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MELANCHOLY AND MIRTH: REALISTIC AND SELF-CONSCIOUS MODES IN
THACKERAY, TROLLOPE AND JAMES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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*****

The Ohio State University
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CHAPTER 1

Most critics know Henry James's famous statement that "the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life." To James, a novel must be "history," and the novelist must not "give himself away," but must "speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian." Any novelist who employs devices calling attention to the fact that the novel is an artifice instead of "true history" is, in James's view, "apologizing" for the novel; and to apologize in this way is "a betrayal of a sacred office," a "terrible crime."^1 Because of his obvious bias toward realism (which James understands to mean mimetic representation of the real world), James found it "impossible to imagine what a novelist takes himself to be unless he regard himself as an historian and his narrative as a history."^2

Although many critics display even today a bias toward mimesis in literature, others have not found it impossible to imagine roles for the novelist and reasons for the existence of the novel which are opposed to the ones given by James. One such critic is Robert Alter. Reacting against the prevailing bias in favor of "serious realism," Alter acknowledges the fact that "there has been a lamentable
lack of critical appreciation for the kind of novel that expresses its seriousness through playfulness, that is acutely aware of itself as a mere structure of words, even as it tries to discover ways of going beyond words to the experiences words seek to indicate." Thus, Alter has devoted himself to a study of the "other great tradition," that of the self-conscious novel.

A self-conscious novel is defined as "a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by doing so probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality." The tradition of the self-conscious novel is as old as the novel itself: Cervantes began both traditions in Don Quixote, which anticipates all the self-conscious techniques that were later used in the works of Fielding, Sterne, and Diderot. For Alter, the self-conscious novel flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but found itself "in eclipse" in the nineteenth century, when self-conscious techniques could only emerge from under the pressures of conventional realism by "fits and starts." Finally, in the twentieth century, the self-conscious novel is again able to assert itself, and rises triumphantly in works like Pale Fire and The French Lieutenant's Woman.

James's assumption of the superiority of realism is apparently balanced by Alter's bias in favor of the self-conscious novel; and we may feel that justice has been done.
But when we examine these two stances disinterestedly, we see immediately that this balance has been achieved only because the two critics share the same basic assumption: that realism and self-conscious artifice are mutually-exclusive modes of writing which may not be mixed in the same novel, except to its detriment. James prefers the realistic, historical novel while Alter, reacting against Jamesian criticism, makes his case for the wholly self-conscious novel; but both critics agree on one basic assumption: any novel which mixes realism and self-consciousness is artistically flawed and evinces a certain lack of clear purpose. And this assumption is problematic.

There have always been problems surrounding the use of the literary term "realism," especially when that term is taken, as it usually is, to mean a representation of reality. What does it mean to say that a novel, obviously a work of art, is realistic? As has become painfully clear, the answer to this question varies extensively according to one's orientation to art and to external reality. To begin to apprehend the variety of answers possible to this question, one need only compare the views of two critics of the realistic novel, such as Erich Auerbach and Georg Lukacs. Since each defines reality itself differently, it is possible for Auerbach to claim the status of realism for works by Joyce and Woolf, while Lukacs utterly denies that their work is realistic.
Woolf herself claims a greater realism for her work than that found in the work of her "materialistic" predecessors, Galsworthy, Wells, and Bennett, in her famous essay "The Novel of Consciousness":

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being "like this." Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms. . . . Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display. . . ?

And Woolf, of course, is not alone. Throughout literary history writers have been anxious to justify their work by its faithfulness to life, by its realism; as each new school arises, its proponents almost always find it necessary to argue that their work is somehow more realistic than that of their forerunners. In an essay on realism, Roman Jakobson compares this process of justification to one aspect of the evolution of language: just as we search for new words when we want a verbal expression to be particularly striking, so "the words of yesterday's narrative grow stale; now the item is described by features that were yesterday held to be the least descriptive, the least worth
representing, features which were scarcely noticed." During this evolutionary process, of course, proponents of the old schools reject any deformation of their cherished canons as unrealistic just as vehemently as the new school proclaims its progress to be in the direction of a greater realism. Thus it is that the term "realism," lacking any sort of concrete, universally-agreed-upon definition, has nonetheless been used throughout literary history, by writers and critics alike, for purposes of evaluation. In his discussion of literary realism, Jakobson sums up the problem. One's view of what is realistic in literature, he says, depends entirely on one's previous assumptions and the conventions to which one adheres because he believes them to be the most realistic: "Whoever senses faithfulness to life in Racine does not find it in Shakespeare, and vice versa."7

Opposing realism, itself so slippery a term, to self-consciousness, as James and Alter oppose it, only magnifies the problem. For it is possible to argue that self-conscious techniques actually lead to realism rather than oppose it: self-conscious devices which call attention to the fact that the novel is a verbal construct merely lead to realism, since the novel is, in reality, an artifice. Thus, the problem of double time, for example, which plagues the self-conscious Tristram Shandy as author of his own autobiography may be seen to be realistic because it imitates or represents the "true" relationship between the historical time in
which all autobiographers live and the literary time within their work:

I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume—and no farther than to my first day's life—'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it—on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back—was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this. . . . (chapter XIII)

But the problem of the relationship between realism and self-consciousness again increases in complexity when we carry our reasoning one step further. It is true that one may argue that self-conscious techniques such as the one discussed above lead to a sort of realism; but that realism itself must finally be seen as artifice. That is, the Tristram Shandy who complains of his "realistic" problems as an author is not, of course, a real author, but is himself a verbal construct, an artifice, as artificial as the story he is telling.

Obviously, we must conclude that pure mimesis in literature is impossible: as Jakobson argues, verisimilitude in the visual arts may be possible, but "verisimilitude in verbal expression or in a literary description . . . makes no sense whatever." And if we admit that literary realism, as a mode of writing which seeks to imitate external reality,
and which is clearly distinguished from a self-conscious, artificial mode of writing, is impossible, then both James's and Alter's basic assumptions fall flat. In his article "Thematics," Boris Tomashevsky sums up our argument so far:

From school to school we hear the call to "Naturalism." Why, then, has a "completely naturalistic school" not been founded, one which would be the ultimate in Naturalism?--because the name "Realist" is attached to each school (and to none). Naive literary histories use "Realist" as the highest praise of a writer. . . . This explains the ever present antagonism of the new school for the old--that is, the exchange of old and obvious conventions for new, less obvious ones within the literary pattern. On the other hand, this also shows that realistic material in itself does not have artistic structure and that the formation of an artistic structure requires that reality be reconstructed according to aesthetic laws. Such laws are always, considered in relation to reality, conventional.

We are now ready to arrive at a more helpful formulation of the terms "realism" and "self-consciousness": they are both conventions operating within a literary system which is, by definition, artificial. Neither term is evaluative, and neither convention is oriented in relation to external reality; instead, each is oriented according to other literary conventions and forms found within the literary system. Realism may now be seen as that literary convention, or group of devices, which the author and reader agree to understand as producing the illusion of verisimilitude; self-consciousness may be seen as that literary convention,
or group of devices, which the author and reader agree to understand as producing an awareness of literary artifice.

In the light of these definitions of realism and self-consciousness, we may now turn to another interesting point of agreement between James and Alter. Just as they share the belief that a mixture of realism and artifice in a single novel is a mistake, so they also share an inability to account satisfactorily for this mixture when it appears in the work of two of the most important English novelists of the nineteenth century, William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope. James has special trouble with what is called the "intrusive" narrator in the works of these novelists; Alter ignores Trollope altogether and finds Thackeray "diffident" and "wavering." I propose to argue that we can better understand both Thackeray and Trollope only when we discard James's and Alter's assumption that realism and self-consciousness are mutually-exclusive modes of writing. When we regard realism and artifice as literary conventions, neither of which exists in isolation from the literary system of which it is a part, we begin to see how they may profitably be mixed in the same novel so that each convention comments on and exposes the other. Novels using primarily the convention of realism and novels using primarily the convention of artifice have been analysed and praised according to the assumptions of critics like James and
Alter; but it is only when we re-orient our critical assumptions that we may become more adequately equipped to deal with the mixture of realistic and self-conscious conventions in the novels of Thackeray, Trollope—and even James himself.

There are two important implications in this critical stance which should be examined briefly before we move to a consideration of the novels of Thackeray, Trollope, and James. First, this stance implies a structuralist view of literary history: literary works evolve from other literary works, and this succession is motivated by artistic considerations rather than mimetic ones. "New form comes about not in order to express new content but in order to replace an old form that has already lost its artistic viability." Moreover, new form comes about not through the introduction of new elements into the literary system, but through a transformation or recombination of the same elements which had informed the old works. As Jurij Tynjanov says, "each instance of literary succession is first and foremost a struggle involving a destruction of the old unity and a new construction out of the old elements." Thus, the novels of Thackeray, Trollope, and James achieve their individual forms through new combinations of the major conventions which they inherit, including the conventions of mimesis and of self-consciousness.

Viktor Šklovskij carries this view of literary evolution
one step further, stressing the literary dynamism which it implies: "a dynamism expressed in incessant violations of the canon being established." And this artistic dynamism is manifested moreover in each individual work of art, which must be seen as essentially fluid. As devices and conventions are inherited and recombined in new works, their functions change according to their new contexts; even as we may remember their old functions, they assume new ones. Each device impinges upon, deforms, and exposes the devices surrounding it: a comic narrative pattern, for example, will be viewed differently in the end according to whether it is preceded by tragedy and surrounded by an ironic frame (as in Wuthering Heights), whether it forms a subplot to a series of other plots which may be variously described as tragic and/or ironic (as in the Fred Vincy-Mary Garth plot of Middlemarch), or whether it forms the major pattern in a work and is merely interrupted by grotesque or ironic interpolations from time to time (as in The Pickwick Papers). Thus, we may expect to regard the conventions of realism and self-consciousness in a new light when they appear together, exposing and commenting on each other, in the works I shall be discussing. Further, I shall argue that it is precisely this fluidity, this combination and interplay of apparently conflicting conventions, that allows the reader of these works to perceive their palpableness of form and so to experience much of
his aesthetic delight when reading them.14

With these critical principles in mind, let us turn to an examination of selected works of Thackeray, Trollope, and James. It is rather a commonplace now to admit that we perceive in art only what our previous critical assumptions allow us to perceive; and I think that the critical principles I have outlined above will allow us, finally, to understand that Trollope is not clumsily apologetic in his work, that Thackeray is neither "diffident" nor "waverling," and that James as novelist was, fortunately, less naive than James as critic and theorist.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 1


4. Alter, p. x.

5. Alter, p. xi.


10. Alter, p. 127.


13. Žejxenbaum, p. 17.

14. In "The Theory of the Formal Method," Boris M. Žejxenbaum cites Šklovskij's theory of the palpableness of form as "the specific criterion of perception in art": "... 'artistic' perception is a perception that entails awareness of form (perhaps not only form, but invariably form)" (p. 12).
The two subtitles variously given to *Vanity Fair* indicate that the novel may not be understood as wholly realistic or wholly self-conscious: *Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society* leads us to expect a realistic work, while *A Novel Without a Hero* draws our attention to the artistic orientation of Thackeray's masterpiece. To what extent the movement from one subtitle to the other may show a change in Thackeray's thinking about the novel is not important here; what is important is the fact that the two subtitles are both appropriate to the work as it stands today, for *Vanity Fair* is informed by a mixture of realistic and self-conscious conventions.

Realism and self-conscious artifice appear side by side immediately as we begin to read *Vanity Fair*. In the famous Prologue, the "Manager of the Performance" prepares us for a self-conscious novel as he modestly speaks of the popularity of his Becky Puppet, Amelia Doll, and Dobbin Figure. He has "spared no expense" on his Wicked Nobleman, we are told, "which Old Nick will fetch away at the end of this singular performance"; finally, the whole story will be "accompanied by appropriate scenery, and brilliantly
illuminated with the Author's own candles.\textsuperscript{1} After all this talk about puppets, stock figures and performances, we may be brought up short by the obviously representational orientation of the first sentence of the first chapter, which immediately follows the Prologue: "While the present century was in its teens, and on one sunshiny morning in June, there drove up to the great iron gate of Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies, on Chiswick Mall, a large family coach, with two fat horses in blazing harness, driven by a fat coachman in a three-cornered hat and wig, at the rate of four miles an hour" (I). If this realistic description, with its historically identifiable setting and abundance of mimetic detail, surprises us after the self-conscious Prologue, we had better learn to take such surprises in stride; for Thackeray continues to shock us with strange juxtapositions and mixtures of verisimilitude and artifice throughout his novel.

Predictably, many critics have found this mixture disturbing and, anxious to claim \textit{Vanity Fair} for either the realist or the self-conscious school, have set about praising some parts of the novel and damning or ignoring others. Percy Lubbock, for example, bases his critical study of \textit{Vanity Fair} on its mimetic power: the subject and strength of the work are to be found in "the impression of a world, a society, a time—certain manners of life within
a few square miles of London, a hundred years ago." Thackeray's self-conscious intervention on behalf of his characters Lubbock finds "pervasive." Likewise, Geoffrey Tillotson defends *Vanity Fair*'s apparent "formlessness" as a mark of Thackeray's commitment to mimetic honesty: ". . . Thackeray's verisimilitude ruled out formal plots. . . ." And Gordon Ray has praised *Vanity Fair* as "the classic moment of English realism."

On the other hand, Alexander Welsh calls attention to the self-conscious artifice of *Vanity Fair*: "Thackeray keeps refusing to disguise his fiction as fact. . . . Thackeray's use of fiction is both daring and necessarily self-conscious." John Loofbourou too argues that "*Vanity Fair* . . . is Thackeray's first major synthesis of literary conventions; variants on the fashionable mode—idealized crime and sentimental love—are major themes." And Arnold Kettle stresses the artificiality of Thackeray's characters, which he says "are presented to us, by and large, in the tradition of the comedy of humors." Since many such critics, however, seem primarily interested in vindicating their own approaches to fiction by claiming *Vanity Fair* for whatever school they espouse, perhaps we should leave them with an even score and turn to Thackeray's work.

In *Structuralist Poetics* Jonathan Culler states that "the basic convention which governs the novel—and which, a fortiori, governs those novels which set out to violate
it—is our expectation that the novel will produce a world. 

*Vanity Fair* does produce a world; and to some extent it is the realistic, recognizable world of England in the early nineteenth century. This world is verified for us repeatedly as events are placed in concrete geographical and historical settings: we are told that certain actions occurred in London, Brighton, or Brussels, in 1815, or 1833, or just before or after the Battle of Waterloo or the passing of the First Reform Bill. Napoleon is mentioned frequently by the narrator and the characters; and even some of the minor characters have been seen as mimetic representations of real people. Moreover, throughout *Vanity Fair* examples abound of what Jonathan Culler calls "descriptive residue" or "items whose only apparent role in the text is that of denoting a concrete reality": for example, in the first chapter we learn that the coach which is to carry Amelia Sedley and Rebecca Sharp from Miss Pinkerton's academy is driven by a coachman who is fat and who is accompanied by a black servant with bandy legs. Neither the coachman nor the servant plays an important role in the novel; neither need be described at all save for the purpose of creating the illusion of reality. Finally, along with the plethora of geographical, historical and realistic detail, the language of the characters is painstakingly realistic, as Gordon Ray has noted: "Thackeray's realism is as exact in
dialogue as in description and narrative. . . . In the fiction of the 1840s it was common enough to find the dialogue of comic characters reported with some accuracy. . . . [Thackeray's] real triumph comes in his ability to differentiate the speech of educated characters who pretend to some degree of cultivation.\(^{11}\)

But to say that the world of *Vanity Fair* is realistic is to describe it only halfway. For, from the Prologue on, the reader is not allowed to forget that this world, representational as it may sometimes seem, is actually created through words. The world of *Vanity Fair*, it is stressed, is not an historical world which once existed and is now being described, remembered or represented through Thackeray's words; it is a world which comes into being only through the words of the novel and cannot exist apart from them.

