunstable to satisfy his vanity and his mother, Miss Dunstable is never in real danger of transforming into Mrs. Gresham despite her financial attractions.[253]

Trollope's use of humor in relation to central female figures, while more varied than Dickens', is fairly uncomplicated. There is an impulse toward the Frye and Santayana stereotypes of lovers in some instances. But Trollope's narrator cannot treat the central lovers with complete seriousness, and around these central romances the narrator engages in a bit of gentle mockery. And Miss Dunstable's humorous characterization does not pose a problem for Trollope's consistency with regard to central female characters because she is peripheral. It is interesting to consider, nonetheless, why she has been relegated to the peripheries. Miss Dunstable's characterization using humor could be permitted by Trollope because she is simply a peripheral figure—too much wealth and age, and too little beauty. However, she might also have been relegated to the peripheries because her humorous perspective at times almost subsumes the role of the narrator.

While the boundary between humor and central female characters is less strictly observed by Trollope compared to Dickens, for Margaret Oliphant there is no observable boundary. Oliphant's central female character, Lucilla Marjoribanks, whose characterization was under discussion at the opening of this chapter, is not a stereotypical or quintessential Victorian heroine. She is convinced of her own correctness, is not exactly dainty or beautiful, and she dominates all of the men, and indeed women, in her life and community. Still the feature of *Miss Marjoribanks* that makes Lucilla truly stand out as a heroine is the dominant of narratorial humor that pervades her characterization. What Lucilla demonstrates is that a central female figure can be characterized humorously without compromising the significance of her centrality.

In terms of the conventional attributes for a heroine, Lucilla is earnest and principled, but the narrator characterizes her behavior and rationale for her undertakings humorously. As her story opens, she returns home from school after her mother's death. The narrator describes how

> She made up her mind on her journey to a great many virtuous resolutions; for, in such a case as hers, it was evidently the duty of an only child to devote herself to her father's comfort, and become the sunshine of his life, as so many young persons of her age have

[253] The savvy Miss Dunstable sees through Frank's motives in flirting with her and ultimately becomes his friend and counsellor in his goal of winning Mary Thorne.

been known to become in literature.[254]

Again and again, Lucilla reminds those around her that her real aim in life is "to be a comfort to papa."[255] In her explanation of events, everything else she does, in one way or another, furthers that ultimate goal. For example, her father gives in to "refurnishing the drawing-room to suit Lucilla's complexion" in a "'pale spring green.'"[256] As a great proof, in her eyes, of her devotion to him she vows she will stay, at least ten years more for "'[i]f I were to go off and marry just now, after all that has been done to the drawing-room and everything, I should feel as if I were swindling papa; and it is the object of my life to be a comfort to *him*.'"[257] Lucilla undertakes this role with a straight-face, without irony, accepting her fate as "the sunshine of" her father's life.

However, it is not just the humorousness with which she is characterized that sets Lucilla apart from other Victorian heroines. Lucilla and her ludicrous ways are neither redeemed nor compromised by the other key attributes of Victorian heroism: beauty. Lucilla is young and she is without doubt the moral heart of her text, but she is not conventionally beautiful. As with all things relating to Lucilla, the narrator presents this information humorously; she is described as

> "a large girl;" and there was great truth in the adjective. She was not to be described as a tall girl—which conveys an altogether different idea—but she was large in all particulars, [. . .] it was known in Mount Pleasant that somebody had said that such a face might ripen into beauty, and become "grandiose," for anything anybody could tell.[258]

Despite these unconventional particulars, Lucilla's eligibility is the focus of much of the plot and the various men who arrive on the scene are immediately assessed as to their likelihood of being interested in and worthy of Lucilla. The narrator writes, "Mr Cavendish having again disappeared into utter darkness, [. . .] Carlingford [began] to enter warmly into the question whether or not Mr Beverly was paying attention to Lucilla."[259] However, it is not until ten years have elapsed from her return home (happily for the investment timeframe for the refurnished drawing-room), that Lucilla would appear to have a real marriageable option when the local candidate that she has canvassed for seeks to reward her support with an offer of his hand.

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[254] Margaret Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks*, in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Elisabeth Jay, vol. 18, *Part IV: Chronicles of Carlingford*, ed. Joseph Bristow (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 7–8.
[255] Ibid., 113.
[256] Ibid., 42; 40.
[257] Ibid., 130 (author's italics).
[258] Ibid., 8.
[259] Ibid., 147.

At this stage, when Lucilla seems about to marry advantageously, the narrator seems unable to leave her in the unromantic position of having become older as well as still rather big and rather plain. Through Mr. Cavendish, who is by no means motivated to consider her in a generous light, the narrator addresses this long-standing problem by describing how "[a]s for Lucilla Marjoribanks, she was rather better looking than otherwise, and absolutely had not gone off" in the last ten years.[260] Following this modest revision of Lucilla's beauty, she receives two marriage proposals within minutes of each other. She is rewarded for her patience with the dual privilege of turning down one marriage proposal and of accepting another—that from a man who had, all along, accurately valued her worth.

Throughout the narrative, evoking the parochial social concerns of a novel like Jane Austen's *Emma*,[261] Lucilla intervenes in her community: arranging social events, throwing herself into the local election, and bringing about the marriage of a widow and the archdeacon. Often, the objects of her generosity fail to share her vision, and the narrator humorously describes how,

> Lucilla passed through one of those moments of sublime despondency which now and then try the spirits of the benefactors of their race. [. . . But no] temptation to give up her disinterested exertions had any effect upon the mind of Miss Marjoribanks; and even her sense of pain at the unbelief of her followers was mingled with that pity for their weakness which involves pardon. [. . .] The idea of giving them up, and leaving their affairs to their own guidance, never for an instant penetrated into her heroic mind.[262]

Here the narrator juxtaposes language that would be more suited to describe an epic or a nation-building political history than to describe Lucilla's views of her arrangement of Thursday evening socials. The humor is derived from the disproportionate gravity with which she views the importance her actions and influence in Carlingford.

Despite the narrator's mockery of Lucilla's seriousness in her undertakings, a recurring theme in Lucilla's characterization is her insightfulness. For example, while her actions do not

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[260] Ibid., 287.

[261] There are many obvious comparisons to be made between Emma and Lucilla. However, the narrator's treatment of Lucilla in *Miss Marjoribanks* is significantly different from Austen's narrator's treatment of Emma. In *Emma*, Austen's characterization of Emma certainly reveals her earnest care for her community, but while Emma is sometimes shown to make bad decisions, she is not shown to be ridiculous (which Lucilla sometimes is, as discussed below). The similarities between Emma and Lucilla are also discussed in Jay, *Mrs. Oliphant*, 69; and Vineta and Robert A. Colby, *The Equivocal Virtue: Mrs. Oliphant and the Victorian Literary Market Place* (Hampden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), 65.

[262] Oliphant, *Marjoribanks*, 192.

particularly seem to take her father's wishes into account, the narrative shows that she is able to give him what he evidently needs rather than what he wants. As the years go by, and the wallpaper investment proves worthwhile, the Doctor takes evident delight in and wonder at watching his daughter skillfully manage the people, particularly the young men, of the community. The narrator writes that "withal Dr Marjoribanks chuckled a little in his secret heart [. . .] He was aware that he had been on the whole very wisely governed since his abdication."[263] The narrator derives much humor from Lucilla's provincial governance, and simultaneously shows that her intentions are, in fact, never to promote herself and instead are grounded in what she believes will further promote the good of her friends and loved ones.

The way Oliphant uses humor in Lucilla's characterization is notable in a few important ways. Firstly, any failures of Lucilla's are offered up as sources of endearment rather than alienation. Humor does reveal what is laughable in Lucilla: primarily in that she takes herself and her community too seriously. But this trait, while laughable, does not compromise Lucilla's moral worth or personal integrity. In making humorous characterization central to *Miss Marjoribanks*, Oliphant seeks to use humor, not predominantly to ridicule, but to foster interest in and generate sympathy for Lucilla.

Secondly, Lucilla is not herself witty and, instead, the primary humor derives from the narrator's characterization of her. However, she, like Miss Dunstable, has a particularly strong self-awareness. In Miss Dunstable's case this results in her making humorous and insightful observations about herself and those around her. In Lucilla's case, she admits,

> "there has always been one thing remarked of me all my life, that I never have had a great sense of humour. I know it is singular, but when one has a defect, it is always so much better to confess it. I always get on very well with anything else, but I never had any sense of humour, you know."[264]

Lucilla's self-awareness is the very attribute that shields from ridicule, and indeed throughout the text, her self-awareness enables her to participate in the humor of the narrative, without, perhaps ever, being made ridiculous by it.

Thirdly, though Lucilla is treated humorously, that humor is merely the dominant framework through which her evident successes are depicted. Despite all of the narrator's jokes, Lucilla is not ridiculous. The events of the narrative show that Lucilla does not actually over-rate

[263] Ibid., 92.
[264] Ibid., 35–36.

her abilities or Carlingford's relative needs. By the end of the text, in fact, she has significantly improved and thoroughly subdued the inhabitants of Carlingford as her social subjects. She is redeemed from the narrator's satirical observations in a way that Elizabeth Gaskell's women of Cranford, described in chapter two, are not since she proves again and again to be correct in assessing her own abilities. Silly as it may be for her to attribute such extreme importance to taking the cares of these people upon her shoulders, she does so with a remarkable capability.

The conventional wisdom of banishing humor from the center of a romantic narrative, as Frye and Santayana have described, is more complicated in practice in the novels in question. For some authors, like Oliphant, and to a much lesser extent Trollope, humor is not by nature necessarily belittling and reductive. Instead, the presence of humor can be the foundational means through which sympathy and interest is built around a central romantic character. Whereas, if an author permeates his novel with humor except in relation to key central characters, as in Dickens' characterization of Agnes, this exclusion suggests that the presence of humor is compromising to the purity of something at the center of the text: such as romance.

3.3 Questionable Heroines

George Eliot's narrator comments in *Middlemarch*'s (1871–1872) twenty-ninth chapter opening, "[o]ne morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea—but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one?"[265] This interjected interrogation of the privilege that Dorothea's perspective has as a central figure in *Middlemarch* can be discussed in a number of different contexts.[266] But for the purposes of this chapter, this question by Eliot's narrator leads us to consider central figures who are unlike Dorothea and those discussed in the previous section. Centrality in some Victorian novels tended to depict characters not just with interesting or dynamic stories to tell, but with a particular kind of normative, moral, or redemptive behavior in response to the narrative circumstances in which they were depicted. However, in another category of novels, centrality was not defined by virtue, but instead by interesting wickedness. Two characters from the Victorian period distinguished by both their centrality and their immorality are Martha Barnaby of France Trollope's *The Widow Barnaby*

[265] George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 292.
[266] For one discussion of the reading dynamics of centrality versus peripherality see Alex Woloch's chapter "Narrative Asymmetry in *Pride and Prejudice*", in *The One Vs. The Many: Minor Characters and The Space of The Protagonist in The Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 43–124.

and Becky Sharp of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.

A reviewer of *Widow Barnaby* in *Tait's Edinburgh Review* notes the narrative gymnastics necessary to foreground a character like Martha Barnaby, writing that "[t]he adventures of so odious a personage must be cleverly and skillfully managed to prevent fatigue and disgust in the reader, in spite of the constant efflux of the amusing or the broadly ludicrous."[267] This description is echoed in assessments of Becky in reviews of *Vanity Fair*. *Lloyd's Illustrated News* writes of Becky, "[p]rofound immorality is made to seem inconsistent with unfailing good humour. [. . .] It is very strange that the reader has a sort of liking for her in spite of his better knowledge."[268] In a more recent assessment of *Widow Barnaby*, Helen Heinemen argues that "[t]he similarities between the widow Barnaby and Becky are striking. [. . .] Creatures of total mendacity, absolute cheats and liars, they are remarkably appealing heroines."[269] Heinemen predominantly attributes their appeal to their wickedness. But rather than plain wickedness generating interest in these characters, I would argue that their appeal is more specifically derived from the fact that they get away with their wicked behavior: Martha almost despite herself and Becky through her calculated effort. What this analysis argues is that the more significant factor in permitting the reader to enjoy all this successful wickedness is in how the reader is inoculated against the wickedness by its humorous presentation. When a central figure is characterized by their immorality, unless that narrative is a manifesto of wickedness, authors are obliged continually to ameliorate that wickedness: to present that figure as intriguing, but not laudable. Humor is used as a means of characterization to orient the sympathy of readers: in these instances towards an appropriate moral conclusion despite placing wickedness at the center of the narrative. Frances Trollope and Thackeray rely on humor to carefully tread a path between generating interest for and condemning the manipulative, perfidious behavior of their central characters.[270]

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[267] Unsigned review of *The Widow Barnaby*, by Frances Trollope, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 6, no. 63 (March 1839): 157, Proquest.
[268] "Literature", *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*.
[269] Helen Heinemen, *Mrs. Trollope: The Triumphant Feminine in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), 158.
[270] There is a division between villainy that is wholly condemnable versus allowable villainy and in Frances Trollope and Thackeray humor is a key means through which villainy is made allowable. In Dickens when true villains are presented, such as Madame Defarge, Miss Havisham, or Rosa Dartle, incongruity may be present to shock, other factors like the grotesque may be at play, but humor is notably absent.

Frances Trollope explicitly identifies Martha as the heroine of her text. *The Widow Barnaby*'s narrator, having dwelt at length upon the widow's good niece Agnes Willoughby, checks the progress of the narrative and explains that the reader must leave "Agnes to aunt Betsy and her fate, I must return to the duty I have assigned myself, and follow the fortunes of Mrs. Barnaby."[271] The widow and her amusing schemes are in no sense comic relief in terms of their function in the narrative structure. It is her fortunes that the text sets out to follow in spite of her questionable character. The explicitness of this designation is no doubt because the narrator cannot rely upon the text's readers to identify Martha as a heroine due to her decidedly unheroic attributes. Indeed, if Martha were not designated as heroine, she would more likely be read as a villain in her attempts to thwart the happiness of her beautiful and good niece Agnes.

As the subtitle of the 1848 printing of *Vanity Fair* asserts, it is "a novel without a hero." Rather than a hero, it is instead a novel with two heroines, or rather with a heroine and an antiheroine: Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp, respectively. Early on, the narrator explains that Amelia is the text's heroine, "for the very reason that she was the best-natured of all, otherwise what on earth was to have prevented us from putting up Miss Swartz, or Miss Crump, or Miss Hopkins, as heroine in her place!"[272] But having asserted this, the narrator makes no effort to abide by that designation and instead flouts the very convention he asserts, that heroines should be the best natured of people, by also calling Becky the novel's heroine much further along in the narrative: "If this is a novel without a hero, at least let us lay claim to a heroine."[273] Thackeray, after commencing his tale by intentionally invoking the narrative convention of the virtuous heroine, humorously violates that convention in two ways. Firstly, after introducing Amelia as his heroine, he gives the text's focus and interest to Becky, a character whose attributes are anti-heroic. Secondly, as the novel progresses, he gradually undermines his own initial assertions about Amelia. As he develops her character, he shows how she is not quite, as he initially asserted, "the best-natured of all": thereby violating some of the conventional expectations

[271] Frances Trollope, *The Widow Barnaby* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1995), 32.
[272] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15.
[273] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 369. Thackeray seems unclear about exactly who the heroine of this text is. In chapter one it is not Amelia (7). In chapter two it is Amelia (15), then, in chapter ten, Becky is "our heroine" (110). The narrator asserts Amelia "wasn't a heroine" in chapter twelve (140), but, in chapter twenty-six, he calls George and Amelia at their marriage "his hero and heroine" (319). In chapter thirty, Becky is once again the heroine (369). Then in chapter thirty-eight, Amelia is the heroine again (491), etc.: all in a novel, as the subtitle indicates, "without a hero."

discussed in the previous section around the heroines of novels, as discussed below.

The humor of both texts orients the narrative toward the condemnation of the actions taken by Martha and Becky. Although the narrative itself is focused on Martha in *The Widow Barnaby*, the narrator uses humor to make clear that she does not represent the novel's moral center. The narrative arc of *The Widow Barnaby* follows Martha's niece Agnes' love plot as well as the various movements of the widow Barnaby to attract a new husband with particular virtues: specifically wealth and position. The narrator recounts that,

> though [Martha] freely permitted herself the pleasure of being made love to, she determined to be very sure of the Major's rent-roll before she bestowed herself and her fortune upon him; [. . .] not the best-behaved and most discreet dowager that ever lived, was more firmly determined to take care of herself, and make a good bargain, "*if ever she married again*," than was our flighty, flirting Widow Barnaby.[274]

The narrator is frank in the account of her motivations and the language choice in the description emphasizes the incongruity between what the reader may view as normative, moral motivations and the widow's, perhaps not unreasonable but certainly unromantic, calculations.

In the lengthy narrative of *Vanity Fair*, the story follows the contrasting choices and romantic pursuits of Becky and Amelia. In a similar fashion to the narrator's commentary on Martha in *The Widow Barnaby*, the narrator in *Vanity Fair* explains Becky's morally questionable approach to her choices:

> indeed in later days Miss Sharp would never have committed herself so far as to advance opinions, the untruth of which would have been so easily detected. But we must remember that she is but nineteen as yet, unused to the art of deceiving, poor innocent creature! and making her own experience in her own person.[275]

Thackeray's narrator does not call her wickedness goodness. Instead his sarcasm, calling her efforts to deceive insufficiently advanced, points to both her intent to deceive and suggesting that she will seek to improve in this wicked potential. If the sarcasm of these early comments is somehow undiscovered by his readers, he states more plainly later on that the story that he relates about Becky will be one "of harrowing villainy and complicated—but, as I trust intensely interesting—crime."[276] Here the narrator points to both attributes of this story: that it elevates badness but that it is interesting. The narrator's use of humor is the rhetorical mode that is used to balance these two attributes.

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[274] Frances Trollope, *Widow Barnaby*, 178 (author's italics).
[275] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 23.
[276] Ibid., 95–96.

In *The Widow Barnaby*, Frances Trollope also uses mocking humor throughout to provide the reader insight into the widow's thought process. In an episode of what could generously be described as self-reflection, but probably more aptly described as scheming, the widow develops a list to help her to achieve her goals. She had "heard it said by a clever man, that human wishes might oftener be achieved, did mortals better know how to set about obtaining them."[277] Her response to this and the further particulars from the "oracle" was to develop and respond to a little list:

> *Q.* What is it that I most wish for on the earth? *A*. A rich and fashionable husband. *Q.* What is required to obtain this? *A.* Beauty, fortune talents, and a free entrance into good society. *Q*. Do I possess any of these? . . . and which? *A*. I possess beauty, fortune, and talents. *Q*. What remains wanting? *A*. A free entrance into good society. "TRUE!" she exclaimed aloud, "it is that I want, and it is that I must procure."[278]

In a sense, this is a remarkably introspective moment for the widow. Her goal is not particularly laudable to begin with, but the real humor comes from her assumption that she has sufficient self-knowledge to perform the kind of self-assessment needed to write such a list. Adequate self-knowledge is the very thing Martha lacks, which serves as the basis of much of the text's humor. She is so mired in self-deception, so convinced of her view of the world, that she cannot answer the questions with sufficient self-criticism to render them useful to her future. The narrator does not seek to praise the widow and, for the reader, this humorous list highlights the widow's ignorance of the real meaning of the events around her and her misjudgment of her role in them. In this scene she may be entertaining, but her schemes are not presented as laudable or offered up for imitation.

Unlike the scheming but obtuse widow, Becky's success in manipulating the people around her derive from her accurate judgement of herself and her surroundings. Toward the close of *Vanity Fair*, Becky, a now married mother, pursues and flirts with Lord Steyne with the aim of tricking some cash out of him. As he arrives, Becky pretends she was in the kitchen, unprepared for his appearance, but he states that he saw her primping upstairs in preparation for his arrival: "'Is it a crime to try and look my best when YOU come here?' answered [Becky] plaintively, and she rubbed her cheek with her handkerchief as if to show there was no rouge at all, only genuine blushes and modesty in her case."[279] Here the narrator interjects, informing the

[277] Frances Trollope, *Widow Barnaby*, 55.
[278] Ibid., 56.
[279] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair,* 606–607.

reader how to receive this action; "About this who can tell? I know there is some rouge that won't come off on a pocket-handkerchief, and some so good that even tears will not disturb it."[280] The narrator sets out to reveal and establish Becky's manipulations for the reader where they otherwise might not have thought to find them. Within *Vanity Fair*, the narrator's description contains more awe and respect at Becky's abilities—the narration often points to her remarkable skill in executing her schemes successfully—than in the narration of *The Widow Barnaby*. But the narrator still wields humor in mockery; a mockery that, again, draws a humorous boundary of incongruity between what Becky chooses to do and what the audience is likely to find laudable.

In the above examples, the narrators of either text are relying on humor predicated upon superiority. The function of incongruity in these instances is to highlight the foolishness or failure of its object as opposed to the superior insight offered to the reader. When humor is explicitly involved in superiority, it is offering a judgement of value or worth through the juxtaposition it is built upon. Ronald De Sousa observes this when he writes, "laughter can be dispassionate, as when it is evoked by mere wit, or emotionally involving, whether we are laughing 'with' someone (involvement with identification) or 'at' someone (involvement with alienation)."[281] De Sousa's categories point to how the humor orients its audience. In the examples from the texts above, the orientation of the humor does not encourage the reader to identify with Martha or Becky. In the case of Martha, the reader is invited to feel superior to her in having greater insight into her position than she does; it is an orientation that invites the reader to laugh at her. In the first part of the example from *Vanity Fair*, the reader is simply invited to laugh at Lord Steyne. However, with the narrator's interjection of additional information that Becky seeks to conceal, the reader is ultimately invited to laugh with the narrator at Becky. The orienting power of the humor in both examples, to use de Sousa's vocabulary, alienates the reader from the aims of these two scheming women. It is these humorous constructs that allow the reader to acknowledge the wickedness and laugh at it but also, in doing so, to identify a boundary between themselves and the wicked character in question. Without this process of alienation, *Vanity Fair* and *The Widow Barnaby*, with Becky and Martha as their heroines, would

[280] Ibid., 607.
[281] Ronald De Sousa, "When Is It Wrong To Laugh?", in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, ed. John Morreall (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 238.

be instructional books in bad behavior. Because of the sarcasm of the narrators and their role in highlighting the irony of many of the scenarios, these texts cannot reasonably be accused of coldly promoting immorality or of presenting it as an object worthy of uncritical interest.

While the interest generated for Martha and Becky is critical, it is nonetheless the primary interest of either text. Frances Trollope in particular writes Agnes' character within the boundaries of Santayana's observation about central romantic figures: they may be the moral heart of the tale, but they are often deeply uninteresting. Agnes cannot compete with her counterpart in terms of generating interest. What she provides is contrast, akin to the polarization common in the myths of romance Frye describes, between "the lady of duty and the lady of pleasure—[. . .] the light and dark heroines of Victorian romance."[282] The moral hierarchy in *The Widow Barnaby* is fairly straightforward. The representative of all that is laudable and virtuous is Martha's niece, Agnes. A very few jokes appear in relation to Agnes. For example, one chapter title, in an observation that epitomizes understatement, reads: "Agnes appears likely to profit by the change of aunts."[283] But Agnes is not the object of this joke—if we laugh at it, we are not laughing at her. Instead, the joke understates the benefit Agnes would receive from being removed from Martha's control: a joke which highlights Martha's awfulness and Agnes' suffering. Later, Agnes' other aunt, Betsy Compton, attempts to tease her, but she protests "looking at [her aunt] very gravely, and with an air of melancholy reproach."[284] Agnes, the embodiment of the traditional attributes of a heroine described in the last section, such as virtue, beauty, and eligibility, is also the embodiment of humorlessness much like the Agnes of *David Copperfield*. She is worthy of interest as a romantic heroine with conventional attributes; it is the story of her courtship and marriage that the narrative arc follows and offers up for rejoicing when it concludes successfully. But this more conventional arc, sincere and humorless, is in competition with "flighty, flirty" Martha's far less conventional and far more amusing arc.

Amelia, though set up as a contrasting figure to Becky, does not fill that role in the same way as Agnes does to Martha. Through Amelia, Thackeray's narrator seems to set out to invoke many of the conventional expectations for a romantic heroine, such as those embodied by Agnes, only to use humor to violate them. When Amelia is introduced in *Vanity Fair*, for example, the

[282] Frye, *Anatomy*, 196.
[283] Frances Trollope, *Widow Barnaby*, 324.
[284] Ibid., 327.

narrator states:

> I am afraid that her nose was rather short than otherwise, and her cheeks a great deal too round and red for a heroine; but her face blushed with rosy health, and her lips with the freshest of smiles, and she had a pair of eyes which sparkled with the brightest and honestest good-humour, except indeed when they filled with tears, and that was a great deal too often.[285]

In this example, the first joke challenges the exacting standard of beauty applied to archetypal heroines and the second suggests that Amelia is silly. Thackeray alludes to the normative expectations for romantic heroines in this example with the express purpose of then describing, humorously, how Amelia fails to meet these standards.

In addition to the greater character complexity in *Vanity Fair*, as opposed to *Widow Barnaby*, its humor is involved in more complex moral dynamics. As Barbara Hardy argues "Thackeray create[s] no virtuous characters, and no intact virtues within characters."[286] In one way or another, all of the characters in *Vanity Fair* are offered up as different aspects of the great deceptive social pantomime which is Vanity Fair, and Amelia is no exception to this rule. Convention might suggest that, in contrast to Becky, Amelia ought to be the moral center of *Vanity Fair*. But this is another convention that Thackeray invokes in order to violate. Amelia is not the beacon of goodness or a repository of virtue that Frances Trollope's Agnes is, nor is she able to inspire the kind of interest that Becky does. John Carey recounts that Thackeray explained that "he had tried to make all the characters 'odious', except Dobbin; and he, though no rogue, was a 'fool', for loving a parasitical little 'milksop' like Amelia."[287] Amelia is, as the narrator claimed early on in *Vanity Fair*, perhaps the "best-natured of all."[288] However, as the novel progresses, that designation is shown to be merely relative, as Amelia, like all of the other characters, is revealed to be as much a part of Vanity Fair in her own way as anyone else. Hardy goes on to observe that the implicit comparisons between Amelia and Becky are far from straightforward, "making us see resemblances where we had begun to expect only difference."[289] Amelia is not conniving and grasping like Becky, but she is obtuse, self-oriented, and weak.

Throughout these two texts, humor is a means the narrators use to orient the reader in

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[285] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 7.
[286] Barbara Hardy, *The Exposure of Luxury*: *Radical Themes in Thackeray* (London: Peter Owen, 1972), 15.
[287] John Carey, *Thackeray: Prodigal Genius* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), 18.
[288] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 15.
[289] Hardy, *Exposure of Luxury*, 18.

their judgment of Martha and Becky in relation to the other characters and the values of the text. The final judgment offered up on these two figures and their relative moral laudability is in their respective narrative ends. In reference to *Widow Barnaby*, Heineman claims that "the widow triumphs in the end, rising above her difficulties to begin a new career."[290] But Heineman's judgement runs counter to that suggested by the narrative arc. Martha or Becky's "success" must be weighed against the other "successes" in their respective narratives. Comparatively, Amelia and Agnes achieve far more desirable ends than Becky and Martha do. In the conclusion of the *Widow Barnaby*, Agnes marries a man who respects, understands, and loves her, is reunited with her father, finds she has a sister, and is revealed to be an heiress. Martha, on the other hand, after two failed attempts to secure herself a connected wealthy husband during the course of the narrative, is rejected by all of her respectable connections because of her treatment of Agnes and ultimately marries a gambler. While it is not suggested that Martha considers this marriage a failure, she, as the narrative has suggested, would likely lack the necessary introspective powers to judge disinterestedly of her success or failure.

However, the humor used in Martha's characterization somewhat complicates the clarity of her moral ends in terms of material history. Martha Barnaby might not have the kind of social and financial stability that Agnes has achieved, but she was so successful a character that it is she, not Agnes, about whom Frances Trollope wrote two further novels. Beginning with *The Widow Married* (1840), these two subsequent novels detail the further particulars of the widow's "career of social climbing through marriage" according to John Sutherland. In the final installment, *The Barnaby's in America* (1843), she is married to her third husband, a card-sharper, and swindling "her way through the New World."[291] The despicable widow is never granted the kind of conventional happy ending that Agnes is, but her delightfully wicked humorous portrayal ensures that she generates much more interest.

Vanity Fair's ending is also complicated: in its purpose and due to the text's use of humor. Becky's ending does not unequivocally demonstrate that she should be condemned. She is shown to be scraping together a reasonable living, but is also shunned by polite society and everyone who formerly knew her. This mild judgement of her offered by the text's conclusion does not seem to compromise the admiration readers may maintain for her canniness and

[290] Heinemen, *Mrs. Trollope*, 167.
[291] Sutherland, *Longman Companion*, 672.

audacity. As a contemporary reviewer notes of Becky,

> Despise her as you may, dear reader, Becky is too feminine, too fascinating, too much bent upon pleasing and being pleased, and a great deal too witty, clever, and sensible, for you not to be taken by her, and watch her with interest all through the book; in fact, just as you would inevitably do in real life. She amuses you and keeps your mind on the alert.[292]

In contrast, however, Amelia is offered a more conventional heroine's ending at the conclusion of *Vanity* Fair: she finally marries the man who has loved her disinterestedly and achieves domestic and familial security. Yet even after describing Amelia's happy ending, the final note of *Vanity Fair* is not an encouraging one: "Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?"[293] Amelia is not wicked in the way Becky is, but she is a part of Vanity Fair, so the narrator seems to suggest that the endurance of her happiness is questionable. Thackeray's larger idea in *Vanity Fair* is not to isolate Amelia's virtues and Becky's vices, but to demonstrate the moral chaos of all of Vanity Fair.[294] Thackeray's point in their respective characterizations in *Vanity Fair* is not that Amelia is good and Becky is bad, but that they partake in the vanities: all are mired in vice of different varieties and at different levels. If Amelia is granted a better ending at the close of the narrative, Chesterton suggests that it "is to show that goodness, even when it is silly, is a healthier thing than wickedness when it is sensible."[295]

Humor in *The Widow Barnaby* and *Vanity Fair* grants the reader permission to enjoy and be interested in Martha and Becky without compromising the broader moral commentary of the narratives. Part of what makes it possible to enjoy the outrageous behavior of Martha and Becky is the stability of the moral framework that they violate. It is also against this stable framework that both authors juxtapose the humorous incongruity of their heroines' choices and behavior. While the humor used in characterizing these anti-heroines generates interest in them, it is also a

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[292] Unsigned review of "Vanity Fair", by William Makepeace Thackeray, *Sharpe's London Magazine, Nov. 1845–Feb. 1849* 7 (July 1848): 249, Proquest.
[293] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 878.
[294] As a point of contrast, a more conventional ending for a heroine would perhaps be that of the contemporaneous Agnes from *David Copperfield* (which began its serialization year after *Vanity Fair*'s serialization ended, in 1849). David and Agnes are married and, as far as David's narration suggests, Agnes and David carry on ever afterward in virtue, prosperity, and happiness. In contrast to Thackeray's narrator's cynical pronouncement, David narrates with confident optimism: "I see myself, with Agnes at my side, journeying along the road of life. I see our children and our friends around us" (852).
[295] G. K. Chesterton, *Masters of Literature: Thackeray* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), xiii.

significant means through which the narrator orients the reader toward appropriate moral conclusions

3.4 Peripheral Characters: The Immortality of Micawber

At the edges and boundaries of the narrative, we find the most verdant and diverse roster of humor and, indeed, some of each text's most memorable characters and culturally resonant figures. By definition, these peripheral figures, though they may reflect it, oppose it, or further it, do not have the primary stake in the action and outcome of the central narrative. A basic definition for peripherality versus centrality has been sketched out by structuralists and narratologists on the basis of each character's comparative effect on the functions within a plot. Vladmir Propp suggests that a function in the plot is "*an act of character, defined from the point of view of the significance for the course of the action*."[296] Roland Barthes further differentiates those functions into the cardinal and the catalytic: "In order to classify a function as cardinal, all we need verify is that the action to which it refers opens (or maintains or closes) an alternative directly affecting the continuation of the story, in other words, that it either initiates or resolves an uncertainty."[297] Central actors perform the cardinal events of the plot and peripheral actors primarily perform actions that are incidental to the central actions of the plot. These catalyses are "purely chronological (what is described is what separates two moments of a story) [. . .] catalyses are no more than consecutive units, while cardinal functions are both consecutive and consequential."[298] These kinds of distinctions are useful for putting characters in different categories.