The verbal corporeality of Thackeray's world is clearly revealed early in the novel when the narrator assures us that, had he so desired, he could have treated his subject (George, Amelia, Jos and Rebecca at Vauxhall) "in the genteel, or in the romantic, or in the facetious manner" (VI). He then proceeds to outline for us the interesting new forms his subject might have taken had it been treated in any of these manners; and in each case, as we might have expected, the new story is quite different from the one that the narrator finally tells. After displaying his
verbal ingenuity, the narrator humbly admits that "my readers must hope for no such romance, only a homely story, and must be content with a chapter about Vauxhall, which is so short that it scarce deserves to be called a chapter at all. And yet it is a chapter, and a very important one too. Are not there little chapters in everybody's life, that seem to be nothing, and yet affect all the rest of the history?" (VI). Like so many of the passages from *Vanity Fair* which I shall be examining, this one is tricky and complex. On the one hand, the narrator seems to be disclaiming use of artificial writing styles and revealing his honesty, his realism, and his view of the novel as history which, moreover, imitates actual daily history ("little chapters in everybody's life"). On the other hand, of course, such a disclaimer cannot help but call our attention to the fact that realism is merely one of many artistic conventions; and we are led to see that the narrator's "realistic" story is actually a fragile artifice, which would be vastly different were a few words changed. This kind of simultaneous exposure of both artifice and realism is discussed by Boris Tomashevsky in his article "Thematics": "A system of realistic motivation quite often includes a denial of artistic motivation. The usual formula is, 'If this had happened in a novel, my hero would have done such and such, but since it really happened, here are the facts. . . .' But the denial of the literary
form in itself asserts the laws of artistic composition."^{12}

Thackeray's exploration of the same "story" in different styles is only an obvious example of the self-consciousness of *Vanity Fair*. As John Loofbourow has shown, the talent for parody and burlesque that Thackeray had demonstrated in his many satiric articles and books before *Vanity Fair* found its way also into his masterpiece; and parodies of accepted literary styles and conventions inform much of *Vanity Fair*. It is important to note, moreover, that whenever literary parody occurs in Thackeray's novel, it is nearly always double-edged, as it was in the exploration of different styles which we examined above: it simultaneously exposes the convention being parodied, and lays bare the conventionality of *Vanity Fair*'s realism. And this process, as we shall see, is integrated with the central meaning of the novel; as Robert Alter says of *Don Quixote*, "In this self-conscious mode of fiction, literary criticism is not, as it may sometimes seem, interpolated, but is an essential moment in the act of imagination, an act that is at once 'conjuration and radical probing.'"^{13}

According to John Loofbourow, the major literary modes parodied in *Vanity Fair* include the heroic or epic mode, the pastoral mode, the chivalric romance, and fashionable fiction, in its two forms, dramatic-criminal romance, and sentimental romance. Since *Vanity Fair* is
subtitled *A Novel Without a Hero*, it is not surprising to find that the work repeatedly stresses its shift from the high mimetic to the low mimetic mode through use of the mock-heroic or mock-epic style. The term "hero," in fact, echoes throughout *Vanity Fair*, reminding us each time we come upon it that it is being applied ironically, since the world of this novel admits of no true heroism. George Osborne, for example, is fashioned into a hero by William Dobbin and by Amelia; all the while it is as obvious to the reader as it is to the narrator and to Rebecca Sharp that he is no better than a conceited and selfish dandy "who condescends to be loved" in his "love-transaction" with Amelia (XIII). The other character of the novel who is actually designated a "hero" is Amelia's brother, Jos Sedley, the secret of whose heroism lies, apparently, in his huge frame and flamboyant couture: he is even less a hero than is George.

The character whose actions approach heroism most nearly is William Dobbin, who embarks on a steady, unwavering quest throughout the novel, a quest which begins with his schoolboy fight on George's behalf and ends with his marriage to Amelia. Moreover, Dobbin is a brave and steady soldier; he saves little Tom Stubble's life at Waterloo, we are told: "And it was Captain Dobbin who at the end of the day, though wounded himself, took up the lad in his
arms and carried him to the surgeon, and thence to the cart which was to bring him back to Brussels" (XXXII).

Dobbin is never called heroic by Amelia, by George, or by anyone; but, knowing what we know about the unreliability of any spokesman from Vanity Fair, such silence may recommend him to us as heroic almost more than any action he might perform. But we are not asked to see Dobbin as a hero in any conventional sense, as the narrator takes pains to point out. From his first fight on George's behalf to his final winning of Amelia, Dobbin's quest is treated in the mock-heroic vein. Of Dobbin's schoolboy fight, the narrator says, "If I had the pen of a Napier, or a Bell's Life, I should like to describe this combat properly. It was the last charge of the Guard (that is, it would have been, only Waterloo had not yet taken place)—it was Ney's column breasting the hill of La Haye Sainte, bristling with ten thousand bayonets, and crowned with twenty eagles. . . ." (V).

Dobbin's victory is not only treated as mock-heroic; it is treated as "merely fictional." And of Dobbin's winning of Amelia the narrator says, "The vessel is in port. He has got the prize he has been trying for all his life. The bird has come in at last. There it is with its head on his shoulder, billing and cooing close up to his heart, with soft outstretched fluttering wings. This is what he has asked for every day and hour for eighteen years. This
is what he pined after. Here it is—the summit, the end—
the last page of the third volume" (L.XVII).

I don't mean to be too hard on William Dobbin.
He is, after all, what no-one else in Vanity Fair is:
a gentleman. And if George Osborne is regarded as a hero
in Vanity Fair, we can hardly do otherwise than to prefer
that rarer breed which is represented by William Dobbin.
But Dobbin is not a hero; and I think that those critics
who are disappointed in him have forgotten the subtitle
of Thackeray's novel. Dobbin is no weaker than a gentleman
must appear to be in the world of Vanity Fair. But his
lifelong quest for Amelia is a parody of the heroic quest,
as Dobbin himself finally discovers: the object of his
quest is not worth winning, just as George, much earlier,
was not worth defending. And the narrator's reference
to "the last page of the third volume" just as he is
describing Dobbin's triumph (about which we must already
feel some doubts) simply reminds us of the literary, parodic
nature of Dobbin's quest: his whole life has been an
ironic inversion of the conventional heroic quest, and
his "triumph" has been achieved right on schedule, to
the delight of the artificer.

The mock-heroic mode reverberates outward from George,
Jos and Dobbin to many of the less important characters.
Indeed, it seems that Thackeray's narrator can hardly
resist mock-heroic treatment of anyone; he must always remind us of the disparity between the world of heroism and the ironic world of Vanity Fair. Mr. Pitt, for example, is seen as a Machiavel; only he is not scheming for political power over nations, but for the majority of the inheritance from an ailing maiden aunt (XXXIV). Later, after he has achieved his goal and inherited his father's title as well, he adopts another larger-than-life role: in an argument with Lady Southdown, his mother-in-law, over whether Rebecca is to be invited to the old Sir Pitt's funeral, the new Sir Pitt is seen "rising, and throwing himself into an attitude of command, like the Portrait of a Gentleman in the Exhibition." Perhaps he feels constrained to attempt an elevation to the high mimetic mode, however, since Lady Southdown has tried to gain the upper hand by similar means: "Lady Southdown rose up as magnificent as Mrs. Siddons in Lady Macbeth, and ordered that horses might be put to her carriage" (XL). This last example illustrates the complexity which the relationship between fiction and reality often achieves in Vanity Fair: here we have a fictive character imitating a real actress playing a fictive role. Such complexity indicates the self-consciousness of Vanity Fair, which usually calls attention to the problematic nature of the relationship between fiction and reality. Moreover, this reference to the heroic mode, along with the other references we have been discussing,
is, once again, double-edged: if such references remind us that a move from the heroic to the low mimetic mode is a move toward realism, they also reveal the conventionality and literary nature of the "realistic" world of *Vanity Fair*.

As John Loofbourow points out, the heroic mode is not the only one which is attacked in *Vanity Fair*, for the chivalric romance and the pastoral mode also appear in parodic form, in scenes such as the Battle of Waterloo (chivalric romance) and the "sheepdog" conversation between Rebecca and Lord Steyne (pastoral mode). But the most important mode parodied in *Vanity Fair*, at least partly because it informs the characters of Rebecca Sharp and Amelia Sedley, is the fashionable mode, in its dramatic-criminal and sentimental forms.

When we examine the treatment of Rebecca and Amelia in *Vanity Fair*, we may first be struck by the artificiality of juxtaposing their lives, which are really so dissimilar. Even though they only meet a few times, we are constantly made aware that we are supposed to be comparing and contrasting their marriages, their attitudes toward their respective sons, their goals in life, and their actions in and effects on society. The arbitrary nature of this juxtaposition calls attention to its conventionality and enables us to see that Rebecca and Amelia, so juxtaposed, are part of a tradition of double heroines, one "good"
and the other "bad," that stretches from *The Faerie Queene* to *Ivanhoe* and beyond. But as soon as we realize these heroines' place in this tradition, we begin to see their violation of it: Amelia, the "good" heroine, has the dark hair of her evil counterpart; Rebecca, the "bad" heroine, is small, blonde, and pretty. As we may expect, *Vanity Fair* uses the tradition of the double heroines self-consciously, exploding the convention even as it takes advantage of it.

Kathleen Tillotson has said of the two main characters of *Vanity Fair* that "Becky is a wholly new kind of heroine, Amelia the old kind exposed." Yet there have always been intelligent and enterprising villains in literature; and Rebecca Sharp is created from inherited conventions just as Amelia Sedley is: Rebecca's mode is primarily that of criminal or dramatic fashionable literature. Rebecca's strong points as a villain include intelligence, heartlessness, seemingly endless energy, and an uncanny gift for dissembling; she employs these talents to fulfill her vaulting monetary and social ambition. Always active, always plotting, Rebecca has no time for the typically feminine interest in providing a warm and loving home for her husband and son. Husband and son, in fact, are only interesting to Rebecca as long as they are useful to her quest for prestige: witness her repentance of having married Rawdon once she learns that she could have had his father; and witness the difference in her treatment
of little Rawdy according to her audience. By her talent and energy Rebecca manages to effect an amazing social rise which culminates in her presentation at court; but her triumph is short-lived, and her downfall is immediate with the famous confrontation scene in which Rawdon unexpectedly discovers her tête-à-tête meeting with Lord Steyne. The melodramatic nature of this scene has often been remarked; it is enough for my purposes here to note that such melodrama is entirely consistent with Rebecca's role as the glamorous, criminal heroine of dramatic fashionable fiction. After the discovery scene Rebecca is left with the melancholy reflection that "All her lies and her schemes, all her selfishness and her wiles, all her wit and genius had come to this bankruptcy" (LIII). Considering the nature of Rebecca's ambition, it is fitting that her downfall be described as a "bankruptcy"; and, although she amasses all her energy and resourcefulness after her disgrace and does manage to become fairly wealthy again, she never regains her social prestige and is doomed to a life of perpetual piety as she tries to become respectable once more.

Rebecca's role as villain is stressed, moreover, by the classical and biblical allusions which cluster around her. She plays Delilah to Rawdon's Samson, Clytemnestra to Jos's Agamemnon. Her talent for deception
is emphasized by the narrator's description of her as a sort of Duessa, or siren-mermaid, beautiful above water but dreadful below, "diabolically hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling round corpses" (LXIV).

Because of all this emphasis upon Rebecca's criminality and power to dissemble, it is all too easy to see her as a conventional villain; actually, she is anything but conventional. Formed from conventions, she explodes the very rules which created her. Orphaned at an early age, Rebecca learns that she is going to have to fend for herself in life; and if she dissembles, it is because Vanity Fair has taught her to do so in order to survive: "She had not been much of a dissembler, until now her loneliness taught her to feign" (II). If she is diabolical, selfish and heartless, she is also intelligent, lively and, above all, good-natured. If she is ambitious and mercenary, it is because the world in which she lives has taught her that money is the only ticket to acceptance available to someone in Rebecca's position: in Vanity Fair, "to fawn upon the rich and kick the poor is a Christian law of the land." Rebecca herself says, "I think I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year"; and the narrator asks the same question which must occur to the reader: "And who knows but Rebecca was right in her speculations—and that it was only a question of money and fortune which
made the difference between her and an honest woman?" (XLI).

This is not to say that Rebecca is innocent or heroic--she is not, really, even very glamorous. What she is is a perfect looking-glass image of the world she inhabits, as Thackeray hints early in the novel: "All the world used her ill, said this young misanthropist, and we may be pretty certain that persons whom all the world treats ill, deserve entirely the treatment they get. The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face" (II). As a creation and reflection of Vanity Fair, Rebecca is the perfect scourge of her society: "The fact is that she belongs to Vanity Fair, both as its true reflection, and as its victim; for both of which reasons, she very resoundingly serves it right. Like Jonson's Volpone, she is a fitting scourge for the world which created her--fitting aesthetically, in the way of poetic justice, and fittingly moral, in that much of her evil is effective only against those who share her taint."

And Rebecca is a mixed creature: her motives and her personality are always complex. A taste for sordid bohemian life always remains mixed with her ambition to rise to the highest of social circles; and her social success ultimately bores her long before she falls. The question of Rebecca's guilt in her relationship with Lord Steyne will never be answered, just as her motives for
revealing the truth about George to Amelia will never be fully understood. Because of her complex, mixed nature, Rebecca will continue to elicit mixed reactions from her readers. And she will also continue to explode the conventions of villainy in general and dramatic-criminal fashionable literature in particular which form her, showing these conventions to be restrictive and highly artificial.

Similarly, Amelia's complexity exposes the convention of sentimental fashionable literature which is her medium. If she is the "good" heroine meant to contrast with the "bad" Rebecca, she is a very peculiar heroine indeed, from Thackeray's first description of her on:

As she is not a heroine, there is no need to describe her person; indeed I am afraid that her nose was rather short than otherwise; and her cheeks a good 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; for the silly thing would cry over a dead canary bird; or over a mouse, that the cat haply had seized upon; or over the end of a novel, were it ever so stupid; and as for saying an unkind word to her, were any persons hard-hearted enough to do so—why, so much the worse for them (I).

The condescension which pervades the narrator's tone here is almost always present when he speaks of Amelia, and it
acts as a counterpoint to the sentimentality associated with her. Such condescension is well-deserved, for Amelia's passive sentimentality is dangerous—both to herself and to those around her. Rebecca, as we saw, was perhaps overly well-equipped to function in Vanity Fair; Amelia, on the other hand, is totally helpless, with no insight or talent whatever. Just as she is incapable of seeing George as he really is and persists in making him into a hero, so she very nearly ruins her son by fashioning him into the same spoiled and selfish dandy that his father had been. And Amelia is selfish too: she seldom considers anyone else's feelings but her own—and her own feelings aren't always of the most charitable nature, as is shown by her attitude toward the faithful Dobbin: "She didn't wish to marry him, but she wished to keep him. She wished to give him nothing, but that he should give her all" (LXVI). Amelia may be lovely, loyal and innocent, but she is also simpering, self-deceiving and, finally, "little more than a child" (XX).

Only the most naive of modern readers could fail to catch the irony implicit in Thackeray's treatment of Amelia and of the sentimental mode altogether. Even if we miss the irony of the narrator, we may yet see that Amelia and the sentimental mode are further exposed by the existence of Miss Briggs, a more extreme and elderly version of Amelia,
who is "of a literary and sentimental turn, and had once published a volume of poems—*Trills of the Nightingale*—by subscription" (XIV). If Rebecca functions as an explosion of the villainess of dramatic fashionable literature, then Amelia works as an exposure of the weak and silly heroine of sentimental fashionable literature. Both characters are more complex than are the individual conventions from which they are formed. And if Rebecca demands our admiration even as we see all too clearly her faults and shortcomings, then Amelia may arouse our sympathy or pity even as we see (or perhaps because we see) her limitations: "When Thackeray rebukes our easy sentimentality towards Amelia, he is clearing the way not for cynicism, but for pity of a truer kind. . . . What Thackeray makes us see is that Amelia is an incurably neurotic woman, destined to unhappiness whether things go well with her or ill."18

It should be clear by now that Thackeray's treatment of Rebecca and Amelia is as self-conscious and complicated as are his disclaimers of artistic motivation which I discussed earlier. His treatment of Rebecca and Amelia reflects both on the conventional nature of the characters and on their realism. The conventions from which Rebecca and Amelia are created are exposed as artificial and restrictive literary devices; yet neither Rebecca nor Amelia would be the character she is were she entirely divorced from
the convention against which she is to be measured. The complexity of both characters, especially, is thrown into relief as Rebecca and Amelia are viewed in relation to the conventions from which they are formed; and that complexity has been called the basis of the characters' psychological realism: "The property of Thackeray's portraits that in the view of his contemporaries gave them a realism beyond that attained by any of his rivals was their embodiment of the mixed motives that operate in human nature, their illustration of the potentialities for good and for evil in all hearts." Rebecca and Amelia are formed from conventions which they violate in the service of realism; but that very violation itself calls attention to the artificial nature of Vanity Fair. We are constantly reminded that Vanity Fair would not be as realistic as it is if it weren't so artificial.