However, these categories are only determined on the basis of the relationship of each character to action. The underlying assumptions of the theorists quoted above cohere with the underlying assumptions of Henry James' well-known conjunction of questions: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?"[299] What this section argues, in a different line of thinking from James and the structuralists and

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[296] Vladmir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Louis A. Wagner (Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1968), 21 (author's italics).
[297] Barthes, "Structural Analysis", 248.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction", in *The Future of the Novel: Essays on the Art of Fiction*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Vintage, 1956), 15–16.

narratologists, is that humor can grant relatively irrelevant characters, in terms of action, disproportionate influence over the narrative. For example, writing about *David Copperfield*, Robert Golding observes of the character Barkis that he "is one of that legion of Dickens characters who achieves immortality though uttering scarcely more than a dozen lines in the book, all of which are torn out of his own inarticularity."[300] The use of humor, particularly in the description and characterization of peripheral characters like Barkis, has the ability to refocus or orient the narrative despite their limited involvement in any incident or action in the larger narrative.

One reason humorous figures at the peripheries are useful to consider is because they can have a relative moral simplicity. People and things presented at the periphery are not necessarily given enough text-space for nuance. Instead, they are often briefer emanations of a text's ethos or they serve as mirrors or contrasts to further the development of central characters.[301] Humor can be a swift means of rendering individuals distinctive and memorable within limited text-space: this is what one sense of the word Dickensian describes.[302] This section considers and compares the characterization of some of the roster of peripheral figures from *The Widow Barnaby*, *Vanity Fair*, *David Copperfield*, *Barchester Towers*, *Doctor Thorne*, *Framley Parsonage*, and *Miss Marjoribanks*. While this section challenges the implications of describing characters as peripheral on the basis of their relationship to action, I nonetheless rely on that definition of peripherality versus centrality as a useful, limited category within which to compare various characters. The narrative purposes for the roster of peripheral characters in these texts is diverse. Comparing examples of the humorous, the unexceptional, and the tragic, this section considers what humor indicates about the role of supporting characters and how humor operates away from the central concerns of the narrative. Finally, this section discusses Wilkins Micawber, a peripheral character in *David Copperfield*, and humor's potential to grant importance to characters at the periphery of narrative that is sometimes disproportionate to their function.

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[300] Robert Golding, *Idiolects in Dickens: The Major Techniques and Chronological Development* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), 136.
[301] For a discussion of the construction and role of minor characters in Dickens particularly, see Woloch, "Making More of Minor Characters", in *One*, 125–176.
[302] The other primary use of this word is to describe the extremely poor or tragic characters in his novels. The duality between humor and tragedy in the word Dickensian is notable given that they are both grounded in incongruity (as the first chapter of this thesis explains).

Because peripheral characters by nature are not given as much textual space as central characters, the humor of superiority is sometimes useful in presenting them swiftly and distinctively. Humor, in these instances, offers an encapsulation of a figure: the reader can take their measure briskly—even through only a single appearance. This use of peripheral figures is particularly present in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. A contemporary reviewer in the *Times* lauded *Vanity Fair*, exclaiming, "[t]hat happy conception of character, and that ability to embody it in a few touches [. . .] belong to Mr. Thackeray as a writer."[303] An example of this can be seen in his swift and cutting characterization of Miss Pinkerton, the owner of an academy for girls that Becky Sharp attends. The narrator conveys the manner in which Miss Pinkerton presents and comports herself thus: "Have you completed all the necessary preparations incident to Miss Sedley's departure, Miss Jemima?' asked Miss Pinkerton herself, that majestic lady; the Semiramis of Hammersmith, the friend of Doctor Johnson, the correspondent of Mrs. Chapone herself."[304] Miss Pinkerton requires and is granted very few other mentions in the breadth of *Vanity Fair*. Nonetheless, through these brief, tidy details the narrator reveals the salient components of Miss Pinkerton's character without delving into minute descriptions of her psychology or offering any physical description. It is clear that Miss Pinkerton considers herself important and the basis upon which she founds that importance are her vocation, her purported relationship with Dr. Johnson, and her correspondence with the writer of conduct books, Mrs. Chapone. By providing this list, the narrator humorously juxtaposes what he offers up as the ridiculous reasons Miss Pinkerton views herself as majestic, and what the reader ostensibly views as majestic.

In a general sense, the humorous character of both Thackeray and Anthony Trollope's narrators almost dictates that if a character is at all introduced into one of their narratives, humorous incongruities will probably be mentioned in relation to them at some point. If Miss Pinkerton is likely to be mentioned at all within *Vanity Fair* that mention is bound to be humorous. Similarly, many of Anthony Trollope's minor characters are touched with humor for no other obvious purpose than simply to maintain a consistency of narratorial character and tone. In the Barsetshire Chronicles, for example, Anthony Trollope's narrator's use of humor is

[303] Notably, the reviewer also praises this quality in Thackeray's illustrations. Unsigned review of *Vanity Fair*, *Times*, 8.
[304] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 3.

liberally applied both to characters who perform cardinal events (like the ones discussed in section one of this chapter) and those who perform catalytic events. An example of such a character is the unexceptional Augusta Gresham from *Doctor Thorne*. Augusta is not persistently mentioned in the text nor by any means a regular source of comic relief, but the occasional incongruous comment is directed at her by the narrator. The son of a tailor, with whom she was not in love but sought to marry for financial security, jilts her, and the narrator states that "Augusta again bore her disappointment well: not, indeed, without sorrow and heartache, and inward, hidden tears; but still well. She neither raved, nor fainted, nor walked about by moonlight alone. She wrote no poetry, and never once thought of suicide."[305] As in many other cases, the reader knows that he or she should receive this incongruously casual mention of suicide as humorous because of the flippancy of the narrator's statement on such a serious topic and because of the humorous dominant in *Doctor Thorne.* Like countless other characters in Anthony Trollope's works, Augusta is not outside the narrator's occasional sarcastic remark, but she is far from characterized by them.

Sometimes humorous minor characters are simplistic interjections, like Miss Pinkerton, or positioned to maintain the text's larger humorous dominant. However, sometimes minor characters are depicted humorously in a way that reflects the humor used to characterize the central figures of their texts. A humorous peripheral figure with more sustained characterization of this sort is Martha Barnaby's maid, Betty Jacks, in Frances Trollope's *The Widow Barnaby*.[306] Betty, in her small way, embodies values that the narrator mocks and her characterization serves as a mirror to her mistress' characterization. Everything about Betty's introduction is delightfully ludicrous. After her husband's death, Martha seeks out a lady's maid in order to demonstrate that she is wealthy enough to retain one. The superficial virtue that Martha looks for in a maid, commensurate with her superficial goal in retaining a maid, is height. The narrator explains that "[t]he first qualification was a tall person, that might set off to advantage such articles of the widow's cast-off finery as might be unnecessary for Agnes." The second important quality Martha seeks out in her servant is "a willingness to accept low wages."[307] Upon finding the

[305] Anthony Trollope, *Doctor Thorne*, 214.
[306] As characters, maids, servants, footman, stewards and the like are stereotypical sources of comedic relief, the fools, or the humorous truth tellers of narratives. Simultaneously, they are symbols of status for the central characters who employ them.
[307] Frances Trollope, *Widow Barnaby*, 65.

"young maypole" Betty Jacks, Martha replaces her surname with what she considers the more appropriate "Jerningham."[308]

The acquisition of Betty Jerningham née Jacks by Martha within the narrative is only one small feature of Martha's larger program of social climbing. Nonetheless, this interaction with a peripheral figure is a microcosm that serves to demonstrates or reinforce features of Martha's character that explain and augment the central problems of the plot. When Martha dictates that the wholly inexperienced young Betty go find a suitable apartment for them, the narrator states that "On receiving the order above mentioned, [Betty] meditated for an instant upon what an 'endurable sleeping apartment' might be; but the sagacity which failed to discover this, sufficed to suggest the advantage of not confessing her ignorance; and she answered boldly, 'Yes, sure, ma'm.'"[309] Jerningham is a fitting servant to her mistress as her self-oriented actions and deception reflect her mistress' similar traits. The pair provide an ironic scenario wherein Martha is swindled by Betty through tactics similar to those that Martha uses to swindle others. Betty's actions are rendered humorous predominantly through the narrator's incongruous explanations and exposures of her ridiculousness. Betty has no central part to play in the narrative and instead her actions function as catalyses: filling in time between cardinal events in various humorous ways. This humorous description of a minor character is needless in terms of the cardinal elements of the plot, but essential in maintaining a humorous dominant, as well as a means of developing Martha's character and person in the story-world that Trollope has created for her to inhabit.

Unlike the mirroring of behavior and perspective between Betty and Martha, in Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* another servant figure, Nancy, initially performs a contrasting effect with her mistress in the narrative. In the cardinal sequence noted in section one of this chapter, the titular Lucilla Marjoribanks returns from school to live at home. The narrator uses mock heroic language exaggerated to humorous effect to juxtapose a domestic setting with a strategic war for power in which Lucilla conquers the peripheral characters around her with, what she views as, acts of service and selflessness. The narrator explains how upon her return, Lucilla establishes herself as the new "young sovereign" over the household.[310] Overthrowing

[308] Ibid., 67.
[309] Ibid., 79.
[310] Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks*, 26.

the precedence of Nancy, the cook and presiding female ruler of the Marjoribanks household, requires greater strategy from Lucilla than the sudden overthrow of her father, which she accomplished at breakfast by simply taking his seat at the head of the table. Lucilla explains that this new arrangement will be far more convenient for the Doctor, and she smiled "sweetly upon her two amazed subjects."[311] The Doctor acknowledges and accepts the new state of local affairs, and anticipating a showdown between the two women, finishes his breakfast and hurries away. However, Nancy "was stand-ing by in open-eyed dismay."[312] After a barrage of compliments for and minor concessions to Nancy's management and cooking, Lucilla in one sweep takes the reins of the house:

> "I want you to know that the object of my life is to be a comfort to poor papa; now let us think what we had better have for dinner," said the new Sovereign. Nancy was so totally unprepared for this manner of dethronement, that she gave in like her master. [The] formidable housekeeper, conducted her young mistress downstairs afterwards, and showed her everything with the meekness of a saint. Lucilla had won a second victory.[313]

On another level, Nancy must be humorously characterized to cohere with the larger dominant of the text which contains humorous characterization at its center. If humor was lacking at the peripheries, but present at the center, that could to some extent undermine the humorous dominant of the text (as I discuss below). But if the reader is endeared to the interests at the center of *Miss Marjoribanks*, i.e. those of Lucilla, then Nancy's humorous characterization also endears her to the reader as she bows to Lucilla's interests. Nancy serves a similar function to Betty in *The Widow Barnaby* in that through establishing her character, her mistress' character is better illuminated. However, instead of mirroring and sharing her mistress' ignorance of self, as Betty mirrored Martha's, Nancy's strength and good judgement mirrors Lucilla's similar qualities.

When narratives have a pervasive humorous dominant, that dominant does not preclude the presence of all tragic or sad events either at the center or the peripheries of the narrative. In a text with a pervasive humorous dominant, for a character to be both at the periphery and excluded from humorous characterization likely serves one of two functions. On the one hand, the character's function could be particularly catalytic in that they are like scenery or props: opening doors, handing in letters, or standing in crowds. Alternatively, a peripheral character's

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[311] Ibid., 27.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid., 28.

exclusion from humor in a humor-dominated text could denote some particular moral or significance. Tragic peripheral figures can serve as reflections of the primary moral of the narrative or contrasting cautionary tales for the primary characters. Sometimes, tragic peripheral figures can also carry the weight of some significant moral purpose in the narrative in order to address difficult or tragic topics while preserving the light heart of the center of a narrative or the moral purity of the central characters. While it is not impossible for humor to be used in relation to tragic or pitiable peripheral figures, humor has the potential to confuse or complicate the pity called for.

The problem of the coexistence of humor and tragedy in relation to a particular character is their similar foundation: both tragedy and humor are types of incongruity. As discussed in the first chapter, tragedy and comedy are both derived from incongruity. As De Sousa observed, the "Comic and Tragic [. . .] are by their very natures related as logical contraries."[314] The perception of an incongruity implies a comprehension and response that will likely be either humorous or tragic, but not both.[315] For example, in *David Copperfield*, some of the greatest tragedy is in the seduction and abandonment of Little Emily by James Steerforth. The incongruities that are introduced in relation to Little Emily are in the disparity between how she ought to be treated and how she is treated by the callous Steerforth and his haughty mother. The perception of this kind of incongruity resonates because it is shocking for its tragedy, rather than its ridiculousness. Likewise, David's young mother Clara Copperfield deserves the reader's pity because she is maltreated and bullied by the Murdstones, her second husband and sister-in-law. The incongruities in Clara's circumstances are difficult to frame as also, simultaneously, humorous.[316]

For similar reasons, peripheral antagonists are not usually the object of humor. Their incongruous behavior toward others would have to be re-framed as humorous, which would require greater text space than peripheral figures are likely to be granted. Moreover, to laugh at a peripheral antagonist, like Steerforth or Edward Murdstone, can diminish the significance of his

[314] De Sousa, "When Is It Wrong", 237.
[315] The third option for the perception of incongruity is the bizarre.
[316] If a character is central to the narrative, then a narrator has sufficient text space to introduce and frame incongruities in relation to them as tragic in some instances and humorous in other instances. However, peripheral figures may not be given enough text space for character development within the narrative for the narrator to frame incongruity as humorous in relation to them in some instances and tragic in others.

or her opposition to the text's moral and, by extension, the moral significance or personal goals of the central characters. To introduce humor in relation to characters who are opposed to the values of the central characters, and ostensibly those of the text itself, is in some way to ameliorate, mediate, or de-emphasize the effect of that opposition. The functional purpose in dwelling upon the wickedness of characters' actions and motives in, for example *David Copperfield*, rather than lessening the impact of their choices though humor, is to emphasize their difference from the values and goals of the central characters.

The question of how peripheral characters are presented and described by the narrator in relation to humor is largely a question of what is at stake in the peripheries of a given narrative in relation to the larger central narrative. In *Vanity Fair*, as I suggested in the previous section, there is no moral center to protect; everyone is complicit in the vanity and is thus subject to the cynical humor of the narrator. Thackeray certainly presents tragic and shocking circumstances, but the dominant of cynicism makes no figure in the text exclusively pitiable. In contrast, in *David Copperfield* and to a lesser extent in *Widow Barnaby*, the consequences of the actions of wicked characters are tragic. These dangers are posed quite seriously and without humor in relation to, predominantly, peripheral characters in *David Copperfield* and in relation to Agnes in *The Widow Barnaby*. In the small-town concerns of the town of Carlingford in *Miss Marjoribanks* and to a lesser extent in the county of Barsetshire in Anthony Trollope's novels (with the exception of Mark Robarts in *Framley Parsonage*), the consequences of wickedness are generally less terrible and are, correspondingly, open to more levity in presentation.

So far, all of the peripheral characters mentioned fit neatly into the action-oriented definitions offered by Propp and Barthes. A few key figures, however, challenge the limitations imposed on the relative significance of characters to narrative on the basis of their cardinal actions. One such character is clearly Anthony Trollope's Miss Dunstable, discussed in the first section of this chapter. Her wit and the interest generated around her characterization through humor distinguish her from Trollope's other peripheral characters, despite her limited cardinal actions in the narratives in which she appears. It is with peripheral characters like Miss Dunstable that it can be seen how humor in characterization has the ability to redirect the interest of the narrative while these characters remain within the prescribed boundaries of peripherality. There are also some fairly significant examples of characters with these outsized qualities present in *David Copperfield*. Humor is, of course, not the only rhetorical means of description

or characterization that can result in a peripheral figure having an effect on a narrative disproportionate to his or her cardinal actions. For example, it could also be argued that Uriah Heep's unctuous, insidious presence looms more conspicuously over the text than his cardinal actions might dictate. I am nonetheless arguing that humor is the most significant reorienting rhetorical device for peripheral characters in *David Copperfield*.

Surely one of the key reasons that narratologists and structuralists define peripherality in the way that they do is that, in using their parameters, "significance" is measurable. Outwith the simple math problem of counting up cardinal action, to make the case for a non-central character's significance is difficult to do. One example is Dickens' Betsey Trotwood. It is through Betsey that humor is introduced as a dominant in *David Copperfield* in the first chapter, "I Am Born." Although previously estranged from David's now deceased father, she arrives for the advent of his birth. Her eccentricity is immediately apparent in David's descriptions. David's father had also "often hinted that she seldom conducted herself like an ordinary Christian; and now, instead of ringing the bell, she came and looked in at that identical window, pressing the end of her nose against the glass."[317] Betsey makes definite her status as an eccentric when, after waiting through David's birth, she departs in a storm of irritation on account of the fact that he turned out not to be a girl. David's account of these events is not from his own memory, of course, but based upon what has been recounted to him. As he interprets this account of events from his early life, the story of Betsey's presence at his birth takes on almost mythic or fairy-tale like characteristics. However, as the novel progresses and David brings the narrative forward to the present, Betsey begins to resemble more and more the un-mythological woman who he has come to know as an adult.

Betsey has only two cardinal functions in the narrative of *David Copperfield*: her early rejection of David as a baby for his failure to be female and her subsequent adoption of him. These two events are consequential to the trajectory of David's life and, thereby, the narrative. However, most of Betsey's other actions are catalytic—if they were absent from the text, they would not change the trajectory of the narrative arc.[318] Nonetheless, Betsey is certainly a significant and memorable character. Her characterization is accomplished through swift, text-

[317] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 4.
[318] Notably, these two actions occur within the first third of the narrative—i.e. the section where Betsey is presented as the most humorous version of herself, in the mythological past when David is still young.

efficient humorous strokes. Despite her minimal presence in the narrative as a whole, she stands out from the larger cast of peripherals because of her eccentricities. Merely to hear in sequence the two words, "'Janet! Donkeys!'" draws her personality into view.[319] Her simultaneous relative insignificance to the action but significance to the story of *David Copperfield* gestures to the potential that humor has for granting some peripheral figures disproportionate influence over the narratives to which they are largely irrelevant. While it is reasonable to suggest that Betsey should be appreciated as greater in significance than the sum of her parts, it is not possible to prove: this question is down to individual reader engagement with and appreciation of humor.

However, there is another peripheral character from *David Copperfield* whose outsized significance to that narrative, relative to his cardinal actions, can be argued for with greater confidence and evidence: Wilkins Micawber. In the chapter, "I Begin Life on My Own Account, And Don't Like It", David meets and introduces to the reader a number of peripheral figures such as Mick Walker, Mealy Potatoes, the foreman of the packers Gregory, and Tipp the carman, who "wore a red jacket."[320] But it is Mr. Micawber with his "extensive face", large bald head, and "imposing shirt-collar" who is distinguished from the other peripheral characters in terms of the amount of description he is granted.[321] Upon being introduced to David by Mr. Quinion, Mr. Micawber, "with a certain condescending roll in his voice, and a certain indescribable air of doing something genteel", returns greetings with a long idiosyncratic speech, explaining who he is:

> "I have received a letter from Mr. Murdstone, in which he mentions that he would desire me to receive into an apartment in the rear of my house, which is at present unoccupied—and is, in short, to be let as a—in short," said the stranger, with a smile and in a burst of confidence, "as a bedroom—the young beginner whom I have now the pleasure to—" and the stranger waved his hand, and settled his chin in his shirt-collar.[322]

After this sequence of introduction, which is somewhat stunning to the young, inexperienced David, he returns with Mr. Micawber to his new lodgings and is introduced to the sprawling minor chaos which is the Micawber family state of affairs.

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[319] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 190. It is with this exclamation that Betsey signals to her servant Janet that donkeys have invaded the "little piece of green in front" of the house. David describes these incursions upon "that immaculate spot" as "[t]he one great outrage of her life, demanding to be constantly avenged" (190).
[320] Ibid., 157.
[321] Ibid., 151.
[322] Ibid.

One of the notable attributes of Mr. Micawber and his family is that they are constantly "'in difficulties'", as Mrs. Micawber puts it.[323] And David's is often the friendly ear into which Mr. and Mrs. Micawber pour, in turns, the tales of their financial woes as he grows in intimacy with the family: Mr. and Mrs., two children, and the infant twins. The only visitors that ever seem to appear at the Micawber home, David recounts, were creditors, who stood shouting at the door for Mr. Micawber to emerge and pay them what they were owed:

> At these times, Mr. Micawber would be transported with grief and mortification, even to the length (as I was once made aware by a scream from his wife) of making motions at himself with a razor; but within half-an-hour afterwards, he would polish up his shoes with extraordinary pains, and go out, humming a tune with a greater air of gentility than ever.[324]

This "elasticity" of the couple in their hard circumstances is an attribute that both man and wife display throughout the novel.[325]

The other remarkable attribute of Mr. Micawber is his vocabulary and flare for dramatic turns of phrase. David lives with the Micawbers while working for a wine merchant at the tender age of ten—an arrangement that Mr. Micawber later ludicrously characterizes as, "'the days when my friend Copperfield and myself were younger, and fought our way in the world side by side.'"[326] While David is lodging with the Micawbers, Mr. Micawber is placed in debtors' prison. By the time "something turns up" and he is released, David has resolved to run away from the miserable work his step-father placed him in and to try and find his Aunt Betsey Trotwood in Dover.[327] At this parting, Mr. Micawber gives David some advice. He advises David, "'[a]nnual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery. The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered.'"[328] However, he admits of this excellent advice, "'I have never taken it myself, and am the' —here Mr. Micawber, who had been beaming and smiling, all over his head and face, up to the present moment, checked himself and frowned— 'the miserable wretch you behold.'"[329]

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[323] Ibid., 168.
[324] Ibid., 154.
[325] Ibid., 167.
[326] Ibid., 405.
[327] Ibid., 169.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Ibid.

While these early memories of Mr. Micawber endear him to the young David, it is clear to the reader that Mr. Micawber, sincere as he may be, is also a bit of a swindling rogue who sometimes borrows money from guileless ten-year-olds. The use of humor in the characterization of Mr. Micawber licenses his ne'er-do-well behavior in some ways that are similar to the license for wickedness granted to Becky Sharp and Martha Barnaby in the previous section of this chapter. But more significantly to framing the reader's reception of Micawber, when the adult, narrating David is reunited with Mr. Micawber, he has nothing but warmth for him and interest in his family's welfare. At the time of their reunion, as in every other stage of his life, Mr. Micawber is not prospering. As the narrator, it is David's perspective that the reader is encouraged to adopt, and David welcomes Micawber back into his life and helps him. These friendly acts cement Micawber's love for David and help to bring about Micawber's redemption and single cardinal act in the narrative: exposing the duplicity and schemes of his villainous employer Uriah Heep toward the close of the narrative. This act is performed with loquacious drama on the part of Mr. Micawber, who in a burst of outrage as Uriah tries to prevent him from speaking, wields a ruler and shouts: "'Approach me again, you—you—you HEEP of infamy,' gasped Mr. Micawber, 'and if your head is human, I'll break it.'"[330]

Although Micawber has only this one cardinal action in *David Copperfield*, there is significant evidence that his character, in particular, looms over the text and cultural memory of *David Copperfield*. Dickens understood Micawber to be one of his most popular creations and seemed to have had a particular fondness for him.[331] In Dickens' correspondence he quotes Micawber as though he is a real person: "I write, as my friend Mr. Micawber says, 'with a sickly mask of mirth.'"[332] Dickens' private allusions to Micawber and Micawberisms could perhaps only be a testament to an author's affection for his own character, and he might reasonably rely upon his correspondents to be aware of his characters and some of their phrases. However, an array of anonymous newspaper articles published during *David Copperfield*'s serialization and in the years following refer to Micawber and Micawberism with that same presumption of

[330] Ibid., 731.
[331] According to biographer Grahame Smith, critics have suggested that the character of Micawber was modeled after Dickens' own father in his warmth and work-ethic but also in his consistent workplace failures and impecuniousness. *Charles Dickens: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 57.
[332] Charles Dickens to John Leech, October 5, 1849, in *The Pilgrim Edition, The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, vol. 5, *1847–49*, eds. Graham Storey and K. J. Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 620.

familiarity in their readers. For example, in a piece of political reporting concurrent with *David Copperfield*'s serialization, a writer for *The Morning Chronicle* on 20 November 1849 wrote, "[i]n spite of his defiant eye and petulant tongue, we greatly fear that the affairs of Mr. Disraeli, like those of Mr. Micawber, are coming to a crisis."[333] There are similar allusions to and quotations of Micawber in a great variety of other publications and varied contexts.[334]

Micawber is also particularly mentioned by contemporary and subsequent literary critics. Margaret Oliphant writes in that same vein of assessment on the basis of authenticity as those reviews mentioned in the previous chapter, when she simply asserts, "[w]ho has not seen Mr Micawber himself [. . .] And who does not know the lady who bears his name."[335] Even Henry James, despite his pronouncements about the definition of characters in relation to incident, writes of Micawber that

> The characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most, but the measure of reality is very difficult to fix. The reality of Don Quixote or Mr. Micawber is a very delicate shade [. . .] it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being.[336]

And Chesterton writes, in awe at Micawber's character and presence in the novel, that "Micawber is not a man; Micawber is the superman. We can only walk round and round him wondering what we shall say."[337]

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[333] "London", *The Morning Chronicle*, November 20, 1849, British Library Newspapers.

[334] Searching "Micawber" in the British Library Newspapers database yields over forty-five such unique allusions to or quotations of Micawber similar to those quoted here in non-literary articles published between 1849 and 1855. Here are some representative examples published during and after *David Copperfield*'s serialization: in a short note, a writer for the *Jackson Oxford Journal* explains that a man, visiting a public house in Abingdon, ate his meal, booked his room, and then attempted to leave before paying. When he was caught, the journalist explains that the man "was compelled to confess himself, Micawber like, 'without adequate means of remuneration.'" "Abingdon", *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, no. 5080 (September 7, 1850) British Library Newspapers; in an article entitled, "What Is to Be Done For the Farmer" a journalist writes, "[i]f an excellent low-lying farm of 464 Scotch acres, skilfully [*sic*] farmed, places the tenant only one step beyond ruin—if the value of a fat cow would turn the scale—if the death of a horse would put the farmer in the miserable position (according to Micawber) of the man who spends 6d. a-year beyond his annual income, it proves the necessity of some general measures of relief." *Inverness Courier* 31, no. 1676 (December 27, 1849), British Library Newspapers; and, finally, in an article entitled "Germany", a political reporter posted to Vienna explained in reference to Louis Napoleon that "[a]t first the President had delivered France. He was a greater man than his uncle. 'In short,' as Mr. Micawber would say, 'what was he not?'" *Daily News*, no. 1783 (February 9, 1852), British Library Newspapers.

[335] Oliphant, "Charles Dickens", *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 1:71.

[336] James, "The Art of Fiction", 12.

[337] Chesterton, *Appreciations,* 139. This is part of a larger argument in Chesterton's introduction to *David Copperfield* in which he suggests that by banishing Micawber to Australia, Dickens has betrayed an ethos

More evidence of Micawber's disproportionate relevance as a peripheral character to the narrative of *David Copperfield* are in accounts of Dickens' famous public readings from his novels. According to Philip Collins, Dickens tended to select excerpts from his works that served to illustrate a particular character, usually on the basis of their popularity and ones that did not require lengthy backstory: especially Pickwick and Micawber.[338] Malcolm Andrews describes how Dickens constructed a shortened script version of *David Copperfield* to include in his repertoire of public performances. Andrews explains that the three elements Dickens generally sought to bring together and balance in a performance were "a complete short story", "a single episode", and "a character study."[339] This agenda is present in Dickens' six-chapter outline for a performance of *David Copperfield* that was to last about two hours:

> *Chapter I*. Copperfield (as a young man of 19 or 20) takes his friend, Steerforth, to the old boat where Mr. Peggotty lives, and introduces Steerforth to Little Emily. It is foreshadowed in this chapter, that Steerforth admires her in a profligate way, and begins to form designs upon her.
> *Chapter II*. Copperfield goes alone to the old boat, to pass with the family, the last evening of Little Emily's single life; because she has engaged herself to be married to Ham (Mr. Peggoty's nephew) that day fortnight. Ham suddenly brings the news that she has eloped with Steerforth—a last letter from her is read—and Mr. Peggotty sets forth to seek her 'through the world'.
> *Chapter III*. Copperfield describes his love for Dora, and the dinner he gave to Mr. and Mrs. Micawber and Traddles.
> *Chapter IV*. Mr. Peggotty returns from his search, unsuccessful, and relates where he has been in France and Italy.
> *Chapter V*. Copperfield describes how he made proposals to Dora—how he married Dora—and what their little ménage was.

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central to his other works: "That is the whole meaning of Dickens; that we should keep the absurd people for our friends. And here at the end of *David Copperfield* he seems in some dim way to deny it. He seems to want to get rid of the preposterous people simply because they will always continue to be preposterous. I have a horrible feeling that David Copperfield will send even his aunt to Australia if she worries him too much about donkeys" (135).

[338] Philip Collins, s.v. "public readings texts", in *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*, ed. Paul Schlicke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). This evidence of the popularity of *The Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield*, in particular, is also present in their library circulation: Jonathan Rose writes that "[s]hortly after its opening in 1888, the Belfast Public Library reported that *The Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield* were among its four most requested books. Dickens's own public readings attracted mobs of working people—at least those who could afford the shilling seats. And at the Loveclough Printworks Library, Dickens accounted for 10 percent of all the loans in 1892–93." *The Intellectual Life of British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 111. Of the popularity of *David Copperfield* specifically, Graham Storey and K. J. Fielding write, "[a]lthough not particularly reflected in reviews, its popularity was immediate." Dickens, *Letters*, 5:683, fn. 2.

[339] Malcolm Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 87.

> *Chapter VI*. described the storm at Yarmouth, in the words of the book, and the Death of Steerforth.[340]

The performances of this significantly shortened and refocused account from *David Copperfield* were well-received. According to the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, "An adaptation of Dickens' *David Copperfield* was produced on Monday night, at the Strand Theatre, with great success. The characters of Uriah Heep, Betsy Trot [*sic*], Martha Endel [*sic*], and Mr. Micawber, told well on the stage."[341] As this outline indicates, Dickens has altered the focus of the narrative to highlight the Steerforth and Little Emily storyline. Notably, then, David's childhood residence with the Micawbers as well as Mr. Micawber's role, arguably his single cardinal action, in exposing Uriah Heep's wickedness at the close of the narrative are both irrelevant to this particular episodic version of David's life. Mr. Micawber seems to be included, as Andrews explains, "to feature some of the famous characters", i.e. one of the "character studies" for the performance.[342]

Through all this evidence, I want to suggest that there is a kind of mysteriousness to the impact of Micawber that cannot be explained by his actions, but could be explained by his predominantly humorous characterization. What is the plot of *David Copperfield* without Micawber? In terms of cardinal functions, largely unchanged. But what is the narrative of *David Copperfield* without Micawber? Fundamentally no longer itself. It seems necessary to re-invoke Bradley's argument about poetry here: that form and content are indivisible. The narrative of *David Copperfield* is obviously not just a sequence of cardinal events, and few structuralists or narratologists would insist that it was. The events, and the description of them and around them, are together, "one thing from different points of view."[343] *David Copperfield*'s narrative cannot be divorced from all of the humorous, significant, irrelevant catalytic details of which Micawber is made up. It is precisely because Micawber is a peripheral figure that he is also such an impressive figure and worthy of study. It is by considering Micawber within the boundaries of the peripheral definition that we can wonder, as Chesterton did, circling "round and round" Micawber, at the impact that he has on the text.