The fashionable mode which, in its dramatic and sentimental forms, is associated with Rebecca and Amelia, is further parodied in an interesting scene involving the old and disreputable Sir Pitt and his cohort Betsy Horrocks. Sir Pitt surprises Miss Horrocks one day "seated at the piano with the utmost gravity, and squalling to the best of her power in imitation of the music which she had sometimes heard." Next to her stands the little kitchenmaid who, through copious praise, is also doing her best to
imitate "a genteel sycophant in a real drawing-room." And later that evening Sir Pitt, in his turn, imitates the unfortunate Betsy Horrocks: "He thrummed on the table as if it had been a musical instrument and squalled in imitation of her manner of singing" (XXXIX). What we finally have by the end of this scene is a fictive character (Sir Pitt) imitating another fictive character (Betsy Horrocks) imitating another fictive character (Rebecca Sharp is probably the model for Miss Horrocks's singing) who herself is always dissembling. These multiple representations of the fashionable mode function in a very self-conscious manner; as Robert Alter says of a similar scene in Don Quixote, "... through a sudden glimpse of multiple possibilities of representation we are brought up short and thus moved to ponder the nature of representation and the presence of the artful representer." Which brings us to another important character in Vanity Fair, the narrator.

There is a real problem in discussing the narrative "voice" in Vanity Fair, because there are really many such voices present. Thackeray begins with perhaps his most famous persona, the puppet-master or the Manager of the Performance, who "is proud to think that his Puppets have given satisfaction to the very best company in the empire" (Prologue). Obviously the puppet-master voice
is highly self-conscious, as it insists that the characters of *Vanity Fair* are not autonomous, real people, but puppets, created and controlled by the puppet-master himself. This voice does not stay with us for long, however; after introducing us to the "show" he retires and other narrative voices rush in to take his place.

The other voices are difficult to distinguish because they seem to flow into each other at every moment. One voice which stands out, however, is the voice of the moralist-preacher: it is this voice which delivers the little lectures or sermons scattered throughout the book—lectures on the proper way to raise children, on women's affectations and their power over men, on the vanity of men and women alike, and so forth. And these lectures, like so many of Thackeray's devices, lead us simultaneously in two directions. By their very presence, they function self-consciously since they call attention to the controlling voice behind the characters and the story line; they may also remind us of the existence of the puppet-master, for his comment at the end of the novel merges his voice with that of the preacher: "Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?—Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out" (LXVII). But the preacher's lectures also
help us, frequently, to perceive how realistic his characters are. For example, in his sermon on the treatment of rich old maiden aunts, the preacher stresses that the Crawleys' treatment of Miss Crawley is not so unusual as it might seem:

What a dignity it gives an old lady, that balance at the banker's! How tenderly we look at her faults, if she is a relative (and may every reader have a score of such), what a kind, good-natured old creature we find her! . . . How, when she comes to pay us a visit, we generally find an opportunity to let our friends know her station in the world! We say (and with perfect truth) I wish I had Miss MacWhirter's signature to a cheque for five thousand pounds. She wouldn't miss it, says your wife. She is my aunt, say you, in an easy careless way, when your friend asks if Miss MacWhirter is any relative? . . . . Is it so, or is it not so? I appeal to the middle classes (IX).

In his repetition of "you" and "we" the narrator reinforces the realism of *Vanity Fair* by breaking down the barriers between the novel's world and the world of the implied reader—ostensibly the real world. The same principles, says the narrator, operate in both worlds. And although at times the preacher-moralist seems removed from the world of *Vanity Fair*, looking down upon it as he comments about it, more often he expressly includes himself in his sermons, as in the one quoted above. Usually this narrative voice is to be identified with the preacher in cap and bells
who appears on the monthly wrappers of *Vanity Fair*, as well as on the title-page to its first edition:

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

The "disagreeable matter" mentioned by the preacher-moralist narrator doesn't always "come out," however; for the moralist voice often becomes the voice of the genteel novelist, whose function is the most highly self-conscious in the novel. It is he who calls attention most explicitly to the conventions which he deploys and/or parodies, such as the convention of sentimental fashionable fiction which prohibits explicit depiction of unsavory events:

There are things we do and know perfectly well in *Vanity Fair*, though we never speak them . . . and it has been the wish of the present writer, all through this story, deferentially to submit to the fashion at present prevailing, and only to hint at the existence of wickedness in a light, easy, and agreeable manner, so that nobody's fine feelings may be offended. I defy anyone to say that our Becky, who has certainly some vices, has not been presented to the public in
a perfectly genteel and inoffensive manner (LXIV).

The novelist-narrator's laying bare of sentimental fashionable fiction extends to an exposure of Amelia, the sentimental heroine, through an "argument" with those readers who find her "fade and insipid" (XII), and to an admission that, even had he wanted to publish the curses of General Tufto on one interesting occasion, he is sure that "no compositor in Messrs. Bradbury and Evans's establishment would venture to print them" (XXIX).

Likewise, the novelist's open concern for the structure of mysterious or dramatic fashionable fiction bares the conventions of this mode. Over and over again he "mysteriously" introduces characters whom he refuses to name (but whose identities should be obvious to the reader), and then teases the reader thus: "Perhaps the ingenious reader has guessed who was the stout gentleman who called upon Georgy at his school in company with our old friend Major Dobbin" (LVII).

The self-conscious novelist-narrator is not content to lay bare the major conventions of fashionable fiction; he continues to disclose as artifice nearly every novelistic device which he uses. He apologizes elaborately for the novelist's need to order events artificially, somewhat in the manner of Tristram Shandy:
Our history is destined in this chapter to go backwards and forwards in a very irresolute manner seemingly, and having conducted our story to to-morrow presently, we shall immediately again have occasion to step back to yesterday, so that the whole of the tale may get a hearing... Although all the little incidents must be heard, yet they must be put off when the great events make their appearance; ... and hence a little trifling disarrangement and disorder was excusable and becoming (XXV).

Such an "apology" and such an exposure implicate all novels, be they realistic or self-conscious, for all novelists must order their events in some way as they write their novels. Likewise, Thackeray's novelist-narrator reflects on all novels as he lays bare various transitional devices:

We must suppose little George Osborne has ridden from Knightsbridge toward Fulham, and will stop and make inquiries at that village regarding some friends whom we have left there (XXXVIII);

and

The astonished reader must be called upon to transport himself ten thousand miles to the military station of Bundlegunge, in the Madras division of our Indian empire, where our gallant old friends of the --th regiment are quartered under the command of the brave colonel, Sir Michael O'Dowd (XLIII).

The novelist-narrator exposes his omniscience as a device
by referring to it frequently ("for novelists have the privilege of knowing everything" [III]); the convention of limited point-of-view is also laid bare as the same novelist-narrator later claims that he got all his information about the Marchioness of Steyne from little Tom Eaves, whose knowledge of high society, it is hinted however, might not be completely accurate. That the narrator can switch back and forth between omniscience and limited point-of-view whenever it suits him, of course, discloses the fragility and the artificiality of both conventions. Finally, the novelist-narrator exhibits the arbitrary nature of his (or any novelist's) decision as to how and when to limit his material: "Our business does not lie with the second generation and Master Rawdon's life at school, otherwise the present tale might be carried to any indefinite length" (LII).

The novelist reveals his full awareness of his novel as an artificial structure when he refers to its chapter titles and illustrations as he does frequently; moreover, Vanity Fair's chapter headings and drawings are used as important self-conscious devices. For example, the chapters entitled "Quite a Sentimental Chapter" and "Sentimental and Otherwise" (XII and XIII) call attention to the parodic treatment of sentimental fiction in those chapters and throughout the novel; "A Cynical Chapter" (XXXIX) ironically exposes the novelist's tone; "A Roundabout
Chapter Between London and Hampshire" (XLIV) reinforces the disclosure of the artist's ordering of events; "Which Contains Births, Marriages, and Deaths" (LXVII) recalls the conventional expectations concerning the events proper to the last chapter of novels.

The illustrations of Vanity Fair, drawn by Thackeray, form a continuous self-conscious commentary on the novel. The depictions of Rebecca and Amelia remind us of the conventions which they violate or expose: Rebecca is consistently portrayed with an evil (or at least mischievous) smirk on her face, while Amelia's face is innocently devoid of expression, her head often modestly bowed. The drawing appearing in chapter IV illustrates a situation described in that chapter: "... Mr. Joseph Sedley, of the East Indian Company's service, was actually seated tête-à-tête with a young lady, looking at her with a most killing expression; his arms stretched out before her in an imploring attitude, and his hands bound in a web of green silk, which she was unwinding" (IV). The title of that drawing, "Mr. Joseph entangled," in addition to its depiction of Rebecca's purposeful smile, makes fairly explicit the metaphorical nature of Jos's entanglement in Rebecca's silken web: Rebecca, of course, means to catch a husband in Jos. Finally, an illustration near the end of Vanity Fair entitled "Becky's second appearance in the character of Clytemnestra"
serves to remind us not only of Rebecca’s role-playing abilities, of her first triumphant appearance as Clytemnestra during the game of charades, and of the social distance which she has fallen since then; it serves also to define more explicitly than does the prose what Rebecca’s relationship with Jos may have come to.

Thackeray’s novelist-narrator also leads us to an awareness of the structure of *Vanity Fair*, of its narrative pattern. Just after Amelia’s marriage to George, the narrator indulges in a long reflection:

> Was the prize gained—the heaven of life—and the winner still doubtful and unsatisfied? As his hero and heroine pass the matrimonial barrier, the novelist generally drops the curtain, as if the drama were over then: the doubts and struggles of life ended: as if, once landed in the marriage country, all were green and pleasant there: and wife and husband had nothing but to link each other’s arms together, and wander gently downwards towards old age in happy and perfect fruition. But our little Amelia was just on the bank of her new country, and was already looking anxiously back towards the sad friendly figures waving farewell to her across the stream, from the other distant shore (XXVI).

That Amelia’s and Rebecca’s marriages occur one third of the way through *Vanity Fair* may indicate to us that we are not reading a typical comedy, which generally ends
with multiple marriages manipulated by a twist in the plot. Had *Vanity Fair* ended with Amelia's and Rebecca's marriages, we might have had a more typical comedy; but, as Thackeray's narrator points out, such comic endings and the expectations that they engender are highly artificial. Thus, *Vanity Fair* explores the lives of Amelia and Rebecca after their marriages, and those lives, of course, are hardly characterized by "happy and perfect fruition." Rebecca's ultimate bankruptcy includes the loss of her husband, and Amelia must learn, years after George's death, to see him for what he really was. And even Amelia's second marriage, which does end *Vanity Fair*, is hardly the typical comic marriage with its innocent expectations of freedom and bliss. Neither Amelia nor Dobbin is innocent by the time they marry: Amelia has had to own that much of her life has been based on a lie, and now must admit that her second husband may be justifiably fonder of their daughter than he is of her; and Dobbin has had to learn that his wife, the object of his quest, is not worth his love. The narrator stresses the bleak nature of this "comic" ending in his overblown, sentimental language, quoted above (p. 21), which he abruptly interrupts by a reference to the fact that this sentimental scene, happily enough, occurs on "the last page of the third volume." What we have in the structure
of *Vanity Fair* is an ironic parody of the comic narrative pattern, whose form is made palpable for us at least partly by Thackeray's use of the narrator as a self-conscious device.

Thus, Thackeray's changeable narrator and the devices of which he makes us aware help to reveal *Vanity Fair* as a self-conscious novel, exhibiting its own artifice. But we must be wary of viewing Thackeray's narrator as a simple self-conscious device who exposes conventions as artificial in the service of realism. As we have seen, many of the devices which he lays bare are as common to realistic novels as they are to explicitly self-conscious works; moreover, at times the narrator exposes as conventional devices associated only with realism, as for example when he insists that "every word" of his "history" is "true," just as he is effecting one of his protean changes and claiming that he, the creator of his characters, has met Amelia and Dobbin on their European tour (LXII). And we are made to realize once more that realism is as conventional and as artificial as is self-conscious fiction.

There is another problem with the narrator of *Vanity Fair*, aside from the problem of his changeability: at times what seems to be the same narrative voice contradicts itself. We are told, apparently by the novelist-narrator,
that not only is *Vanity Fair* "A Novel Without a Hero," but that it is also a novel without a heroine; but soon the same voice tells us that Amelia is "the heroine of this work (whom we have selected 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?)" (II). Then again, we are later told that "If this is a novel without a hero, at least let us lay claim to a heroine. No man in the British army which has marched away, not the great duke himself, could be more cool or collected in the presence of doubts and difficulties, than the indomitable little aide de camp's wife" (XXX)—and here the narrator is speaking of Rebecca.

The effect of such a fluid and contradictory narrator is worth examining, if only because this device, more than any other in *Vanity Fair*, has caused a great deal of understandable confusion among Thackeray's critics and readers. Some critics have objected to the lack of realism they see in *Vanity Fair* because of the "intrusive narrator," while others have said that Thackeray's narrator makes the novel more realistic: "he openly admits, as no modern novelist dare, all the relations of the novelist to his story."22

As I have mentioned, Thackeray's narrator exposes and
makes fun of nearly everyone connected with his novel, as well as of innumerable conventions associated with the novel form in general. Most of his characters (especially Amelia and Rebecca), other novelists and their styles and conventions, the "genteel reader"--all fall victim to the wit of at least one of Thackeray's narrative voices. And since often the same narrator who has just ironically undercut Rebecca or Amelia will immediately turn his irony on the reader, we must feel that we are all implicated in the folly of *Vanity Fair*. Even as we perceive that *Vanity Fair* is an artifice we find ourselves reacting uncomfortably to its realism.

Since nearly everyone comes under fire and since Thackeray's narrative voices are so slippery and contradictory, it is practically impossible to accept any one voice's moral judgments as the absolute truth. We find finally that Amelia is not totally "good" any more than Rebecca is totally "bad"; but neither is the reverse true. We can never be sure how to judge Amelia and Rebecca, for we are given no absolute, reliable standards by which to do so. Rebecca and Amelia live in a topsy-turvy, complex world, from which traditional Christian morality has disappeared: Thackeray once said that the characters in *Vanity Fair* are "a set of people living without God in the world." 23 Without God there
can be no moral certainty; in place of God we have an
unreliable narrator-guide, and "to learn caution about
Thackeray's role as puppet-master is to learn caution
about the explicit moral judgments of which the novel
[and our world, we are made to feel] is full."24

Thackeray's novel is above all an ironic portrait of
an entire society, one that is thoroughly rotten and whose
individual members are impossible to judge, since their
world excludes absolute moral judgment. Rebecca,
Amelia and th others are caught in a trap which admits no
moral absolutism: Vanity Fair itself is that trap, and
we cannot help feeling that there is no Celestial City
beyond it to which these characters can progress or escape.
Partly because we acknowledge the imprisoning quality
of Vanity Fair, and partly because the realistic nature
of the novel leads us to feel that we too are implicated,
we may be left with feelings very close to those of
the puppet-master at the beginning of Vanity Fair:
". . . the general impression is one more melancholy
than mirthful. When you come home, you sit down, in a
sober, contemplative, not uncharitable frame of mind,
and apply yourself to your books or your business. I
have no other moral than this to tag to the present story
of 'Vanity Fair'" (Prologue).

But surely melancholy is only half our response to
Vanity Fair. If we are made wholly melancholy by such
a work, how are we to read, for example, Beckett's trilogy without plunging into hopeless despair? It seems obvious that our response to *Vanity Fair* (to say nothing of our response to Beckett's work) must be far more complex than Thackeray's puppet-master indicates. For if the novel's disclaimers of artifice, psychological realism, historically accurate setting, and reader-directed irony all make us feel the mimetic orientation of *Vanity Fair*, they also make us aware of its artifice, as we have seen. Thus, we may feel melancholy at the end of *Vanity Fair*; but, simultaneously, we also feel a certain amount of aesthetic delight as we experience the novel's palpableness of form. If we feel sad about the imprisoning quality and moral rottenness of *Vanity Fair* (and, by implication, of our world), we may be comforted by our knowledge that the novel is really a verbal construct; and our melancholy may be relieved and our "mirth" regained through our experience and contemplation of the skillful way in which the novel finds its artistic form in relation to literary conventions. Moreover, because of *Vanity Fair*'s double nature, the moral questions raised by its realism give way to ontological questions raised, as we have seen, by its multiple representations of the same event and by its exposure of the problematic nature of the relationship
between reality and fiction (how, for example, is it possible for a real person such as Napoleon to influence the life of a fictive character such as Amelia Sedley, as the novel asserts that he does? [XVIII]). *Vanity Fair* is, at one and the same time, realistic and self-conscious; the mixture of the two modes leads to our mixed response and accounts for much of our delight as we read Thackeray's work, as we perceive how the conventions of realism and self-consciousness comment on each other and lay each other bare for our inspection. Our knowledge of the double nature of *Vanity Fair* may lead us, finally, to a response similar to that of Miss Rose, Rebecca Sharp's pupil, when she is questioned about her studies by Mr. Pitt Crawley. "Is it history you are reading?" he asks. "'Yes,' said Miss Rose; without, however, adding that it was a history of Mr. Humphry Clinker" (X). When we read *Vanity Fair* we are reading history of a more profound kind than that generally found in history books. Thackeray's story is both real and fictitious, and through its mixture of realism and artifice it forces us to question and examine the nature of mimesis and self-consciousness as conventions, as well as the nature of reality, or history, itself.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1 William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. xxx. All future references are to this edition and chapter numbers will be cited parenthetically in the text.


9 See J. H. Friswell, "Novelists' Names," *The Train*, Oct. 1856. He speculates that Miss Pinkerton might "not improbably" have been a daughter of the antiquary and historian Pinkerton, who lived from 1758-1826. Likewise, Becky's father might have been drawn from an artist named Sharp who died in 1840.

10 Culler, p. 193.

11 Ray, p. 397.


14 For a fuller discussion of the chivalric and pastoral modes in *Vanity Fair*, see Loofbourow, pp. 33-60.


17 Dyson, p. 85.

18 Dyson, p. 92.


20 Alter, p. 8.


22 Kathleen Tillotson, p. 54.


24 Dyson, p. 78.
In Trollope: Artist and Moralist, Ruth aprRoberts briefly reviews the Trollope criticism produced over the last hundred years. Most of it falls into two categories, "surveys" and "appreciations," and most of it fails dismally to provide any systematic, professional, or even very helpful guide to an understanding of Trollope's work. Yet the attitudes toward Trollope and the prejudices in regard to his work evinced by this basically undistinguished body of criticism still shape much of the Trollope criticism which is being written today. A clear-eyed view of how Trollope has been read may begin to help us decide how he should be read.

Most of Trollope's critics and appreciators have agreed that his talent lies in his ability to mirror society faithfully: "he sees a section of English life, and paints it with unerring truth, tact, and liveliness." Trollope, we are told, is a realist. Unfortunately for his reputation, the mimesis which Trollope is supposed to have practiced has long been considered a rather passive exercise which is by definition inferior to more creative forms of art. Thus it is that a condescending, apologetic tone pervades Trollope criticism. He is a good copier,
the critics say, but not much of an artist. He can reproduce interesting characters from his observation of life but can't construct a plot. The verdict of one reviewer of The Warden is typical: "There is considerable talent displayed in this volume. It is visible in the delineation of character rather than in the construction of the plot. The latter is meagre and unsatisfactory, wanting a moral, and failing to satisfy reasonable expectation. . . ." And many of Trollope's own statements about his work have helped to damage his reputation. Critics reading Trollope's Autobiography were horrified to discover that he actually kept schedules recording how many pages of his simple mimesis he managed to grind out per day. On the basis of Trollope's novels and his statements about how they were produced, critics have proclaimed over the years that he was "a man of activity and business, rather than . . . a man of letters," that he had no imagination, and, what is worse, no ideas at all! One wonders how the poor man contrived to write anything.

The critics' designation of Trollope as a realist has impaired our understanding of his artistry in more ways than one. Just as they have agreed on Trollope's mimetic ability, critics have also agreed to censure anything in his novels which seems to work against or intrude upon his realism—in short, anything which smacks
of self-consciousness. Even before Henry James, critics were complaining about Trollope's "intrusive narrator," for example: "Such intrusions are as objectionable in a novel as on the stage: the actor who indulges in extempore and extra-professional hints and winks to the audience, and the author who interrupts his characters to introduce himself to our notice, are alike guilty of a violation of good taste."\(^5\) Apparently the fact that this analogy crumbles on all sides didn't faze Victorian critics, for it was used frequently in attacks on Trollope's narrator.\(^7\)

It is so widely accepted that Trollope's narrator represents a flaw in otherwise realistic work, that even today most defenses of this device have an apologetic ring: David Skilton says that when the narrator explains a character's motives or outlines the complexity of a given situation, then "the narrative presence of Trollope's persona in the novels is essential to their illusion, and not damaging to it. . . . There is certainly one sort of authorial intrusion which does ruin the coherence of the work by admitting that it is fiction, but there are fewer of these harmful intrusions than is often supposed."\(^8\) In other words, when the narrator intrudes to further Trollopian realism, he is an asset; when he acts self-consciously, he is a liability. Thus, the same critics who have forced Trollope into the mold of realism have blamed him when
he doesn't seem to fit it.

Which brings us back once again to the exact nature of Trollope's realism. And, although, as we have seen, Trollope's comments on his work have often told against him, in discussions of realism he has shown himself to be far more sophisticated than his critics. For Trollope does not equate realism with mimesis, as do most of his critics; in fact, he says, "in very truth the realistic must not be true—but just so far removed from truth as to suit the erroneous idea of truth which the reader may be supposed to entertain." Realism, to Trollope, is oriented not in relation to external reality; it is oriented, artistically, in relation to the expectations of the readers who are to receive the work of art. Thus, realism is a literary convention—an agreement between the author and reader as to what shall seem to be real.

Moreover, in a surprisingly modern statement, and one which has particular importance for this paper, Trollope demonstrates his understanding of the relationship between the convention of realism and another convention of Victorian fiction:

Among English novels of the present day, and among English novelists, a great division is made. There are sensational novels and anti-sensational; sensational novelists and anti-sensational; sensational readers and anti-sensational. The novelists who are considered to be anti-sensational are generally called realistic. 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. They who hold by the other are charmed by the construction and gradual development of a plot. All this is, I think, a mistake,—which mistake arises from the inability of the imperfect artist to be at the same time realistic and sensational. A good novel should be both, and both in the highest degree.

This statement not only re-emphasizes Trollope's conception of realism as a literary convention having little to do with the imitation of external reality; it also demonstrates his impatience with restrictive literary formulas which allow for no combination of conventions, and reveals his expansive and typical desire to "have it both ways." Although sensationalism is obviously not to be equated with self-consciousness, the definition that Trollope gives of the one has an important characteristic in common with the other: both are seen as relatively artificial modes opposed to realism. And just as Trollope says that the good novelist should not be afraid to mix conventions, so a close examination of his novels reveals their combination of realistic and self-conscious modes which continues to baffle the naive critic.

Trollope published forty-seven novels during his lifetime. Since this number is a little unwieldy, I shall confine myself to a discussion of the six Barsetshire
novels, which span nearly half Trollope's publishing career and which form an easily-recognizable unit. These novels, like all of Trollope's fiction, are held to be realistic; and indeed it is obvious that the world of Barsetshire is meant to be much like our world. Most of the characters, for example, who people Trollope's world are presented to us as psychologically realistic mixtures of good and bad traits and motives; and Trollope's narrator never tires of stressing their similarity to himself and to us, his readers. Archdeacon Grantly, for example, is "somewhat too fond of his own way"; he is "bigoted in favour, not so much of his doctrines as of his cloth"; moreover, "the possession of a large income is a desire that sits near his heart." On the other hand, he is "a gentleman and a man of conscience," with "healthy aspirations" and "sincere beliefs." "On the whole," says Trollope's narrator, "the Archdeacon of Barchester is a man doing more good than harm—a man to be furthered and supported, though perhaps also to be controlled." Dr. Grantly is obviously complex; but, even more importantly, he is human, like we are: "Our archdeacon was worldly—who among us is not so? He was ambitious—who among us is ashamed to own that 'last infirmity of noble minds!'" (Barchester Towers, I). Likewise, Mark Roberts's complexity and his humanity are simultaneously revealed by the narrator of Framley
Parsonage, just as Robarts has set in motion his disastrous entanglement with Sowerby:

It is no doubt very wrong to long after a naughty thing. But nevertheless we all do so. . . . And ambition is a great vice . . . if the ambition of the man be with reference to his own advancement, and not to the advancement of others. But then, how many of us are there who are not ambitious in this vicious manner? And there is nothing viler than the desire to know great people—people of great rank, I should say; nothing worse than the hunting of titles and worshipping of wealth. We all know this, and say it every day of our lives. But presuming that a way into the society of Park Lane was open to us, and a way also into that of Bedford Row, how many of us are there who would prefer Bedford Row because it is so vile to worship wealth and title? (IV).

Such comments keep us from making easy judgments about characters whom we know to be basically good at heart. But Trollope defends not only the behavior of his "heroes" in this manner; the conduct of his "villains" is also explained and, to some extent, mitigated. Those whose actions may be all-but-irre Decorarable are yet characterized by a complex mixture of good and bad motives which demands our consideration and militates against easy judgment. For example, in The Small House at Allington, just as Adolphus Crosbie is beginning to waver in regard to his engagement to Lily Dale, the narrator intercedes on his behalf: "I beg that it may be understood that
Crosbie was not altogether a villain. He could not sit down and write a letter as coming from his heart, of which as he wrote it he knew the words to be false. He was an ungenerous, worldly, inconstant man, very prone to think well of himself, and to give himself credit for virtues which he did not possess; but he could not be false with premeditated cruelty to a woman he had sworn to love" (XVIII). Views of Nathaniel Sowerby are similarly balanced in Framley Parsonage; Lord Lufton's disgust at his behavior is countered by the narrator:

In the expression of which opinion Lord Lufton was too hard upon poor Sowerby; as indeed we are all apt to be too hard in forming an opinion upon the rogues of the world. That Mr. Sowerby had been a rogue, I cannot deny. It is roguish to lie, and he had been a great liar. It is roguish to make promises which the promiser knows he cannot perform, and such had been Mr. Sowerby's daily practice. . . . But, for all that, in spite of his acknowledged roguery, Lord Lufton was too hard upon him in his judgement. There was yet within him the means of repentance, could a locus penitentiae have been supplied to him. He grieved bitterly over his own ill-doings, and knew well what changes gentlehood would have demanded from him (XLIV).

Even Mrs. Proudie, perhaps Trollope's most famous "villain," is somewhat vindicated before her death. Her virtues are emphasized ("She did regard the dignity of her husband. . . . She did also regard the welfare of the clergymen around her" [Last Chronicle, XLVII]); and her soul-searching
after her treatment of Dr. Tempest may even excite a mild sympathy in the reader: "But now an idea made its way into her bosom that she was not perhaps doing the best for the welfare of the diocese generally. What if it should come to pass that all the clergymen of the diocese should refuse to open their mouths in her presence on ecclesiastical subjects, as Dr. Tempest had done? This special day was not one on which she was well contented with herself" (Last Chronicle, XLVII).

Most of the characters presented to us in the world of Barsetshire are like Archdeacon Grantly and Nathaniel Sowerby in their mixture of good and bad impulses. The natures of Lady Lufton, Johnny Eames, and Lily Dale, to name a few, are obviously shaped by warring elements; and this combination of conflicting tendencies in a single character is what makes Josiah Crawley, one of Trollope's finest figures, so memorable—and so realistic—to at least one rather shrewd critic, Margaret Oliphant: "His obstinate perversity—his sham sentiments and his true, which mingle together in an inextricable way as they do in nature, not as they generally do in art—his despair and confusion of mind, and quaint arrogance and exaggerated humility—make up a wonderfully perfect picture." Since most of these figures' generosity is interwoven with selfishness, their humility alloyed by pride, when they
appear in social interaction with each other, they often seem to be particularly perverse, or "cross-grained," which term Trollope's narrator delights to apply to men in general: "The cross-grainedness of men is so great that things will often be forced to go wrong, even when they have the strongest possible natural tendency of their own to go right" (Last Chronicle, LXXXIII). And things do go wrong—repeatedly—in Trollope novels. Characters are constantly misunderstanding each other and involving themselves in complex, often unnecessary quarrels. There is, for example, the Grantly family argument in The Last Chronicle of Barset, or the disagreement between Lady Lufton and her son in Framley Parsonage. Or the painful silence around the Grantly dinner table in Barchester Towers produced by the fact that all the characters find themselves "at cross purposes" (XXXIV). It is especially difficult to sort out such situations, since often no one person is particularly at fault. The entire world of Barsetshire, in fact, is characterized by a mingling of good and evil, just as our world is, says the narrator: "in this world no good is unalloyed, and . . . there is but little evil that has not in it some seed of what is goodly" (The Warden, XV).

In such a morally complex world, obviously the "truth" of any given situation is difficult to grasp; and reading
Trollope often seems like an exercise in the development of relativism or casuistry on the part of the reader. In the absence of any pure or easily-identifiable good or evil, there clearly exist "two sides to every question" (Dr. Thorne, XLIV); and we finally must agree with the narrator of Barchester Towers when he says, "It is astonishing how much difference the point of view makes in the aspect of all that we look at!" (XXIV). Ruth Roberson discusses this casuistry at great length in her book on Trollope, but perhaps a brief examination here of a Trollopian situation demanding casuistic consideration will help to make my point clear.

In The Warden we are presented with a difficult moral problem which manifestly has at least two sides. The background of the problem is as follows: in 1834 one John Hiram had died in Barchester and had designated his house and property as a charity for the support of twelve superannuated wool-carders; he had provided also for the maintenance of a warden to care for the old men. Over the years, the property had increased in value so much that it produced, by the time of the opening of the novel, an income of 800 pounds for the warden, while the current recipients of the charity now received one shilling fourpence a day each. Before the time of the opening of the story, we are told, there had been "murmurs" that Hiram's property had been unfairly divided, with too great an income
being enjoyed by the warden; but these murmurs had died down. The story itself, and its moral problem, begins as a young "Barchester reformer," John Bold, reopens the question of the injustice of the distribution of the income from Hiram's property. And, although Bold is described as "too much imbued with the idea that he has a special mission for reforming" (II), we are forced to admit that he may have a point—that the warden, in fact, who is appointed by the Bishop of Barchester, may be a prime example of the unjust sinecures infesting the Anglican church at the time, and that he may be enjoying an income far in excess of that to which he is legally entitled.

So much seems simple. But the problem is immediately complicated since the present warden of Hiram's Hospital is Mr. Septimus Harding, the kindest and most gentle of men, who had accepted his stipend innocently and has always done his best for his charges (in fact, he had increased their pensions from his own pocket before the opening of the story). Thus, our sympathy is divided. Moreover, the more we see of the twelve recipients of the charity, the more we realize that they are better off as they are than they could be after any reforms of the hospital, in spite of the alleged injustice of their income. And the problem is complicated even further by the fact that John Bold is the acknowledged suitor to Eleanor Harding, the warden's
daughter. Our sympathies and judgments are pulled this way and that as the story progresses. Eleanor convinces Bold to give up his campaign; but Bold's withdrawal comes too late for Mr. Harding who, humiliated by the press, resigns, against the wishes and advice of all his friends. Throughout the story, any proclivity on our part to choose sides or to retreat into the security of absolutes has been confounded; and therein lies the essence of Trollope's casuistry. For "Trollope is everywhere a complicator." Each case is different, since each depends on the people involved in it; each case must be decided on its own merits, and each case has many sides, depending on one's point of view: "Truth!" exclaims John Bold inwardly at one point, "it takes an age to ascertain the truth of any question" (XV).

Since the central problem in The Warden is so complex and since goodness exists on both sides of the conflict, there is no solution possible which will satisfy equally all the characters and the reader's hopes for them. Thus, Mr. Harding's resignation from his post is the only answer he can find to his own moral dilemma, but it does not help the twelve old men; nor does it help to rectify the injustices practiced regularly by the Anglican church. Most importantly, it probably does not satisfy the reader of The Warden who has come to love Mr. Harding and hopes for a happier ending for him, as critics have testified: the ending of this novel (as well as similar endings to other
Trollope novels) is generally found to be "remarkably inconclusive." And it is precisely the open-endedness of plots such as Mr. Harding's which has given rise to the critical prejudice mentioned earlier that Trollope sacrifices formal plot in the interest of realism: "The shape of this case is the shape of the novel," says apRoberts, just as Bradford Booth had earlier stressed Trollope's lack of formal plot: "In the mid-nineteenth century Trollope was one of those who hastened the decay of plot. The Warden had been no more than the examination of a situation, a case of conscience. . . ." What such critics fail to realize is that open-ended, relativistic novels such as The Warden are indeed shaped by a formal narrative pattern or plot. In fact, the world of The Warden, which continually confounds easy reliance on absolutes, is clearly an ironic world; and the ironic narrative pattern is typically open-ended, for the essence of irony lies in the realization that none of the problems presented by life may ever be easily or satisfactorily resolved. And the physical decay of Hiram's Hospital at the end of The Warden is consistent with and stresses the ironic nature of Mr. Harding's plot. Thus, what has been seen as Trollope's neglect of formal plot in the service of realism may in fact be seen as his preference in some cases for the open plot of irony over the closed plots of tragedy or comedy.