What this section has argued is that humor, used to develop peripheral characters, is

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[340] Ibid., 88.
[341] "Metropolitan", *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* 26, no. 1535 (October 26, 1850): 3, British Library Newspapers.
[342] Andrews, *Charles Dickens*, 87–88.
[343] Bradley, "Poetry", 15.

significant in a number of ways to narratives. Humor has the potential to swiftly render characters who are granted limited text space distinctive, ridiculous, or endearing. These peripheral characters maintain the dominant of humor in the catalytic moments or provide a break from a more somber central theme as comic relief—providing humor without compromising the moral center of the narrative. Often, their purpose is to serve the central character: showcasing the central character's attributes or providing contrast with the moral center of the text. However, most significantly, some humorous peripheral characters pose challenges to the strictures of peripheral status. In the case of characters like Betsey Trotwood, peripherality is shown to be more of a spectrum of relevance than a category. This complexity of relevance is even greater in characters like Wilkins Micawber whose characterization using humor invites the reader to give him more attention and interest than is technically relevant to the central concerns of the text. What characters like Micawber, and to a lesser extent Betsey, illustrate is that through humorous characterization the impact of some characters can be much greater to the narrative than the extent of the textual space they occupy suggests. Their humorous characterization garners an affective sympathy, to use Greiner's phrase, that, despite their peripherality, gives them a disproportionate significance to the narrative.

Conclusion

Andrew Lang wrote in "Realism and Romance" (1887) of his fellow novelists that "happy, and jolly, and humorous people they hardly ever show us; yet these have their place among reality."[344] This chapter has sought to focus on those few happy, jolly, and humorous people and speculate as to why, as Lang notes, in many instances these figures are relegated to the peripheries or are unusual or compromised when they appear at the center of a narrative, even in humor-dominated ones. Within each author's set of work there are different but distinguishable observed boundaries between which kinds of figures authors will and will not characterize using humor. But in each text considered in this chapter, the presence or absence of humor plays a key role in the author's interpretive framework. Sometimes, authors use the presence of humor to signal a character's exclusion from the central concern or focus of the text. Alternatively, excluding characters from humorous description and characterization can signal to the reader that those figures represent a particular moral significance or purity. The examples of

[344] Andrew Lang, "Realism and Romance", *The Contemporary Review* 52 (July 1, 1887): 687, Proquest.

The Widow Barnaby and *Vanity Fair* show how humor can permit readers to enjoy the depiction of wickedness without compromising the central moral of either text. Perhaps most notably, however, humor can be a powerful means of reorienting, to use Woloch's phrase, "the distribution of attention within narrative" away from its conventional center and toward the peripheries or away from the moral center toward less conventionally suitable characters.[345] Thus, humor is a significant element of the interpretive framework for these texts: highlighting or diminishing a character's significance to the text's moral and to the interest of the text through inclusion or exclusion.

[345] Woloch, *One*, 15.

Chapter 4: Humor in Society

4.1 Introduction

The emphasis in this thesis so far has been on some of the technical aspects of the use of humor in narratives. As I argued in chapter one, humor functions as a kind of rhetorical device within novels. Chapters two and three have sought to explain some of the techniques or features of humor's rhetorical functions in Victorian novels: humor's role in narration and humor's role in characterization. This chapter and the next slightly shift in their emphasis and organization to highlight some of the thematic patterns in the use of humor as a rhetorical device in novels. As the introduction argued, to consider both the technical and thematic aspects of humor in Victorian novels, to re-cite Bradley, is to look at "one thing from different points of view."[346] The analyses of texts in this chapter, the final chapter, and the conclusion build upon the technical arguments of the last three chapters to focus on the question of what humor in Victorian novels is about and to consider why humor has been relied upon as a rhetorical device to address these themes. These final chapters seek to elucidate some of humor's other rhetorical or technical characteristics alongside a consideration of what themes, in particular, humor is used to address.

The most foundational and broad thematic category that humor is used to address and depict in Victorian novels is society: the interaction between individuals and social groups and the dynamics within social groups. Because social dynamics are a part of the nature of humor itself, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, humor is a likely rhetorical tool to use to depict the social world. Henri Bergson argues in his essay *Laughter* that "[t]o understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all we must determine the utility of its function, which is a social one. [. . .] Laughter [. . .] must have a *social* signification."[347] Humor or comedy, Andrew Stott observes, "is certainly a social activity first and foremost, conceived of always with some kind of audience in mind, and everywhere produced from the matter of dominant cultural assumptions and commonplaces."[348] Humor in

[346] Bradley, "Poetry", 15.
[347] Bergson, "Laughter", 119–120 (author's italics).
[348] Stott also points out that humor is not always transgressive in this context, he writes that "[e]ven though comedy often seems to be suspending, inverting, or abandoning dominant norms, these inversions are produced in relation to the cultural orthodoxies from which they must always begin." *Comedy*, 8.

literature plays against, as Stott puts it, the "dominant cultural assumptions" from the society in which and to which the literature is written. Humor's relationship to the social is thus both in its technique, in that it is written for an audience, and in its themes, in that its topics are derived from the social world.

Perhaps to argue that humor in Victorian novels depicts and explains the dynamics of human interaction is such a broad observation that it may seem hardly worth pointing out; as Lionel Trilling has argued, "the field of [the novel's] research [is] always the social world."[349] Naturally, Victorian novels, and the humor they may contain, are about people because novels are, generally speaking, about people.[350] However, because humor is derived from and built for its social environment, as Bergson and Stott observe, the social dynamics that humor is used to depict in any period of history will be, to some extent, distinctive to the context of that time period.[351] The social dynamics in the novels analyzed in this thesis and the humor used to depict them are to that extent distinctly Victorian.

As the century progressed, one notable trend in literature was toward the expansion of the breadth of social groups and social topics depicted in novels.[352] In a prescient analysis of

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[349] Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel", in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1955), 212.

[350] The subjects of novels may be animals or cyborgs, etc., but the human characteristics of reason and emotion are, as Trilling asserts, generally what novels are engaged in depicting and exploring.

[351] To engage with humor does not necessitate belonging to the society for which and in which humor is written or created: as this thesis' engagement with the humor of the Victorian period is an example. This observation about the nature of humor is in relation to its creation or inception. The community to which humor is written or the social world for whom humor is created can be minutely or broadly conceived: from one other person to perhaps millions of people who share a cultural framework against which incongruity can be highlighted.

[352] Parallel to this expansion in the focus of novels, was the expansion of the readership for novels as well as the number of novels being published in serial and other formats. Sutherland states that "[b]etween 1830 and 1890 [. . .] the reading public for books published in England grew from 50,000 to 120,000,000", including domestic readers as well as international markets. *Victorian Novelists,* 63. According to Simon Eliot and Andrew Nash, "[i]n 1830 the population of the British Isles was nearly 24 million, by 1914 it was over 46 million. In 1841 in England and Wales at least 67 per cent of bridegrooms and 51 per cent of brides were literate; by 1900 the percentage was 97 per cent for both sexes. A higher percentage of a much larger figure means a remarkable expansion in the number of readers and thus the demand for books." "Mass Markets: Literature", *The Cambridge History of The Book in Britain*, 6:418–419. Michael F. Suarez S. J. explains that the metric of signatures at weddings to calculate literacy, has been used by researches because "a number of studies have found that, over time, trends in literacy are positively correlated with signature data." "Introduction", in *The Cambridge History of The Book in Britain*, eds. Michael F. Suarez S. J. and Michael L. Turner, vol. 5, *1695–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9. As to the number of novels published in the nineteenth century, Sutherland writes that "there were somewhere around 60,000 works of adult and juvenile fiction published 1837–

Dickens' significance, in a discussion of *Great Expectations* for *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1862, Margaret Oliphant observed that Dickens "has been mainly instrumental in leading the present generation of authors to disregard to a great extent the pictorial advantages of life on the upper levels of society, and to find a counter-picturesqueness in the experiences of the poor."[353] Oliphant's description is notable in that she does not describe Dickens' approach as exceptional, but rather that Dickens stood at the head of a trend that characterized his generation. Similarly, Caroline Levine argues in "Victorian Realism" that there was movement toward the inclusion of a greater diversity in the types of people whose lives and experiences were depicted in novels as the Victorian era progressed compared to the novels of the previous century and of the romantic period. This trend of expansion in the subjects for literature beyond the upper echelons of society included:

> the truths of prosaic, gritty, and hideous experiences. Thanks to the realists, poor, marginal, and hitherto neglected figures [. . .] came to be seen not only as serious artistic subject matter, but also subjects in the philosophical sense, sources of knowledge and action in the novel rather than picturesque or comic objects.[354]

Along similar lines, Alex Woloch characterizes the social dynamics depicted in Victorian novels as, "[t]he inclusive aesthetics of the nineteenth-century realist tradition." Woloch points to the historical context of the First Reform Bill of 1832 and the Second Reform Bill of 1867 as a political backdrop of expansion in the franchise and what he argues is the concurrent expansion of the representation of a diversity of classes in fiction.[355] According to Woloch, this "inclusive

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1901 (i.e. around 20 percent of total book production in the period). Non-book tract fiction produced by Evangelical organizations like the Religious Tract Society and short stories in magazines might well double this figure." "Preface", *The Longman Companion*, 1. For comparison with the previous century, Suarez S. J. writes that "[e]ven at its height in the eighteenth century, fiction publishing represents slightly less than 3.5 per cent of all surviving titles. [. . .] When viewing fiction as a percentage of the broader category 'literature, classics and belles-lettres', throughout the century, novel publishing never makes up more than a quarter of this category and, in 1743, is only around 10 per cent of the total." "Towards a bibliometric analysis of the surviving record, 1701–1800", in *The Cambridge History of The Book in Britain*, eds. Michael F. Suarez S. J. and Michael L. Turner, vol. 5, *1695–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 48.

[353] Oliphant, "Sensation Novels", *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 1:257.

[354] Levine, "Victorian Realism", 89.

[355] Woloch, *One*, 31. The texts in this chapter in particular were written during the period of debate preceding the Second Reform Bill. The Second Reform Bill, "granted the vote to all householders in the boroughs as well as lodgers who paid rent of £10 a year or more"; this bill "reduced the property threshold in the counties and gave the vote to agricultural landowners and tenants with very small amounts of land"; and ultimately, "the Act roughly doubled the electorate in England and Wales from one to two million men." "Second Reform Act of 1867", UK Parliament, accessed March 12, 2021,

aesthetic" balances the "dual impulses to bring in a multitude of characters and to bring out the interiority of a singular protagonist."[356] In light of this trend of including a variety of characters from different social backgrounds, one of the particular tasks of the Victorian novelist was to situate their central and peripheral characters within their social world: showing how they relate to it and how they are received by it.

It was out of the material of this particular social environment that the humor of Victorian literature was made, and it was for this audience that the humor of Victorian novels was written. To consider humor's role in depicting social dynamics and situating characters within their communities, this chapter performs a small case study by comparing four humorous novels from the 1860s. To varying degrees, all of the texts discussed in previous chapters and the texts discussed in the next chapter are engaged in depicting the relationship between individuals and social groups. This chapter does not set out to argue that the 1860s were exceptionally distinct from the decades before and after. Rather I have chosen the 1860s as the setting for this case study in order to compare examples that have the same historical context and that emanated from the same social moment. I have also chosen these four novels, written in the 1860s, because they offered up such conspicuous examples of social conflict and confusion. The texts this chapter compares are *Evan Harrington: Or, He Would Be a Gentleman* (serialized 1860) by Meredith, *Great Expectations* (serialized 1860–1861) by Dickens, *Orley Farm* (serialized 1861–1862) by Anthony Trollope, and *Wives and Daughters: An Every-Day Story* (serialized 1864–1866) by Gaskell. Published over a span of six years, these four novels provide a focused comparison of examples of the kinds of social scenes and manners their authors were interested in. All four texts rely upon humor as a significant tool and medium for laying bare the different expectations, manners, rules, snobbery, or moral qualities motivating their characters' social ideals or behavior.

The first section of this chapter discusses Anthony Trollope's depiction of the dynamics and conflicts between a great array of different social groups in *Orley Farm* through humor. The second section compares the use of humor to critique the motivations and machinations of two social climbers: one from *Wives and Daughters* and one from *Evan Harrington*. Finally, the last

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https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/houseofcommons/reformacts/overview/furtherreformacts/.

[356] Woloch, *One*, 30.

section considers the use of humor by Dickens in *Great Expectations*, in conversation with some corresponding examples from *Orley Farm*, *Evan Harrington*, and *Wives and Daughters*, as it engages with the question: what is a gentleman?

4.2 Greed and Justice in *Orley Farm*

Of Anthony Trollope's "independent' novels", N. John Hall suggests that *Orley Farm* was particularly well regarded and that, of his independent volumes, it "stood out in Trollope's day."[357] It is one of Trollope's vast novels, both in terms of its length and in terms of the great array of characters it includes. Robert Adams argues that "[t]he earth, air, water, and fire of English social life fill *Orley Farm* in the spacious dimensions of a world."[358] Placed within this vast social milieu was what Trollope considered, "probably the best [plot] I have ever made."[359] The plot revolves around an issue of inheritance and the legal proceedings to discover to whom a piece of property, Orley Farm, ought to belong. The great discovery of the novel (which Trollope lamented he disclosed too early in the narrative), is that the beautiful, noble Lady Mason is guilty of forging the document that reallocated ownership from her step-son and bestowed it upon her natural son.[360] Adams argues that "[i]t is the interrelation of money and morals, of property and principle, which provides the book with its most interesting insights into English society. [. . .] The only question was, and is, what will society, acting through the law, do about her [Lady Mason's] fault?"[361] The interesting outcome of the novel is not that she is punished for her misdeeds, but that instead the guilty, but seemingly noble, lady is found to be not-guilty by a court of law and her wronged, but seemingly ignoble, step-son is deprived of English justice.

Around this serious narrative of a miscarriage of English justice and the drama of the court case, Trollope builds a wide social world.[362] The character of the narrator in *Orley Farm*

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[357] Hall, *Trollope*, 507. According to Robert M. Adams, *Orley Farm* was also the fourth most lucrative of Trollope's novels (he was paid £3,135). "'Orley Farm' and Real Fiction", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 8, no. 1 (1953): 27, https://doi.org/10.2307/3044274.
[358] Adams, "'Orley Farm'", 28.
[359] Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography*, 167.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Adams, "'Orley Farm'", 30.
[362] Although many elements of the narrative of *Orley Farm* revolve around English jurisprudence, Trollope's understanding and description of the minutiae of English law and judicial proceedings came under heavy criticism at the time. See Albert D. Pionke, "Navigating 'Those Terrible Meshes of the Law': Legal Realism in Anthony Trollope's Orley Farm and The Eustace Diamonds", *Elh* 77, no. 1 (spring 2010), Proquest.

and his use of humor is similar to that employed by the narrator of the Barsetshire Chronicles, discussed in the previous chapter. Humorous incongruity in *Orley Farm* is used at times to describe the characters that anchor the plot of *Orley Farm* as well as in application to minor characters. But *Orley Farm*'s cast of minor characters stand out somewhat, as Francis O'Gorman notes: one of *Orley Farm*'s distinctive attributes was that its "habit of characterisation dallied with Dickensian comedy alongside Trollope's more expected realist figures."[363] What is particularly notable about the use of humor in *Orley Farm,* to accomplish the characterizations of these peripheral figures, is that so many of the incongruities that the humor lays bare and highlights revolve around social distinctions and conflict. Through humor, Trollope explores questions of unwritten social codes for behavior and interaction at a variety of levels of social distinction. These questions about social codes, acceptable behavior within one's social group, and acceptable behavior in relation to other social groups played out by the minor characters mirror the somber questions of the text's primary storyline: the violation of law and noble behavior by a noble lady and her aristocratic supporters.

Mr. Moulder, Mr. Dockwrath, and Mr. Joseph Mason are three of the primary figures whose characterization is executed with that Dickensian flare that O'Gorman identifies. The conflict at the heart of *Orley Farm* over the legality of Lucius Mason's inheritance of Orley Farm rather than his step-brother Joseph Mason is, to some extent, initiated and pursued by the country attorney Samuel Dockwrath. Dockwrath, "a vulgar, low-minded, revengeful fellow", took umbrage when the land he had been lent by Lady Mason until her son's maturity was taken back by that son Lucius when he came of age.[364] In recompense for this anticipated, yet what he considers outrageous, exercise of Lucius' rights, Dockwrath decides to find and present evidence confirming the rumor that Lady Mason forged the codicil that granted her son Orley Farm at the time of her husband's illness and death. His first step in this pursuit is to travel to see Lady Mason's stepson, Mr. Mason of Groby Park, who also harbors an angry suspicion that his inheritance was curtailed by this rumored unlawful codicil contrived by his stepmother. It is on his travels that Mr. Dockwrath is confronted with the massive, masterful, and "almost vicious" commercial gentleman, Mr. Moulder.[365]

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[363] Francis O'Gorman, "Trollope, *Orley Farm*, and Dickens's Marriage Breakdown", *English Studies* 99, no. 6 (September 21, 2018): 630, doi:10.1080/0013838X.2018.1492228.
[364] Anthony Trollope, *Orley Farm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 1:121.
[365] Ibid., 1:50.

In two scenes, Trollope uses humor to present a parodic example of the pursuit and execution of justice and enforcement of appropriate social behavior that contrasts poignantly with these themes pursued on a larger scale in the narrative of *Orley Farm*. On Mr. Dockwrath's journey to solicit the help of Mr. Joseph Mason to accuse Lady Mason, he stops at The Bull Inn. Here, he asks to be shown to the commercial sitting room. As an attorney, social convention dictated that this was not the appropriate room in which to take his meal. The waiter felt "all but confident that such a guest had no right to be there. He had no bulky bundles of samples, nor any of those outward characteristics of a commercial 'gent' with which all men conversant with the rail and road are acquainted."[366] But Mr. Dockwrath, careful of his expenditure, due to his obligation to provide for his wife and sixteen children, sought admittance to the commercial room, as dinner there was less expensive.[367] When Mr. Moulder, "in the grocery and spirit line", and his compatriot in commerce Mr. Kantwise, "in the hardware line", enter, Mr. Moulder knows Mr. Dockwrath has been admitted erroneously; for Mr. Moulder knew "all the bearings of a commercial man thoroughly, and could have put one together if he were only supplied with a little bit—say the mouth."[368] Immediately, therefore, Mr. Moulder challenges the waiter on his placement of Mr. Dockwrath in the room and, even more importantly, in Mr. Moulder's accustomed chair.

When Mr. Dockwrath wades in to make his case, it is with both a legalistic attitude and using legalistic language. He does not pretend an ignorance of the room's rules, but he argues, demonstrating not for the last time a lawyerly awareness of loopholes, that "'you'll find [the word commercial] extremely difficult to define [. . .];—extremely difficult. In this enterprising county all men are more or less commercial.'"[369] The argument comes to a close when Mr. Dockwrath suggests that the rules of commercial rooms are kept less strictly in other parts of the country. Mr. Moulder grudgingly assents to Mr. Dockwrath's remaining in the room on the understanding that his entry was "'because he didn't know the custom of the country [. . .] I, for one, shall be very happy if the gentleman can make himself comfortable in this room as a

[366] Ibid., 1:49.
[367] Throughout *Orley Farm*, Mr. Dockwrath is repeatedly credited with having sixteen children except in the opening to volume one, chapter thirty-two in which Trollope twice alludes to his having fourteen children (1:315).
[368] Anthony Trollope, *Orley Farm*, 1:50; 1:52.
[369] Ibid., 1:54.

stranger'"[370] But Mr. Moulder stews on what he believes is a violation of accepted behavior: "for he was a stickler for the rights and privileges of his class, and had an idea that the world was not so conservative in that respect as it should be."[371]

The dispute over rights and privileges continues the next day upon Mr. Dockwrath's return to the inn, when he resorts once more to the commercial room for his dinner. This time, the narrator explains, Mr. Moulder was prepared for him and intended to "be more firm in maintaining the ordinances and institutes of his profession."[372] At the end of the dinner, Mr. Moulder enacts his plan of entrapment by calling for wine. The custom of the room and of the community dictated that, as a part of their number, Mr. Dockwrath would pay equal shares with the other seven gentlemen present for the wine consumed that evening. Mr. Dockwrath, aware of this custom, openly refuses all the wine offered him, even when the Queen is toasted, intending to avoid splitting the bill for "he knew well that commercial gentlemen do sometimes call for bottle after bottle with a reckless disregard of expense."[373] Each of the men in turn invite Mr. Dockwrath to take a glass, but he refuses them all and "after that there was very little conversation [. . .] for the men knew that the goddess of discord was in the air."[374]

To describes the final showdown, Trollope uses language that evokes a courtroom drama. This pointed language choice, which evokes consequential matters, is humorously juxtaposed with the relatively minor social violation of which Dockwrath is guilty. Mr. Moulder calls for the bill and James, the waiter "also knew well what was about to happen, and he trembled as he handed in the document."[375] To the discomfort of all the other commercial gentlemen in the room, Mr. Moulder insists that if Mr. Dockwrath chooses to represent himself as a commercial gentleman that he must be made to act the part and pay his share for the wine whether he has partaken or not. Mr. Moulder appeals to the other commercial gentlemen to witness whether or not this was expected behavior. The gentlemen and the waiter reluctantly admit and agree that "'[t]hat's the rule, sir, in all commercial rooms.'"[376] Mr. Dockwrath angrily states that he "'must

[370] Ibid., 1:55.
[371] Ibid., 1:52.
[372] Ibid., 1:83.
[373] Ibid., 1:86.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid., 1:87.
[376] Ibid., 1:88.

decline to acknowledge that I am amenable to the jurisdiction.'"[377] Mr. Moulder in return accuses him of committing a "'premeditated infraction of our rules.'"[378] Finally Dockwrath is forced to admit that he is not actually a commercial man, but is rather a lawyer, albeit "'a commercial lawyer.'"[379] All of the gathered commercial men, some warmly and some hesitatingly, agree he never should have been let in to the room in the first place. The end of the matter is that the landlord Mr. Crump is called upon to hand down a verdict. Mr. Crump begs the pardon of the commercial gentlemen, and, because Mr. Dockwrath refuses to move from his place, the commercial gentlemen all leave to take their coffee in Mr. Crump's private sitting-room. Moulder led "the way with a stately step [. . .] bearing the bottle of port and his own glass, and Mr. Snengkeld and Mr. Gape followed in line, bearing also their own glasses, and maintaining the dignity of their profession under circumstances of some difficulty."[380]

The image of Mr. Moulder sweeping away, glass and bottle in hand, with his associates bobbing along behind him, each pursuing their steps with a conviction of the dignity of the stand just taken, is delightfully ludicrous. In addition to the comic value that this scene brings to the text, Trollope is also using these humorous juxtapositions to underscore a broader point about the relationships between commerce, the law, and greed. Albert D. Pionke argues that through the characters of Kantwise and Moulder, Trollope is highlighting the similarities between the vocations of law and commerce.[381] This likeness is particularly evident in the language used by Moulder, as when he compares himself as a commercial man to a lawyer, "'[m]y duty is to sell, and I sell;—and it's their duty to get a verdict.'"[382] Later in the text, Trollope uses comparative language to describe the lawyer Chaffanbrass in commercial terms: "He was always true to the man whose money he had taken, and gave to his customer, with all the power at his command, that assistance which he had professed to sell."[383] The motivation of commercial men like Moulder and Kantwise, according to Trollope, is greed. And the motivation of lawyers like Chaffanbrass and Dockwrath, Trollope depicts as commercial; they are men who practice law to make money rather than to promote justice.

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[377] Ibid., 1:90.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Ibid., 1:92.
[380] Ibid., 1:93–94.
[381] Pionke, "Navigating", 139.
[382] Anthony Trollope, *Orley Farm*, 2:213.
[383] Ibid., 2:359.

The other question that Trollope explores through this analogous incident between Dockwrath and Moulder, is: who deserves which privileges in English society? Unexpectedly in this scene, Mr. Moulder is seeking to protect the rights of his social set of commercial gentlemen from an incursion by a member of a somewhat higher class: a commercial attorney. If someone does not belong to a particular part of society, Moulder seems to suggest, they should not receive the rights and privileges afforded to that group by convention or by justice. This code, introduced through this humorous scene, is explored with greater pathos and detail in relation to Lady Mason. Despite her guilt, Lady Mason is acquitted by English justice of her crime. Trollope seems to suggest, at least in part, that this acquittal is because she is a titled lady. Her lawyer Mr. Furnival, in his closing remarks on her behalf, makes so little of the evidence presented against her that he suggests it could not convict a known felon, but even "'[w]ith strong evidence you could not have believed such a charge against so excellent a lady.'" Ultimately, Mr. Furnival tells the jury, "'[l]et us make what laws we will, they cannot take precedence of human nature.'"[384] Although he knows her to be guilty, Mr. Furnival defends her even on the basis of her character as a lady: she has a particular privilege of being disassociated from base behavior because of her social standing.

However, Trollope does not simply describe Mr. Furnival's choice to defend Lady Mason in transactional terms, nor does he describe Lady Mason as motivated to forge the contentious codicil by greed. Mr. Furnival and Lady Mason are in the category of "expected realist figures", to use O'Gorman's categories quoted above, and the moral conflicts they undergo are in contrast to the moral simplicity of their somewhat caricatured counterparts, like Chaffanbrass and Joseph Mason. Trollope's characterization of Lady Mason does not involve much, if any, humor. Her characterization is cast in serious terms as she is wracked by the moral dilemma in which she has placed herself. Trollope uses the course of the narrative to explore and explain the ways in which Lady Mason's nobility of bearing, her good manners, and the other codes of social and familial behavior by which she lives have a right to inspire our sympathies despite her violation of the law. Her characterization is nuanced in that, as John Kucich argues, "when Trollope apologizes for the moral deviations of characters like Lady Mason, the forger of *Orley Farm*, [. . .] he still

[384] Ibid., 2:328.

convicts them unequivocally on their dishonesty."[385] Similarly, Trollope both convicts and forgives Mr. Furnival of his complicity with Lady Mason. On the one hand, although he is a lawyer, he escapes the accusation of association with greed, even though he defends a woman who has all but admitted her guilt to him. Shirley Robin Letwin explains his "readiness to spend his valuable time and talents helping Lady Mason, for no reason other than a disinterested devotion to her, helps to establish Furnival's freedom from a servile professionalism and strengthens his claim to be considered a gentleman."[386] On the other hand, Mr. Furnival's rhetorical accomplishments resulting in a verdict of not-guilty for Lady Mason, as Pionke points out, provide "Trollope with his most pointed example of the gulf between law and truth."[387]

Lady Mason's step-son Joseph Mason is one of the other key peripheral characters whose characterization is primarily accomplished through humor. Humor in the narrative does a great deal to alienate the reader's sympathies from him. Mr. Joseph Mason of Groby Park is certainly technically a gentleman, although Sir Peregrine, a friend and neighbor (and later suitor) of Lady Mason's, would never "allow that [Joseph Mason] was a gentleman, or that he could by any possible transformation become one."[388] Although his inheritance, not including Orley Farm, was substantial indeed, Mr. Mason is adamant throughout the novel that what was his should not be interfered with. He was convinced that Orley Farm had been taken from him through deceit: "He wanted nothing that belonged to any one else, but he could not endure that aught should be kept from him which he believed to be his own."[389] Consequently, the dispute long ago over Orley Farm still rankled in his heart. However, even as the narrator gradually reveals that Joseph Mason is more sinned against than sinning in the legal case surrounding Orley Farm, Mr. Mason and his family are gradually revealed to be more sinning than sinned against in the primary vice critiqued by the novel: greed.

In between showdowns with Mr. Moulder, Mr. Dockwrath makes his trip to Groby Park to meet with Mr. Mason to recommend how he might initiate an investigation into the ownership of Orley Farm. After Mr. Dockwrath arrives and they have a satisfactory meeting, Mr.

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[385] John Kucich, *The Power of Lies: Transgression In Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 46.
[386] Shirley Robin Letwin, *The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 120.
[387] Pionke, "Navigating", 136.
[388] Anthony Trollope, *Orley Farm*, 1:17.
[389] Ibid., 1:64.

Dockwrath is invited to stay for lunch with his co-conspirator. Lunch at the Masons of Groby Park, however, is an uncertain affair. Mr. Mason was known for his "cupidity" in business affairs, but miserliness, the narrator explains, was a trait of which the whole family partook.[390] Of Mrs. Mason, the narrator sarcastically details: "Parsimony was her great virtue, and a power of saving her strong point."[391] It was especially in the matters of food and drink where Mrs. Mason's "virtue" was manifested: "When standing with viands before her, she had not free will over her hands", but would take for her own hoard any choicest pieces of food that came in her way.[392] In the Mason household, to keep the servants from being starved, they were granted wages for their board. The narrator explains that "Mr. Mason had been driven by sheer necessity to take this step, as it had been found impossible to induce his wife to give out sufficient food to enable the servants to live and work."[393] As the family sits at table with their guest Mr. Dockwrath,

> the covers were removed, John taking them from the table with a magnificent action of his arm which I am inclined to think was not innocent of irony. On the dish before the master of the house,—a large dish which must I fancy have been selected by the cook with some similar attempt at sarcasm,—there reposed three scraps, as to the nature of which Mr. Dockwrath, though he looked hard at them, was unable to enlighten himself.[394]

Here, as elsewhere, O'Gorman's observation about Dickensian language seems particularly fitting as Trollope's narrator exerts a conversational presence to juxtapose the mockery of the servant and the miserliness of his wealthy employers. Mr. Mason is furious at his wife for setting before his company this inadequate fare—knowing full well that whatever was absent from the table would be secreted away in a cupboard for Mrs. Mason's private dining later on. Mrs. Mason, hoping to allay the wrath of her husband, makes an attempt to argue for the food's sufficiency and acceptability, but Mr. Mason rejects her excuses and urges his guest to take bread and butter, rather than gnaw on the bones presented for consumption.

Notably, in addition to illustrating the greed and miserliness of the Mason family, Trollope's narrator also discusses this humorous scene in terms of relative privilege and gentility by asking: what behavior is expected of a lady or gentleman of rank? This humorous scene, like

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[390] Ibid., 2:126.
[391] Ibid., 1:64.
[392] Ibid., 1:78.
[393] Ibid.
[394] Ibid., 1:78–79.

the conflict between Moulder and Dockwrath, parodies the broader text's serious engagement with this question in relation to Lady Mason's behavior. Although Mr. Dockwrath was merely "an attorney from Hamworth", Mr. Mason is furious that this meal might impugn "his household honor and character as a hospitable English country gentleman."[395] The irony of Mr. Mason's outraged pride on the basis of his claim to gentility, in the broader context of *Orley Farm*, is that Mr. Mason, though perhaps imbued with pride in his privilege, lacks other gentlemanly attributes. Broadly in the novel, Trollope juxtaposes Lady Mason and her virtues with Mr. Mason's technical correctness but generally ungentle behavior.

At the close of the novel Trollope offers up the court's decision, but the reader also makes his or her decision as to who is deserving of punishment and who of protection or praise. After winning the court case, Lady Mason privately admits her guilt to her son Lucius who then insists that the property be turned over to Mr. Joseph Mason. But Mr. Mason is far from pleased. His attorneys adjure him: "'if you have a spark of generosity in you, you will accept the offer made to you without asking any question. By no such questioning can you do yourself any good,—nor can you do that poor lady any harm.'"[396] But Mason is unsatisfied, for "[t]he property was sweet, but that sweetness was tasteless when compared to the sweetness of revenge."[397] Consequently, the novel ends with Mr. Mason, in ownership of Orley Farm, laying out vast sums of money in an unsuccessful effort to regenerate a case against Lady Mason to establish her guilt. In addition to this expense, he is also faced with a lawsuit from his former crony Mr. Dockwrath. In an effort to disassociate himself from the distasteful Hamworth attorney, Mason had reneged on the promise he made to place Dockwrath in management of Orley Farm as a reward for his help. This legal battle, "in the end ruined the Hamworth attorney, and cost Mr. Mason more money than he ever liked to confess."[398] Thus, in the end when the reader perhaps ought to pity the Mason family for how they had been swindled by Lady Mason for so many years and not granted English justice, Mr. Mason's revengeful behavior alienates all the sympathy he might technically deserve.