But Trollope does use comic plots, often right alongside
his ironic ones which attack the notions upon which comedy is founded. At the end of The Warden, for example, just as we are contemplating the inevitable inconclusiveness of Mr. Harding's resignation from Hiram's Hospital, we are told simultaneously of the marriage of Eleanor Harding and John Bold, which forms the comic culmination of their courtship plot. A brief examination of the way in which the resolutions of these two plots impinge upon each other may finally banish the notion that Trollope lacked formal artistry. It must be noticed, for example, that the treatment of the Harding-Bold wedding is rather subdued than ebullient: "There were some difficulties to be got over on the occasion of the marriage. The archdeacon, who could not so soon overcome his grief, would not be persuaded to grace the ceremony with his presence, but he allowed his wife and children to be there. The marriage took place in the cathedral, and the bishop himself officiated. It was the last occasion on which he ever did so; and, though he still lives, it is not probable that he will ever do so again" (XXI). Although we guess that Eleanor and her husband will be happy—there is little question about the appropriateness of their marriage—still, our appreciation of their happiness is not allowed to remain pure; it must be affected by Trollope's hints of difficulty and death. And Trollope is not content to end The Warden on this note of happiness, however qualified it may be; we have yet to consider once
more Mr. Harding's position. We are told repeatedly that he is "not an unhappy man" (this negative phrase, stressed by repetition, must make us question his actual happiness); and the novel ends with his characteristically self-effacing, sad answer to those citizens of Barchester who persist in addressing him by his former title: "'No, no,' he always says when so addressed, 'not warden now, only precentor'" (XXI). Yet Mr. Harding's humiliation and the loss of his beloved home at Hiram's Hospital are somewhat alleviated, we are given to understand, by the apparently happy marriage of Eleanor, at whose new home he now spends most of his time. We must be struck by Trollope's careful artistry as he skillfully balances the opposing but mingled comic and ironic plots at the end of *The Warden*: the irony of Mr. Harding's plot and the ironic nature of life in Barchester are conditioned, and to a degree mitigated, by Mr. Harding's gentle heroism and Eleanor Bold's happy marriage; on the other hand, the comedy of Eleanor Bold's courtship and marriage is hedged round and attacked by the decay of Hiram's Hospital, pointing up the irony of Mr. Harding's plot and the end of a way of life which had been precious to Mr. Harding.

Trollope's first successful novel seems highly realistic, and its realism find artistic form through conventional plots. *The Warden*'s narrator forces us to acknowledge
that the world which he describes, with its combination of ironic and comic possibilities, is perilously close to our world; and that understanding of the one world may lead to enlightenment in regard to the other. But *The Warden* is not purely realistic, for Trollope's self-conscious artistry may be seen here too, although it is as yet embryonic.

*The Warden* opens, for example, with a proclamation of the artificiality of its setting: "let us call [the place] Barchester," says the narrator; and "let us presume that Barchester is a quiet town in the West of England . . ." (I). And the novel closes with a short aside concerning the artificiality of endings: "Our tale is now done, and it only remains to us to collect the scattered threads of our little story, and to tie them into a seemly knot" (XXI). In between, we find various mock-heroic characterizations of Barchester citizens, which call attention to the fact that they are fictive, bouncing off the literary and mythic conventions against which they are conceived: John Bold is called the "Barchester Brutus" (VI); Archdeacon Grantly and his wife are "our reverend Adam and his valued Eve" (VIII); Eleanor Harding is an "Iphigenia" (XI). Tom Towers's office is a modern Mt. Olympus (XIV) and the warden's tea-party is described, highly artificially, as a series of heroic combats performed "as in the glorious days of old, when fighting was really noble" (VI). The parodies of
Carlyle and Dickens found in chapter XV of the novel have been attacked repeatedly; self-consciously, they function to expose the verbal nature and the fragility of the story the narrator is telling, for the situation of Mr. Harding and his twelve charges is, of course, radically different according to whether it is described in the words of "Dr. Anticant" or "Mr. Popular Sentiment," or whether it is described in the words chosen by the narrator of The Warden. This chapter is, in fact, similar to the section of Vanity Fair in which the narrator offers to describe Becky, Jos, and the rest at Vauxhall in various literary styles. Both instances of this device are extremely self-conscious since, in purporting to expose the artificiality of other literary modes, they ultimately lay bare the artificiality of realism, the chosen modes of both narrators; moreover, both instances point forward to Ulysses's experiments in style and in multiple representations of the same event or the incident in Giles Goat-Boy in which Giles meets a girl reading the novel Giles Goat-Boy (Third Reel, Section 3). Finally, it must be remembered that all the narrative comments I have cited earlier which point to the complexity of any given character or situation and thereby reinforce The Warden's realism are simultaneously inherently self-conscious, as they remind us of the existence of "the artful representor." Even though these self-conscious devices undoubtedly
occur in *The Warden* and make us aware from time to time of the artificiality of the novel, their effect is limited and they provide no consistent or sustained commentary on any specific element in the novel. Their chief importance lies in the fact that they reveal Trollope's interest in mixing realistic and self-conscious techniques so early in his publishing career. And that mixture becomes much more striking and central in his next novel, *Barchester Towers*.

*Barchester Towers* is similar to *The Warden* in that it is characterized by two major plots, an ironic one, which is mainly concerned with the shifting of the balance of power in Barchester between high- and low-church factions, and a comic one, which deals with the courtship and marriage, again, of Eleanor Bold, who has been left a widow by John Bold's death. The ironic plot of this novel, like that of *The Warden*, is never really resolved: during the course of the story, we learn that the inclinations of those who are appointed to fill two vacant church-related posts in Barchester, the wardenship of Hiram's Hospital and the Deanship of the town, will help to sway the balance of power in that town either toward the high-church faction (or, more properly, the anti-low-church faction, since its members are not so much convinced of the necessity of all high-church doctrines and trappings as they are of the
insidiousness of all low-church doctrines), represented chiefly by the Grantlys, or toward the low-church faction, represented by the Proudies and Mr. Slope. In the end, the wardenship is filled by Mr. Quiverful, Mrs. Proudie's protégé, while the deanship is occupied by Mr. Arabin, a friend to Dr. Grantly and ally to the 'anti-low-church faction; so nothing has really changed in Barchester at the end of the novel. Moreover, we are told in the conclusion to Barchester Towers not only that neither side is to be awarded the laurels of victory, but also that neither side need be absolutely morally preferred: "If it be essentially and absolutely necessary to choose between the two, we are inclined to agree with Mrs. Grantly that the bell, book, and candle are the lesser evil of the two. Let it however be understood that no such necessity is admitted in these pages" (LIII). The ironic world of Barchester Towers is, like that of The Warden, casuistic and conventionally realistic: the characters and their situations are complex; and the narrator is always present to remind us that there is a little Dr. Grantly and even a little Mr. Slope in us all.

The workings of the comic plot concerning Eleanor Bold and her three suitors, on the other hand, are rigidly separated from the workings of our world, even as the characters concerned in it remain complex and realistic. For example, the Signora Vesey Neroni says at one point,
"There is no happiness in love, except at the end of an English novel" (XXVII). The world of Eleanor Bold is the world of an English novel, and the narrator assures us at the end of Chapter XV, only about a quarter of the way through the novel, that Eleanor's story will have a "happy ending": "But let the gentle-hearted reader be under no apprehension whatsoever. It is not destined that Eleanor shall marry Mr. Slope or Bertie Stanhope. . . . I would not for the value of this chapter have it believed by a single reader that my Eleanor could bring herself to marry Mr. Slope, or that she should be sacrificed to a Bertie Stanhope. But among the good folk of Barchester many believed both the one and the other."

During this passage, the narrator explains one reason for his revealing the end of the novel so early: his interest in his work, and the reader's interest, ought not to center merely on what is going to happen, on the outcome of the plot, but on how that plot unfolds. "Nay, take the last chapter if you please," the narrator invites, "—learn from its pages all the results of our troubled story, and the story shall have lost none of its interest, if indeed there be any interest in it to lose." This concern is obviously related to Trollope's casuistry. What is important is not the definition of who is "right" and should therefore emerge victorious at the end of the story, or who is "wrong" and should be punished (such definitions are all—but-impossible
in the relativistic world of Barsetshire anyway). Rather, we are told that Eleanor Bold's story will have a happy ending early in the story so that we may concentrate on the interesting complexities of her situation. Moreover, by telling us how the story will turn out, the narrator is acting self-consciously, not only as his disclaimer of the use of literary devices which function to create suspense reveals the literary nature of his story, but also as he forces us to become aware of the narrative pattern which his story assumes, the pattern of comedy.

This leads us to a more important effect created by the narrator's insistent separation of Eleanor Bold's comic world—the world of an English novel—from our world. The narrator grumbles for hundreds of words about the difficulties involved in ending a novel, for "the end of a novel, like the end of a children's dinner-party, must be made up of sweetmeats and sugar-plums" (LIII). All this complaining must remind us, as indeed, Trollope never lets us forget, that the narrator is artificially controlling the fates of his characters, squeezing them into conventional narrative patterns. And the fact that we realize all along that the narrator has created the "happy ending" obviously undermines its force in Barchester Towers, at least in relation to the world of the reader. What Trollope has done here is to lay bare the literary convention of comedy. That is,
problems in the comic world, as Northrop Frye has shown, usually resolve themselves through irrational, arbitrary, coincidental means: a rich uncle dies suddenly and leaves his entire fortune, unexpectedly, to a poor nephew, who is thereby enabled to marry the girl of his dreams. By emphasizing the arbitrary nature of the events which bring about the comic resolution and the power of the novelist to control these events, Trollope exposes the comic pattern and makes us aware of its fragility. And this exposure has grim implications for the reader, who exists in the real world outside the novel.

We have been brought to realize that our world outside the novel is just as complex as, and demands the same casuistic consideration as, the world of Barchester. And when we see that Eleanor Bold's "happy ending" has been artificially created by its controlling narrator in compliance with conventional literary requirements, we cannot help feeling that things might not turn out so well in our world— for, where is our narrator? Who will create the "happy ending" in our world? Such questions are present in Barchester Towers only by implication; but the sustained mixture of realism and self-consciousness here cannot help leaving us with mixed feelings. We feel gratified by our expanded knowledge of the social and psychological workings of the world of Barchester and our world, which, we have been shown,
is so similar; we feel satisfied with Eleanor Bold's marriage; and we feel, undoubtedly, aesthetic delight at experiencing the palpableness of the comic form. But our gratification, satisfaction, and delight must somehow be combined with if not undermined by our dual realization that the world of Barchester (and our world) is complex and basically ironic, and that any happy endings in either world are likely to require much manipulation before they can occur.

These mixed feelings arise largely from our being forced, simultaneously, to accept the notions and values of romantic comedy and to reject them. We must delight in Eleanor Bold's comic ending, yet we must not relinquish our knowledge that it is artificial. Throughout his literary career Trollope insisted on accepting and rejecting romantic comedy in this way; and his complex treatment of this literary convention is generally linked to the combination of realism and self-consciousness in his novels. Both these complicated subjects may best be seen, perhaps, in Trollope's elucidation of the Lily Dale-Johnny Eames story which forms the main plot of The Small House at Allington and which recurs as a subplot in The Last Chronicle of Barset.

When first we see Lily Dale in The Small House at Allington, we must be struck by her romanticism. Early in the novel, she falls suddenly and passionately in love with one Adolphus Crosbie, whom she had only a short time earlier considered to be a "swell," an "Apollo." Once
she falls in love with him, of course, his faults disappear; and the term "Apollo" takes on new meaning for her: "And to her he was an Apollo... He was handsome, graceful, clever, self-confident, and always cheerful when she asked him to be cheerful" (VI). Lily fashions Crosbie into a hero of romance and gives herself to him passionately and completely. Her romantic nature is stressed early in the novel during a moonlight stroll with her lover:

'Don't you like the moon?' she said, as she took his arm... "Like the moon—well; I fancy I like the sun better. I don't quite believe in moonlight. I think it does best to talk about when one wants to be sentimental.'

'Ah; that is just what I fear. That is what I say to Bell when I tell her that her romance will fade as the roses do. And then I shall have to learn that prose is more serviceable than poetry, and that the mind is better than love. It's all coming, I know; and yet I like the moonlight.'

'And the poetry—and the love?'

'Yes. The poetry much, and the love more. To be loved by you is sweeter even than any of my dreams—is better than all the poetry I have read... It is the meaning of the moonlight, and the essence of the poetry,' continued the impassioned girl. 'I did not know then why I liked such things, but now I know. It was because I longed to be loved' (The Small House, IX).

Lily may have played the cynic to the romanticism of her sister Bell earlier (even so, her phrasing of it here is an old romantic cliché); in any case, she gives total rein to her romantic expectations in her own love affair
with Crosbie. Unfortunately, her "romance fades" much earlier than she had anticipated, as Crosbie unexpectedly (to Lily, if not to the reader) jilts her and marries rank in the person of Lady Alexandrina de Courcy. This disappointment only heightens Lily's romantic tendencies. She now sees herself as "a forlorn damsel in a play-book" (The Small House, XLIV); if her tone is joking as she thus refers to herself, yet her actions throughout the rest of The Small House at Allington and The Last Chronicle of Barset show that underneath such jests lies the truth. She decides that she has fallen "altogether out of love with the prospect of matrimony" (Last Chronicle, LIII); and she refuses repeatedly to consider marrying the faithful Johnny Eames, since "She had not found him to be a hero... His rival had come before her eyes for the first time with all the glories of Pall Mall heroism about him, and Lily in her weakness had been conquered by them. Since then she had learned how weak she had been—how silly, how childish, she would say to herself... but not the less on that account did she feel the want of something heroic in a man before she could teach herself to look upon him as more worthy of her regard than other men" (Last Chronicle, LXX). Lily's desires remain strong for the wish-fulfillment of romantic comedy; and these desires are often expressed in explicitly literary terms: after she has just finished
reading a popular novel, Lily comments upon it to her sister Bell:

'I am quite sure she was right in accepting him, Bell,' she said, putting down the book as the light was fading, and beginning to praise the story. 'It was a matter of course,' said Bell. 'It always is right in the novels. That's why I don't like them. They are too sweet.' 'That's why I do like them, because they are so sweet' (The Small House, XLII).

And so Lily's romantic expectations—her expectations of evenings in the moonlight with her heroic husband reading her poetry (see The Small House, IX)—prevent her from achieving a solid happiness with the loyal but imperfect Johnny Eames.

Johnny is indeed imperfect, and he functions to attack the notions of romantic comedy, just as does Lily Dale. Johnny's main problem is a marked inability to distinguish between the romantic, mysterious dream world which he builds for himself and the low-mimetic, often ironic reality of the world surrounding him. Appropriately enough, Johnny's problem, like Lily's, often expresses itself in self-conscious literary terms: we are told early in The Small House at Allington, for example, that Johnny "knew much—by far too much—of Byron's poetry by heart" (XIV). And, later, in The Last Chronicle of Barset, Johnny affects the pose of a Byron or a Hamlet as he enters Sir Raffle Buffle's
office, dressed entirely in black, to inform his superior that he must have leave from his work to defend his family's honor (XLVIII). That Johnny is aware of the literary origins of his pose is stressed immediately after Sir Raffle gives in to his request, when he compares Lily to Madalina Demolines in a Shakespearean manner: "Why had he left Lily to go to Madalina? As he thought of this he quoted to himself against himself Hamlet's often-quoted appeal to the two portraits." Clearly, Johnny sees himself, in his position as constant suitor to Lily Dale, as the hero of a romance: in The Small House at Allington we are told that "The perusal of a novel was to him in those days a slow affair; and of poetry he read but little, storing up accurately in his memory all that he did read. But he created for himself his own romance, though to the eye a most unromantic youth; and he wandered through the Guestwick woods with many thoughts of which they who knew him best knew nothing" (LII). And in The Last Chronicle of Barset, likewise, we learn that "he thought that he could look forward with some satisfaction towards the close of his own career, in having been the hero of such a love-story" (XXXV).

Johnny's inability to distinguish between romance and the reality of his position leads him into the very mistake which finally helps to make Lily reject him. In The Small House at Allington Johnny had attempted to pass
the time by indulging in a flirtation with Amelia Roper, his landlady's daughter; and he had managed to extricate himself from this entanglement comparatively easily. But in *The Last Chronicle of Barset* the same mistake costs Johnny more dearly. Telling himself that he is compensating innocently for his repeated rejection by Lily, Johnny involves himself this time with Miss Madalina Demolines, who almost proves to be too many for him. He thinks that his "Bayswater romance," as he refers to his relationship with Miss Demolines (XLVI) is "as good as a play" (XXV), and he delights in its romantic mysteriousness, until the "play" becomes a rather grim reality. Madalina almost manages to trap Johnny into marriage, and his escape is qualified by the fact that Madalina has already ruined what chances he might have had with Lily through her offensive anonymous letter.