In the humorous interactions and conflicts of Moulder, Mr. Dockwrath, and Joseph Mason, Trollope contrasts their relative moral simplicity with the complexity of Lady Mason's

[395] Ibid., 1:79.
[396] Ibid., 2:390.
[397] Ibid., 2:391.
[398] Ibid., 2:407.

moral entanglement. James Kincaid describes Trollope as a situational ethicist whose code centers around the undefined word and idea of "gentleman." He demonstrates in his novels, "[s]ituations of great complexity [that] may require a gentleman to behave in ways that appear odd, but we, as readers, are made to see the consistency of the moral logic."[399] In the case of *Orley Farm*, it is Lady Mason who, despite her deceit, is in the role of the gentleman and whose behavior the reader is asked to perceive as moral. Where humor is absent from her characterization and from the characterization of other central figures, it is notably present in the social conflicts surrounding the Mason case. Trollope uses these peripheral humorous scenes to mirror and give insight into the tangled problems at the heart of the narrative that explore the moral logic of Lady Mason's choices and behavior.

4.3 Hagridden Ladies

"Folly", Meredith writes in his "Essay on Comedy" (1877), "is the natural prey of the Comic, known to it in all her transformations, in every disguise."[400] It is particularly the foolish motivation to appear to be something that one is not that Meredith in his novel *Evan Harrington: Or, He Would Be a Gentleman* and Gaskell in her novel *Wives and Daughters: An Everyday Story* use humor to reveal. The folly that the humor used in these two texts focuses on is the desire to appear to belong in high society. In a particularly evocative characterization of this phenomena in nineteenth-century fiction, the writer C. S. Lewis in an essay entitled "The Inner Ring" explains that "Victorian fiction is full of characters who are hagridden by the desire to get inside that particular Ring which is, or was, called Society."[401] The desire to belong in society, "in that sense of the word", according to Lewis is, "snobbery."[402] It is the snobbery of appearing to belong to elevated society that is the prey of Meredith and Gaskell's use of humor. The humor that these authors use in their texts, while still relying upon incongruity to reveal what is worthy of ridicule, belongs, broadly, within a tradition of superiority theory. The incongruities of both texts are offered up to the reader as a social corrective. They both use humor as Meredith describes its uses in the "Prelude" to the *Egoist* (1879): it is for "the correcting of

[399] James R. Kincaid, *The Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 13.
[400] George Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy", in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 33.
[401] C. S. Lewis, "The Inner Ring", in *The Weight of Glory* (London: William Collins, 2013), 146.
[402] Ibid.

pretentiousness, of inflation, of dulness, and of the vestiges of rawness and grossness to be found among us. [Humor] is the ultimate civilizer, the polisher, a sweet cook."[403]

The most pronounced use of humor in *Wives and Daughters* is in the characterization of Mrs. Gibson, "as unmitigated a snob as ever existed on the earth" according to an anonymous critic in the *Saturday Review*.[404] The humor surrounding her characterization is specifically oriented toward ridiculing her desire to appear to be genteel. While Meredith's *Evan Harrington* is satirical throughout and the critique of social motivations appears in relation to a number of characters, Mrs. Gibson stands out within *Wives and Daughters* particularly because she is characterized through humor while most of the other characters are not. The greatest snob in *Evan Harrington* is the Countess de Saldar, formerly Louisa Harrington. Gaskell uses Mrs. Gibson and Meredith uses the Countess in some similar ways to ridicule the individual's desire to get "in" to society or to appear to be genteel. But Meredith also uses the Countess to satirize the aristocrats with whom she wants to get "in." The Countess, unlike Mrs. Gibson, is remarkably successful at pretending to be an aristocrat and is able to move through their ranks without them realizing she is an impostor. Through the Countess' ingenuity in passing as an aristocrat, Meredith also satirizes the aristocratic belief that they know their own, and that their manners cannot simply be adopted. Humor is used to reveal the disguised folly, to use Meredith's terms, of the motivations of the Countess and Mrs. Gibson: their shallow focus on appearances. The focused use of humor in relation to these two peripheral comic characters serves as a critique of behavior and motives that contrasts with the texts' exploration and validation of the motives of the central characters.

As Maureen T. Reddy observes,

> In *Wives and Daughters*, the social problem is actually the entire society itself, which Gaskell explores in terms of manners. The central question is this: How is the individual, especially the individual woman, to find a way to live in a society that seems hostile to individual desires, and in which members even of the *same* class cannot agree upon the proper relation of the individual to society, much less upon how one expresses that relationship in one's daily conduct.[405]

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[403] George Meredith, *The Egoist* (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1905), 3.
[404] Unsigned review of *Wives and Daughters*, by Elizabeth Gaskell, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 21, no. 543 (March 24, 1866): 361, Proquest.
[405] Maureen T. Reddy, "Men, Women, and Manners in *Wives and Daughters*", in *Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study of the Novel of Manners*, eds. Bege K. Bowers and Barbara Brothers (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), 68 (author's italics).

Wives and Daughters is another text that particularly fits Woloch's description quoted in the introduction to this chapter—balancing a focus on the interiority of its main figure Molly Gibson with the inclusion of a great variety of secondary characters. *Wives and Daughters* is a particularly remarkable text for its depiction of Molly's maturity from childhood to womanhood and her growth in her relationships. One of her key antagonists is Mrs. Gibson, against whose selfishness and obtuseness the reader is able to chart Molly's growing self-awareness and selflessness.

When Hyacinth Kirkpatrick, Mrs. Gibson to be, is introduced in *Wives and Daughters*, it is as the poor former governess of the local aristocracy.[406] Lady Cumnor explains to the local country doctor, Mr. Gibson, that "'[s]he went and married a poor curate, [. . .] And now he's dead, and left her a widow, and she is staying here; and we are racking our brains to find out some way of helping her to a livelihood without parting her from her child.'"[407] Initially, the aristocratic Lady Cumnor's caring but condescending attitude toward her governess offers Mrs. Kirkpatrick up as a figure to be pitied rather than a figure for mockery. Mr. Gibson, a long-term widower, later marries Mrs. Kirkpatrick for the sake of his motherless daughter Molly. Gaskell describes how he decides that Molly needs a mother, but is fairly perplexed as to where to look for a new bride: "Among his country patients there were two classes pretty distinctly marked: farmers, whose children were unrefined and uneducated; squires, whose daughters would, indeed, think the world was coming to a pretty pass, if they were to marry a country surgeon."[408] The future Mrs. Gibson, as the former governess for the aristocratic family at the Towers but not an aristocrat herself, is an educated and connected alternative. Mr. Gibson, without knowing a great deal more about her than Lady Cumnor's reports of her background and his observation of her refined appearance, proposes. When he does, "a little to his surprise, and a great deal to her own, she burst into hysterical tears: it was such a wonderful relief to feel that she need not struggle any more for a livelihood."[409] Initially Mrs. Gibson is presented as a relatively pitiable

[406] The setting for *Wives and Daughters* is in the 1820s, so some of the manners that Gaskell satirizes when she is writing in the 1860s are old-fashioned. However, it is notable that the political context of the 1820s forms a bookend to the 1860s, in that during the 1820s there was much debate about the First Reform Bill just as in the 1860s there was much debate about the Second Reform Bill. See Reddy, "Men, Women, and Manners", 68.
[407] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 42.
[408] Ibid., 135.
[409] Ibid., 140.

figure without any power or recourse to self-betterment besides this marriage to Mr. Gibson. But while "[h]er greatest triumph was to have married Dr. Gibson", as Coral Lansbury writes, it was "her greatest sorrow that so many people persist in reminding her of this singular good fortune."[410]

As noted in the previous chapter, the necessity of evoking pity for characters can complicate their relationship to humor. Thus, after Hyacinth Kirkpatrick is elevated to this more secure, respectable position of being Mrs. Gibson and removed from a potentially pitiable position, she is transformed into a character whose position of security makes her open to humorous interpretation and observation both from the narrator and other characters. On her first evening presiding over the Gibson home after the honeymoon, Mr. Gibson is induced to rush away on a medical call, and Mrs. Gibson, feeling lonely, summons her young step-daughter Molly for company. Mrs. Gibson complains to Molly, "'I think your dear papa might have put off his visit to Mr Craven Smith for just this one evening.'" Molly who was knowledgeable about her father's patients in their community replied "'Mr. Craven Smith couldn't put off his dying.'" Mrs. Gibson does not perceive that Molly's irony is directed at her and responds: "'You droll girl! [. . .] But if this Mr Smith is dying, as you say, what's the use of your father's going off to him in such a hurry? Does he expect any legacy, or anything of that kind?'"[411] Her coldhearted and unironic logic is astounding to Molly. Notably, Mrs. Gibson's unfeeling perspective on events and response to Molly requires no exaggeration or interpretation by the narrator to underscore, comically, her unwitting egoism. [412]

Gaskell's narrator, however, sometimes more pointedly intervenes to highlight the true nature of Mrs. Gibson's motives. Shortly after her marriage, the town of Hollingford holds a charity ball at Easter. The new Mrs. Gibson "spoke of it as her first appearance in society as a

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[410] Coral Lansbury, "Wives and Daughters", in *Elizabeth Gaskell*, Twayne's English Authors Series 371 (Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 114. Gale eBooks.
[411] Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, 209.
[412] Although not the focus of this chapter, it is worth noting that while Gaskell certainly relies upon her narrator to introduce and frame incongruity as humorous in *Wives and Daughters*, she is also particularly adept at introducing humor through juxtaposition in dialogue as in the above example. Winifred Gérin notes this relative narratorial absence in a broader context in her biography of Gaskell. She argues that "[t]he beauty of *Wives and Daughters* lies in the absence of all authorial comment, in the severance of all visible ties between creator and created [. . .]. And this respect for the independent lives of her characters, not fully achieved in her early novels, gives *Wives and Daughters* the extra dimension of real life that makes it her crowning achievement." *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 274.

bride." Soon all of her focus shifts to using the ball to introduce Molly and Cynthia into society, though the narrator wryly points out that "pretty nearly every one who was going to this ball had seen the two young ladies." But Mrs. Gibson, the narrator explains, was "aping the manners of the aristocracy as far as she knew them, [and] she intended to 'bring out' Molly and Cynthia on this occasion, which she regarded in something of the light of a presentation at Court."[413]

Mrs. Gibson is something of a Victorian reincarnation of Mrs. Bennet from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in that much of her role in the narrative's conflict and humor results from the mounting evidence that she has married above her social, emotional, and intellectual capacity.[414] Soon after their marriage, it quickly becomes apparent that Mr. and Mrs. Gibson's respective priorities in life and principles of behavior are incompatible, and the doctor's proclivity for sarcasm emerges increasingly in the direction of his oblivious second wife. While Austen's Mrs. Bennet is characterized by her relatively selfless, if misguided, maternal motivations to promote the marriage of her daughters into higher classes, Mrs. Gibson is more often characterized with motives born out of insecurity in her own position.

Like the characters of *Orley Farm*, Mrs. Gibson's ridiculed, petty motivations serve in contrast to the pathos in the characterization of figures around her: particularly her step-daughter Molly Gibson. As Molly's introduction into life with her new step-mother, the charity ball scene turns out to be representative of Mrs. Gibson's future behavior and response to events and people around her. Neither Molly nor her father are shown to be in the habit of particularly considering appearances, but they are secure in their places in their community. Lionel Trilling observes in his essay "Manners, Morals, and the Novel" (1947) that "[t]he dominant emotions of snobbery are uneasiness, self-consciousness, self-defensiveness, the sense that one is not quite real but can in some way acquire reality."[415] All three of these attributes are at the root of most of Mrs. Gibson's choices, which are oriented around the optics of gentility. For example, while her own daughter Cynthia and Mr. Gibson are away, Mrs. Gibson insists on having dessert served after the meal even though neither she nor Molly will eat it: "'But it looks well, and makes Maria [the maid] understand what is required in the daily life of every family of position.'"[416] This status symbol decadently displayed for the sake of a servant would never have occurred to Molly or

[413] Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, 274.
[414] Lansbury also notes the similarity between Mrs. Gibson and Mrs. Bennet. *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 114.
[415] Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel", 209–210.
[416] Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, 549.

Mr. Gibson before Mrs. Gibson's marriage into their family: neither, seemingly, did Maria fail to acknowledge the position of the family before she was compelled to bring out dessert for no one to eat. Mrs. Gibson demonstrates a self-conscious hyper-awareness of social conventions that is bewildering to Molly and Gaskell suggests, through humorous juxtaposition, parodic of good manners.

The humor surrounding Mrs. Gibson's characterization is predominantly derived from the juxtaposition between her perspectives and motives as opposed to those of other characters around her. One notable humorous contrast is drawn between Mrs. Gibson and another character deeply concerned with class distinctions and appearances, but from quite a different perspective: Squire Hamley. Because of her association with the Cumnors, the highest set in the community, Mrs. Gibson is somewhat disdainful of the local landowner Squire Hamley, even though the Hamley family had held their land, as the town believed, "'[e]ver since the Heptarchy.'"[417] The Hamleys do not belong in the social set that Mrs. Gibson wants to be seen to belong to, and Squire Hamley, in particular, demonstrates a different set of standards from Mrs. Gibson when it comes to manners and social behavior.

In some significant ways, Squire Hamley is shown to prioritize family and friendship over appearances, in contrast to Mrs. Gibson. For example, at one point, the Squire rushes to the Gibsons to beg Molly to visit his increasingly ill wife. The Squire confirms that he had already secured the permission of Molly's father and emphasizes Mrs. Hamley's urgent need, so Molly prepares to leave at once. But in Molly's charitable haste, she fails to seek the approval of her attendant step-mother. Taking immediate offense at not being consulted, Mrs. Gibson calls her back and stiffly informs the Squire that it will be impossible for Molly to leave with him just then. Mrs. Gibson coolly explains that Molly had made an earlier appointment elsewhere, and she was certainly obliged to keep it, for "'you must acknowledge that an engagement is an engagement.'"[418] In response, the hot-tempered and anxious Squire loudly demands, "'[d]id I ever say an engagement was an elephant, madam?'"[419] This sudden outburst is simultaneously shocking and ludicrous as the incredulous Squire interjects with the juxtaposition of engagements and elephants at the infuriating Mrs. Gibson. Moreover, this small scene underlines

[417] Ibid., 72.
[418] Ibid., 224.
[419] Ibid.

the differences in the Squire's and Mrs. Gibson's priorities. It is not the Squire who has failed to understand the true nature of fidelity to an engagement—it is rather Mrs. Gibson in her unfriendly insistence that manners should over-rule other more natural demands. After the Squire's departure, his request denied, Mrs. Gibson turns furiously to her step-daughter, and declares, "'I must never have you exposing me to the ill-manners of such a man again! I don't call him a squire; I call him a boor, a yeoman at best.'"[420] Notably, to assert her confidence in her own position of authority and judgment, Mrs. Gibson turns to the reduction of the Squire's social place.

Gaskell uses the contrast between Mrs. Gibson and the Squire to highlight Mrs. Gibson's inhuman dedication to defending her security in the appearance of her authority. However, the Squire is also deeply concerned with appearances and social belonging in other ways. When Molly is finally able to visit the Hamleys and stay with them during Mrs. Hamley's time of illness, they grow to love her as a daughter. But as soon as the Squire hears that one of his sons is traveling home, he is anxious that Molly should leave. For as he tells his wife,

> "All I know is, that it's a very dangerous thing to shut two young men of one and three and twenty up in a country-house like this with a girl of seventeen—choose what her gowns may be like, or her hair, or her eyes. And I told you particularly I didn't want Osborne, or either of them, indeed, to be falling in love with her. I'm very much annoyed."[421]

While these observations are humorous, the Squire's concerns underlying them are serious. And subsequently, these concerns about the social connections of his sons are not characterized with ridicule in the way that many of Mrs. Gibson's concerns about social connections are because the outcomes of some of the Squire's concerns are particularly tragic. Rather than Molly, Osborne eventually secretly marries someone who, from the Squire's perspective, is much worse than a local doctor's daughter: a French, Roman Catholic, former nursery maid called Aimée. Osborne and the Squire are estranged predominantly due to miscommunications and debt brought about by Osborne's secret wife. Eventually Osborne dies and Molly helps to reveal the existence of this secret wife and son to the Squire. The Squire, by the close of the text, is shown to have the ability to reform some of his thinking by accepting Aimée into his home and her and Osborne's son as his heir.

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[420] Ibid.
[421] Ibid., 112.

The tragedy of Osborne's death, as well as Mrs. Hamley's death earlier in the narrative, dictates that, to some extent, the Squire's concerns over class and appearances and his ultimate reformation are predominantly explored through pathos. In contrast, Mrs. Gibson's interaction with the text's tragedy provides only more evidence for her misalignment of priorities under the dominating motivation of social advancement. Since Osborne's marriage was kept a secret, Mrs. Gibson angles to get her daughter Cynthia married to him as the wealthy Squire's son and heir. However, when she hears that Osborne is sick, she immediately begins to promote a union between Cynthia and the Squire's younger son Roger: presuming that he will most likely inherit when Osborne dies. Once this engagement is accomplished, Mr. Gibson is disgusted to discover that Mrs. Gibson had shifted her efforts toward Roger after having overheard him in his medical capacity discussing Osborne's illness with another doctor.[422] He then expressly forbids any interference with Molly's romantic prospects. Only two chapters later, Gaskell's narrator describes how,

> Mrs Gibson, who felt that she had somehow lost her place in her husband's favour, took it into her head that she could reinstate herself if she was successful in finding a good match for his daughter Molly. She knew that he had forbidden her to try for this end, as distinctly as words could express a meaning; but her own words so seldom expressed her meaning, or if they did, she held to her opinions so loosely, that she had no idea but that it was the same with other people.[423]

Mrs. Gibson's does not, through the course of the text, grow in her understanding of the characters around her and their motivations. As Reddy puts it, "[f]or Mrs. Gibson, the world *is* merely appearance, and appearances are all that count: to appear genteel is to be genteel, in her way of thinking."[424] Unfortunately for Mrs. Gibson, as the humor in her characterization demonstrates, it is only to her that her choices appear genteel.

A more successful social chameleon, but one whose motives are also laid bare through humor, is Meredith's Louisa, the Countess de Saldar in *Evan Harrington*.[425] As Richard C.

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[422] Stoneman defends this choice within the boundaries of common sense: "Mrs Gibson justifies herself by an appeal to the 'unquestioned assumptions' [. . .] of a whole society which thought that a woman who failed to marry had 'failed in business.'" *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 115. Stoneman may be right in her assessment of the broader Victorian cultural standards by which Mrs. Gibson views her decision, but within the moral economy of *Wives and Daughter* the decision is not presented as laudable.
[423] Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, 447.
[424] Reddy, "Men, Women, and Manners", 78 (author's italics).
[425] Critics have noted the autobiographical features of *Evan Harrington*, in particular the use of some of Meredith's family members as models for characters. Donald Stone suggests the Countess was modeled

Stevenson has aptly summarized, the Countess, "is a marvelous rendition of a Cinderella who has married nobility, albeit in the form of a middle-aged, impoverished, and exiled count, and then dedicated her life to covering the tracks leading back to her humble origin."[426] The Countess is Evan's elder sister who has much in common with the anti-heroines Becky Sharp or Martha Barnaby discussed in the previous chapter. She is witty, suave, and her canny ability to deceive and manipulate is a source of a great deal of humor—as Meredith's narrator proclaims, she is "a lady who is at war with two or three of the facts of Providence, and yet will have Providence for her ally."[427]

Louisa and her brother, the titular Evan, were both born into the family of a tailor, the Great Mel, or Melchisedec. Louisa achieves the most fabulous marriage of the Great Mel's three daughters, to Señor Silva Diaz, Conde de Saldar of Portugal. After her marriage, her life's defining goal and purpose becomes to obscure any potential identification with her origins as a tailor's daughter.[428] In Meredith's humorous characterization of the Countess, there is a pointed duality throughout the text. The role of the Countess, on the one hand, is to satirize the social prejudice displayed around her. The narrator tells the reader, "[a]ccept in the Countess the heroine who is combating class-prejudice, and surely she is pre-eminently noteworthy."[429] However, the narrative throws into doubt the narrator's suggestion that the Countess is really interested in combatting class-prejudice in her life's pursuit to hide her origins and to be a part of high society. Thus, on the other hand, the Countess' own desires for distinction, empty as she knows they are, are also satirized in her characterization. For example, when Evan is seen by the Countess' maid to be in company with a tailor, the maid reports this to her mistress in surprise. The Countess, alarmed by the use of the term tailor in relation to her brother,

> jumped and complained of a pin. [. . .] "My brother is Charity itself," sighed the Countess. "He welcomes high or low." "Yes, but, my lady, a tailor!" Maria repeated, and

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after Meredith's Aunt Louisa. *Novelists in a Changing World: Meredith, James, and the Transformation of English Fiction in the 1880's* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), 103.
[426] Richard C. Stevenson, "Innovations of Comic Method in George Meredith's *Evan Harrington*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15, no. 2 (summer 1973), 313, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40755218.
[427] George Meredith, *Evan Harrington* (London: Archibald Constable, 1902), 216.
[428] According to Altick, the social status of small-scale tradesmen or craftsmen like tailors was unclear: "the Victorians were never sure to which station of life people in such occupations belonged." "The Sociology of Authorship: The Social Origins, Education and Occupations of 1,100 British Writers, 1800–1932", in *Literary Taste, Culture and Mass Communication*, eds. Peter Davidson, Rolf Meyerson and Edward Shils, vol. 10 *Authorship*, ed. Peter Davidson (Cambridge: Chadwick-Healey, 1978), 53.
[429] Meredith, *Evan Harrington*, 324.

> the Countess, agreeing with her scorn as she did, could have killed her. At least she would have liked to run a bodkin into her, and make her scream. In her position she could not always be Charity itself: nor is this the required character for a high-born dame: so she rarely affected it.[430]

Despite her awareness of her and Evan's origins, Meredith's narrator describes her as "agreeing with [the maid's] scorn" respecting tailors. The irony of this interaction operates thus on two levels. First, in that Maria is unaware that she is speaking to the daughter of a tailor, and, second, in that the Countess could simultaneously be the daughter of a tailor and despise people who are associated with tailors.

As the above example suggests, the primary impediment to the shared goal of the three Harrington sisters of obscuring their tailoring origins is their brother Evan: "How to make him a gentleman! That was their problem."[431] The solution determined upon is that the Countess will take Evan back with her to Portugal and put him in the way of meeting the young English heiress, Rose Jocelyn. Meredith's "comedy opens" as Evan and the Countess return from Portugal to England on the same ship with the Jocelyns and their fellow aristocrats.[432]

In the Countess' interactions with the aristocrats, the duality in her humorous characterization is even more strongly evident. While chatting with Rose and her aunt and uncle, the Melvilles, the Countess takes the opportunity to point to some of the standards of the appearances of gentility. She observes of a journalist, Mr. Redner, that he "'was so horridly vulgar; his gloves were never clean; I had to hold a bouquet to my nose when I talked to him [. . .] what woman can be civil to a low-bred, pretentious, offensive man?'"[433] Her aristocratic companions rejoin, suggesting his faults could be attributed to his origins:

> "He is the son of a small shopkeeper of some kind in Southampton, I hear." "A very good fellow in his way," said her husband. "Oh! I can't bear that class of people," Rose exclaimed. "I always keep out of their way. You can always tell them." The Countess smiled considerate approbation on her exclusiveness and discernment. So sweet a smile![434]

The Countess has an interest in highlighting the absence of genteel appearance in this journalist because a source of her assumed gentility is her own appearance. And in their thorough acceptance of the Countess on the basis of her appearance, the Melvilles and Rose are the objects

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[430] Ibid., 129.
[431] Ibid., 19.
[432] Ibid., 25.
[433] Ibid., 31.
[434] Ibid., 21.

of the narrative's satire. But, in a sense, as Joseph Moses points out, if "[o]ne extends a limited pardon to Rose's prejudice, founded on ignorance", because it is merely "the acceptance of a social prejudice", the Countess must also be granted some pardon for her deception.[435] In other words, the Countess' social advancement is based upon her insight into existing social prejudices, and she uses them to her advantage. While it is unfortunate that Rose holds these prejudices, without them the Countess would not have the opportunity to pass as an aristocrat.

In this example Meredith is still engaged in satirizing the hypocrisy of the Countess in her genuine disgust with the tradesman in question. The text's irony, operating on both levels, still condemns the Countess for, essentially, buying into her own falsehood. As canny and clever as the Countess is shown to be, the narrator continues to ridicule her hagridden desires. For example, after she and Evan have successfully hoodwinked the Jocelyns during their voyage, they are invited to visit their home at Beckley Court. The narrator sarcastically explains: "this lady experienced thrills of proud pleasure at the prospect of being welcomed at a third-rate English mansion."[436] As Natalie Michta explains, the narrative undertakes to expose "the snobbery of those who try to expose the Countess", but it simultaneously exposes "the petty snobbery of the Countess herself."[437]

While Mrs. Gibson's characterization stands out from the other means of characterization in *Wives and Daughters* as particularly humorous, *Evan Harrington*'s dominant is satire. Thus, while Evan's plight is presented with some pathos, his characterization is also accomplished through the narrator's satirical observations. Much like Mrs. Gibson's ridiculous social machinations are contrasted with Molly's purer motive and outlook, the Countess' wily maneuvering is in stark contrast to her brother Evan's tortured desires to be both honest and genteel. For example, in a parallel scene to that of the Countess and the Melvilles, the narrator describes Evan standing on the deck of the ship taking them back to England, contemplating with regret his lowly parentage. Rose joins him on deck and, in the course of conversation, obliviously makes a few cutting remarks about shopkeepers. Then Evan observes to her that he had been standing on the deck, gazing upon England, and hoping that

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[435] Joseph Moses, *The Novelist as Comedian: George Meredith and the Ironic Sensibility* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 155.
[436] Meredith, *Evan Harrington*, 144.
[437] Natalie Cole Michta, "The Legitimate Self in George Meredith's 'Evan Harrington'", *Studies in the Novel* 21, no. 1 (spring 1989): 52, Proquest.

> "I might never disgrace the name of an Englishman." "Now, that's noble!" cried the girl. "And I'm sure you never will. Of an English *gentleman*, Evan. I like that better." "Would you rather be called a true English lady than a true English woman, Rose?" "Don't think I would, my dear," she answered, pertly; "but, 'gentleman' always means more than 'man' to me." "And what's a gentleman, mademoiselle?" "Can't tell you, Don Doloroso. Something you are, sir," she added, surveying him. Evan sucked the bitter and the sweet of her explanation.[438]

The irony in the juxtaposition between reality and Rose's confidence in her class-based observations is again at play in this scene. But whereas the irony in Rose's observations in the scene with the Countess highlights their shared acceptance of social prejudice on the basis of appearance, Evan painfully perceives the inconsistency of her view point and of the social prejudice.

Evan initially plays the role the Countess has laid out for him and effectively wins Rose's love. But the course of the narrative describes his gradual conviction that he must own up to his tailoring. In contrast, the Countess is shown to go to greater and more daring lengths to hide their collective heritage as she continues to try to get "in" with the Jocelyns: "scaling the embattled fortress of Society."[439] Meredith's narrator describes with martial language her approach to gaining entry into this elevated circle.[440] She perceives that one of the aristocrats, Harry Jocelyn, suspects her brother after she observes him coldly refusing to bow to Evan in passing, and turning to his companion and saying, "'[f]ancy the snipocracy here—eh?'"[441] The Countess "was a born general" and immediately seeks out Harry and begins a shrewd verbal campaign.[442]

After flattering him with her awe at reports of his cricket prowess and his family connections, she inquiries about the great house at which they are all staying, Beckley Court. She suggests that of course it is he, Harry, who will inherit this estate. He demurs saying it will more likely go to his cousin Juliana rather than himself. Further to her enquiries he explains that

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[438] Meredith, *Evan Harrington*, 37 (author's italics).
[439] Ibid., 439.
[440] Norman Kelvin has argued that "[s]ociety, in *Evan Harrington*, is a battleground, as the form and details of the story make abundantly clear." *A Troubled Eden: Nature and Society in the Works of George Meredith* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 16. But J. M. S. Tompkins disagrees suggesting that to reduce Meredith's discussion of society to a war between the classes is to "flatten the idiosyncrasies of the novelist and his creatures." "On Re-reading *Evan Harrington*", in *Meredith Now: Some Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971) 125. My argument respecting the duality of the presence of irony in the Countess' characterization generally supports Tompkins' reading.
[441] Meredith, *Evan Harrington*, 153.
[442] Ibid., 143.

Beckley Court was purchased from the money acquired through his grandfather's speculation with oil. The Countess exclaims in surprise, "'[o]il! [. . .] I imagined Beckley Court to be your ancestral mansion. Oil!'" Harry responds in protest that oil is money, however the Countess has found her line of attack and pursues it, reasoning,

> "Let me see—oil! That, I conceive, is grocery. So, you are grocers on one side!" [. . .] "Am I leaning on the grocer's side, or on the lord's?" Harry felt dreadfully taken down. "One ranks with one's father," he said. "Yes," observed the Countess; "but you should ever be careful not to expose the grocer."[443]

After asserting her superiority through this condescending line of conversation, Harry then apologizes for his rudeness in entertaining and spreading rumors about her brother. In the end, the Countess has so thoroughly reversed the power of their positions that Harry is grateful to her and became "the happy slave of the Countess de Saldar."[444]

Despite the Countess' remarkable successes with the Jocelyns, Evan is the chink in her armor and ultimately his heritage is revealed to Rose. The Countess retreats to Portugal and, in her final act as a social chameleon, with an eye to social success in that sphere, converts to Catholicism. The Countess is granted the last word in the narrative in a letter to her sister Caroline where she explains the entire reorientation of her thinking on account of her new religion: "I am persuaded of this; that it is utterly impossible for a man to be a *true gentleman* who is not of the true Church. [. . .] your religion precludes any possibility of the being the *real* gentleman, and whatever Evan may think of himself, or Rose think of him, I *know the thing*!"[445]

Both the Countess and Mrs. Gibson stand out from the cast of characters in their respective novels. The Countess in *Evan Harrington* is characterized satirically along with most other characters in the text. However, some critics have suggested that, despite Meredith's title, the Countess is almost the novel's central character and that the humorous ingenuity with which she is drawn best fulfills the "comic spirit" that Meredith defines in his essay.[446] The Countess is an important means through which Meredith is able to engage humorously with the social dynamics he sets out to critique: both the snobbery of aristocrats as well as the snobbery of those

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[443] Ibid., 158–159.
[444] Ibid., 161.
[445] Ibid., 472 (author's italics).
[446] See Harry Blamires, *A Short History of English Literature* (London: Routledge, 2003), 318, Proquest Ebook Central; Margaret Tarratt, "'Snips', 'Snobs' and the 'True Gentleman' in *Evan Harrington*", in *Meredith Now: Some Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 108–109; Stone, *Novelists*, 119; Moses, *The Novelist*, 153.

who aspire to be aristocrats. Equally Mrs. Gibson stands out from the cast of *Wives and Daughters* because she alone amongst the central cast of characters is predominantly characterized through humor. Mrs. Gibson's singular characterization in *Wives and Daughters* serves as a kind of outline of what Gaskell offers up to the reader as unacceptable social behavior and motivation. To reinvoke Bergson from the introduction, "[t]o understand laughter, we must [. . .] determine the utility of its function, which is a social one."[447] The pointed use of humor in relation to these two characters, draws the reader's attention to what Meredith and Gaskell set out to criticize through them. Meredith and Gaskell turn to humor, particularly in the form of ridicule, to expose bad social behavior; humor in its corrective, critiquing function is, as Meredith put it, "the ultimate civilizer."[448]

4.4 An Aspiring Gentleman

According to V. S. Pritchett,

> the burning Victorian question, one that lasted out the century from Dickens (*Great Expectations*) to Shaw, Wells, Ford and Maugham[, was]: what is a gentleman? It is the obsessive preoccupation of the ever-expanding middle class [. . .] you have to show the gentry that you are more of a gentleman than any one of them really is. You have to show that you are *morally* superior.[449]

To re-cite Stott from this chapter's introduction, humor is "produced from the matter of dominant cultural assumptions and commonplaces."[450] One of the questions circulating in Victorian culture according to Pritchett was about the relationship between gentility and morality. Some of the ways in which *Orley Farm*, *Wives and Daughters*, and *Evan Harrington* are circling the themes of gentility and moral behavior have already been alluded to in the previous sections. For example, Mrs. Gibson and the Countess seek to pass as genteel ladies through various external signifiers of class; the virtuous but poor Evan seeks social elevation in order to marry the lady Rose; the Squire in *Wives and Daughters* must learn to value the qualities of the individual over his or her station or even religion after the death of his son Osborne; and

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[447] Bergson, "Laughter", 119–120 (author's italics).
[448] Meredith, *The Egoist*, 3.
[449] V. S. Pritchett, *George Meredith and English Comedy: The Clark Lectures for 1969* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), 75–76 (author's italics); David Daiches also observes, "the great theme of the eighteenth and often of the nineteenth century novelist is the relation between gentility and virtue." *Literary Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), 35.
[450] Stott, *Comedy*, 8.