As if the misguided romantic notions of Lily Dale and Johnny Eames weren't attack enough on the ideals of romantic comedy, Trollope surrounds these two characters in both novels by other figures who, in various ways, chip away at the idealism of the romantic mode. In *The Small House at Allington*, Adolphus Crosbie sees himself as a potential romantic hero: "While resolving, during his first four or five days at the castle, that he would throw Lily Dale overboard, he had contrived to quiet his conscience by inward allusions to sundry heroes of romance. He had
thought of Lothario, Don Juan, and of Lovelace; and had
told himself that the world had ever been full of such
heroes. And the world, too, had treated such heroes well;
not punishing them at all as villains, but caressing them
rather, and calling them curled darlings. Why should not
he be a curled darling as well as another?" (XXV). Crosbie's
lesson is that the world in which he finds himself is not
the world of romance; and his jilting of Lily hardly qualifies
him for the title of "curled darling." One almost feels
sorry for him. For if Crosbie is not a dashing hero,
neither is he a completely heartless villain. He is,
like most of Trollope's characters, a low-mimetic mixture
of good and bad traits. And his marriage for rank to
Lady Alexandrina de Courcy provides another attack on the
expectations of romantic comedy, as do Cradell's sporting
interest in Mrs. Lupex and subsequent marriage to Amelia
Roper, and Mr. Plantagenet Palliser's empty courtship of
Lady Dumbello: "The mere idea of loving Lady Dumbello
had seemed to give a salt to his life of which he did not
know how now to rob himself. It is true that he had not as
yet enjoyed many of the absolute blessings of love, seeing
that his conversations with Lady Dumbello had never been
warmer than those which have been repeated in these pages;
but his imagination had been at work . . ." (The Small House,
LV). All these couples--Crosbie and Lady Alexandrina,
Cradell and Mrs. Lupex, Cradell and Amelia Roper, and Mr. Palliser and Lady Dumbello—must rely on some cerebral, romantic ideas of social or emotional profit to mask the emptiness of their actual affairs.

In The Last Chronicle of Barset, the attack on romance supplied by the characters surrounding Lily Dale and Johnny Eames continues. Madalina Demolines, for example, Johnny's "Bayswater romance," is a master of the romantic form: "Some people like whist, some like croquet, and some like intrigue. Madalina would probably have called it romance—because by nature she was romantic" (LXXV). Conway Dalrymple, too, is a master of romantic representation, as evidenced by his paintings; but the confusion of romance and reality involved in his relationship with Clara Van Siever finally baffles him: he can paint Clara in the heroic pose of Jael easily enough, but when he tries to propose to Clara the person, he finds that the turban which she wears as part of her costume is in his way (LI). Dalrymple is, of course, simultaneously carrying on a flirtation with Mrs. Dobbs Broughton, Madalina Demolines' only equal in the art of romantic posture. Poor Mrs. Broughton is a thorough fool who lives entirely in an artificial, romantic world: "the game of love-making" is her favorite pastime (XXVI); and when it begins to crumble, she takes refuge in "tragic
tones" (XXXVIII) and visions of herself as the heroine of Byronic verse (LI), or as a modern Isaac, assiduously "piling her own fagots" (LI). Mrs. Broughton, in fact, is so deeply confused by the artificial world she has built for herself that, we are told at one point, "The truth was that she did not know what she wanted" (LX); and when terrible reality breaks over her in the form of her husband's suicide, she finds that she cannot function at all. Even Henry Grantly, the young hero of The Last Chronicle of Barset, contributes to the novel's attack on romantic comedy as he builds his own romance of self-sacrifice (he will marry the disgraced and penniless Grace Crawley against his father's wishes and emigrate to Pau); and his romance must remind us of Mrs. Broughton's vision of herself as Isaac.

All these characters provide a sustained attack on the literary convention of romantic comedy and the romantic notions associated with it. And such an assault is obviously self-conscious, since it makes us aware of the artificial, literary nature of the convention under attack. Yet, once again, Trollope does not allow such attacks to go unchallenged; for in the two novels we have been discussing he exploits the same conventions he has been attacking.

In The Small House at Allington the notions of romance and the validity of the comic pattern are upheld by the
Bell Dale-Dr. Crofts plot. Dr. Crofts is not an idealized, absurdly romantic hero; he is, as the narrator tells us, "a good average lover" (XXXIX), who in his quiet way wins Lily's sister Bell and achieves happiness with her. This plot is so minor in *The Small House at Allington* that it may easily be obscured by all the attacks on romance in that novel; but in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, the heroism of Josiah Crawley and the happiness of Grace Crawley and Henry Grantly at the end of the novel may not easily be overlooked. They form, in fact, the two main plots of the novel. Josiah Crawley is undoubtedly a complex mixture of strength and weakness, of good and bad traits; yet, when considered totally, Crawley's behavior in the face of almost unbearable misfortune must be considered heroic. Crawley is not heroic in the simple mythic way that his beloved Oedipus, Polyphemus, and Samson Agonistes are heroic, but he is to be identified with these archetypal giants even though his heroism is more mixed and imperfect. And this is the essence of the kind of heroism which Trollope allows to triumph in works like *The Last Chronicle of Barset*: it must be mixed and imperfect, just as human beings (and psychologically realistic characters) are mixed and imperfect. It must be low-mimetic and accessible rather than high-mimetic and impossible. Thus Henry Grantly, even with his imperfections and sometimes overblown romantic notions, is
united with Grace Crawley at the end of the novel in a triumphant vindication of the norms and expectations of comedy. All obstacles to the marriage are overcome and the comic society expands to include the Grantlys, the Crawleys—nearly everyone in the novel. Even Johnny Eames is finally judged to be worthy in the narrator's ultimate evaluation of him:

The reader, who may have caught a closer insight into Johnny's character than Mrs. Arabin had obtained, may, perhaps, think that a young man who could amuse himself with Miss Demolines was unworthy of Lily Dale. If so, I may declare for myself that I and the reader are not in accord about John Eames. It is hard to measure worth and worthlessness in such matters, as there is no standard for such measurement. My old friend John was certainly no hero—was very unheroic in many phases of his life; but then, if all girls are to wait for heroes, I fear that the difficulties in the way of matrimonial arrangements, great as they are at present, will be very seriously enhanced. Johnny was not ecstatic, nor heroic; nor transcendent, nor very beautiful in his manliness; he was not a man to break his heart for love or to have his story written in an epic; but he was an affectionate, kindly, honest young man; and I think most girls might have done worse than take him (LXXVI).

This new kind of unheroic heroism is precisely what Lily Dale is unable to accept, and so her old-maidenhood is assured, to the disappointment of generations of Trollope readers. For Trollope certainly agreed with Lucy Toogood
in her evaluation of the respective advantages of high-mimetic and low-mimetic romance: "Fancy a lover," she says, "'Who thundering comes on blackest steed, With slackened bit and hoof of speed.' Were not those the days to live in! But all that is over now, you know, and young people take houses in Woburn Place, instead of being locked up, or drowned, or married to a hideous monster behind a veil. I suppose it's better as it is, for some reasons" (Last Chronicle, XL). Thus, while we are made to see the artificiality of high-mimetic romantic comedy, we are asked to accept the values of the low-mimetic comic pattern. We find that "we are all of us heroes of a new and real sort. . . . Trollope only appears to be rejecting Romantic heroism and is in fact translating it into low-mimetic modes and then internalizing it." Of course, as we have seen in our discussion of Vanity Fair, any disclaimers of artificiality on the part of a novel, such as the one implicit here in these novels' rejection of high-mimetic romantic comedy, simply point to the artificiality also of the more realistic, low-mimetic pattern adopted instead. Trollope, "everywhere a complicator," shows us once again, largely through manipulation of realistic and self-conscious techniques, that comic patterns are both valid and invalid, and that comic norms are to be both accepted and rejected.
In *The Warden*, *Barchester Towers*, *Framley Parsonage* (which I have not discussed at length but which functions similarly to these other novels), *The Small House at Allington*, and *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, Trollope's mixture of realism and artifice, and his mingling of comedy and irony, leave us with mixed responses and mixed impressions as to how we are to view the worlds of these novels. The narrative patterns and values upheld by the plots of Eleanor Bold, Lucy Robarts, Bell Dale, and Grace Crawley and their various lovers are simultaneously attacked by the intermingling of these plots with casuistic, ironic plots developed by conventionally realistic techniques, and by self-conscious assaults on romantic comedy, such as the one provided by the figure Lily Dale. Because of these mixtures, attacks and counter-attacks, these novels are extremely complex, difficult, and more modern than most critics have realized. But the most thoroughly self-conscious, and the most modern, of Trollope's Barsetshire novels I have not yet mentioned. This novel is *Dr. Thorne*.

The artificiality of *Dr. Thorne* is stressed early in the novel. In the first chapter, the reader is told that he may choose his own hero of the novel and may even retitle the book, if he wishes, "The Loves and Adventures of Francis Newbold Gresham the Younger."
The fragility of the story of Dr. Thorne is thus exposed as the reader is told from the outset that he may in essence rewrite the novel to fit his own tastes, if he so chooses. Also in chapter I the verbal nature of the setting of the novel is revealed: the setting is one whose reality and solidity may more easily be "asserted" "in the past tense, as we are speaking of it with reference to a past time." Finally, still in chapter I, the artificiality of the novelistic ordering of events and descriptions in Dr. Thorne is laid bare for the reader: the narrator is pleased to realize that he has "said that on one side [of Greshamsbury Park] lay the kennels," because that statement will give him "an opportunity of describing here one especial episode, a long episode, in the life of the existing squire." The narrator seems as surprised at his own mastery of the device of ordering material as the reader must be at the narrator's exposure of order as a device.

The narrator's delight at his own talent is short-lived, however. In a long "digression" at the beginning of chapter II the narrator, sounding remarkably like the self-conscious Tristram Shandy, complains of the difficulties involved in trying to get his story to run smoothly:

I quite feel that an apology is due for beginning a novel with two long dull chapters
full of description. I am perfectly aware of the danger of such a course. In so doing I sin against the golden rule which requires us all to put our best foot foremost, the wisdom of which is fully recognised by novelists, myself among the number. It can hardly be expected that anyone will consent to go through with a fiction that offers so little of allure in its first pages; but twist it as I will I cannot do otherwise. I find that I cannot make poor Mr. Gresham hem and haw and turn himself uneasily in his arm-chair in a natural manner till I have said why he is uneasy. I cannot bring in my doctor speaking his mind freely among the bigwigs till I have explained that it is in accordance with his usual character to do so. This is unartistic on my part, and shows want of imagination as well as want of skill. Whether or not I can atone for these faults by straightforward, simple, plain story-telling--that, indeed, is very doubtful.

In his inevitable problem with double time, too, the narrator is like Tristram Shandy; for example, on the question of how long Frank Gresham managed to hold Mary Thorne's hand before she jerked it away in chapter VIII, the narrator says:

From my tedious way of telling it, the reader will be led to imagine that the hand-squeezing had been protracted to a duration quite incompatible with any objection to such an arrangement on the part of the lady; but the fault is all mine: in no part hers. Were I possessed of a quick spasmodic style of narrative, I should have been able to include it all--Frank's misbehaviour, Mary's immediate anger, Augusta's arrival, and keen,
Argus-eyed inspection, and then Mary's subsequent misery—in five words and half a dozen dashes and inverted commas. The thing should have been so told; for, to do Mary justice, she did not leave her hand in Frank's a moment longer than she could help herself.

As is true of similar self-conscious "apologies" in *Vanity Fair*, this statement pulls us in two directions at once. On the one hand, it is a realistic defense of Mary's behavior. On the other hand, and more importantly, it calls our attention once again to the fact that this incident, as well as the whole narrative, is a verbal experience, not a real, physical one. Finally, the narrator apologizes for his lack of legal knowledge in *Dr. Thorne*, and simultaneously calls our attention to the artificiality of his comic plot: "I can only plead for mercy if I be wrong in allotting all Sir Roger's vast possessions in perpetuity to Miss Thorne, alleging also, in excuse, that the course of my narrative absolutely demands that she shall be ultimately recognised as Sir Roger's undoubted heiress" (XLV).

If *Dr. Thorne's* setting and narrative pattern are avowedly artificial, the novel's characters are equally so. Roger Scatcherd's biography, for example, points up his fictionality and represents a fiction-within-a-fiction: the man described by the words of Sir Roger's biography is not the same man described to us as Roger Scatcherd.
by the narrator of *Dr. Thorne* (XXV). As soon as the verbal basis of Sir Roger's existence becomes clear to us, this knowledge cannot help influencing our perception of the other characters surrounding Sir Roger who exist on the same plane, especially when we realize that most of the characters in *Dr. Thorne* are grouped into sets of doubles; such doubling is recognized by Robert Alter as one of the obvious marks of self-conscious fiction. Louis Philippe Scatcherd, for example, is doubled with Frank Gresham as they are both suitors to Mary Thorne; Dr. Thorne is doubled with Roger Scatcherd as they are both uncles to Mary (and this doubling is stressed as chapter XIII is called "The Two Uncles"); Beatrice and Patience Driel are doubles as they are both friends to Mary. And, in each case, as in *Don Quixote*, the doubles are opposites: Louis Philippe is sickly and disgusting while Frank is robust, handsome and attractive; Dr. Thorne is good and wise while Sir Roger is an ignorant drunkard; Beatrice is romantic while Patience is pragmatic (see chapter XXVI). Doublings of incident also mark *Dr. Thorne* as self-conscious: Dr. Thorne, for example, is turned away from the Greshams' house in chapter XL just as he had earlier been turned away from the home of the Scatcherd. Such doublings of character and incident call our attention to the artificial structure of the
narrative pattern in which they function and to the verbal
ture of the characters and incidents themselves.

 Appropriately, the character who is most obviously
created through words in Dr. Thorne is Mary Thorne, the
young heroine. Critics have long remarked the importance
of verbal means of characterization in Trollope novels--
figures usually reveal their characters best in conversation
or in correspondence--but in Dr. Thorne we see Mary Thorne
as an entirely verbal creature, created explicitly through
words and depending on word-play, to a great extent,
for her continued existence. In chapter III of the novel
the narrator describes his conception of Mary Thorne:
"Of her personal appearance it certainly is my business
as an author to say something. She is my heroine, and,
as such, must necessarily be very beautiful; but, in truth,
her mind and inner qualities are more clearly distinct
to my brain than her outward form and features." Clearly,
Mary was conceived in the author-narrator's brain and
born through words. She has no existence at all apart
from the words and literary conventions (she is his
"heroine") through which she comes into being. The
tenuousness of Mary's existence, once established here,
is reflected metaphorically by the position which she is
called upon to fill in the plot of the novel, for Mary
is a bastard--quite literally, she is "nameless." Mary
spends most of the novel struggling with her problems of identity and trying to understand how to fit into society when there is no clear rank to which she belongs; significantly, word-play, which confirms her intelligence and sense of humor, is the major weapon she wields to keep from being obliterated: "you see how humble I am; not only humble but umble, which I look upon to be the comparative, or, indeed, superlative degree. Or perhaps there are four degrees; humble, umble, stumble, tumble; and then, when one is absolutely in the dirt at their feet, perhaps these big people won't wish one to stoop any further" (IV).

Mary, then, is a verbal creature; and her problems of identity are solved only by the highly artificial resolution of her most conventional of love-plots: she is separated from her lover by a number of complicated problems, all of which are cleared up by the joint deaths of Sir Roger Scatcherd (who has been revealed to be Mary's rich uncle) and his son Louis Philippe. Sir Roger's money is left to Mary, and she is enabled to marry her lover and attain a name and identifiable rank in society. The artificiality of this plot is stressed repeatedly at the end of the novel by the narrator of Dr. Thorne. He calls attention to the verbal nature of his work as he despairs that he has "only a few pages to finish everything" (XLVII), that is, to describe Beatrice's and Mary's weddings; and
he stresses that the multiple marriages at the end of the novel are in fact conventional by his abrupt dismissal of Patience Oriel: "And of whom else must we say a word? Patience, also, of course, got a husband--or will do so" (XLVII).

But Dr. Thorne is realistic as well as self-conscious, like most Trollope novels. The Reform Bill and Peelism are mentioned in chapter I, for example, during the narrator's opening description of Barsetshire. The characters in the novel are, for the most part, psychological mixtures rather than conventional types; even Mary Thorne, the most verbal of creatures, is psychologically complex, and she violates the convention which helps to form her, as she is one of Trollope's "low, brown girls" rather than a typically fair and statuesque heroine. And Dr. Thorne himself is faced with a complicated case of conscience regarding his niece similar to the cases of conscience we discussed earlier as part of Trollope's casuistic realism. As we have seen, the interspersing of realism and self-consciousness results generally in the exposure of realism as a literary convention, existing on the same level of artificiality with other literary conventions. And Dr. Thorne proves this rule once again: the realistic treatment of Mary and Dr. Thorne is shown to be literary and conventional by the self-conscious devices surrounding them; we are never allowed to forget that these characters, no matter how
realistic they may seem at times, are created from words. And any frightening ontological questions raised in the novel by its multiple representations of the same event (e.g., Sir Roger's diary) or by the exposure of realism as a convention are balanced by our aesthetic pleasure as we experience the palpability of the form of the novel.