Anthony Trollope questions the qualities implied by social elevation through the dubious character of Joseph Mason and the immoral choices of Lady Mason. But as Pritchett indicates, one text in particular from the Victorian period stands out in its engagement with the question of what constitutes gentility: *Great Expectations*. This section demonstrates how humor is one of the central means by which Dickens interrogates this cultural question through the course of the narrative of *Great Expectations*.

In the 1862 article cited in this chapter's introduction, Margaret Oliphant further argued that Dickens was "one of the first popular writers who brought pictures of what is called common life into fashion."[451] One of these pictures incorporates *Great Expectations*' Pip, who is granted unexpected access to affluence and society. Raised by his sister and apprenticed to his blacksmith brother-in-law, Pip's earliest years are far from any association with gentility or instruction in the manners of society. It is through Pip's role as an outsider to gentility that Dickens explores what it means to be a gentleman after Pip's unexpected receipt of riches. In particular, one of the central sources of incongruity in *Great Expectations* is of the hero Pip's autodiegetic narration and the shifting focalization from the perspective of young, ignorant Pip versus the grown-up, reflective narrator-Pip. The narrator-Pip's focus on the conflicts between young-Pip's expectations, notions of gentility, and appropriate social behavior versus the behavior and evident expectations of the characters around him is rife with incongruity. Dickens varies the framing of these incongruities between humor and tragic irony as Pip grows and his insight into his circumstances and his place in his community matures. To contextualize how Dickens is engaging with the question of what a gentleman or gentility is and the role that humor plays in that definition, this section places examples from *Great Expectations* in dialogue with the other texts from the 1860s discussed in this chapter. This section compares the presence and absence of humor in *Great Expectations* to corresponding characters, scenes, and details from the other texts as they comment upon the relationship between gentility and morality.

Most directly, Dickens echoes Pritchett's observation of gentlemen in Victorian literature in *Great Expectations* through the character Mr. Pocket, who believes that "'no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in manner.'" According to Mr. Pocket, "'no varnish can hide the grain of the wood; and [. . .] the more varnish

[451] Oliphant, "Sensation Novels", *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 1:257.

you put on, the more the grain will express itself.'"[452] Mr. Pocket's observation is, in a way, a thesis statement upon which *Great Expectations* meditates through its various characters, and predominantly through Pip. As a young boy, Pip is introduced to a higher rung of society than that into which he was born when he is taken to Satis House by his sycophantic Uncle Pumblechook. Upon his arrival, Pip is immediately exposed to a different standard of behavior and appearance when he meets the "immensely rich and grim lady" Miss Havisham.[453] Young-Pip is without a clue "why on earth I was going to play at Miss Havisham's, and what on earth I was expected to play at."[454] At this house he is introduced to Miss Havisham's haughty, adopted daughter Estella. When he and Estella are playing cards to please Miss Havisham, Estella exclaims over his "'coarse hands [. . .] And [. . .] thick boots!'" and laughs at him for calling the knave cards "'Jacks.'"[455] While these and similar expressions of disdain awaken in Pip a sense shame and uncertainty, narrator-Pip describes his young self's dawning awareness of his own ignorance humorously: "I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair. Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious and I caught it."[456] He observes later that the outcome of these experiences are that he has become "'[d]issatisfied, and uncomfortable, and— what would it signify to me, being coarse and common, if nobody had told me so!'"[457] Notably, all of Pip's early exposure to gentility and genteel manners are to people who regard wealth and refined appearance, rather than any particular moral qualities, as genteel. When Pip sets out to live as a gentleman later in life upon receipt of his mysterious inheritance, it is clear that, to some extent, he has absorbed and adopted some of these early examples of how to regard and define gentility as represented by refined appearance and condescending manners.

In *Wives and Daughters* one of the most obvious commentaries on the qualities of gentility is through the humorous characterization of Mrs. Gibson as discussed in the previous section. However, in the depiction of Mrs. Gibson, Gaskell is predominantly pointing to her failures of understanding and lack of success in her inordinate focus on surface-level

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[452] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, eds. Graham Law and Adrian J. Pinnington (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), 212.
[453] Ibid., 87.
[454] Ibid., 88.
[455] Ibid., 95.
[456] Ibid.
[457] Ibid., 161.

characteristics: the appearance of gentility in dress and manners. But Gaskell provides some other important examples in her broader commentary on gentility through other characters. The most detailed portrayal of the positive qualities of gentility is in the character Lady Harriet, Molly Gibson's friend and a local aristocrat from the Towers.

While in Pip's first exposure to high society through Miss Havisham he receives the impression that to be genteel is to be haughty and unkind, Gaskell shows how Lady Harriet's particular respectfulness and sensitivity to others derive, to some extent, from her social position. Like Dickens in his example of Pip's introduction to gentility, Gaskell also employs humor to describe the conflicting expectations around social behavior when representatives of various classes come together at the Hollingford Easter ball. Lady Harriet and the Cumnors arrive particularly late and the narrator observes that "[e]veryone with any pretensions to gentility was painfully affected by [their] absence [. . .]; the very fiddlers seemed unwilling to begin playing a dance that might be interrupted by the entrance of the great folks."[458] When the Tower people do finally arrive, Mrs. Goodenough, a middle-class lady who lives in Hollingford, is tremendously annoyed to find that the visiting duchess is far from resplendent. She exclaims, "'[s]uch a shabby thing for a duchess I never saw; not a bit of a diamond near her! They're none of 'em worth looking at except the countess [. . . and] they're not worth waiting up for till this time o'night.'"[459] While making this objection, Mrs. Goodenough had not observed that Lady Harriet had left the circle of aristocrats and was standing nearby greeting Molly. Upon hearing the complaint, Lady Harriet turns to introduce herself and the startled Mrs. Goodenough immediately apologizes: "'Deary me, your ladyship! I hope I've given no offense! But, you see—that is to say, your ladyship sees, that it's late hours for such folk as me, and I only stayed out of my bed to see the duchess, and I thought she'd come in diamonds and a coronet.'"[460] Not only is Lady Harriet not offended, but she somewhat facetiously concedes Mrs. Goodenough's point and promises that "'if ever I am a duchess, I'll come and show myself to you in all my robes and gewgaws. Good night, madam!'"[461] Although this facetious promise and Lady Harriet's manner is enough to assuage Mrs. Goodenough's discontent, the more significant outcome of this interaction is that Lady Harriet perceives that her people's lateness has been

[458] Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, 332.
[459] Ibid., 334.
[460] Ibid.
[461] Ibid., 335.

taken to be disrespectful by the townsfolk. She immediately sets about making reparations for the offense by inducing all of her aristocratic connections to dance with various members of the lower classes. Finding her brother she announces that "'[y]ou must go dance with some of the townspeople, and I'll ask Sheepshanks to introduce me to a respectable young farmer.'"[462] Gaskell suggests that while Lady Harriet's approach to making amends is fairly ludicrous it is also appropriate to address the perceived offense. Although Lady Harriet is aware that what she is making all of her friends and relations do is fairly silly, she also makes these arrangements with some degree of dedication as she sincerely desires to maintain the goodwill of her neighbors.

The relationship between morality and gentility are not the focus of *Wives and Daughters* in the way they are in *Great Expectations*. However, through Lady Harriet, as well as some other characters, Gaskell makes a fairly clear statement about the higher value of the intent of the heart as opposed to the haughty manners characters like Mrs. Gibson or Miss Havisham value. Whereas young Estella's condescension in *Great Expectations*, for example, is revealed in her desire to put Pip down, Lady Harriet's condescension is to act in such a way as to elevate those around her: she does not degrade herself by condescending to dance with a respectable farmer, but rather her condescension elevates them both. As she explains to Molly, the habit of only referring to people who do not labor as gentlemen is just a way of speaking in her community. But these distinctions of vocabulary are "'only on the surface.'"[463] What is manifest throughout the novel in Lady Harriet's behavior in her interactions with other characters below her in rank, and in particular toward Molly, is that she is genteel at heart.

For much of *Great Expectations*, Pip is not focused on the quality of his motives or the state of his heart and, not unlike Mrs. Gibson, is primarily concerned with the appearance of gentility. He eventually stops going to Satis House when he is apprenticed to his brother-in-law Joe as a blacksmith. Four years into this apprenticeship, he is sought out by the lawyer Mr. Jaggers who informs him "'that he has great expectations [. . .] that he will come into a handsome property. Further, that it is the desire of the present possessor of that property, that he be immediately removed from his present sphere of life and from this place, and be brought up as

[462] Ibid., 337.
[463] Ibid., 197.

a gentleman.'"[464] Pip presumes, as does his community, that this anonymous endowment is from Miss Havisham: a perception which she encourages to spite her relations. As Pip transitions into his new, monied life in London, he begins to seek out two primary means of being perceived as a gentleman: material goods and genteel manners.

Pip the narrator, as he depicts these youthful pursuits, particularly relies upon humor to illustrate young-Pip's ignorance as to how gentlemen behave. Pip's primary instructor in his new life turns out to be the "pale young gentleman" who he had met early on at Satis House, Herbert Pocket.[465] Herbert is one of the relations who Miss Havisham sought to distress by seeming to choose Pip as her heir. When these two young men meet again in London, Pip and Herbert become fast friends. While Herbert is relatively poor, he possesses kindness and generosity of manner as well as high birth. And while Pip values Herbert's personal virtues as a friend, the qualities that he sets out to learn from his genteel contemporary are superficial rather than moral. Pip indicates to Herbert that it would be a great assistance to him to be instructed in the elements of etiquette of which he is ignorant, and Herbert begins this instruction with a goodwill that leaves Pip unable to be embarrassed or angry.

As Herbert tells Pip, who he has now dubbed with the moniker Handel, all he knows about Miss Havisham and Estella's histories, he cuts-off intermittently to gently recommend some revisions in Pip's manners:

> "in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth—for fear of accidents—and that while the fork is reserved for that use, it is not put further in than is necessary. It is scarcely worth mentioning, only it's as well to do as other people do. Also, the spoon is not generally used over-hand, but under"; "Take another glass of wine, and excuse my mentioning that society as a body does not expect one to be so strictly conscientious in emptying one's glass, as to turn it bottom upwards with the rim on one's nose"; "Now, I come to the cruel part of the story—merely breaking off, my dear Handel, to remark that a dinner-napkin will not go into a tumbler." Why I was trying to pack mine into my tumbler, I am wholly unable to say.[466]

The private lessons that Herbert offers Pip on genteel behavior form a catalog of social faux pas revolving around table manners. But Dickens also uses humor to depict Pip's attempts to demonstrate his newly adopted gentility in more public, performative ways.

In addition to modifying his table manners, Pip also begins to spend his money on what

[464] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 270.
[465] Ibid., 124.
[466] Ibid., 210; 211; 211.

he supposes genteel people spend their money on. Pip furnishes his and Herbert's apartment "in some quite unnecessary and inappropriate way or other" and takes pleasure in knowing that he occupies "a few prominent pages in the books of a neighbouring upholsterer."[467] He also hires a young boy to be his servant. However, because Pip spends his time in London doing nothing, in true gentlemanly disaffection, he has no commissions to send the boy on. At one point, Pip sends this boy, who he has dubbed the Avenger, to watch a play in order to keep him busy: "A better proof of the severity of my bondage to that taskmaster could scarcely be afforded, than the degraded shifts to which I was constantly driven to find him employment. So mean is extremity, that I sometimes sent him to Hyde Park corner to see what o'clock it was." [468] Like Mrs. Gibson discussed in the last section, Pip's relationship to his servant becomes performative, and he spends most of his time trying to "find him a little to do and a great deal to eat; and with both of those horrible requirements he haunted my existence."[469] Once again, like Mrs. Gibson, Pip is ill at ease in his precarious position in society because of his awareness that, rather than being a gentleman, he is only presenting himself as such.

With Pip, these behaviors are all put on, they are "'only on the surface'" as Lady Harriet explained them to Molly. But unlike Lady Harriet, what lies beneath Pip's surface attempts to look like a gentleman is not yet the true gentility Mr. Pocket described. The unfortunate but true grain of Pip's heart emerges beneath all of the varnish of fine goods and particular manners when his brother-in-law Joe comes to visit him in London. Before Pip's introduction to Satis House, the revelation of his inheritance, and his departure for London, Joe was all and all to him, and they were "fellow-sufferers" under the rule and wrath of Mrs. Joe, Joe's wife and Pip's sister.[470] At this point in his established life in London, however, narrator-Pip explains that, if the ungrateful young-Pip "could have kept him away by paying money, [he] certainly would have paid money."[471] Dickens uses Joe's visit to highlight all of Pip's developing pretensions to gentility and juxtaposes these affectations with Joe's unaffected gentleness. After Joe is announced by Pip's young Avenger, Pip and Joe have a formal, awkward reunion. When Herbert is introduced, Joe, regarding the three young men, is uncertain about the respective roles of the

[467] Ibid., 248.
[468] Ibid., 275.
[469] Ibid., 248.
[470] Ibid., 44.
[471] Ibid., 248.

three together and in paying his compliments "so plainly denoted an intention to make [Pip's servant] one of the family, that I frowned it down and confused him more."[472] Pip receives Joe without warmth and with some petulance, and, perceiving Pip's embarrassment, Joe behaves with a nervous desire to please. Trying to minimize his intrusion in the room, Joe, lays his hat "on an extreme corner of the chimney-piece, from which it afterwards fell off at intervals" and, each time it fell, Joe correspondingly leapt up and replace it on that same precarious edge.[473] Although by this point Pip may look like a gentleman and may have enough of the manners of gentility sufficient to cow Joe, Joe's presence is a material reminder to Pip of his origin in the smithy: that these trappings of gentility are merely purchased and his manners are adopted.

This reunion sequence between Joe and Pip is full of incongruity as Dickens underlines Pip's hypocrisy in his coldness and condescension to Joe. But Joe does not accuse Pip of hypocrisy, and modestly reminds him that "[y]ou won't find half so much fault in me if, supposing as you should ever wish to see me, you come and put your head in at the forge window and see Joe the blacksmith, there, at the old anvil, in the old burnt apron, sticking to the old work."[474] This scene of incongruity is one in which Pip at the moment is not able to perceive his own fault. However, the reflecting narrator-Pip, who knows the true origin of young-Pip's wealth, explains how "I had neither the good sense nor the good feeling to know that this was all my fault."[475] Notably, while this scene of incongruity is painful, the distance that narrator-Pip has to these events results in a focalization that also frames the incongruities in Pip's arrogant and Joe's nervous behavior as humorous.

While Dickens emphasizes the virtues that Pip lacks in his pursuit of gentility and of his blindness to what he lacks, Meredith, in *Evan Harrington*, conversely emphasizes Evan's fitness, both morally and in bearing, for the role of gentleman as well as the blindness of society in its unwillingness to admit him to their ranks. Evan, in *Evan Harrington*, has, in some ways, the opposite set of needs to Pip. Although the son of a tailor, Evan is well-educated and well-dressed and is generally perceived to be a gentleman, for "Harrington had the look of one."[476] What Evan is lacking, according to his mercenary sister the Countess, were "two things—a title or money.

[472] Ibid., 251.
[473] Ibid.
[474] Ibid., 254.
[475] Ibid., 252.
[476] Meredith, *Evan Harrington*, 125.

He might have all the breeding in the world; he might be as good as an angel but without a title or money he was under eclipse almost total."[477] Although, as discussed in the last section, the Countess is, in many ways, the most interesting character in *Evan Harrington*, it is Evan whose pursuit of gentility the narrative principally follows. If the Countess in her machinations embodies what Meredith critiques, Evan conversely embodies what Meredith lauds through the text: gentility at heart.

While Dickens varies his framing of incongruity in *Great Expectations* between humor and tragedy, Meredith's framework, as discussed in the last section, is predominantly satirical. In one example in particular, Meredith highlights the humorous inconsistencies of looking like a gentleman without being raised a gentleman and without the corresponding financial assets. As Evan sets out for his father's funeral, the coach on which he had booked passage leaves without him. As a consequence, he engages a private vehicle to unite him speedily with his originally booked seat. The postillion driving in pursuit of the other carriage assumes Evan is a gentleman, noting what he considers the external symbols of gentility in Evan's bearing: "a firm voice, a brief commanding style, an apparent indifference to expense, and the inexplicable minor characteristics, such as polished boots, and a striking wristband, and so forth, which will show a creature accustomed to step over the heads of men."[478]

After many hours of driving but not catching the other coach, Evan inquires what fee has accumulated thus far, afraid he will be unable to meet it. The postillion assures him that the cost required for going further will not be outwith the means of a gentleman. To the postillion's surprise, however, Evan then insists on disembarking and declares that he will walk the rest of the way. As he pays the fee, Evan discovers that he has too little remaining in his purse to give the man an appropriate tip. After some hesitation, he decides the right thing to do will be to offer the man the only coin he has left. The pride of the postillion is piqued upon being offered what he considers an insultingly low gratuity and he demands "'[t]hat's what you're goin to give me for my night's work? [. . .] A scabby sixpence? [. . .] now, was we to change places, I couldn't a' done it! I couldn't a' done it!'"[479] The narrator tells the reader what Evan, given his upbringing, could not know: "The powers who wait on gentleman had only helped the pretending youth to

[477] Ibid., 23.
[478] Ibid., 49.
[479] Ibid., 53.

try him. A rejection of the demand would have been infinitely wiser and better than this paltry compromise. The postillion would have fought it: he would not have despised his fare."[480] What Meredith's narrator seeks to point out is that a born and raised gentleman would know how to act in this moment, and, correspondingly, the postillion, accustomed to serving gentlemen, knows what to expect from a gentleman. Unfortunately, as neither a gentleman nor the servant of gentlemen, Evan does not know how to maintain his façade.

Ashamed, Evan admits to the slighted man that the sixpence he has offered him is his last. With this admission, the power dynamic suddenly and ludicrously shifts as the coachman realizes that he is dealing with someone who is much closer to his own financial footing. But the postillion also realizes, by the humility of this admission, that Evan is not one who is "accustomed to step over the heads of men."[481] Unexpectedly, the power to act nobly is thus transferred to the man in the lower class as he declares that Evan should take the tip money back and instead of walking the rest of the way to his father's funeral, that he should "'ride when you can, and you walks when you can. Lord forbid I should rob such a gentleman as you!'"[482] Part of the humor of this scene lies in the incongruity of this reversal. Suddenly a man who seemed to be a gentleman is proved not to be, and is then forced to accept the noble charity of a coachman. But the other source of humor is the narrator's juxtaposition of Evan's interiority, his failure to know how to act in order to be perceived as a gentleman, with the expectations of the postillion.

Like Pip, Evan's seeming gentility is only a varnish: it consists in manners and clothes. In the scene between Pip and Joe, the varnish of manners and clothes only serve to reveal Pip's pride and condescension. Whereas in this scene between Evan and the postillion, beneath Evan's varnish of manners and good clothes is revealed a true, moral gentility in his sincere attempt to treat the postillion with respect. It is only when the postillion's assumptions are overturned, and Evan is proved not to be a gentleman in the conventional sense, that the postillion asserts with conviction that Evan is a gentleman.[483] Although *Evan Harrington*'s narrator wryly observes

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[480] Ibid.
[481] Ibid., 49.
[482] Ibid., 53.
[483] As Stone observes, however, the messaging in *Evan Harrington*, in its overall plotting, is inconsistent: "The novel is flawed in conception as a result of Meredith's desire for his hero to face the truth of his birth but also to be rewarded in the eyes of society for having done so. What begins as a satire directed against the accepted view of the gentleman goes to pieces as Evan turns out to be a gentleman in fact. The attentive reader is treated to the rather uninteresting heroine's discovery that her beloved is a gentleman by nature." *Novelists*, 102.

that, "[m]oney is the clothing of a gentleman", Meredith is challenging a definition of gentility that is based on wealth or manners and instead is outlining a standard for social value that is founded on moral behavior.[484]

Dickens, in his exploration of the relationship between morality and gentility through *Great Expectations*, varies his framing of incongruity between humor and tragedy. One particularly notable use of incongruity in *Great Expectations*, toward its close, is of peripetia. According to Aristotle, peripetia involves a discovery, or a revelation of information, that involves a reversal of the expected outcome of the plot.[485] Peripetia is a form of incongruity and, though it is commonly associated with tragedy, it can be framed as humorous or tragic. The discovery that leads to the reversal of Pip's fortunes occurs when it is revealed that it is Magwitch, the convict who he met as a child, not Miss Havisham, who is the source of Pip's access to life as a gentleman.

Pip's moment of peripetia in his journey to discovering what a gentleman is, or the kind of gentleman he wants to be, is comparable to the character arc of Lucius Mason of Anthony Trollope's *Orley Farm*. Broadly, Lucius' narrative in *Orley Farm* is, in significant ways, the inverse of Pip's in *Great Expectations*. While Lucius grew up with wealth and a confidence in his place in society, Pip is an orphan and is raised by his sister and Joe. While Lucius has no cause to doubt his rights to his wealth and to his position within his community, doubt is planted in Pip's mind as to his fitness for his surroundings when wealth is given to him under mysterious circumstances. Pip presumes that his patron is genteel, but he enters society without certainty as to his rights to be there. Lucius, however, takes his aristocratic lifestyle for granted. At the end of both texts, both Pip and Lucius learn that their wealth is connected to criminality: Lucius' was gained through the criminal acts of his mother and Pip's by the generosity of an exiled convict. The pretensions and expectations of both characters are punctured through these revelations.

In comparing the trajectories of Lucius and Pip's respective fates, the reversals and outcomes broadly correspond to the structures of classical tragedy versus comedy. When Lucius

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[484] Meredith, *Evan Harrington*, 56. Notably, both of these texts were written by authors whose less than aristocratic origins parallel their primary characters. Dickens was the son of a clerk and had been obliged to work in a blacking factory for a period of his early life while his father was in the Marshalsea debtor's prison, and Meredith, like Evan, was the son and grandson of tailors: see, Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 20–24; and David Williams, *George Meredith: His Life and Lost Love* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), 1–4.

[485] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996), 18–19.

is told at the end of *Orley Farm* that his inheritance has been achieved through forgery, the outcome is chaos: he is estranged from his mother, his property, his fiancé, and his place within his community and moves abroad. Perhaps considering its unharmonious, tragic outcome, Lucius' peripheral narrative is told predominantly without humor. In contrast, Dickens uses the disclosure of the origins of Pip's wealth to bring about his moral reformation and reunion and harmony with his community. Perhaps because the mature narrator-Pip knows that young-Pip has this harmony to look forward to, even many of the scenes of relative anguish for young-Pip are focalized with some humor.

When Magwitch presents himself to Pip, the juxtaposition between Pip's grand assumptions and the sobering reality as to the origins of his wealth are a source of suffering to him. Yet the narrator-Pip in his focalization of the scene heavily leans upon the acute ironies of the juxtaposition that serve as almost a deserved comeuppance for his youthful arrogance. Magwitch crows in triumph upon seeing Pip: "'And this,' said he, dandling my hands up and down in his, as he puffed at his pipe; 'and this is the gentleman wot I made! The real genuine One!'"[486] He gleefully considers how his money has fathered a more gentlemanly figure than many who were born to it and joyously itemizes the external trappings that, to him, indicate Pip's elevation:

> "Lookee here!" he went on, taking my watch out of my pocket, and turning towards him a ring on my finger, while I recoiled from his touch as if he had been a snake, "a gold 'un and a beauty: *that's* a gentleman's, I hope! A diamond all set round with rubies; *that's* a gentleman's, I hope! Look at your fine linens; fine and beautiful! Look at your clothes; better ain't to be got! And your books too," turning his eyes round the room, "mounting up, on their shelves, by hundreds! And you read 'em; don't you?"[487]

As Magwitch looks around himself detailing and counting up all of these external indications of gentility, internally all of Pip's hopes and ideas around what this fortune might mean are overthrown.

Although Pip has known all along that his access to gentility has been purchased, the origin of that money changes what being a gentleman means to him. Not unlike Evan's motivations in relation to Rose, Pip's desire to conform to and belong to the higher sphere into which he is introduced by Miss Havisham and by his unexpected inheritance is primarily motivated by his growing love for Estella. His presumption that Miss Havisham was his

[486] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 355.
[487] Ibid., 346–347 (author's italics).

benefactress gave birth to the supposition that he was intended by Miss Havisham to marry Estella. In a strange twist of fate, Pip also discovers that Estella, who for so long symbolized all that Pip wanted to gain by becoming a gentleman, is Magwitch's daughter. However, after all of these revelations, Pip's disillusionment forces him to see the trappings of wealth as so much varnish. This understanding precipitates his moral reformation. After Magwitch is re-arrested, a humbled Pip, with both gratitude and pity, is by his side as he dies in prison. Finally, Pip returns to his village to repent for his snobbish treatment of his old friend and fellow-sufferer Joe.

In 1862 Sir James Fitzjames Stephen seeking to define the term "Gentlemen" in an editorial for *Cornhill Magazine*, argued that

> in the present day, the word implies the combination of a certain degree of social rank with a certain amount of the qualities which the possession of such rank ought to imply; but there is a constantly increasing disposition to insist more upon the moral and less upon the social element of the word.[488]

All four texts considered in this chapter, and written around the same period as Stephen's article, support the trend he observes and, directly and indirectly, emphasize a "moral and less" a social understanding of gentility. Significantly, many of these examples turn to humor to express that moral understanding of gentility. But the most directly, cohesively, and humorously expressed redefinition of gentility is found in *Great Expectations*.

Notably, in *Great Expectations* it is in a forge rather than in a great house that Dickens places his foremost example of the gentle-man in the character of Joe. Ironically, by the close of the narrative, to prove his gentility Pip must leave society and London and make a pilgrimage to the forge: not permanently, but to achieve a redemptive forgiveness from Joe. This outward act signifies an inner change: he has become a true gentleman at heart. He is perhaps then, as Pritchett puts it, "more of a gentleman than any one" in that he demonstrates by the close of the narrative through his reformation that he is "*morally* superior."[489]

Conclusion

Humor, as Meredith saw it, was bound up in the social world: it needs "matter and an audience" and the social world fulfills both requirements.[490] As noted in the introduction to this

[488] [Sir James Fitzjames Stephen], "Gentlemen", *Cornhill Magazine* 5, no. 27 (March 1862): 327, Proquest.
[489] Pritchett, *George Meredith*, 75–76 (author's italics).
[490] Meredith, "Essay on Comedy", 3.

chapter, because humor is derived from the social world and built for an audience, it provides a particular kind of insight into the context of its creation and reception. As Meredith explains, "[t]he comic poet is in the narrow field, or enclosed square, of the society he depicts; and he addresses the still narrower enclosure of men's intellects, with reference to the operation of the social world upon their characters."[491] Meredith's claim for humor is that it addresses its contemporary environs and is an effective means of prying into the nature of the relationship between the individual and society. Because of the richness of confusion in expectations around appropriate social behavior in these novels, these four authors particularly turn to humor to depict the conflicts and juxtapositions between individuals and groups as they jostle together in society. Within these four novels and the limited timeframe of the early to mid 1860s, humor points to contemporary concerns around the abuse of privilege, it critiques the motives of social climbers, and emphasizes the moral over the social understanding of gentility.

The next chapter continues to focus on what themes humor in Victorian novels addresses and why humor is used to depict these themes. In this chapter, I have alluded to a number of ways in which the humor used in the novels in question engages in critique or serves as a corrective in relation to the social problems or individual vices their narratives depict. The next chapter considers with more detail how humor is used to engage in argument and the kinds of topics around which authors used humor to make arguments through narrative.

[491] Ibid., 46.

Chapter 5: Humor as Persuasion

5.1 Introduction

In an article discussing Thackeray's works for *The Morning Chronicle* in 1848, George Henry Lewes, the Victorian literary critic, discusses at some length the particular capacity that humor has to persuade. He explains that the use of humor can be one of the most effective means of engaging in argument because, in contrast to a serious essay or story, the reader is not anticipating that he or she will encounter persuasion and is therefore not on his or her guard against it: "The laughter passes, but the idea remains: it has gained admittance in our unsuspecting minds, and is left there unsuspected."[492]

When literature undertakes to explore a moral or social question through its characters and narrative, it offers its readers a means of engaging with that question through an aesthetic experience. This aesthetic experience produces a distinct kind of knowledge or information in relation to that moral or social question. In the essay "Image and Imagination", C. S. Lewis argues, using the example of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, that

> When we know Lear through the play, we know that if such things were said and done and suffered in the real world it would be by a man of such and such a kind. And this is a bit of knowledge about human nature, differing not at all from that knowledge of human nature which we use in our daily life.[493]

This engagement through the experience of literature is a form of persuasion: the reader must be satisfied that Lear is plausible if he or she are to be persuaded that "if such things were said and done and suffered in the real world" it would be by a man like him.

While Lewis' example of this aesthetic experience leading to a kind of knowledge is drawn from tragedy, engagement with comedy or humorous literature is equally likely to result in the kind of knowledge he describes. However, humor's manner of inviting readers to engage with and experience moral, social, and philosophical questions aesthetically—that is through literature—has certain distinctive characteristics as a mode of persuasion. George Lewes attributes almost coercive persuasive powers to humor, and, in the context of literature, these powers are an outcome of one of humor's particular rhetorical features: the kind of engagement

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[492] [Lewes], review of *The Book of Snobs*, 3.
[493] C. S. Lewis, "Image and Imagination", in *Image and Imagination: Essays and Reviews*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 53.

it encourages. As Lewes points out, as they laugh, audiences tend not to take humor's persuasive influence seriously: the author "throws us off our guard, and storms conviction by enveloping it in laughter."[494] If humor functions as it is intended to, its audience must entertain humor's premises in order to engage with its conclusions. Humor can leap past the intellectual barriers that might question premises, and achieves a kind of consent with its conclusions through laughter. James Kincaid, discussing Dickens' use of humor, makes a similar observation. He argues that "[l]aughter implies, among other things, a very solid agreement with a certain value system, and Dickens is masterful in using that agreement for subtle thematic and aesthetic purposes."[495] I would modify Kincaid's claim to suggest that, rather than asserting solid agreement, laughter implies engagement with the value system presented and that engagement can foster agreement. And when authors turn to humor as a sustained means of engaging their audience with a particular value or a value system throughout the text of a novel, that program of humor can be a powerful tool of persuasion through the aesthetic experience of the narrative.

This final chapter, like the previous chapter, again asks the thematic question: 'what is humor in Victorian novels about?' And, once again, as in the last chapter, this chapter considers why humor has been relied upon to address the themes this chapter identifies. At various points the previous chapters have alluded to humor's persuasive and critical capacities. While the previous chapter highlighted humor's particular fitness to depict social interaction, this chapter examines with more detail the properties of humor that render it especially useful for persuasion through narrative. To consider humor's persuasive powers, this chapter compares Dickens' *Hard Times* (serialized 1854), Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1855) and *Rachel Ray* (1863), George Eliot's "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton" from her collection *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), and Oliphant's "The Rector" (1861). This chapter identifies some of the similar themes around which these authors engage in persuasion as well as some of the rhetorical aspects of the use of humor in narrative to persuade.

The first section of this chapter looks at some examples from a subgenre of literature depicting conflicts within the church in *Rachel Ray*, "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton", and "The Rector." This section compares how authors use humor to comment upon the appropriate role of the church and churchmen within the contemporary conflicts between the

[494] [Lewes], review of *The Book of Snobs*, 3.
[495] James R. Kincaid, *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1.

high and low church. And the second section of this chapter compares *Hard Times*, a text in which Dickens uses humor in narrative to critique Utilitarianism, to *The Warden*, a text in which Trollope uses humor in narrative to critique, both implicitly and explicitly, the way in which Dickens uses humor to persuade in *Hard Times*. While all of the texts in this section essentially rely upon humor to persuade in the manner George Lewes describes, involving the reader in the experience of the moral and social ideas depicted in the lives of their characters and in the course of their narrative, some undertake this with subtlety and others more overtly.

For the four authors considered, humor emerges as a particularly important tool to undertake persuasion. As discussed in the previous chapters, humor involves the reader sympathetically in the questions or themes that the text explores through its orienting function: endearing or alienating the text's causes and characters to the reader. What this chapter observes are the ways in which this function of humor is an experience that seeks to persuade.

5.2 Ecclesiastical Conflict

According to Simon Eliot, "[t]he most striking feature revealed by subject statistics from the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century is the shift from the publishing of religious titles to the publishing of more secular subjects, particularly literature, and within literature, prose fiction."[496] Despite this shift in publication patterns, Victorian authors were clearly not abandoning religious, moral, or ethical questions. Instead, many of these questions were addressed through fiction: in particular, John Sutherland explains, "the Victorian period saw an unparalleled flowering of religious fiction."[497] The various conflicts between high-church members (the Oxford Movement or Tractarians),[498] the broad-churchmen (the liberal Anglicans), and the low church (those with sympathies with the Evangelicals or other Dissenting sects like Presbyterians, Baptists, or Quakers) served as the backdrop to this

[496] Simon Eliot, "Some trends in British book production, 1800–1919", in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, eds. John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 37.
[497] Sutherland, "Religious Novel", *Longman Companion*, 529.
[498] The high-church sect, also called the Oxford Movement or the Tractarians, was predominantly populated by Anglicans in sympathy with some doctrines and practices associated with the Roman Catholic Church. Some members within this group converted to Catholicism, most famously John Henry Newman in 1845.

substantial subgenre of novels.[499] Richard Altick observes of Victorian religious novels that

> They were more numerous than any other kind of fiction devoted to a single close group of themes. [. . .] Some of these novels were homiletic, some cautionary-exemplary, some propagandist-polemical. By no means all dealt with, or were even tinged by, doctrinal issues; many were concerned with the church in its various relations with society, including charity, education, domestic habits and morals, and public morality.[500]

Novels by authors such as Charlotte Yonge, Elizabeth Sewell, James Anthony Froude, and John Henry Newman engaged directly with religious questions and themes.[501] Anthony Trollope's Barchester Chronicles, Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*, and Oliphant's *Perpetual Curate* and *Salem Chapel* are all examples of novels that take place in an ecclesiastical setting. And texts such as Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Adam Bede*, Dickens' *Bleak House*, and Gaskell's *North and South* feature Dissenting or Evangelical characters.

This section particularly focuses on three narratives that use humor to depict ecclesiastical characters and take place in ecclesiastical settings: Anthony Trollope's *Rachel Ray*, Eliot's "Amos Barton" from *Scenes of Clerical Life*, and Oliphant's Carlingford short story "The Rector." None of these texts engage in the kind of homiletics with which a novel like Yonge's *Daisy Chain* (1856) might be associated, nor do they engage with the intricacies of doctrinal conflict in the way a text like Newman's *Loss and Gain* (1848) does. But nonetheless, through their texts and particularly through humor, all three authors are engaged in presenting a different viewpoint on the appropriate role of the church and of the church's representatives in the contemporary communities they depict. These three texts are particularly interesting to compare because the humor that they use shares in that quality that Lewes describes; it is not overtly

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[499] According to Gerald Parsons, the "1851 Census of Religious Worship" revealed that, taken together, Dissenting or Nonconformist sect attendance far outnumbered the established, Anglican church attendance within England and Wales. "From Dissenters to Free Churchmen: The Transitions of Victorian Nonconformity", *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. 1, *Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 68–70. For a more detailed analysis of the "1851 Census of Religious Worship", see K. D. M. Snell and Paul S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a helpful, brief overview of the religious landscape in Britain in the nineteenth century, see Elisabeth Jay, "Spirituality", in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 350–69, doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521846257.018.

[500] Altick, *Presence of the Present*, 51.

[501] Under "The Religious Novel" in *Longman Companion*, Sutherland lists other notable authors who dealt with religious themes in their fiction, some generally and some more overtly proselytizing, for example: John Oliver Hobbes, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, J. H. Shorthouse, Silas Hokay, and Walter Pater (529).

didactic and instead fosters agreement through engagement. Humor is a central tool of persuasion in all three texts, but the persuasion in which they engage—to demonstrate the right role and function of churchmen and of the church in society—is built within their broader narrative.[502]

Although Trollope is most commonly associated with ecclesiastical fiction through the Barsetshire Chronicles, one of his best-selling standalone novels is also one of his most overtly critical portraits of the church, or, more specifically, Evangelicals within the church: the otherwise mild comedy *Rachel Ray*.[503] In the spring of 1862, Norman Macleod, editor of *Good Words*, a popular Evangelical and Nonconformist periodical, was looking to publish a new work of fiction that would increase *Good Words*' already widening circulation.[504] As a friendly acquaintance of Trollope's, he decided to commission a serial novel from him as a sure means of broadening the readership of his magazine. Trollope sought to dissuade Macleod by assuring him that a novel of his would not have any exceptional interest to *Good Word*'s religious readers, but Macleod persisted and Trollope eventually agreed. In January of 1863, alongside a new short story by Trollope, "The Widow's Mite", *Good Words* published advertisements alerting readers that the first installment of a new serial novel by the author of *Framley Parsonage* would appear in July.[505]

In April, however, another periodical, *The Monthly Record*, an Anglican weekly with

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[502] James Kincaid observes that "[b]oth Trollope and George Eliot believed in the novel as an effective moral agency, both were realists, both used a narrator as a strong rhetorical weapon." *Trollope*, 51. This chapter adds Oliphant's writings to that list: both moral and realist, the narrator in her writing is a powerful tool in argument and evaluation.

[503] A. O. J. Cockshut, Kincaid, and Jane Nardin all note the thinness of *Rachel Ray*'s plot: Cockshut, *Anthony Trollope: A Critical Study* (London: Collins, 1955), 111; Kincaid, *Anthony Trollope*, 85; 83; Nardin, "Comic Convention in Trollope's *Rachel Ray*", *Papers on Language and Literature* 22, no. 1 (January 1, 1986), 39, Proquest. However, N. John Hall, in *Trollope: A Biography*, ranks *Rachel Ray* alongside *Barchester Towers* (1857) and *John Caldigate* (1878–1879) as one of the key texts in Trollope's attack on low-church doctrine (138). He also places *Rachel Ray* alongside *Orley Farm* (1861–1862), *The Way We Live Now* (1874–1875), and *Three Clerks* (1858) as having been particularly well received among Trollope's "'independent'" fiction (507).

[504] Hall, *Trollope*, 252. According to Sutherland in *Longman Companion*, *Good Words* was "[t]he most popular fiction-carrying monthly (after 1861) magazine of the nineteenth century, before Newne's *Strand* appeared in 1891" (252). Sutherland describes how Alexander Strahan launched *Good Words* "to find a way of recruiting the large evangelical readership of magazines for something lighter than theology and church news", and that "[u]nder Macleod, the tone of the journal was consistently instructive, with a preference for articles of travel and geographical interest" (252; 253).

[505] Hall, *Trollope*, 251–252.

low-church leanings, published a series of polemics against *Good Words* and what it described as the dilution of its religious message. A significant source of their critique against *Good Words* was the publication of secular materials, like Trollope's short story and forthcoming novel, and the representation in these works of the views of "'broad churchmen'" (the more liberal faction of the Anglican church).[506] Macleod, worried he might have erred in commissioning this novel from Trollope, requested and read the early proofs of *Rachel Ray*. He was not pleased with what he found in terms of its depiction of the low church and ultimately declined to publish the text to avoid *Good Words* being embroiled in any further conflict between religious factions. So Trollope published *Rachel Ray* with Chapman & Hall in a single volume and it was met with critical success.[507]

Trollope, in his autobiography, writes of *Rachel Ray* that he did not consider his criticism of the low church to be particularly extreme and whatever else *Rachel Ray* was, "it certainly [was] not very wicked"; although he admitted that there was "some dancing in one of the early chapters."[508] But Macleod was not principally concerned that the depiction of dancing or that any wickedness in the text would offend his Evangelical readers. In a later letter to Trollope, Macleod insists that he did not reject *Rachel Ray* because of the *Record*'s aspersions, but explained that he was concerned about the depiction of the low-church clergy and of their supporters:

> You hit right & left—give a wipe here, a sneer there, & thrust a nasty *prong* into another place, cast a gloom over Dorcas Societies, & a glory over balls till 4 in the morning, —in short, it is the old story—the shadow over the church is broad & deep, & over every other quarter sunshine reigns.[509]

While Macleod does not find *Rachel Ray* exceptionally objectionable, he explains that it treats the low church with a stereotypical simplicity that was likely to incite and offend the greater part of his low-church readership. And Trollope, in his facetious pretense at not understanding the critical thrust of his own text, undersells the reductive, contemptuous effect that his use of humor in application to his low-church characters lends his critique of the low church.

When young Luke Rowan moves to the town of Baslehurst to claim his inheritance in the

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[506] Ibid., 252.
[507] Ibid., 254–256.
[508] Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography*, 188.
[509] Macleod to Anthony Trollope, June 11, 1863, in *The Letters of Anthony Trollope*, ed. N. John Hall, vol. 1, *1835–1870* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 223 (author's italics). Macleod's reference to "prong" is a play on the name of the low-church minister in *Rachel Ray*.

local brewery, the overseer of the brewery, Mr. Tappitt, is disinclined to hand over that inheritance. This delay in Luke's ability to start his business is one of the primary conflicts that for a time separate Luke and Rachel, the text's lovers. But besides the Tappitts, the greatest antagonists to the happiness of Luke and Rachel are two representatives of the low church. The first is Rachel's sister, the widowed Mrs. Dorothea Prime, and her supportive admirer, the low-church minister Mr. Samuel Prong. Mrs. Prime is an Evangelical caricature not unlike Collins' Miss Clack in *The Moonstone* (1868). But Mrs. Prime, the attendee of the aforementioned Dorcas society meetings, is a much harsher and more dour figure with her "voice of the ravens" and horror of dancing.[510] Mr. Prong belongs in a trend of caricatured Evangelical ministers, such as Frances Trollope's Rev. William Cartwright in *The Vicar of Wrexhill* (1837), Dickens' Mr. Stiggins from *Pickwick Papers* (1836) and Mr. Chadband from *Bleak House* (1852–1853), and Thackeray's Rev. Charles Honeyman in *The Newcomes* (1854–1855). Trollope's narrator underlines that Prong was "deficient in one vital qualification for a clergyman of the Church of England; he was not a gentleman."[511] It is primarily these two characters who are the vehicles for criticizing the low church. When Rachel first interacts with Luke and word filters back to the Ray household, Mrs. Prime is shocked that Rachel would associate with an unmarried young man and harshly condemns her sister. After Rachel's widowed mother, Mrs. Ray, permits Rachel to attend a dance held by the Tappitts, the one Trollope facetiously refers to in his *Autobiography*, Mrs. Prime is so offended and incensed that she chooses to move out of the family home. In all of this outraged behavior, Mrs. Prime is supported by Mr. Prong.

Rachel's mother is unsettled by the opinions of her warring daughters. And Trollope's narrator underlines her own inconsistent beliefs. He explains how Mrs. Ray, when she heard a couple was getting married,

> rejoiced greatly, thinking that the son of Adam had done well to get himself married. But whenever it was whispered into her ear that any young man was looking after a woman,—that he was taking the only step by which he could hope to find a wife for himself,—she was instantly shocked at the wickedness of the world, and prayed inwardly

[510] Anthony Trollope, *Rachel Ray*, ed. P. D. Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 46. According to P. D. Edwards, Dorcas societies were "sewing-circles which made and mended clothes for distribution to the needy"; for a while these groups were "one of the institutions that most sharply distinguished the low church from the old 'high-and-dry' church." In Trollope, *Rachel Ray*, 406, fn. 7.
[511] Anthony Trollope, *Rachel Ray*, 77. The narrator's comment here echoes Trollope's strict ideas of what constitutes a gentleman in relation to Joseph Mason in *Orley Farm*.

that the girl at least might be saved.[512]

The narrator presents Mrs. Ray's two responses side-by-side to highlight their illogic and incongruity. Moreover, the narrator reminds the readers that both Mrs. Ray and Mrs. Prime, who assert that it is immoral for men and women to fraternize, are both widows: i.e. in order to have become married, they both must have indulged in fraternization at some point in their young lives. But they do not perceive the inconsistency between their moral objections to Rachel and Luke meeting as single people and their moral quietude as to their own past courtships when they met with their, then single, husbands-to-be.

In spite of Mrs. Prime's objections to Rachel meeting with Luke Rowan without a chaperone, or indeed at all, Mrs. Prime feels no discomfort meeting with the single Mr. Prong without a chaperone because of his role as a minister and hers as a widow. In justifying to herself the reasonableness of meeting with Mr. Prong and the unreasonableness of Rachel meeting with Luke, she ruminates, "all men cannot be hardworking ministers of the Gospel, nor all women the wives of such or their assistants in godly ministrations."[513] Trollope underlines the double standards with which Mrs. Prime and Mrs. Ray are operating when Mrs. Ray seeks advice from her minister, suggestively named Mr. Comfort. Mr. Comfort is the voice of reason for Mrs. Ray as she is caught between the perspectives of her daughters. Mr. Comfort is sanguine as to the intentions of Luke and Rachel and encourages Mrs. Ray to let their relationship develop. He joins the narrator's ironic perspective on the situation by wryly asking Mrs. Ray, "'[a]nd how are young people to get married if they are not allowed to see each other?'"[514]

While Mr. Comfort is characterized as wise enough to see the same ironies as the narrator, Mr. Prong is the epitome of unreflective arrogance. When Mrs. Prime reports the advice Mrs. Ray has received to Mr. Prong in one of their tête-à-têtes, he despairs at the carelessness of his colleague:

> "What shall the sheep do," said Mr. Prong, "when the shepherd slumbers in the folds?" Then he shook his head and puckered up his mouth. "Ah!" said Mrs. Prime; "it is well for the sheep that there are still left a few who do not run from their work, even in the heat of the noonday sun."[515]

The orientation of this humor is to demonstrate the incongruities in Mr. Prong and Mrs. Prime's

[512] Anthony Trollope, *Rachel Ray*, 13.
[513] Ibid., 154.
[514] Ibid., 63.
[515] Ibid., 79.

thinking and the insightfulness of Mr. Comfort. Whereas what Mr. Comfort points out is both obvious and poignant, Mr. Prong's moralizing is laughable in that it shows his failure to perceive the hypocrisy of his and Mrs. Prime's position.

Trollope further highlights Mr. Prong's hypocrisy when it is revealed that he has more than ministry aims in his meetings with Mrs. Prime. Ultimately, it is revealed that he has had the same motives for meeting with Mrs. Prime as Luke had for meeting with Rachel when Mr. Prong asks Mrs. Prime to become his wife and assistant in the godly work to which they had both been called. Mrs. Prime is inclined to accept, but when Mr. Prong mentions uniting their resources, Mrs. Prime hesitates. Mr. Prong in his wooing states, "'[m]oney is but dross. Who feels that more strongly than you do?'"[516] But, according to the narrator, to Mrs. Prime "money certainly was not dross, and I doubt if it was truly so regarded by Mr. Prong himself."[517] In fact, it turns out that Mrs. Prime had grown fond of her independence and the money that enabled that independence. She agrees to be married but only with the provision that she retains control of her money after their union. To Mr. Prong, however, these conditions are unacceptable and it is better to "remain single in his work than accept the name of husband without its privileges!"[518] He justifies his decision to himself by considering "he had the law on his side,—the old law as coming from the Scriptures. He could say that such a pecuniary arrangement as that proposed by his Dorothea was sinful."[519] Trollope's narrator's depiction of Mr. Prong's inconsistency particularly emphasizes his justification for his hypocrisy on the basis of his religious beliefs. What Polhemus observes in relation to Trollope in *Orley Farm* is equally applicable to the narrator of *Rachel Ray*: "What he does is to make a reader see the human tendency to throw the cloak of morality around self-interest, to become oblivious to the connection between what one thinks is right and what will benefit one."[520]

In addition to overt associations between hypocrisy and low-church religious convictions, Trollope also characterizes Mrs. Prime, in particular, as unpleasant and judgmental. For example, when she returns for a visit home after moving out, her mother asks her in to take tea. Mrs. Prime

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[516] Ibid., 119.
[517] Ibid.
[518] Ibid., 326.
[519] Ibid., 327.
[520] Robert M. Polhemus, *The Changing World of Anthony Trollope* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1968), 87.

responds with a tone of deprecation that typifies her characterization,

> "I've taken tea, thank you, two hours ago;" and she spoke as though there was much virtue in the distance of time at which she had eaten and drunk, as compared with the existing rakish and dissipated appearance of her mother's tea-table. Tea-things about at eight o'clock! It was all of a piece together.[521]

The narrator's depiction of Mrs. Prime and the conflict she causes in her family conflates her low-church leanings with or as related to her other attributes of self-importance and love of authority: both seem to be the cause and outcome of the other. Mrs. Prime is only relatively redeemed as a character in the story when she is removed from Mr. Prong's influence and friendship and reinstalled with her mother and sister in their family home.

While Trollope's depiction of the low church through these two representatives is overwhelmingly negative, he does provide a counterexample of a less than exemplar high churchman. The rector of Baslehurst, Dr. Harford, "hated the dissenting ministers by whom he was surrounded. In Devonshire dissent has waxed strong for many years, and the pastors of the dissenting flocks have been thorns in the side of the Church of England clergymen."[522] In a noteworthy explanatory aside the narrator appraises Dr. Harford's passionate hatred thus: "Now all this was, to say the least of it, a pity, for it disfigured the close of a useful and conscientious life."[523] The narrator does not pursue this line of critique further, but it is a significant acknowledgement of the fallibility of supporters of the high church, even if the fault seems to ultimately lie at the feet of Dissenting communities for causing a disturbance. Moreover, while the narrator acknowledges this fault in Dr. Harford, his final judgement of the man is that he lived an otherwise "useful and conscientious life" —an epithet that contrasts strongly with Trollope's narrator's judgements of Mr. Prong.

Trollope is accurate in his *Autobiography* when he claims that there were no descriptions of extreme wickedness in *Rachel Ray* that would offend Evangelical readers. Nor does he describe any particularly heinous immorality in relation to his low-church characters. However, the potential that Trollope would offend Evangelical readers is no less potent despite the absence of any greater wickedness than dancing. His alienation of low-church readers would arrive through his unremitting attack on the low church through his ridiculing characterizations of Mrs.

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[521] Anthony Trollope, *Rachel Ray*, 151.
[522] Ibid., 235.
[523] Ibid., 236.

Prime and Mr. Prong. While Mr. Prong, for example, is largely a caricature, with simplistic motives and actions, Mr. Comfort is a more rounded character and his views are treated with both humor and seriousness. Humor is used to show Comfort's reasonableness and insight as his perspective aligns with the narrator, whereas the humor used in reference to Mr. Prong is purely to ridicule his failures of self-awareness and self-critique which are derived from his pedantic views of scripture and doctrine. But the final negative pronouncement on the low church is not just through characterization, but through the judgement rendered by the narrative's conclusion. It is not just that Mr. Prong and Mrs. Prime are low-church, they also oppose Luke and Rachel's relationship which is the heart of *Rachel Ray*'s narrative.

In the first story in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton", Eliot's use of humor to represent the low versus high church is far more nuanced than Trollope's.[524] But much like Trollope, the questions of low versus high church are played out by their different representatives who make moral and relational choices. Amos Barton, minister of Shepperton Church in the vicinity of the market-town Milby, is not a Dissenter, but he has clear low-church tendencies.[525] While Eliot does not present Amos as a perfect minister, in writing about him sympathetically, she wrote against Evangelical stereotypes like Mr. Prong and those perpetuated by Dickens, Thackeray, Frances Trollope, and Anthony Trollope. The narrator explains that Shepperton's minister "preached Low-Church doctrine—as evangelical as anything to be heard in the Independent Chapel", but that he did so with "a High-Church assertion of

[524] It was perhaps Eliot's experience of and exposure to Evangelicalism that led Elisabeth Jay to characterize her as "the one major novelist to portray Evangelicalism with detailed fidelity and imaginative sympathy." *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 209. According to Valentine Cunningham, Eliot's "saturation in Evangelicalism" began at boarding school and continued through her friendships with Baptists and Unitarians as an adult and with her relationship to her aunt and uncle, who were Methodists. *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 144; 145–146. Cunningham also notes Eliot's balanced portrayal of Nonconformists: "though George Eliot may in the end insist on the contemporary redundancy of Dissent as of orthodox Christianity [. . .] she steadily eschews the easy dismissals, the cheap sneers, and genuinely sympathizes with what, ultimately, she rejects" (145).

[525] According to Rosemary Ashton, Barton "is based, at least in terms of his circumstances if not his character, on the Revd John Gwyther, curate of Chilvers Coton", where Eliot was baptized. Like Barton, Gwyther's wife died giving birth and he was then removed from his post as reverend in favor of a relative of the absentee vicar. *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), 170. Avrom Fleishman additionally describes Reverend Gwyther as having Evangelical leanings. *George Eliot's Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12.

ecclesiastical powers and functions."[526] Even after two years, the community still distrusts his low-church doctrines and his uncertain connections. The town doctor, Mr. Pilgrim, speaking to his friends of Amos, explains, "'[t]hey say his father was a Dissenting shoemaker; and he's half a Dissenter himself."[527]

Whereas Anthony Trollope's presentation of low-church characters focused on inconsistencies in their reasoning and perspective, Eliot's narrator focuses on the inconsistencies in the stereotypes the townspeople use to critique low-church ideas. The narrator observes that Mr. Pilgrim's dislike of Mr. Barton does not stem from his insistence on "meeting-house" hymns and his propensity to read out his sermons rather than present them extempore. Instead, Mr. Pilgrim's dislike derives most strongly from the fact that Amos "had called in a new doctor, recently settled in Shepperton."[528] In other words, Mr. Pilgrim's objections to Amos' low doctrine are primarily on the basis that he had not been called on for medical advice by the Reverend. Similarly, Mrs. Patten has nothing but negative rejoinders on the subject of Amos Barton, having been offended by his suggestion that she was a sinner in need of salvation. She explains, "'I've never been a sinner. [. . .] The cheese-factor use to say my cheese was al'ys to be depended on. I've known women, as their cheeses swelled a shame to be seen, when their husbands had counted on the cheese-money to make up their rent.'"[529] The narrator observes, however, that despite her poignant evidences of a blameless life, Mrs. Patten would have been better inclined to accept Amos Barton's doctrines if he had not also urged her to increase her subscription for the purpose of rebuilding Shepperton church.

Eliot's narrator humorously represents how the townspeople consistently fail to give the Reverend credit for the good work he does and focus instead on ways in which he does not fit their ideal of a minister. The narrator explains that the community is particularly disillusioned as to Amos' education: poorly spelt letters

> in a man who had gone through the Eleusinian mysteries of a university education, surprised the young ladies of his parish extremely; especially the Miss Farquhars, whom he had once addressed in a letter as Dear Mads. apparently an abbreviation for Madams. The persons least surprised at the Rev Amos's deficiencies were his clerical brethren,

[526] George Eliot, "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton", in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. Thomas A. Noble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 18.
[527] Ibid., 13.
[528] Ibid.
[529] Ibid., 14.

who had gone through the mysteries themselves.[530]

Here the narrator uses humor to point out not Amos' personal inadequacies per se, but systemic inadequacies in clerical education. But for the community, these evidences of poor education along with Amos' propensity to preach to the poor amongst them are all perceived as originating from his low-church beliefs.

While Eliot presents the low church with some sympathy, the novel is not eulogistic of the low church. For example, as an antidote to Amos' sincerity, Eliot mentions the Evangelical character Reverend Archibald Duke, whom she describes as "a very dyspeptic and evangelical man, who takes the gloomiest view of mankind and their prospects, and thinks the immense sale of the 'Pickwick Papers,' recently completed, one of the strongest proofs of original sin."[531] Rev. Duke, though he is only described briefly, seems to have much in common with Trollope's Mr. Prong in his Evangelical attitudes and the reader is not invited to sympathize with his perspective or his life circumstances.

But Eliot is not entirely eulogistic of Amos. Her portrait of him is not reductive: while he is not a thorough hypocrite like Prong, he is also not perfectly effective or without blindness. On the one hand, the narrative explains that Amos preaches without remuneration at the local workhouse: "Mr Barton was not acting as paid chaplain of the Union, but as the pastor who had the cure of all souls in his parish, pauper as well as other."[532] But despite his sincerity and the purity of his motives, Eliot's narrator questions the usefulness of this undertaking. To succeed at speaking in this context, the narrator explains, a preacher must be able to

> bring his geographical, chronological, exegetical mind pretty nearly to the pauper point of view [. . .] It is a flexible imagination that can take such a leap as that, and an adroit tongue that can adapt its speech [. . .] Rev Amos Barton had neither that flexible imagination, nor that adroit tongue.[533]

And, unfortunately, the Rev. Barton is fairly unaware of his ineffectiveness. Amos was "in no respect an ideal or exceptional character", but Eliot's narrator still invites the reader to have sympathy for him, particularly given that his neighbors and parishioners have none.[534]

The sad fortunes of Amos Barton that the narrator recounts involve his gradual financial

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[530] Ibid., 23.
[531] Ibid., 52.
[532] Ibid., 25.
[533] Ibid., 26.
[534] Ibid., 41.

insolvency and the illness and death of his wife. One of the narrator's implicit arguments throughout the story is that the slander and gossip of the community, born out of their dislike of Amos' low-church ideas, creates the environment that leads to his financial downfall and his wife's consequent and subsequent illness and death. This argument is predominantly made through sardonic narratorial asides. The narrator offers this poser as to the Reverend Amos and his family's situation:

> Given a man with a wife and six children: let him be obliged always to exhibit himself when outside his own door in a suit of black broadcloth [. . .] let him have a parish large enough to create an external necessity for abundant shoe-leather, and an internal necessity for abundant beef and mutton, [. . .] let him be compelled [. . .] to dress his wife and children with gentility [. . .] by what process of division can the sum of eighty pounds per annum be made to yield a quotient which will cover that man's weekly expenses?[535]

The sarcasm of this kind of narration early in the story seeks to establish sympathy with Amos and his family's financial plight. With a lack of community support and a worsening financial situation due to the circumstances described above, Amos is given one more burden in the form of a friend of the family, a thoughtless and self-absorbed Countess.[536] Because of her own family difficulties, Amos allows this Countess to stay with himself and his family for a time. Insinuations immediately begin to spread about why Amos has taken in this glamorous woman, and many in the town gradually advance from merely disliking him for his low-church ways, to believing that he might actually be acting immorally. Discussing the situation, a fellow clergyman states, "'I used to think Barton was only a fool,'" and the narrator suggests that he made this observation "in a tone which implied that he was conscious of having been weakly charitable" in that generous assumption.[537]

As time goes on, Amos stubbornly refuses to address the innuendos circulating that "'he dines alone with the Countess at six, while Mrs Barton is in the kitchen acting as cook.'"[538] Because pernicious gossip has infected the town's perception of Amos, most of the townspeople fail to realize that, with the additional financial strain of the utterly unhelpful Countess, Amos and his family are living on close to nothing and Amos' wife is increasingly unwell and overworked. Finally, Amos' wife Milly and infant son die, and Amos is then informed that the

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[535] Ibid., 10.
[536] Or more accurately, a former Countess whose husband, the Count, had been reduced to "giving dancing lessons in the metropolis" (38).
[537] Eliot, "Amos", 49.
[538] Ibid., 54.

Vicar, Mr. Carpe, has decided to take over Amos' post and he will have to move away from Shepperton. The narrator explains that Amos was well aware that "Mr Carpe's wish to reside at Shepperton was merely a pretext for removing Mr Barton, in order that he might ultimately give the curacy of Shepperton to his own brother-in-law, who was known to be wanting a new position."[539]

Overall, if Eliot is overtly setting out to critique one thing through the narrative and her use of humor, it is probably provincial gossip. However, as Rosemary Ashton points out, in "Amos Barton", Eliot shows "how a variety of causes converge to bring about misfortune. Amos's stupidity and vanity, Milly's passive goodness, Milby gossip, and Amos's unpopular Evangelical innovations in the church service, all play their part in the outcome."[540] On the one hand, the provincial prejudice against low-church beliefs that Eliot depicts is a merely a backdrop against which to explore human failing. But on the other hand, Eliot's depiction of Amos and his circumstances and her emphasis on compassion despite his unheroic characteristics is a repudiation of the reductive, uncompassionate portraits of low-church ministers found in the novels of the Trollopes, Dickens, and Thackeray. Addressing another story in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, "Janet's Repentance", which is also set within a backdrop of low-church Anglicanism, Eliot explains, "[m]y irony, so far as I understand myself, is not directed against opinions—against any class of religious views—but against the vices and weaknesses that belong to human nature in every sort of clothing."[541] Eliot's description of her undertaking in "Janet's Repentance", as a critique of the failings of mankind rather than of "any class of religious views", bears a strong resemblance to her undertaking in "Amos Barton." But the other powerful critique that emerges almost implicitly in "Amos Barton" is of novelists who depict reductive characters and perpetuate stereotypes.

Given the similarity of their provincial and religious subjects, some critics apparently suspected that Oliphant had written "Amos Barton", and some others suggested that Eliot had written Oliphant's series Chronicles of Carlingford, of which *Miss Marjoribanks* is one installment.[542] Eliot wrote in 1862 in a letter to Sara Hennel, "'I am NOT the author of the

[539] Ibid., 69.
[540] Ashton, *George Eliot*, 169–170.
[541] Eliot to John Blackwood, June 11, 1857, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, vol. 2, *1852–1858* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 347.
[542] Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against*, 231.

Chronicles of Carlingford [. . .] but from what Mr. Lewes tells me, they must represent the Dissenters in a very different spirit from anything that has appeared in my books.'"[543] The context of Dissent in Scotland, where Oliphant was born and raised, was indeed different from the sects of Nonconformity that emerged in England, with which Eliot was better acquainted. Oliphant was a child when the Free Church of Scotland broke away from the established Church of Scotland in 1843, and was then raised in the Free Church.[544] When Oliphant moved to England, she found the Dissenting community not to her liking and eventually attended an Anglican church. She wrote in a letter to her publisher, John Blackwood, in 1856, "I don't like English dissent though I am a Free Church woman [. . .] I *like* the English Establishment a great deal better than the English sectarians with whom perhaps I might differ less in doctrine." She further explains that she has little sympathy for the "chilly intellectualists" whom she found shepherding the English Dissenting churches and preferred a "fervid poor preacher though he be ungrammatical."[545]

Oliphant wrote a number of novels set in Scotland, but her most popular, the Carlingford Chronicles, are set, like Anthony Trollope's Barsetshire Chronicles and Eliot's *Clerical Scenes*, in a small English rural town and are primarily concerned with provincial manners and politics. Perhaps because of Oliphant's background, Valentine Cunningham suggests that she writes with less information about Dissent in England than Nonconformists in Scotland: "Mrs. Oliphant is less interested in analysing seriously the social problems of Dissent than in developing the ironies of the fictional situation she has designed."[546] In Oliphant's longer novels on

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[543] Eliot to Hennel, April 23, 1862, in *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, vol. 4, *1862–1868* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 25. When Eliot disavowed authorship of the Chronicles of Carlingford in April of 1862, both "The Executor" in May 1861 and "The Rector" in September 1861 had been published, "The Doctor's Family" had been serialized between October 1861 to January 1862, and *Salem Chapel*'s serialization had begun in February 1862 (*The Rector, and The Doctor's Family* were later published together in three volumes in 1863 by Blackwood). The Carlingford series would eventually also include *The Perpetual Curate* (1864), *Miss Marjoribanks* (1865–1866) as discussed in chapter three of this thesis, and *Phoebe Junior* (1876).