The effects of Trollope's mixture of realism and self-consciousness are similar to the effects of the same mixture when it occurs in *Vanity Fair*. But it should be clear by now that Trollope's world is even more complex than is Thackeray's. For Thackeray's world is pervaded throughout by a dismal irony, while Trollope's world in his Barsetshire series embraces casuistic irony, the values of love and freedom which form the basis of comedy, and the knowledge that comic patterns, realism, and literature in general are all artificial. Thus, Trollope's work is even more expansive and less conclusive than is Thackeray's: "The form of Trollope's novels avoids the simplicity and finality of conclusions by involving us in a complex series of counterattacks and subterfuges that dramatize a dynamic yet coherent process of living."21
NOTES TO CHAPTER 3


3 From unsigned notice, Eclectic Review, March 1855, pp. 359-61; rpt. in Smalley, p. 39.


7 See, for example, the unsigned notice in Leader, 17 Feb. 1855, pp. 164-5; rpt. in Smalley, p. 37.


11 The Warden, ed. Frederick Page and Michael Sadleir (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), chapter XX. All future references will be to the Oxford Univ. Press editions of Trollope's novels, and short titles and chapter numbers will be cited parenthetically in the text.
Mr. Harding is an obvious exception; but even his goodness may be qualified by his weakness. Other exceptions include some of Trollope's heroines: Grace Crawley and Lucy Robarts, for example, do seem a little too good to be true.


CHAPTER 4

James's Preface to the New York Edition of The Princess Casamassima reveals the double nature of this novel from its inception. The Preface opens with an assertion of the novel's realistic orientation: The Princess Casamassima "proceeded quite directly, during the first year of a long residence in London, from the habit and the interest of walking the streets." In his walks James experienced "a mystic solicitation, the urgent appeal, on the part of everything, to be interpreted and, so far as may be, reproduced." Thus it was that Hyacinth Robinson "sprang up" for James "out of the London pavement." 1

Apparently, however, as soon as James conceived of writing this most realistic of novels, other concerns--more self-consciously artistic ones--complicated his view of his work. The London street urchin Hyacinth Robinson gradually became transformed in James's mind to a literary figure taking a recognizable place in an explicitly literary heritage. Hyacinth must have, says James, "the power to be finely aware and richly responsible," just as "Hamlet and Lear, say, are finely aware." The outline of his contemplated novel begins to fill itself in for James according to established literary patterns:

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"Hamlet and Lear are surrounded, amid their complications, by the stupid and the blind, who minister in all sorts of ways to their recorded fate. Persons of markedly limited sense would, on such a principle as that, play a part in the career of my tormented youth. . . ."²

Clearly, Hyacinth was conceived from a parentage quite as mixed as the one assigned him in The Princess Casamassima, for James fashioned him, and the novel itself, from a mixture of realistic and self-conscious modes. Hyacinth must be as realistic as any London street urchin but as artistic and literary as Hamlet and Lear. Perhaps it is because of the explicitly dual orientation of The Princess Casamassima that this novel, more than any other James work, has been subjected to critical dispute conspicuously similar to that surrounding the work of Thackeray and Trollope.

The most extensive attempt to validate The Princess Casamassima on realistic grounds was made by W. H. Tilley in his monograph "The Background of The Princess Casamassima." In response to charges that the novel's politics were unrealistic and naive, Tilley argues that in this work James attempts and achieves a wholly accurate portrayal of contemporary events: "In an ambitious novel, boldly set in London as of 1885, James showed a group of revolutionists secretly conspiring--and showed them in a manner that suggested they were drawn from life."³
More specifically, Tilley demonstrates that the portrayal of the revolutionaries in *The Princess Casamassima* is not, as had been charged, a feeble and unsuccessful attempt on James's part to capture a stratum of society about which he knew nothing; on the contrary, the revolutionary personages, acts and theories in James's novel are entirely consistent with *The Times*'s reports of revolutionary activities in Europe during the 1880's. The assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, the Phoenix Park murders of 1882, the explosion in the Local Government Board offices in 1883 and subsequent explosions in 1884 and 1885 all form the background for *The Princess Casamassima*, according to Tilley. James even drew his characters directly from life, Tilley asserts: Hoffendahl was probably based on the revolutionary Friedrich August Reinsdorf, who was tried on charges of conspiring to assassinate the Emperor William I of Germany; and Hyacinth may have been modelled after Franz Reinhold Rupsch, the saddler Reinsdorf chose to assassinate the Emperor.

Tilley is not the only, or even the first, defender of *The Princess Casamassima* on the grounds of the novel's truth to life. In his famous essay on James's novel written twelve years before Tilley's monograph, Lionel Trilling asserted, "there is not a political event of *The Princess Casamassima*, not a detail of oath or mystery
or danger, which is not confirmed by multitudinous records." That many European revolutionaries of the 1880's were as disorganized and confused as James's "Sun and Moon" rabble has often been noted with approval, as has James's faithfulness to the reality of nineteenth-century political life in his vague suggestions of the existence of an international underground conspiracy. And the general complexity of The Princess Casamassima (indeed, the complexity of all James's works) has been justified by Edmund Wilson on realistic grounds: "Henry James is a reporter, not a prophet. With less political philosophy even than Flaubert, he can only chronicle the world as it passes, and in his picture the elements are mixed." 5

Such efforts have rescued The Princess Casamassima from charges that its politics are implausible; but all such charges and all such defenses beg certain important and related larger question: is the novel primarily "about" politics at all? 6 and, must the novel's validity depend exclusively on the success of its apparent attempt to mirror faithfully life in general, and politics in particular? Obviously the answer to these questions is "no." And many critics have recognized the literary background of the novel as well as certain self-conscious elements within it. Even as Lionel Trilling stresses the novel's verisimilitude, he sees Hyacinth as James's
representative of The Young Man from the Provinces legend, and he places The Princess Casamassima in a great line of nineteenth-century novels using a theme which is closely related to the questing knight theme of fairy-tale and medieval romance. J. A. Ward notes too the marks of fairy-tale and romance in The Princess Casamassima as well as the novel's Dickensian qualities (he cites the prison scene in the beginning of the novel as a "Dickensian" scene). The resemblance of Hyacinth to Nezhdanov in Turgenev's Virgin Soil has often been remarked, as has Rosy Muniment's similarity to Dickens's Jenny Wren. And Stuart P. Sherman argues, although on questionable grounds, that James's novels never represent mere attempts to mirror life accurately: "What he offers us . . . is a thousandfold better than life; it is an escape from life. It is an escape from the undesigned into the designed, from chaos into order, from the indiscriminated into the finely assorted, from the languor of the irrelevant to the intensity of the pertinent. It is not reality; . . . it is poetry." Thus, while most critics agree that James's later works such as The Wings of the Dove are far more complex and metaphorical than the works of his early phase, such as The Portrait of a Lady, and then proceed to argue over the relative merits of simplicity and complexity, they ask different questions about The Princess Casamassima. And the questions surrounding this
rovel of James's middle phase are those we have met before: the questions involving the use of the conventions of realism and of self-conscious artifice.

The construction of *The Princess Casamassima* is extremely complex; and, although such complexity may give rise to the illusion of verisimilitude in the novel, yet it must also remind us of the presence of an artful controller, once the full extent of the pattern is revealed. The novel is organized according to an amazingly pervasive binary system. There exist, for example, two central characters--Hyacinth Robinson and Christina Light, the Princess Casamassima--who reflect each other and act as doubles throughout the novel. Each is a bastard; each has parents of different nationalities and from different social classes. And Hyacinth and the Princess are drawn to each other from opposite ends of the social spectrum for the same reason: both are incorrigible romantic idealists.

Hyacinth's parentage is problematic from the outset. His mother we know to be Florentine Vivier, a French working girl who dies while serving a prison sentence for the murder of an English nobleman, but who first survives long enough to impress herself indelibly on Hyacinth's consciousness. Of the identity of Hyacinth's father we can be less sure. It is supposed, by Miss Pynsent at least, that he was the English nobleman murdered by Mlle. Vivier,
one Lord Frederick; and on that supposition Hyacinth bases much of his life. It is significant, however, that both Hyacinth's parents are so shadowy that they become far less individualized characters than class representatives, and they are ultimately important only insofar as they represent the idealistic split which informs Hyacinth himself—his division between loyalty to the revolutionary working class and loyalty to the beauty and order of the aristocracy. Indeed, as the novel progresses, it seems increasingly true that Hyacinth was created more from ideas--from a momentary and chance conjunction of the essence of the working class and the essence of the aristocracy--than from human parents. It is no wonder that Hyacinth is troubled by an ontological insecurity which rivals that of Mary Thorne. If Mary was created explicitly through words, then Hyacinth is created just as explicitly through ideas (which, after all, are only words); and both have a great deal of trouble validating their existence in human or social terms.

Miss Pynsent, the little dressmaker who raises Hyacinth, first teaches him to overcome this problem by thinking of himself in literary, romantic terms. She in fact conceives of Hyacinth as a kind of fiction and insists on basing his credibility on the aristocracy of his supposed father: "To believe in Hyacinth, for Miss Pynsent, was to believe that he was the son of the extremely immoral Lord Frederick."
Miss Pynsent vicariously fulfills her own romantic
tendencies by modelling the young Hyacinth into an
idealized figure straight from the pages of fiction:
"Her own isolation went out to his, and in the course of
time their associated solitude was peopled by the dress-
maker's romantic mind with a hundred consoling evocations.
The boy proved neither a dunce nor a reprobate: but
what endeared him to her most was her conviction that
he belonged, 'by the left hand,' as she had read in a
novel, to a proud and ancient race . . ." (I). Hyacinth's
value and very existence depend for Miss Pynsent not on
any personal quality belonging to him, but on his being
thrust into a romantic role largely of her own creation.
And Miss Pynsent is not the only one who insists on the
fictional nature of Hyacinth. Millicent Henning, for
example, Hyacinth's childhood playmate, "always thought
he would have something to do with books" (IV); and Paul
Muniment persists in his view of Hyacinth as "a young
man in an illustrated story-book" (XIV), even after
Hyacinth has pledged away his life in the service of what
he conceives to be Paul's "cause."

It is little wonder that the insecure Hyacinth,
searching for some terms in which to articulate his
identity, learns to see himself as a verbal, conventional
creature lifted from the pages of a book. He has had
excellent training in such perception from Miss Pynsent
and the others, and his training has been supplemented by a steady diet of romances and novels (see chapters I and VI). Gradually Hyacinth learns to see himself as a colorful Frenchman in the style of Michelet or Carlyle (V), and he identifies most fervently with "the heroes of several French novels in which he had found a thrilling interest" (XII). And as Hyacinth comes to see himself as a French hero, so his experiences begin to take a literary form appropriate to his role. Hyacinth's stay at Medley looks in retrospect like a romance: "His last week at Medley in especial had already become a far-off fable, the echo of a song; he could read it over as a romance bound in vellum and gold, gaze at it as he would have gazed at some exquisite picture" (XXIX). And the vow that will eventually contribute to his death appears to him "thrilling," "like some famous novel" (XXIV).

The questions involving the relationship between reality and artifice raised by such obviously self-conscious treatment of Hyacinth are crystallized in an important and complex passage where Hyacinth learns, to his surprise, that experience may be transmuted into art: "Strange enough it was, and a proof surely of our little hero's being a true artist, that the impressions he had accumulated during the last few months appeared to mingle and confound themselves with the very sources of his craft and to lie open to technical 'rendering'" (XXXI). The effect of this
passage, in conjunction with Hyacinth's entire search to validate his existence in literary terms, is as complex as the effect of any self-conscious passage in *Vanity Fair* or in the Barsetshire novels. For as we watch a fictional character attempt to ground his existence in avowedly literary terms, and as we watch the metamorphosis of his fictional experience into a work of art within the work of art which is the entire novel, we must be "brought up short," as Alter says, to ponder the relationship between reality and artifice.

If Hyacinth was conceived from ideas and born through literary conventions, then he was, as the novel tells us, "consecrated" to the stage (II). And our attempt to sort out the relationship between realism and self-consciousness in *The Princess Casamassima* becomes complicated as we examine the importance of the theater in the characterization of Hyacinth. As we have seen, Hyacinth tries to understand himself in literary terms, but he doesn't always succeed: "He was not what he seemed, but even with Pinnie's valuable assistance he had not succeeded in representing to himself very definitely what he was" (X). Because he has no solid, fixed identity, Hyacinth comes to view himself as one who "was to go through life in a mask, in a borrowed mantle; he was to be every day and every hour an actor" (V). The theater appeals to Hyacinth because its "sweet deception"
(XII) enables him to cover up his uncertainty as to his actual identity by assuming masks, or artificial identities. And so, once again, Hyacinth finds a way to become the romantic hero he wishes to be, for whatever part he is called upon to play, he will play it romantically:

"Hyacinth waited for the voice that should allot him the particular part he was to play. His ambition was to play it with brilliancy, to offer an example—an example even that might survive him—of pure youthful, almost juvenile consecration" (XXI). Appropriately enough, when the voice, or the word comes, it affects the verbal Hyacinth in a physical manner: "like a quick blow in the face: it seemed to leap at him personally" (XXI), and Hyacinth's consecration to the stage (as he still conceives he is playing a part) leads him to devote his life to a cause he can never fully espouse.

Hyacinth can never support wholly the revolutionary cause or any other, because he is not the conventional, single-minded romantic hero that he would like to be; he is always, as the Princess perceives, "a strange mixture of contradictory impulses" (XXXVII). As we watch Hyacinth try desperately to create himself in his own image and to reconcile the warring elements within himself into a cohesive whole, we must acknowledge both the high-mimetic conventionality of the romantic mold which Hyacinth exposes
and the low-mimetic conventionality of the realism from which Hyacinth's complex character is drawn. An early description of James's "little hero" shows the complexity of his characterization:

He was shabby and work-stained, but an observant eye would have caught the hint of an "arrangement" in his dress (his appearance being plainly not a matter of indifference to himself), while a painter (not of the heroic) would have liked to make a sketch of him. There was something exotic in him, and yet, with his sharp young face, destitute of bloom but not of sweetness, and a certain conscious cockneyism that pervaded him, he was as strikingly as Millicent, in her own degree, a product of the London streets and the London air. He looked ingenuous and slightly wasted, amused, amusing and indefinably sad. Women had always found him touching, but he made them—so they had repeatedly assured him—die of laughing (V).

Hyacinth reveals the conventionality of the romantic mold in his diminutive stature, his cockneyism, and in his more-than-occasional absurdity. He is a low-mimetic, complex, realistic character who aspires to the high-mimetic simplicity of romance. He is hopelessly split, by birth and by inclinations, between loyalty to the revolutionary working class and loyalty to the aristocracy; with a dim knowledge of his own foolishness, he vainly hopes to reconcile—or at least to disguise—this split by assuming the role of romantic hero. And we must never
lose sight of either of the conventions which form Hyacinth if we are really to understand him, just as the narrator evokes and exposes both conventions in his description of Hyacinth: the artist who could most profitably portray him would be "not of the heroic"—would be, in positive terms, "of the realistic." Even as we appreciate Hyacinth's realism, we must realize that it only exists in relation to the heroic convention with which it combines to form him.