[544] Jay explains that Oliphant's "childhood experience of the 1843 disruption in the Church of Scotland, and her family's 'warm' advocacy of the Free Church predisposed her to sympathize with seceders rather than with a conservative remnant." *Oliphant*, 143. Low churchmen are the subject of some of her other novels and a certain degree of sympathy for the low-church cause is present in the other novels in the Carlingford series.

[545] Oliphant to Blackwood, 1855, Blackwood Papers: Part of the Literary Archives of the Firm of William Blackwood and Sons, Publishers, MS 4111:266, National Library of Scotland (author's italics).

[546] Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against*, 234; 237.

ecclesiastical themes, *Salem Chapel* (1862) and *The Perpetual Curate* (1863), her engagement with questions of the low versus the high church are more extended. But in "The Rector", her second story of Carlingford, rather than the nuances of doctrinal distinction between Dissenting congregations and the Established church, she instead critiques that "chilly intellectualism" to which she so strongly objected.

"The Rector" is a story that questions the role and fitness of ministers to serve their parishioners and, significantly, Oliphant deploys her evaluation and critique through humor.[547] Class was a much more visible factor in the division between the Dissenting communities and the Established Church in England than in Scotland.[548] And Oliphant's narrator opens her story, explaining, "[n]aturally there are no Dissenters in Carlingford — that is to say, none above the rank of a greengrocer or milkman."[549] The narrator speaks with sardonic critique from the perspective of Carlingford "Society" when he explains, "[t]he Church had been low during the last rector's reign — profoundly low — lost in the deepest abysses of Evangelicalism. A determined inclination to preach to everybody had seized upon that good man's brain."[550] Much like Amos, the last rector of Carlingford had perceived his duty to be preaching to all of the people in his community, including the working classes. The narrator focuses on highlighting the incongruities within the high-church position: while the low church is focused on saving all souls—what is, ostensibly, the purpose of Christian ministry—the high church is more concerned with questions of propriety.

As soon as the new rector, Morley Proctor, appears in Carlingford, the first question asked by the townspeople is which faction of the church he belonged to: "People asked in vain, what was he?"[551] A member of the community conjectures, "'[f]ancy if he were just to be a Mr Bury over again! Fancy him going to the canal, and [giving] sermons to the bargemen, and attending to all sorts of people except to us, whom it is his duty to attend to!' cried one of this

[547] In some significant ways, this question of the fitness of individual ministers in "The Rector" reflects aspects of Oliphant's specific cultural background in Scottish Dissent. One reason for the Disruption of 1843, in which the Free Church broke away from the Church of Scotland, was the issue of preferment: local communities had no say over who would be sent to them as ministers and had no recourse for getting rid of them if they were not fit for the work or for serving a particular community.
[548] Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against*, 237; Jay, *Oliphant*, 146–147; 203.
[549] Margaret Oliphant, "The Rector", in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Elisabeth Jay, vol. 15, *Part IV: Chronicles of Carlingford* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 29.
[550] Ibid.
[551] Ibid., 36.

much-canvassed clergyman's curious parishioners."[552] In an unexpected turn of events, Oliphant's narrator explains, it turns out that "[h]e was neither High nor Low, enlightened nor narrow-minded; he was a Fellow of All-Souls."[553] Proctor threads his way in-between these two factions and turns out to be, rather than high or low, an academic. Through this focus on Proctor as an academic rather than a high- or low-church proponent, Oliphant circumvents issues of doctrine and instead refocuses the story to engage in the question of a minister's fitness, socially and morally, to serve his community.

The first question of social fitness that the narrative humorously pursues is whether a minister is obliged to get married to one of his parishioners. As the newly arrived rector begins to meet some of the town's inhabitants, his mother immediately inquires which of the churchwarden's two daughters Proctor plans to marry:

> "Tell me all about them, Morley" [she asked]. "One's one thing," at last shouted the confused man, "and t'other's another!" [. . .] "My dear, you're lucid!" cried the old lady. "I hope you don't preach like that. T'other's another! —is she so? and I suppose that's the one you're wanted to marry—eh?"[554]

These accusations terrify the utterly undesigning rector and render him suspicious of the subtext of every further encounter with his parishioners in relation to these two daughters, Miss Wodehouse and Lucy, assuming this small world "was plotting against him."[555] The narrator, who along with the Rector's mother seems to enjoy his distress, observes that "[n]o woman was ever so dismayed by the persecutions of a lover, as was this helpless middle-aged gentleman under the conviction that Lucy Wodehouse meant to marry him."[556] Proctor's mother is not the only person to anticipate a potential marriage. The narrator explains that "[o]ther people besides his mother had intimated to him that there were expectations current of his 'settling in life.' He lived not in false security, but wise trembling, never knowing what hour the thunderbolt might fall upon his head."[557]

In "The Rector", the bookish Proctor's fears about marriage are an indicator of his broader unsuitability to fulfill some of the wider social obligations in his role as rector. Muireann O'Cinneide points out in relation to "The Rector" that Oliphant's "characters are often not so

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[552] Ibid., 30.
[553] Ibid., 36.
[554] Ibid., 37.
[555] Ibid., 38.
[556] Ibid.
[557] Ibid., 41.

much evil or actively malicious, as failing to position themselves properly within the social and physical boundaries of their constrained worlds."[558] In his sheltered former life as an academic, before he was called to the role of rector in Carlingford, taking a wife did not occur to him as an important undertaking: in this period, most academics were bachelors.[559] But gradually, from his mother's prompting and some insinuations from the community around him, he began to realize that

> At the bottom of this fright and perplexity [. . .] the Rector had a guilty consciousness within himself that if Lucy drove the matter to extremities, he was not so sure of his own powers of resistance as he ought to be[.] She might marry him before he knew what she was about; and in such a case the Rector could not have taken his oath at his own private confessional that he would have been so deeply miserable as the circumstances might infer.[560]

Signaling the extent of his personal growth, in the sequel novel to this story, *The Perpetual Curate*, Proctor does eventually seek out a wife in one of these sisters (though not Lucy, whose heart is occupied elsewhere). But the narrator's use of humor in its gentle mockery of Proctor and his fears over marriage at his stage of life herald more fundamental problems in Proctor's suitability to serve his flock.

Shortly after these disturbing threats of marriage are introduced into Proctor's mind, he encounters a far more sobering and significant requirement for the role of ministry: administering comfort, wisdom, and guidance at the deathbeds of parishioners. In the first death, the narrative is gradually made absent of the humorous narratorial commentary that dominates the rest of the tale. Having been called to this deathbed, the Rector's behavior is incongruous with what might be expected of a minister due to his ineptitude, but Oliphant does not frame this incongruity as amusing. It is Carlingford's other, second minister, Mr. Wentworth, who appears on the scene and is able to help this dying woman where Proctor had failed in doing so. Proctor recognizes in Mr. Wentworth his "young brother—young enough to have been his son—not half nor a quarter part so learned as he; but a world further on in that profession which they shared—

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[558] Muireann O'Cinneide, "Introduction", in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Elisabeth Jay, vol. 15, *Part IV: Chronicles of Carlingford*, ed. Muireann O'Cinneide (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), xxviii.
[559] Until 1871 fellows of Oxford and Cambridge, formerly seminaries, were required to be celibate. John Cannon and Robert Crowcroft, s.v. "Cambridge University", in *A Dictionary of British History* (Oxford University Press, 2015), accessed March 12, 2021, doi: 10.1093/acref/9780199550371.001.0001.
[560] Oliphant, "Rector", 38–39.

the art of winning souls."[561] Proctor's reflection upon his helplessness in this moment subsequently incites him to question his ministerial calling. After this sad scene, however, it does not take long for the narrator to resume her humorous presentation both of the situation in Carlingford and of death. The narrator notes that "[i]f there had been no other sickbeds immediately in Carlingford, Mrs Proctor would have won the day", in the sense that her son would have decided to stay in Carlingford for her sake.[562] But days after the first death scene, Mr. Proctor is called to attend to another deathbed. After the pathos with which the first death was depicted, emphasizing the significance of the woman's needs and Proctor's fearful inability to meet them, the narrator simply flippantly notes that a second death occurred. While for other ministers of the faith these visitations were evidently an integral component of their calling, the narrator ironically describes how they were "murder to the Fellow of All-Souls."[563] The narrator explains that

> As soon as he became aware of what was included in the duties of his office, he must perform them, or quit his post. But how to perform them? Can one *learn* to convey consolation to the dying, to teach the ignorant, to comfort the sorrowful? Are these matters to be acquired by study, like Greek verbs or intricate measures? The Rector's heart said No.[564]

Ultimately, Proctor decides to leave Carlingford under the conviction that he is not yet fit to serve as both the instructor in virtue and the comforter of the sorrowful and dying.

Overall, Oliphant is engaging in "The Rector" with the question of what makes a clergyman fit to serve his community. She is not concerned with making a sectarian argument about the fitness or unfitness of Proctor because he belongs to a particular persuasion within the church. Instead, through these scenes of death and in his interactions with the community, she explores Proctor's relational role and duties. Re-enforcing this relational ethos, the narrator humorously notes at the end of the story that when Proctor finally chooses to leave Carlingford under the conviction that he cannot adequately undertake his spiritual and social role, he is replaced by the Reverend Morgan, who "'wanted to marry.'"[565] Proctor's inability to fulfill his social role is analogous to his inability to fulfill his spiritual role. As Vineta and Robert A. Colby explain, Oliphant's "satirical shafts are directed not at institutions, customs, classes, but at

[561] Ibid., 45.
[562] Ibid., 47.
[563] Ibid.
[564] Ibid., 46 (author's italics).
[565] Ibid.

individuals, personal idiosyncrasies, and fallibilities."[566]

In these three texts, humor is a means of inviting the reader to engage with and be persuaded by narratives that revolve around church matters, but do not engage in doctrinal specifics. In Trollope, the low church is critiqued through association with the ridicule of Mr. Prong and Mrs. Prime. In Eliot, the low church is defended through disassociation with reductive and stereotypical characterization. And Oliphant sidesteps the question of the low versus high church to engage with other, more socially oriented, questions of what fitness to serve as a minister could and should mean. To use Elisabeth Jay's phrase, generally in these three texts, the authors are "doctrinally unconcerned."[567] All three authors fit within the description that Ruth apRoberts applies to Trollope: they write "so extensively and knowingly about ecclesiastical matters without writing about religion."[568] With humor as a significant means of interpretation and critique, the persuasion in which these three authors engage emerges from the broader arc of their narrative and characterization. These texts represent a way of exploring religious and moral questions and offering clear and persuasive judgements on contemporary questions through the experience of narrative.

5.3 Mr. Popular Sentiment Takes on Utilitarianism

Of the five texts considered in this chapter, it is perhaps Dickens' *Hard Times* that is the most overtly didactic. In many ways an outlier to the rest of Dickens' works, *Hard Times* has enjoyed a renaissance in critical interest following its inclusion by F. R. Leavis in his list of the "Great Tradition" of western literature in 1948.[569] One of the reasons for this inclusion was Leavis' praise of *Hard Times* as a text that demonstrated a "marked moral intensity."[570] In *Hard*

[566] Colby, *Equivocal Virtue*, 124.
[567] Jay argues that this preference in literature of focusing on the social dynamics of sectarian divisions leads to "distortions of interpretation" of the different doctrines and beliefs of church sects. *Religion of the Heart*, 28.
[568] Ruth apRoberts, *Trollope: Artist and Moralist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), 115.
[569] Leavis' inclusion of Dickens, in the adjoined "Analytical Note", is as a somewhat secondary figure to the great three: George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad. *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962,) 227–248; Philip Collins suggests that initial reviews and subsequent re-publication of *Hard Times* tended to relegate it to Dickens' minor works. *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 315; see also Monroe Engel, "Hard Times", in *The Maturity of Dickens* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), 172–175; and Patricia E. Johnson "*Hard Times* and the Structure of Industrialism: The Novel as Factory", *Studies in the Novel* 21, no. 2 (summer 1989): 128–129, JSTOR.
[570] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, 9.

Times Dickens critiques the idea that society and morality should be based upon the goal of the collective good rather than the individual good, criticizing contemporary ideas that he perceived as at work in Victorian society and loosely drawn from Utilitarian and Benthamite philosophy.[571] Dickens' characterization of Utilitarianism in *Hard Times* is as a life based upon 'fact' to the exclusion of 'fancy.' Leavis called this interpretation of Utilitarianism "a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhumane spirit", but one that for Dickens explained "the inhumanities of Victorian civilization."[572] While various aspects of Dickens' engagement with the specifics of Utilitarian and Benthamite ideas have been discussed by critics elsewhere, this section considers the role of humor in Dickens' argument against Utilitarian ideas in *Hard Times*.[573]

As a companion text, this section compares *Hard Times* with Anthony Trollope's *The Warden*.[574] *The Warden* is a similarly distinctive text in Trollope's oeuvre: the first of Trollope's to gain relative fame and, like Dickens' *Hard Times*, a novel with themes that overtly engaged with contemporary social controversies.[575] Trollope's focus of criticism was along two lines: the corrupt dispensation of charitable endowments by the Church of England, and the extreme and

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[571] The degree to which contemporary readers apprehended Utilitarian philosophy as the object of Dickens' criticism is illustrated in an example from the career of John Stuart Mill. According to Timothy Larsen, the association between the name Mill (as in James Mill and John Stuart Mill) and the name Gradgrind, or the grand grinder, the "'person who grinds anything in a mill,'" was fairly obvious to the contemporary readers of *Hard Times*. In fact, Larsen suggests that this association was sufficiently conspicuous and undesirable to John Stuart Mill that in editions of his *Principles of Political Economy* that postdated *Hard Times*, he "corrected the manuscript [. . .] changing 'upper millstone' to 'upper stone', 'windmill or watermill' to 'machine' and 'in four other cases within five pages the possible pun is deleted.'" *John Stuart Mill*: *A Secular Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 64.
[572] Leavis, *Great Tradition*, 227.
[573] Some of the specifics of Dickens' critique of Utilitarianism are discussed in: Leavis, "Analytical Note", *The Great Tradition*, 227–248; Richard J. Arneson, "Benthamite Utilitarianism and 'Hard Times'", *Philosophy and Literature* 2, no. 1 (spring 1978): 60–75, https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1978.0004; K. J. Fielding, "Mill and Gradgrind", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 11, no. 2 (September 1956): 148–151, doi:10.2307/3044114; Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972): 167–168; Engel, "Hard Times", 172–175; John Holloway, "*Hard Times*, a History and Criticism", in *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 167–174.
[574] A contemporary text that is thematically related to both sections of this chapter is Gaskell's *North and South* (1854). Gaskell's narrative is engaged in criticism of the working conditions in factories and includes a Dissenting minister as a central character. Notably, however, Gaskell's characterization of that minister and of the conflict between factory masters and workers is not presented humorously.
[575] Sutherland, *Longman Companion,* 635.

unbalanced treatment by journalists of the clergymen who stewarded, and had been compensated using, these funds.[576]

Published within a year of one another, *Hard Times* and *The Warden* present distinctive examples of Victorian texts responding critically to contemporary events.[577] In *The Warden*, when Trollope takes journalism to task, there are flashes of the kind of direct attack that he makes in *Rachel Ray*, eight years later, in relation to Mr. Prong. But in the broader argument regarding church endowments, *The Warden* was criticized at the time for failing to effectively pick a side in the debate.[578] On the topic of endowments, Trollope relies on humor throughout to invite the reader into the issues somewhat more subtly, demonstrating their intricacies and showing the difficulty of parsing the moral imperatives by situating this controversy amidst realist characters and plausible conflicts. In *Hard Times* humor makes powerful but intermittent appearances that offer up a condemnation of Utilitarian ideals through exaggerated characterization and setting. Dickens at times sacrifices subtlety and realism to his didactic purpose; the interplay of extreme pathos and humorous appeals results in a central and secondary cast of characters who are more symbolic than relatable and a setting that is far more exaggerated than realist.[579] In each of these texts, humor is relied upon both to explain what is at stake in the conflicts, and as a means through which readers are asked to share the perspective and interpretation that Dickens and Trollope present.

The first and foremost of the symbolic characters that Dickens relies upon to critique Utilitarianism is Thomas Gradgrind. Gradgrind and his family inhabit an industrialized mill town called Coketown. Gradgrind is an ardent adherent to "Facts": Dickens' shorthand term to represent Utilitarian ideas. The opening lines of *Hard Times* begin with a then unidentified speaker, declaiming, "'[n]ow, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. [. . .] You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of

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[576] Hall, *Trollope*, 134,

[577] *Hard Times* was written and serialized in 1854, and *The Warden* was written between July 1852 to the autumn of 1854 and published in 1855.

[578] Hall, *Trollope*, 148

[579] Structurally, humor appears as a dominant at the beginning of the novel, is largely absent from the middle section of the narrative, and then remerges in a slightly different form at the end of the narrative. The deliberate use of humor interspersed with scenes of pathos serves to intensify the contrast between the two modes as will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

any service to them."[580] As the narrator describes both the setting and speaker as harsh and angular, the role of exaggeration emerges immediately. The narrator explains that "[t]he speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders,—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was, — all helped the emphasis."[581] The schoolchildren receiving this lesson are likened to "little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim."[582] The humorous dominant established by this opening passage is one of hyperbole: describing the external factors of Gradgrind and the broader environment as reinforcing the ethos that he preaches.

The seriousness with which Dickens urges his readers to understand the implications of the imposition of facts on these children is highlighted by the title of the second chapter: "Murdering of the Innocents." This is a reference to the infanticide committed by King Herod in the Gospel accounts of the New Testament and implicitly connected with Mr. Gradgrind, who is described as "a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, [. . .] prepared to blow [the schoolchildren] clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge."[583] The allusion made in the title and the description of Mr. Gradgrind is both a humorous overstatement of the drama of the scene but simultaneously also suggests how seriously the reader should regard the destructive potential of the kind of education that is being undertaken.

The "murdering" of the innocents through this fact-based program occurs in the following bizarre manner. Gradgrind calls upon the student he identifies as "'[g]irl number twenty.'" The pedagogical choice to reduce students to numbers rather than use their given names encapsulates how this factual program of education tends to diminish or downplay the humanity of the individual. Unfortunately, girl number twenty, Sissy Jupe, is not yet instructed in this fact-based belief system. As Gradgrind examines her on points of fact, she demonstrates an inability to answer the questions as well as a failure to grasp the ethos of the exam: "'Give me your definition of a horse,'" Gradgrind intones, "(Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by

[580] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, eds. Fred Kaplan and Sylvère Monod (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 5.
[581] Ibid.
[582] Ibid., 6.
[583] Ibid.

this demand).”[584] Sissy’s father is a horse breaker, but she flounders to reply under the scrutiny of this exacting schoolmaster, so Gradgrind calls upon a vessel of known quantity, Bitzer:

> “Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in the mouth.” Thus (and much more) Bitzer.[585]

Bitzer is not, like Sissy, new to this creed and this reply meets with Gradgrind’s satisfaction. What Gradgrind, and the narrator, mean by facts becomes clear as the narrative progresses: a system of categorizing and interpreting humanity and society that results in a world that lacks imagination or gentleness and is expressed numerically, statistically, or factually.

The diversity of application for the facts-based comprehension of the world is indicated by the next crucial question in this childhood development program. A new speaker, later revealed to be Josiah Bounderby, the local mill owner and Gradgrind’s lieutenant of facts, steps forward:

> “Now, let me ask you girls and boys, Would you paper a room with representations of horses?” After a pause, one half of the children cried in chorus, “Yes, sir!” Upon which the other half, seeing in the gentleman’s face that Yes was wrong, cried out in chorus, “No, sir!” —as the custom is, in these examinations.[586]

The narrator’s comment upon “the custom” in “these examinations” suggests that the purpose of this exam is not to say what one opines to be correct but, instead, to guess what the speaker desires to be said. This sarcastic aside underlines the arbitrariness of the principles for wallpapering that the pompous teacher propounds: “‘you are not to see anywhere, what you don’t see in fact; you are not to have anywhere, what you don’t have in fact. What is called Taste’”, Bounderby instructs the children, “‘is only another name for Fact.’”[587]

Dickens, in a letter to his friend Charles Knight, described his undertaking in *Hard Times* as “[m]y satire.” He explains that its purpose and direction “is against those who see figures and averages and nothing else—the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of the time.”[588] Stott explains that humor as satire “takes its subject matter from the heart of political

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[584] Ibid., 7.
[585] Ibid.
[586] Ibid., 8.
[587] Ibid., 9.
[588] Dickens to Knight, December 30, 1854, in *The Pilgrim Edition, The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, vol. 7, *1853–1855*, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, and Angus Easson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 492.

life or cultural anxiety, re-framing issues at an ironic distance that enables us to revisit fundamental questions that have been obscured by rhetoric, personal interests, or realpolitik."[589] These scenes in the schoolroom, and others like them in *Hard Times*, are attempts by Dickens to reframe the tenets of Utilitarianism so that their damaging influence can be more clearly perceived. In this sense, he is seeking to use humor to educate. The presentation of an incongruity can bring to light, or de-familiarize, a way of looking at a given situation that reveals something previously obscured in that scene's nature. Dickens' incongruous suggestion is that factual curriculum on the subject of wallpaper is murdering these children. From Gradgrind and Bounderby's perspective, the principles of fact permeate every element of existence and comprehension: no feature of life is to be excluded from the system of fact. Thus, the totality of this education—the reduction of all things, even the most mundane and inconsequential—beneath the burden of fact is to inculcate a system of critical thinking about the world that, as Dickens' incongruity seeks to highlight, is not only incorrect in its interpretation of the world but has the capacity to destroy innocence.

But the other factor of persuasion for which Dickens uses humor is to draw Utilitarianism into such a ludicrously extreme corner that it would be insane to accept it. As Dickens characterizes it, either one accepts all of the tenets of this version of Utilitarianism or none of them. This unreasonable, universal philosophy is juxtaposed with the innocent, reasonable approach embodied in Sissy. The way that Dickens draws these two camps, characters must be either adherents of one or the other; he creates no middle group to occupy. But most powerfully, in presenting Utilitarianism in this exaggerated, ludicrous manner Dickens presents it as ridiculous—there is no conclusion to be drawn from this scene besides laughing rejection of Bounderby and Gradgrind and their limiting, hard philosophy.

In contrast to *Hard Times*, in Trollope's *The Warden*, as Kincaid argues, "[t]he ostensible issues matter very little in [the] novel, precisely because the morality advocated is aesthetic and intuitive rather than argumentative and rationalistic."[590] Though *The Warden* takes the church as its setting, Trollope is far less interested in the inappropriate allocation of funds by the church than he is in his characters' personal moral struggles within that conflict. His subsequent novel contains an even smaller critical focus on elements of church policy; and instead, N. John Hall

[589] Stott, *Comedy*, 109.
[590] Kincaid, *Trollope*, 97.

suggests, by the time he writes *Barchester Towers*, "the issue of reform had been lost to the personalities of the protagonists."[591] In *The Warden* there is evidence of an intent to recommend reform, but Trollope's perspective on these reforms is as a means of exploring the moral quandaries he proposes for his characters.

In this focus, however, Trollope is still engaging in persuasion, but his persuasion is regarding personal moral behavior rather than societal change such as Dickens undertakes in *Hard Times*. The vehicle for the question of reforming the church is the titular warden Mr. Harding. Harding—meek, gentle, and slightly eccentric—is not a conventional hero for a novel. Yet for Trollope's purposes, Harding's meekness is a heroic attribute as he seeks to make the right decision about whether to give up the administration and living of his wardenship amidst the conflicting advice of characters who are stronger, more forceful, and more charismatic than himself. Mr. Harding had served as warden, a post overseeing the care of "broken-down journeymen of Barchester" (that is, certain poor, elderly men in the community) for ten years.[592] In other towns and places, accusations of corruption and the misuse of funds in similar situations had arisen against other such overseers. As the narrative unfolds it is clear there was never any doubt that Mr. Harding had been a just steward of his wardenship. Instead, the reformers in Barchester, namely John Bold, seek to abolish institutions like the wardenship because they are open to exploitation by churchmen with fewer scruples than Mr. Harding. The conflict of *The Warden* does not focus on the intricacies of this reform as much as it does upon Mr. Harding's moral wrestling with the question of whether his wardenship had been justly awarded to him and whether it could be justly retained.

While, in the end, Mr. Harding does decide to give up this living, the text argues through his character that, irrespective of the moral dimensions of the existence of wardenships within the church, a virtuous person like Mr. Harding should certainly be allowed to hold a wardenship. In order to give up his wardenship, Mr. Harding must defy his well-intentioned friends and relations, particularly his son-in-law Archdeacon Grantly. In an uncharacteristic move, Mr. Harding sneaks away from Barchester to London without notifying Grantly in order to tell the lawyer Sir Abraham of his intention to quit his post and give up his stipend. The narrator describes how

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[591] Hall, *Trollope*, 148.
[592] Anthony Trollope, *The Warden*, ed. David Skilton (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 13.

> No schoolboy ever ran away from school with more precaution and more dread of detection; no convict, slipping down from a prison wall, ever feared to see the gaoler more entirely than Mr. Harding did to see his son-in-law as he drove up in the pony carriage to the railway station, on the morning of his escape to London.[593]

As he waits for his appointment with Sir Abraham, Mr. Harding spends his time in London skulking about and dining in unlikely places for fear of accidently bumping into his son-in-law.

One way in which Trollope engages in argument using humor is that Harding's characterization, the basis for his argument regarding wardenships, is predominantly defined through humor. Harding's meekness, for example, is a source of his virtue, but it is also a significant source of humor. Playing the cello is a joy to Mr. Harding, but the urge to do so is also often an indicator of his fear and insecurity. Lacking confidence during his meeting with Sir Abraham to discuss quitting the wardenship, the desire to play the cello suddenly comes over him strongly. However, he lacks an instrument. So while seated before Sir Abraham, he begins to move his hands and fingers and "play a slow tune on an imaginary violincello."[594] As his agitation increases, so does the violence of the manifestations of his imaginary playing:

> He was standing up, gallantly fronting Sir Abraham, and his right arm passed with bold and rapid sweeps before him, [. . .] and with the fingers of his left hand he stopped, with preternatural velocity, a multitude of strings, which ranged from the top of his collar to the bottom of the lappet of his coat. Sir Abraham listened and looked in wonder. As he had never before seen Mr. Harding, the meaning of these wild gesticulations was lost upon him.[595]

As Trollope provides further and more specific details of these incongruous actions, both the humor and the sincerity of Mr. Harding's plight is emphasized. This is a scene of bravery as Mr. Harding, after a novel's length of agony over what he ought to do, stands up to Dr. Grantly in absentia and directly to Sir Abraham, who also seeks to dissuade him from quitting the wardenship. But Trollope's narrator belies any attempt by the reader to venerate thoroughly this bravery by making Harding, simultaneously, the source of humor with his incongruous air-cello playing.

Ultimately, the point Trollope seems to be making about wardenships is nuanced. As characters like Bold point out, there was a possibility that individuals within the church could and did take advantage of wardenships and similar appointed roles with stipends within the

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[593] Ibid., 210.
[594] Ibid., 233.
[595] Ibid., 237.

church hierarchy. However, what Trollope is arguing in his focus on Harding's character in particular, is that in the hands of certain kinds of men wardenships can be a means of good within a community.

However subtle Trollope is on this topic of contemporary controversy, there is a secondary concern that *The Warden*'s narrative addresses (occupying two latter-middle chapters), about which the narrator is humorously and unequivocally critical: journalism. In the latter chapters of *The Warden*, John Bold, the reformer, and also suitor to Mr. Harding's daughter Eleanor, travels to London to visit his newspaper acquaintance Tom Towers. Towers has been, at Bold's initial encouragement, publishing condemnations of the greed and peculation of the church in their distribution of paid roles overseeing charitable trusts through cronyism. At this point in the narrative, Bold seeks to dissuade Towers from continuing to pursue this line of attack. The narrator's sarcasm about Towers' response in the negative to Bold's request is trenchant:

> "The public is defrauded," said [Towers], "whenever private considerations are allowed to have weight." Quite sure, thou greatest oracle of the middle of the nineteenth century, thou sententious proclaimer of the purity of the press—the public is defrauded when it is purposely misled. Poor public! how often is it misled! against what a world of fraud has it to contend![596]

The purpose of all of these exclamations is to highlight Towers' role in the deception of the public in his pretense of rejecting interference. Trollope's narrator indicates that there is one private interest that Towers has allowed to influence the content of his paper—Towers' interest in selling his own newspaper.

In addition to Towers, Trollope's narrator singles out two other figures associated with the popular press for satirical censure: Dr. Pessimist Anticant and Mr. Popular Sentiment. Dr. Pessimist Anticant is a pseudonym for Thomas Carlyle, to whom *Hard Times* was dedicated. Carlyle in his famous essay "Signs of the Times" (1829) writes that "[w]ere we required to characterize this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it [. . .] the Mechanical Age."[597] This idea of mechanism as discussed by Carlyle, Michael Goldberg argues, "provided Dickens with a key to understanding much that was wrong with Victorian society."[598]

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[596] Ibid., 204.
[597] Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times", in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. Henry Duff Traill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27:59, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511697296.002.
[598] Michael Goldberg, *Carlyle and Dickens* (Athens, Georgia: Georgia University Press, 1972), 84.

Dickens' regard for Carlyle's philosophies is particularly evident in *Hard Times*, as indicated by its dedication, and Dickens wrote to Carlyle of *Hard Times*, "I know it contains nothing in which you do not think with me."[599]

Further connecting *The Warden* to *Hard Times*, Trollope's other satirical character, Mr. Popular Sentiment, with his "rattling, lively [. . .] Buckett and Mrs. Gamp" is a pseudonym for Dickens.[600] Trollope's satirical account of Mr. Sentiment accuses this popular author of a morally reductive writing style for the purpose of, like Towers, appealing to subscribers: "The artist who paints for the million must use glaring colours."[601] And Trollope's description of the problems with Mr. Sentiment's writings in *The Warden*, published in 1855, seem particularly applicable to Dickens' undertaking in *Hard Times*, published in 1854. In *The Warden,* the fictional Mr. Sentiment writes about the Barchester story obliquely to denounce Mr. Harding. The newsman Tom Towers notes that "[i]t's very clear that Sentiment has been down to Barchester, and got up the whole story there."[602] This little detail evokes Dickens' well-known fact-finding trip to the famous site of mill strikes at Preston before writing *Hard Times*. After that journey, Dickens wrote an account of the situation he found there in "On Strike" for *Household Words* in February of 1854.[603] Preston, and aspects of what Dickens saw there, are generally accepted to have served as a model for Coketown.[604]

The bedesmen who live at the beneficence of the will that the warden in Sentiment's novel dispenses are, according to Trollope's narrator, so saccharine that "it was really a pity that these eight old men could not be sent through the country as moral missionaries, instead of being

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[599] Dickens to Carlyle, 13 July 1854, in *Letters* 7:367. For a discussion of Carlyle's influence on Dickens and particularly how that influence manifests in *Hard Times*, see Goldberg's "The Critique of Utility: *Hard Times* (1854)", in *Carlyle and Dickens*, 78–99.
[600] Anthony Trollope, *The Warden*, 206.
[601] Ibid., 208.
[602] Ibid., 200.
[603] Charles Dickens, "On Strike", *Household Words* 8, no. 203 (February 11, 1854): 553. Oliphant assumed in reference to *Hard Times*, in a review of Dickens' works, that the narrative used Preston as a model: "We anticipated a story, certainly sad—perhaps tragical—but true, of the unfortunate relationship between masters and men which produced the strike of Preston." She also calls the conclusion of *Hard Times* "lame and impotent." "Charles Dickens", *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 1:61.
[604] See Sutherland, *Longman Companion,* 276; and Altick, *Presence*, 69; cf. Robert L. Patten, who argues that Dickens resisted this association because he feared it would "'localize'" his critique, which he wanted to be understood as applicable "'all over England.'" *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 173.

immured and starved in that wretched alms-house."[605] In Trollope's account of the bedesmen in *The Warden*, he depicts a diverse group of men with varying motivations: none evil and none perfectly good. Even of Bunce, the most supportive of Mr. Harding, the narrator jokingly says, "[o]h, Bunce, Bunce, Bunce, I fear that after all thou art but a flatterer."[606] And of the worst few of the eight, the narrator can only bring himself to suggest gently that they had pursued legal action against Mr. Harding because they had been misled to believe that the warden had wronged them by retaining funds due to them. Mr. Sentiment's exaggeration of the virtues of the poor and the wickedness of their oppressors, according to Trollope's narrator, is a mode of criticism that is too hyperbolic to connect with reality. The narrator explains that "[r]idicule is found to be more convincing than argument, imaginary agonies touch more than true sorrows."[607]

Trollope's apparent critique of Dickens, that his poor are unrealistically virtuous, is particularly applicable to the moral dichotomy set up in *Hard Times* between poor, humble people and the promoters and leaders of manufacturing and industry. The first group of poor worthies are the factory workers such as Stephen Blackpool who are defined by their suffering. Stephen, in particular, functions as more of a symbol than a realized character: in this instance as a symbol of the virtuous and poor objects of oppression by the manufacturers of Coketown. Notably, he and his fellow factory hands are characterized almost exclusively with pathos and without humor.

But in addition to this pathos-ridden camp of virtue, is another camp of virtue in opposition to the Gradgrindian school of thought: Sleary and his circus community. Of Sleary's circus, Dickens' narrator remarks that there "was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any sharp practice, and untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving often of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the every-day virtues of any class of people in the world."[608] Sleary and his circus represent fancy as opposed to Gradgrind's school of fact. And while Gradgrind is the object of the narrator's sarcasm and satire, the circus folks are perhaps the primary source of typical Dickensian humor in *Hard Times*: they are remarkable for their jolliness and their earnest

[605] Anthony Trollope, *The Warden*, 208.
[606] Ibid., 30.
[607] Ibid., 205–206.
[608] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 31.

ridiculousness.[609] Whenever the narrative in *Hard Times* returns to the circus, fancy reenters the narrative, with, for example, such ludicrous information as "[t]he Emperor of Japan, on a steady old white horse stenciled with black spots, was twirling five wash-hand basins at once, as it is the favorite recreation of that monarch to do."[610] These circus performers in their association with fancy and anti-utility are the examples of virtuous motive and behavior in the novel.[611]

Even when Sissy's father abandons her, the narrator cannot quite bring himself to condemn this action and refocuses the condemnation on Mr. Bounderby's unfeeling instructions to Sissy to face the situation logically and get over her dejection immediately. The narrator sarcastically comments that Sleary's people "cared so little for plain Fact, these people, and were in that advanced state of degeneracy on the subject, that instead of being impressed by [Mr. Bounderby's] strong common sense, they took it in extraordinary dudgeon."[612] The focus the narrator takes in these painful circumstances are not on the individual violation of moral behavior—the abandonment of one's child—but on the collective virtues of the community. When Trollope objects to Dickens' moral criticism for being too simple and reductive, it is not just the pathos-imbued scenes with Stephen that he is referring to. He explains, in relation to Mr. Sentiment again, that "his good poor people are so very good; his hard rich people so very hard; and the genuinely honest so very honest."[613] To paint in these reductive extremes, Trollope suggests, renders arguments inaccurate and problematic.

In relation to the primary story about Mr. Harding in *The Warden,* even as Trollope engages in persuasion and critique, he seeks to demonstrate that "in this world no good is unalloyed, and that there is but little evil that has not in it some seed of what is goodly."[614] Of Mr. Sentiment's novels, Trollope sarcastically writes that there must always be a "Mephistopheles of the drama. What story was ever written without a demon? What novel, what

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[609] Sleary's circus evokes Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of humor as related to the carnivalesque, which is "organized on the basis of laughter" and "built a second world and a second life outside officialdom." *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 8; 6.
[610] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 208.
[611] They are also, notably, associated with childlikeness, not unlike the depiction of childlikeness in *A Christmas Carol* discussed in chapter two of this thesis. The characters called Kiddermister and Childers are particularly pointed indications of the associations between children and the circus in *Hard Times*. This association of childlikeness and fancy in these uneducated people is juxtaposed with the earlier scene in the schoolroom where notions of fact are being inculcated in the naturally fanciful children.
[612] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 32.
[613] Anthony Trollope, *The Warden*, 206.
[614] Ibid., 194.

history, what work of any sort, what world, would be perfect without existing principles both of good and evil?"[615] In *The Warden* there is seemingly no villain per se. At the outset of the conflict, it appears that the villain will be John Bold, who takes up the idea that the funds of the wardenship have been mismanaged. But the narrator explains that Bold is no such extreme creature. Instead, the narrator suggests, he is merely "too much imbued with the idea that he has a special mission for reforming. It would be well if one so young had a little more diffidence himself, and more trust in the honest purposes of others."[616] With all of his best intentions and reformer's zeal, Bold will not do for a villain.

Another option for villain in *The Warden* is Archdeacon Dr. Grantly, Harding's son-in-law. In his *Autobiography*, Trollope explains that Dr. Grantly, "who has been said to be life-like", is "the simple result of an effort of my moral consciousness."[617] Indeed, rather than a villain, Grantly is presented as another well-meaning antagonist. Dr. Grantly is firm in his support for the church's position throughout, even when Harding begins to question the appropriateness of his own position as warden. However, much like the narrator's generous characterization of Bold's motives, whenever Grantly becomes too much like a villain, the narrator interposes to assure the reader that his intentions are good and that he is no caricature, but a human instead, though he "has as many eyes as Argus."[618] After Dr. Grantly's name is introduced as a figure to be reckoned with, the narrator mediates this first impression through a humorous description—when he dons his nightcap and joins his wife in bed.[619] The narrator explains that

> Many of us have often thought how severe a trial of faith must this be to the wives of our great church dignitaries [. . .]. A dean or archbishop, in the garb of his order, is sure of our reverence, and a well-got-up bishop fills our very souls with awe. But how can this feeling be perpetuated in the bosom of those who see the bishops without their aprons, and the archdeacons even in a lower state of dishabille?[620]

This humorous interjection and interpretation by the narrator suggests that while most people, including Dr. Grantly himself, take the archdeacon quite seriously, the narrator and Dr. Grantly's wife know better.

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[615] Ibid., 207.
[616] Ibid., 15.
[617] Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography*, 93.
[618] Anthony Trollope, *Warden*, 17.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Ibid., 18.

The contrast in the introduction of Dr. Grantly and the scene in the schoolroom introducing Gradgrind and his henchman Mr. Bounderby demonstrate the different critical positions taken by the narrator of either text. The characters and the stakes are so purposefully hyperbolic in *Hard Times* that some critics have suggested that it ought to be read as a dystopian novel.[621] While dystopia as a genre is not necessarily associated with humor, the conventions of exaggeration and extremity unite them. As Dickens varies his pathetic and humorous appeals, he presents his message on more of a heightened symbolic than realist stage. Gradgrind is an exaggerated vehicle for a belief system in an exaggerated dystopian world whose downfall by the close of the narrative, due to the inadequacy of his belief system, is a warning that serves Dickens' didactic purpose.

One other notable parallel in the critical undertakings of *The Warden* and *Hard Times* is the way in which both texts fail to live up to certain standards expressed by the texts themselves. In his criticism of *Hard Times*, both indirectly through the nuance he emphasizes throughout *The Warden* and directly in his satirical depiction of Mr. Popular Sentiment, Trollope suggests that Dickens has exaggerated to the point of inaccuracy. Reflecting on the criticism he received for not picking a side in *The Warden*, Trollope explains later in his *Autobiography* that, when he set out to write *The Warden*, he did so with the express intent of avoiding caricature. And in a description illustrative of Trollope's objection to Mr. Sentiment, Trollope explains of his choice: "Satire, though it may exaggerate the vice it lashes, is not justified in creating it in order that it may be lashed. Caricature may too easily become a slander, and satire a libel."[622] What Trollope sought to avoid, and what he suggests in *The Warden* that Mr. Sentiment does, is to create a strawman that no longer resembles the issue at hand and can easily be beaten down.[623]

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[621] See Northrop Frye, "Dickens and the Comedy of Humors", *Experience in the Novel: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 67; Lena Toker, "'Hard Times' and a Critique of Utopia: A Typological Study", *Narrative* 4, no. 3 (October 1996): 218–234; Melissa Schaub, "The Serial Reader and the Corporate Text: 'Hard Times' and 'North and South'", *Victorian Review* 39, no. 1 (spring 2013): 182–199, doi:10.1353/vcr.2013.0012; and Philip Rogers, "Dystopian Intertexts: Dickens' 'Hard Times' and Zamiatin's 'We'", *Comparative Literature Studies* 35, no. 4 (1998): 393–411, JSTOR.

[622] Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography*, 95. Considering his characterization of Mr. Prong as discussed in the previous section, however, Trollope did not always live up to this articulated standard regarding exaggeration.

[623] Thackeray makes a similar critique of one of Charles Lever's novels. He writes, "[y]ou cannot have a question fairly debated in this way. You can't allow an author to invent incidents, motives, and characters, in order that he may attack them subsequently. How many Puseyite novels, Evangelical novels, Roman Catholic novels we have had, and how absurd and unsatisfactory are they." "Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve* —

But the irony of Trollope's objection is that, of course, there is one section of his tale in which he fails to be nuanced: his characterization of Dickens and Carlyle as Mr. Sentiment and Dr. Anticant. It is, ironically, in Trollope's particular critique of Dickens and Carlyle in *The Warden*, in its departure from the nuance of his critique of church endowments, that he adopts aspects of the very mode of the heightened comedy of exaggerated critique with which he takes issue. And yet, Trollope's argument about Mr. Sentiment also highlights an irony in the manner in which Dickens has undertaken his argument in *Hard Times*. In an effort to illustrate the inhumanity of Utilitarianism, Dickens strips his characters of their humanity and renders them as symbols. As demonstrated in his other novels, Dickens certainly has the capacity to depict the full, contradictory reality of the individual. But, curiously, to make his point in *Hard Times*, he adopts an almost Utilitarian mode of reductive characterization.

Humor, persuasive purpose, and engagement with contemporary societal controversies unite these two texts despite their difference in approach. It is the humor of exaggeration through which many of Dickens' most potent satirical critiques emerge in *Hard Times*. Leavis, in his assessment of *Hard Times*, explains that "[o]rdinarily Dickens' criticisms of the world he lives in are casual and incidental—a matter of including among the ingredients of a book some indignant treatment of a particular abuse." Whereas in *Hard Times*, Leavis sees Dickens as finally achieving his potential as a critic through the singlemindedness of *Hard Times*' critique.[624] Trollope, who did not merit inclusion in Leavis' list of "The Great Tradition", undertakes his primary critique without singlemindedness. Trollope's humor lends his criticism, grounded in the exploration of personalities, a reasonableness that excludes *The Warden* from the kind of encomium that Leavis writes of *Hard Times*. Trollope's focus in *The Warden* is humane—the question of the virtue of the vocation of wardenship seems much less relevant than the moral convictions of each of the main characters: Bold, Mr. Harding, Dr. Grantly, and Mr. Harding's daughter Eleanor. But Dickens and Trollope clearly had different purposes. Chesterton helpfully explains that despite Dickens' extreme focus in *Hard Times*, that focus is the outcome of "righteous indignation" and that "[i]t may be bitter, but it was a protest against bitterness. It may be dark, but it is the darkness of the subject and not of the author. [. . .] It is perhaps the only

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Comic Politics (3 April 1845)", in *William Makepeace Thackeray's Contributions to the Morning Chronicle*, ed. Gordon N. Ray (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955), 72.

[624] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, 228.

place where Dickens, in defending happiness, for a moment forgets to be happy."[625] There is a darkness and sharpness to the humor in *Hard Times* as it is wielded for the purposes of argument: one that Dickens evidently saw as of great significance to his society. Dickens and Trollope engaged with contemporary controversies in different modes and with a different reliance upon humor: one to highlight extremity and one to highlight moderation. In both texts, however, to engage with their humor is to understand and engage with the argument that either author is presenting through his narrative.

Conclusion

Lionel Trilling argues that the novel's "greatness and its practical usefulness lay in its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his conventional education has led him to see it."[626] What the novel is able to do, as opposed to other kinds of moral writing, is to involve the reader in sympathetic relationship to individuals faced with moral dilemma and uncertainty. This feature of engaging with literature to parse moral questions is particularly present in Eliot, Oliphant, and some of Trollope's work in their use of humor to depict their characters and to construct their narratives. On the other hand, the use of humor in literature can have a less gentle persuasive power. As Molière observed of the power of humor in his preface to *Tartuffe*, "[w]e can easily stand being reprehended, but we cannot stand being mocked. We are willing to be wicked, but we will not be ridiculous."[627] And it is this power of critique through humor that Dickens and Trollope, at points, turn to in their engagement with contemporary controversies: to urge better behavior through ridicule and mockery.

For Trollope, Eliot, Oliphant, and Dickens humor was a significant tool in their attempts to persuade, explain, and teach. The exploration of moral themes and questions in novels provides a way of thinking about and experiencing moral questions aesthetically. And humor, in its different modes, is a powerful rhetorical mode through which authors involve their readers in experiencing and judging the moral questions with which their texts engage.

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[625] Chesterton, *Appreciations*, 171; 176.
[626] Trilling, "Manners", 222.
[627] Molière, "Preface to Tartuffe", in *The Misanthrope and Other Plays*, trans. John Wood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 101.

Conclusion: The Limits of Humor

I: A Series of Deaths

As discussed in chapter two, the broader aim of many authors in these realist texts was to be authentic in their storytelling—to depict real life. Naturally, then, they turned to humor because, as Lang put it, "happy, and jolly, and humorous people" form a part of life.[628] Besides its use in characterization, humor was also used as a powerful educative tool and a persuasive tool to engage with and critique significant ideas through narrative. But to achieve the central goal of authenticity, humor was not the exclusive rhetorical tool employed by these authors. At significant points within most of the humor-dominated texts discussed in this thesis, humor is notably absent.

Humor is not, for example, the primary means of depicting suffering. As explained in chapter two, the humorous and the tragic are connected in that they are both formed by incongruity. Because of this relationship, when incongruity is present it must be framed to be read and received in one or the other light: the humorous or the tragic.[629] To present an incongruity in tragic or pathetic terms it is necessary for humor to depart temporarily from the text's framework for the incongruity to be clearly understood as tragic.

However, using humor in relation to suffering and death, when it is not intended to evoke pathos, is, in a sense, equally conventional: as in black humor or gallows humor. To requote Ted Cohen from chapter two: "If you wish to tell a joke to the largest possible audience, you need a presumed background shared by everyone, and you cannot do better than to presume that everyone in your audience has thought about death."[630] At times it is inappropriate to represent death or suffering humorously and at other times there is almost a fitness to representing suffering or death with humor.

This brief conclusion focuses on some examples where humor is absent from the texts analyzed in this thesis and discusses the evident limits of humor's use in these texts. In particular, this section compares instances of difficult themes like suffering and death and considers whether humor remains or departs as a means of explanation and representation. If

[628] Lang, "Realism and Romance", 687.
[629] Unless it is to be received as merely bizarre or curious.
[630] Cohen, *Jokes*, 43.

Thackeray was correct and the authors considered in this thesis are indeed the weekday preachers of the Victorian period, it should come as no surprise that their sermons must at some point turn to the topic of death and suffering. Preachers are always talking about death. Of the twenty-one humor-dominated texts considered in this thesis, only Thackeray's "Little Dinner" does not mention or describe the death of one of its characters. The role of death in each text is distinct and, correspondingly, so is the presence or absence of humor in relation to it.

The primary focalizer framing incongruity, as discussed in the second chapter, is the narrator. In *The Moonstone*, for example, as discussed in that same chapter, there are competing narrator-focalizers. But there are also competing dominants in *The Moonstone*; and it is primarily the narrators that guide the reader into and out of the various dominants for reading and interpreting the text. While humor and pathos are both modes that various narrators turn to, the overriding dominant of *The Moonstone* is mystery, as indicated by the positioning of the account of the diamond's acquisition by Colonel Herncastle at the beginning. The focalization of the narrators in *The Moonstone* is, therefore, essential for introducing the changing dominant frameworks through which readers are asked to interpret the information of the narrative, particularly the incongruities of the text.

One example of the role of the narrator in framing incongruity, in particular, is in Betteredge's account of Rosanna Spearman's suicide. He explains that after Rosanna had been missing for some time, he is summoned by the Police Sergeant to bring one of Rosanna's boots to the sandy cliffs near the house. He rushes there with "*detective-fever*" and a desire to shield Rosanna from the intrusive policemen.[631] But as he approaches the sergeant, "[h]is face frightened me. I saw a look in his eyes which was a look of horror."[632] Using the boot Betteredge had brought to verify the shoeprints in the sands are Rosanna's, the Sergeant confirms that Rosanna had walked to the cliff-edge alone and had made no return journey. It is Betteredge who first deduces that these clues are not pointing to an accidental death, putting them in the context of his earlier conversation with Rosanna:

> I tried to say, "The death she has died, Sergeant, was a death of her own seeking." [. . .] I heard her again, telling me that the Shivering Sand seemed to draw her to it against her will, and wondering whether her grave was waiting for here *there*. The horror of it struck at me, in some unfathomable way, through my own child. My girl was just her age. My girl, tried as Rosanna was tried, might have lived that miserable life, and died this

[631] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 118 (author's italics).
[632] Ibid., 151.

dreadful death.[633]

Whereas humorous incongruity often benefits from sudden disclosure, Betteredge's realization of this tragic incongruity is revealed gradually. Betteredge's focalization of the event, as he connects to Rosanna's death by imagining the death of his daughter, models for the reader how to read and receive this terrible incongruity. Humor is a dominant that is resumed after the suicide by Betteredge before the close of his narration, and by other narrators: for example, the account of Rosanna's suicide precedes the humorous narration of Drusilla Clack. The focalization of Betteredge as he processes this event is the vehicle that moves the reader from one framework to another: after some time, Betteredge returns to his allusions to *Robinson Crusoe* and chatty asides to his reader.

In contrast to the focalization of the narrator moving the reader into and back out of various dominants, in "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton", Eliot's narrator relies on two dominants: first humor and then, at the climax of the "Sad Fortunes", humor departs and is replaced by pathos. The narrator sows the seeds of Amos' future tragedy amidst consistently humorous commentary preceding the climax of the narrative. Amos' wife Milly arises very early each day to begin the work of looking after her family on increasingly restricted means even as the hardworking and earnest "Amos, who was snoring the snore of the just", sleeps on.[634] Milly is cheerful but overworked, and after the additional burden of the Countess, Milly and Amos are gradually overwhelmed financially and practically and the pregnant Milly falls ill.

Notably, as Mrs. Barton is on her deathbed, the narrator does not altogether abandon humor. Instead, a moderate amount of the humorous dominant is maintained as the story is eased into the full tragedy of what is about to occur. When asked why little Dickey was kissing his sick mother's hand, he answered, "'[i]t id to yovely,' [. . .] Dickey, [. . .] you observe, was decidedly backward in his pronunciation."[635] The narrator facetiously criticizes the innocent boy for his earnest mispronunciation to restrain, somewhat, the pathos of the scene. This tempering of the dawning tragedy is perhaps necessary given the preeminent humorous dominant preceding this exchange. With the subsequent death of Milly and her newly born baby, humorous narration disappears from the narrative.

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[633] Ibid., 152 (author's italics).
[634] Eliot, "Amos", 22.
[635] Ibid., 44.

While humor is appropriate and even helpful for depicting and engaging with some suffering, Cohen also points out that "sometimes the only proper way to think about death is to try looking it straight in its morbid, mordant eye, and on those occasions telling a joke is exactly the wrong thing to do because it is a way of avoiding the real issue."[636] After the death of Mrs. Barton in "Amos Barton", the absence of humor, though it is at variance with the predominant focalization of the narrative up to that point, ultimately serves the narrator's broader, stated purpose in the narrative: "I wish to stir your sympathy with commonplace troubles—to win your tears for real sorrow: sorrow such as may lie next door to you—such as walks neither in rags nor in velvet, but in very ordinary decent apparel."[637] The humor of the text was a preamble to this purpose, which is ultimately sought by looking Amos and his family's suffering "straight in its morbid, mordant eye."

Almost all of the texts considered in this thesis at one point abandon humor as a dominant. One of the exceptions to that generalization is Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*: a useful example of a text with a satirical dominant that does not retire even when death is described. As Gaëtan Brulotte observes, while laughter

> is a way of making contact with others and with the world (this is especially so in the case of teasing), [. . .] yet (and this is another of its fundamental ambivalences), it also implies distance because, in order to laugh at something or someone, we need to view it/them from a detached perspective. Laughter does at least allow us to distance ourselves from the realities of existence, and makes us into spectators of humanity, which means that it can make us insensitive as well as sensitive.[638]

Humor, as has been discussed throughout this thesis, can invite readers into sympathy and understanding with the narrator or focalizer of that humor. But that sympathy can also invite the audience to share the narrator or focalizer's alienation from its object. Particularly in depicting death, humor can be an essential means of granting the reader distance from the suffering of certain characters so as to evade sympathy with them.

For example, in stark contrast to *The Moonstone* and "Amos Barton", in *Vanity Fair* Thackeray describes the deaths of various secondary characters with a humorous anti-sentimentality. Thackeray's brief descriptions of death in *Vanity Fair* achieve a distance from the

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[636] Cohen, *Jokes*, 69.
[637] Eliot, "Amos", 56.
[638] Gaëtan Brulotte, "Laughing at Power", in *Laughter and Power*, eds. John Parkins and John Phillips, trans. John Phillips, European Connections vol. 19 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), 13.

suffering of each death that permits laughter. For example, to describe the death of Miss Crawley, Becky's husband Rawdon's aunt, the narrator merely says, "[t]he last scene of her dismal Vanity Fair comedy was fast approaching; the tawdry lamps were going out one by one; and the dark curtain was almost ready to descend."[639] The mercenary Rawdon wonders if, upon his Aunt Crawley's death, he will receive a significant bequest, but after her will is read they discover she left him only £20. The narrator explains that "[t]hough it told against themselves, the joke was too good, and Becky burst out laughing at Rawdon's discomfiture."[640] The glib description by the narrator and the unsentimental responses of the characters to Miss Crawley's death are, again, focalizations that model how the reader should respond to her death.

Whereas Thackeray maintains a satirical approach to all of the deaths in *Vanity Fair*, Dickens, in his satire *Hard Times*, alternates in his treatment of death and suffering back and forth between callous satire and pitiable pathos. In *Hard Times* the starkest absence of humor occurs in relation to the life and struggle of Stephen Blackpool; much like David Copperfield's wife Agnes, when Stephen enters a scene humor is obliged to depart. His life is described with unremitting pathos. Born in poverty, trapped in a marriage to an alcoholic, but in love with his kind friend Rachel, Stephen is unjustly dismissed from his work at the mills only to be falsely accused of thievery when he is absent from Coketown. As Stephen returns to Coketown to repudiate the accusation of theft, he has a fatal fall down a mineshaft. After he is found and hailed as an innocent, wronged man, Rachel bends over Stephen's dying body and he tells her "'Rachel, beloved lass! Don't let go of my hand. We may walk toogther t'night, my dear!'"[641] Stephen's life and particularly his death are pointedly depicted without interaction with humor. The overall effect of the absence of humor in the description of Stephen's life and death, in contrast to the use of humor elsewhere in the narrative, points to the persuasive purposes Dickens has for Stephen as a symbolic victim of Utilitarian principles.

While Dickens' narrator dwells upon the details of Stephen's death, heightening its pathos as a symbol, the presentation of Bounderby's death, in contrast, is terse and sardonic. Bounderby, Gradgrind's erstwhile associate in the faith of fact, proves unredeemable by the end of the narrative—maintaining a commitment to Utilitarian ideals and antagonistic to Gradgrind's

[639] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 314.
[640] Ibid., 315.
[641] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 204.

redeemed, revised perspective on the world. At the conclusion of the narrative, Bounderby has been exposed as a fraud by the formerly admiring Mrs. Sparsit. Despite some recent reversals of fortune, the narrator shows Bounderby contemplating his future hopefully through a series of questions. Bounderby imagines for himself a purpose and a legacy in Coketown that justifies his actions of deception born out of his belief in fact. But after his vision, the narrator asks in contrast, "[h]ad he any prescience of the day, five years to come, when Josiah Bounderby of Coketown was to die of a fit in the Coketown street [. . .]?"; or did he realize that his legacy would be a will that would bring about a "long career of quibble, plunder, false pretences, vile example, little service and much law? Probably not. Yet the portrait was to see it all out."[642] The contrast between what the narrator depicts as Bounderby's hopes and his future death is an ironic juxtaposition. Irony, according to Swabey, involves "a certain detachment or transcendence."[643] And detachment is what Bounderby's death evokes. Although there is a kind of incongruity in the dismissive way that the narrator explains Bounderby's death, there is simultaneously a kind of congruity between Bounderby's cold, impersonal life and his dying alone and unmourned.

Many of the deaths depicted in the humorous texts considered in this thesis are of peripheral characters: the deaths of Morley Proctor's parishioners in Oliphant's "The Rector", the death of the Squire's wife Mrs. Hamley and his son Osborne in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, the suffering of Little Emily and the death of Steerforth in *David Copperfield*, and the death of the heiress Juley who leaves all of her wealth to Evan in Meredith's *Evan Harrington*. But there is one notable death of a central character that sheds light on another aspect of the presence and absence of humor in relation to the depiction of death: that of Mr. Harding.

Harding's character is predominantly developed through *The Warden* and *Barsetshire Towers*, but his death is not depicted until Anthony Trollope's final novel set in Barsetshire, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (serialized 1866–1867). Of all of the characters who die in the texts discussed in this thesis, Harding is by far the most central and developed figure. Trollope's narrator recounts how Harding has grown increasingly weak and feeble over the sequence of a few weeks. The extent of his weakness is signaled by his inability to play with his beloved granddaughter. She complains, "'Grandpa won't play cat's-cradle' [. . .] 'No, darling,—not this

[642] Ibid., 220–221.
[643] Swabey, *Comic Laughter*, 57.

morning,' said the old man. He himself knew well enough that he would never play cat's-cradle again. Even that was over for him now."[644] Humor is not entirely banished from the situation as the suggestively named Dr. Filgrave arrives to attend to Mr. Harding. The narrator interjects to note, "I do not know that [Dr. Filgrave] had much reputation for prolonging life, but he was supposed to add a grace to the hour of departure."[645] The narrator, however, provides humor and pathos at intervals, as when Mr. Harding's formidable son-in-law Archdeacon Grantly, his sometime antagonist, is stricken, feeling "that the very moment of his father's death had repeated itself."[646] The narrator carries on to relate that all of Barchester turns out to see Mr. Harding laid in his grave, including one of his former bedesmen Bunce, who "was so old that he might have been Mr. Harding's father."[647] While Trollope's narrator at times underlines the pathos of the situation, for the most part, the narrator recounts sparse details of the sequence of events and relies upon the ideal reader to supply the pathos.

As chapter three discussed, much of Trollope's characterization is accomplished through humor and, as argued in the last chapter, this is equally the case in Harding's characterization. And while humor does predominantly, though not entirely, depart for the description of Mr. Harding's death and funeral, it is still fundamental to understanding how his death is framed for readers. The ideal reader of *The Last Chronicle*, is, naturally, one who has read the preceding texts in the series and is acquainted with Mr. Harding and his family. If the reader is ideal, then all the humor of the preceding texts in relation to Mr. Harding has laid a groundwork of interest and sympathy in his character. This sympathy is foundational to the sorrow the reader is invited to experience at his death and the shared sorrow the reader experiences with the other endeared characters who mourn Mr. Harding.

William West observes of the simplicity and brevity of the details Trollope's narrator recounts of this event that

> so easily and naturally does Trollope present the old man's decline and death that there is never any question that Trollope wishes to arouse the kind of passionate grief associated with tragic death; nor is there the slightest indication of a Dickensian invitation to shed a few sentimental tears. On the contrary: the death is presented as a kind of beautiful

[644] Anthony Trollope, *Last Chronicle of Barset*, ed. Peter Fairclough (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 832.
[645] Ibid., 832.
[646] Ibid., 835.
[647] Ibid., 836.

consummation.[648]

As West notes, the scene of Harding's burial achieves an almost comedic effect in the Aristotelian sense. As various characters from the series, beloved and antagonistic, assemble to honor the meek Mr. Harding, Trollope presents this death as bringing about a kind of final unity or harmony in the Barchester series. While this funeral is far from humorous, Trollope's humorous characterization has laid the foundation for both the pathos and the harmony the scene evokes.

In light of the previous chapter, in particular, and its contention as to humor's role in persuasion, there is a fitness to the occasional absence of humor within the fullness of the experience into which the text is inviting its readers. Similarly, there is a fitness to its continued presence, even in relation to suffering, in satirical texts. But what is notable in comparing these examples of suffering in humor-dominated texts is the potential for humor to exert a persistent, significant effect even in its absence.

II: The Shortest Route

If, as Aristotle argues, tragedy is associated with death, pain, and disunion, comedy is in contrast associated with life, reconciliation, and harmony.[649] Stott explains that theorists like Bergson and Susanne Langer describe humor as a kind of comic vitalism. They "position comedy at the ontological centre. [They claim] for comedy a close relation to fertility ritual, rites of passage, and reproductive events."[650] And comedy and laughter are in many ways rightly associated with vitality: joy, birth, and life. While comedy is a designation of genre, the prevalence of humor within that genre also gives it some stake in these associations. For example, underlying Thackeray's argument in "Charity and Humour", quoted at the beginning of this thesis, is an assumption that humor is a forcible means of representing life.[651] However, as this conclusion has suggested, humor, as distinct from comedy, can also play a role, if indirectly, in inviting readers into a community of mourning: another of life's rituals.

The depiction of death and the, sometimes corresponding, absence of humor is important

[648] West, "*The Last Chronicle of Barset*", 127.
[649] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 22; 9.
[650] Stott, *Comedy*, 28. In a similar vein, Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* associates comedy with spring (163–186) and "the green world" (182).
[651] Thackeray, "Charity and Humour", 712.

to highlight at the close of this thesis. The Victorian authors considered in this thesis were not writing these realist texts exclusively for amusement, as valuable as that might have been for their readers. Rather, to return to the assertion of chapter one of this thesis, humor is a way of telling a story, or a part of telling a story, rather than what the story is usually about. It is a part of the broader experience of the novel as a work of art. Susan Sontag argues in her essay "On Style" (1967) that "[a] work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience, not a statement or an answer to a question. Art is not only about something; it is something. A work of art is a thing *in* the world, not just a text or commentary *on* the world."[652] This thesis has approached humor as a tool of rhetoric in the art of Victorian narrative. While one of the purposes of this research has been to examine the centrality of humor in their craft and as a tool of their narratives, ultimately the focus has been to understand humor as a contributing part of the whole.

As has been discussed in all of the chapters of this thesis, humor orients: it can invite or it can alienate; it can create a community or it can target a community; it can build understanding or it can ridicule a lack of understanding. Humor has been shown to be a means of critique, attack, and alienation at points, as when the humor is oriented, for example, to convict the readers of Thackeray's "A Little Dinner at Timmins's." But, on the whole, the manner in which these Victorians authors used humor within their realist narratives was not to alienate or exclude their readers from most of their characters, but as an invitation into a community of sympathy and understanding with their characters through their narrators. Thackeray, if he can be taken to represent some of his contemporaries, argued in "Charity and Humour" that "humour is wit and love; I am sure, at any rate, that the best humour is that which contains most humanity, that which is flavored throughout with tenderness and kindness."[653]

Noting and demonstrating the absence of humor in some instances foregrounds humor's proper importance and its limitations: it cannot and did not do all things. But humor was an important means of bringing readers into texts—even to ultimately encounter and experience tragedy. Brulotte explains that laughter "has the power of social cohesion, implying companionship, shared memories and collective activity. It offers the shortest route from one human being to another."[654] In these texts, humor offered the shortest route from humans to

[652] Susan Sontag, "On Style", in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), 21 (author's italics).
[653] Thackeray, "Charity and Humour", 715.
[654] Brulotte, "Laughing", 12.

characters and, usually week to week or month to month, readers were invited through humor into companionship, memory, and "collective activity" with literary characters: usually to laugh, as at the antics of the ladies of Cranford, or Lucilla Marjoribanks, or Wilkins Micawber, but also, at other times, to weep, as at the death of a good, old friend like Mr. Harding.

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