Hyacinth's desire to embrace the romantic convention against which his own realism defines itself not only makes him ridiculous at times, but also makes him seriously, ironically limited. Aside from his fundamental error in misunderstanding himself and his ability to reconcile or disguise his opposing elements, Hyacinth's most critical mistake involves his idealization of those around him, especially Paul Muniment. Wishing to be a hero, Hyacinth attempts to surround himself with a fantastic world in which his heroism may shine; thus it is no wonder that he is so eager to see romance in Paul Muniment, in reference to whom he "had dreamed of the religion of friendship" (XXX). Hyacinth's limitations in regard to Paul are pointed up from their first meeting, where the narrator forces us, as he so often does, to "see around" Hyacinth: Paul is "tall and fair and good-natured looking, but you couldn't tell—or at least Hyacinth couldn't—
if he were handsome or ugly . . ." (VII). Here and elsewhere, Hyacinth inevitably chooses to believe the best of Paul, and builds a fantasy around him: "Our hero treated himself to a high unlimited faith in him; he had always dreamed of some grand friendship and this was the best opening he had yet encountered" (XIV). Paul, of course, usually falls short of Hyacinth's dream; and Hyacinth's true tenacity is revealed as he persistently interprets Paul's inhumanity according to his own romantic dream instead of according to what is revealed to be the truth of the situation. After Paul has led Hyacinth to pledge away his life, Hyacinth is somewhat surprised by "the cheerful stoicism with which Muniment faced the sacrifice," and he finds it necessary to "remodel a good deal his original conception of his sturdy friend's character" (XXX). Predictably, however, Hyacinth's remodelling of Paul is only in the direction of a more extreme idealism: Hyacinth teaches himself to feel that Paul's hard-heartedness is a mark of his superiority and superhuman dedication to an ideal, and "Hyacinth felt that he himself could never have risen so high" (XXX). Actually, of course, Paul is not the hero which Hyacinth makes him out to be; he is an extremely limited character himself who, in his apparent dedication to the idea of "the people" (although we can never be sure how deep
even that dedication goes), has lost all vestiges of sympathetic humanity. Paul has become the inhuman monument of stone which his name suggests; he is so cold to humanity that he can't even appreciate the pathetic, human heroism that little Hyacinth finally does attain in his willingness to sacrifice himself. Both characters' limitations are sharply delineated as they spend a holiday at Greenwich during what will be their last afternoon together. Paul attempts to defend his sacrifice of Hyacinth by asserting his notion that Hyacinth would "jump" at the opportunity to strike out for the revolutionary cause:

"I did jump at it--upon my word I did; and it was just what I was looking for. That's all correct!" said Hyacinth cheerfully as they went forward. There was a strain of heroism in these words--of heroism of which the sense was not conveyed to Muniment by a vibration in their interlocked arms. Hyacinth didn't make the reflection that he was infernally literal; he dismissed the sentimental problem that had worried him; he condoned, excused, admired--he merged himself, resting happy for the time, in the consciousness that Paul was a grand person, that friendship was a purer feeling than love, and that there was an immense deal of affection between them. He didn't even observe at that moment that it was preponderantly on his own side (XXXV).

Hyacinth persistently pursues the romantic ideal both in himself and in others, and his idealism blinds him and limits him. Hyacinth is not a high-mimetic hero and his world is not romantic; but even as he exposes the
conventionality of such romanticism for us, he aspires back toward its simplicity and thus destroys himself. 11

The other central character of *The Princess Casamassima* is, of course, Christina Light, who gives her name to the novel and who was revived from James's earlier novel *Roderick Hudson*. That Christina functions as a double to Hyacinth in *The Princess Casamassima* may be seen most clearly if we examine her as her character gradually unfolds through both novels. *Roderick Hudson* fills in the details of biographical information which are only hinted at in *The Princess Casamassima*. Thus, the "horrible education" mentioned by Christina in the later novel is described in the earlier. Here we learn that Christina's mother, a character so unattractive that the clear-sighted Rowland Mallet is "disgusted with himself for pleasing her," 12 has based her daughter's whole life on a recognition of the financial and social values of her beauty. Mrs. Light's neglect of Christina as an infant had turned overnight to worship when she recognized Christina's beauty; and we reach full realization of Mrs. Light's exploitation of this beauty only with her triumphant statement, "I've raised money on that girl's face!" (XII).

The details surrounding Christina's marriage to Prince Casamassima are also supplied by the earlier novel. In *Roderick Hudson*, Rowland and Mme. Grandoni conclude
that Christina has married the Prince to hide her new knowledge of her bastard birth behind the Casamassima facade of wealth and respectability. Like Hyacinth and like Mary Thorne, Christina is troubled by a certain amount of social insecurity when she learns of her bastard birth. And like a somewhat jaded Mary Thorne, Christina attempts to dispel this insecurity through a marriage which grants her an indisputable place in society. But while Mary has also married for love and thus achieves a comic "happy ending," Christina conceives that she has "sold herself for a title and a fortune" (Princess, XVIII); and her empty marriage functions to expose the artificiality of such conventional "happy endings." Christina has cured her insecurity but, in doing so, has perpetuated the vulgar and materialistic values represented by her mother. Thus, when we see Christina in The Princess Casamassima, she is still the complex, headstrong, restless character that she was before her marriage in Roderick Hudson.

Part of the difficulty critics have had in dealing with Christina arises from the fact that in neither novel do we see her thoughts, so we are dependent on her actions and on the impressions of other characters for our knowledge of her. However, when we examine her actions in both novels, striking patterns begin to emerge. Her willfulness is revealed again and again as she openly
flaunts society's expectations—and she does indeed "go very far." In both novels she becomes interested in artistic young men—Roderick Hudson and Hyacinth—and in both cases her interest has more to do with what they are, with the ideas they represent, than with who they are personally. Thus, when she perceives that Roderick's genius is not everything she had hoped it to be, or that Hyacinth's devotion to the revolutionary cause is complicated by other concerns, she turns her back. Finally, in both novels, Christina herself attempts whole-hearted devotion to an ideal—first, to an inner integrity which militates against her marriage to the Prince; later, to the revolutionary cause of "the people"—and in both cases, she is defeated or prevented from carrying her idealism to its logical conclusion.

The consistency of Christina's actions at first seems to be echoed by the consistency of other characters' comments about her. Most of the characters ranged around Christina note her beauty, her pride, her world-weariness, her aversion to the banal. But complications arise as the reader recognizes the tendency of these characters to contradict themselves in identifying Christina's motivation for her actions; and the pervasive characterization of Christina as an actress in both novels, a characterization which parallels Hyacinth's perpetual role-playing, and which
leads in Christina's case to questions about her motivation and sincerity, only makes matters worse. Christina's motives are problematic to most of the characters around her, as well as to most of the critics who attempt to understand her. In Roderick Hudson, Mme. Grandoni, Christina's oldest and wisest friend, gives us our first clue as to an explanation for Christina's behavior: "My own impression is that, like the most interesting people always, she's a mixture of better and worse, of good passions and bad--always of passions, however . . ." (VIII). Christina is a creature of passion, looking for an ideal to which she can attach that passion: she looks for such an ideal in Roderick, in her own heart, in Hyacinth, in the revolutionary cause. Rowland Mallet too sees Christina's passion and presciently links it with the deaths of Roderick, and, especially, Hyacinth: "The impression remained . . . that she was a complex, wilful, passionate creature who might easily draw down a too confiding spirit into some strange underworld of unworthy sacrifice . . . and yet . . . she struck him . . . as ready to take on occasion her own life in her hand" (IX). Christina's tendency to devote herself passionately to an ideal--any ideal--is further demonstrated in Roderick Hudson as we learn of her youthful aspiration to be a nun: "I had for three months--positively--the perfect
If we view Christina's actions in *The Princess Casamassima*, we see that this romanticism, introduced and developed in the early novel, persists and has in fact become the major mark of her character. Oppressed by a suspicion that life is, from beginning to end, trite, monotonous and suffocating, Christina conceives that she needs to "feel freshly about something or other," and in her quest for a romantic ideal that will bely the banality of life, she fastens on to the revolutionary ideal and on to "the people," represented for her at first by little Hyacinth Robinson. Just as Hyacinth is drawn to the Princess out of a desire to know grand, romantic people, so the Princess is drawn to him because he appears to her to be remarkable, strange, romantic—in any case, not commonplace. And while it lasts, Christina's devotion to "the people" is far more passionate and single-minded than is Hyacinth's; she certainly is sincere as she challenges him: "Is all this going to burst forth some fine morning and set the world on fire? Or is it to sputter out and spend itself in vain conspiracies, be dissipated in sterile heroisms and abortive isolated movements? I want to know à quoi m'en tenir" (XIII). She is as sincere as she knows how to be, even if her devotion to "the people" derives entirely from her own..." (XIV).
need to attach herself to an ideal about which she can "feel freshly," rather than from any philanthropic convictions about the actual misery of the working class. And if the novel reminds us repeatedly that Christina is acting, yet we must never forget that, as Rowland Mallet notes, "She herself was evidently the foremost dupe of her inventions" (XIV). Christina's brand of poverty at Madeira Crescent represents not only an attempt to impress Hyacinth; it is primarily an attempt to impress, and even to fool, herself.

Christina is, as Mme. Grandoni recognizes, a *capricciosa*; but she is a paradoxical one. She is an actress who believes sincerely and passionately in each role she plays; she is an idealist who devotes herself to the fantastic world which is in fact of her own creation. She is not malicious; she is not false; she sees intensely what she wishes to see, and everything else simply ceases to exist for her. She recognizes her aversion to the banal, so she turns her face in the other direction and creates a world which excludes the banal. Like Hyacinth, Christina sees with romantic eyes; and, like Hyacinth, her vision is severely limited. Thus it is that she asserts that Hyacinth is most "out of it"—the inner circle of revolutionary activity—precisely at the moment when he is most "in it," having just received
his summons from Hoffendahl to sacrifice himself (XLV). Both Hyacinth and Christina limit their vision by devotion to an ideal. But, since Hyacinth has seized upon romanticism as a way of defining his very being, he can no longer exist when the world he has created crumbles as his friends betray him and he is forced to acknowledge his own complexity. Christina, having already established her identity, turns to romanticism merely as an escape from boredom; thus, when the limitations imposed by her idealism are made clear to her as they seem to be by the end of _The Princess Casamassima_, she survives to rush to Hyacinth's bedside. It is notable that Christina rushes to Hyacinth rather than to the Duke's party (which is where she had told Muniment she was going), since her sudden and desperate concern for the little, human bookbinder at the expense of her ideals reveals that Christina has not only recognized the clash between the realistic world she has ignored and the romantic world she has created, but has been forced to acknowledge the reality of the one and the artificiality of the other. Unfortunately, at least for Hyacinth, her recognition and her acknowledgment come too late.

Hyacinth and the Princess, the two centers of _The Princess Casamassima_ form only the most illustrious pair of doubles in the novel. The binary system which
they represent extends throughout the novel as nearly all the characters double and reflect each other. Hyacinth's original parents, Florentine Vivier and (we assume) Lord Frederick, are echoed in turn by Miss Pynsent and Mr. Vetch, and by the Poupins; still later, Paul Muniment fulfills a somewhat paternal role in relation to Hyacinth, while Millicent Henning's "generous breast" (XLVII) is obviously maternal. That each of Hyacinth's surrogate parents either betrays him or is not able to save him reflects the fact that Hyacinth was betrayed, in a very real sense, by the nature of his conception and by his mother's murder of his father. Hyacinth and Millicent, in spite of all their differences, reflect each other at times. They share a love for rambling through the streets of London, probably at least partially because Hyacinth "was as strikingly as Millicent, in her own degree, a product of the London streets and the London air" (V). Hyacinth and the Princess, of course, reflect each other in their dual parentages and in their desire for new experiences and sensations. The Princess and Millicent mirror each other's beauty; in church, in fact, Millicent is described in terms more befitting a member of royalty than a member of the lower class, even if the description is somewhat tongue-in-cheek: "She sat up in her pew with a majesty that carried out this idea; she seemed
to answer in her proper person for creeds and communions and sacraments; she was more than devotional, she was individually almost pontifical" (XLI). The Princess and Paul Muniment reflect each other so strongly, since they are both totally idealized by Hyacinth, that it is no surprise when they finally come together at the end of the novel. And the Princess and Hoffendahl are linked for Hyacinth as he recognizes that to be touched by either involves a certain loss of liberty (XXII).

Individual actions in *The Princess Casamassima* also mirror each other. The oath or solemn vow which Hyacinth takes with Hoffendahl is reflected in the oath extracted from him by Mr. Vetch. When Hyacinth sees Millicent and Sholto together at the end of the book and feels betrayed, we must be reminded of his feelings of betrayal and jealousy just a few chapters earlier when he had seen the Princess and Muniment together. The "long, deep glance of mutual scrutiny" exchanged by the Princess and Paul Muniment in chapter XXXVI, wherein each "seemed to drop a plummet into the other's mind" should be recalled by us as, in chapter XLVII, Hyacinth and Sholto stare at each other in the same penetrating way: "What these two pairs of eyes said to each other requires perhaps no definite mention." The Princess's challenge to Paul Muniment, "I believe you are afraid!" (XXXIX) is still
ringing in our ears when, just two pages later, the Prince accuses Mme. Grandoni: "You're afraid—you're afraid!"

Even the walks that Hyacinth takes with the Princess are explicitly reminiscent of those he had taken with Millicent: "It reminded him more queerly than he could have expressed of some of the rambles he had taken on summer evenings with Millicent Henning. . . . She stopped as Millicent had done to look into the windows of vulgar establishments and amused herself with picking out the abominable objects she should like to possess . . ." (XXXIII). The "losses" of Hyacinth and Lady Aurora are likewise explicitly linked: "What had each done but lose that which he or she had never so much as had?" (XXVII).

It is significant that Hyacinth realizes the personal nature of the revolutionary act which he is called upon to perform simultaneously as he recognizes the repetitive nature of such an act:

He had a sense that his mind, made up as he believed, would fall to pieces again; but that sense in turn lost itself in a shudder which was already familiar—the horror of the public reappearance, in his person, of the imbrued hands of his mother. This loathing of the idea of a repetition had not been sharp, strangely enough, till he felt the great, hard hand on his shoulder; in all his previous meditations the growth of his reluctance to act for the "party of action" had not been the fear of a personal stain, but the simple growth of yearning observation. Yet now the idea of the personal stain made him
horribly sick; it seemed by itself to make service impossible. It passed before him, or rather it stayed, like a blow dealt back at his mother, already so hideously disfigured; to suffer it to start out in the life of her son was in a manner to place her own forgotten, redeemed pollution again in the eye of the world (XLVII).

These two realizations are linked as they combine to make Hyacinth's death inevitable; and if the one reminds us that there can be no "new" actions in this world of repetitions, then the other parallels the Princess's recognition that Hyacinth's death is a personal, human matter rather than an idealistic, romantic one.

Noticing the pervasiveness of the doubling device in The Princess Casamassima, J. A. Ward has testified to its realistic effect: "In The Princess the purpose of the ... parallels is not simply to achieve intensity, but to define the quality of human existence in London."14 Surely this is true; but even as the doubling device reveals the complexity and realism of James's depiction of London life, it must still function self-consciously to remind us of the artful organizer who has paired his elements so thoroughly in order to define them fully. And there are numerous other self-conscious devices operating throughout The Princess Casamassima, always reminding us that the novel is ultimately a verbal artifice.
The characters in the novel repeatedly see each other as fictive beings who have momentarily stepped out of novels, plays, or paintings. Lady Aurora is "a personage in a comedy" (VIII), a "ludicrous heroine" (XV); Millicent is just as much an actress as ever the Princess is (XXV) and at times assumes for Hyacinth the shape and color of the main figure in Delacroix's *Le 28 Juillet, La Liberté Conduisant le Peuple aux Barricades.* And "a gentleman in a dirty dressing-gown, smoking a pipe, who made Hyacinth think of Mr. Micawber" (XXXIII) lives near the Princess in Madeira Crescent. Christina Light and Paul Muniment both bear self-conscious names which indicate their salient characteristics, much as the names of comedy of humours figures reveal at a glance their personalities: Christina emits a continual brilliance and radiance felt by all who come into contact with her, while Paul is indeed an inhuman monument of stone. And the name Casamassima which Christina assumes through her marriage, and which becomes the title of the second novel in which she appears, not only indicates the size, solidity and splendor of the aristocracy with which she has allied herself, but also hints at its emptiness and vacuousness. The characters in *The Princess Casamassima* persist too in seeing their own and each other's actions as essentially fictional or literary: Lady Aurora's life seems to the
Princess "like something in some English novel" (XXXIV); Hyacinth's first meeting with the Princess (during, appropriately enough, a performance of the melodrama *The Pearl of Paraguay*) seems like "a play within a play" (XIII); the revolutionary activity itself is described as "a rehearsal" (XXXIV) for some great drama.  

Finally, and in spite of James's injunction that the novelist must not "give himself away," the narrator's hand may be seen frequently in *The Princess Casamassima*, arranging, commenting, explaining--and always reminding us that his story is of a verbal, artificial nature. Here the narrator's treatment of Hyacinth is of special interest. Frequently, the speaker refers to Hyacinth as "our hero," an appellation which must remind us not only of Hyacinth's dreams, but also of the fact that he has been created in reference to the convention of heroism by some external author. Since, however, we must be enabled to see "around" Hyacinth's romanticism and to perceive that heroism is evoked in reference to Hyacinth only to define his realism, the narrator balances his comments on Hyacinth's heroism with numerous defenses of the complexity of Hyacinth's personality and motivation. The narrator's self-conscious concern for the arrangement of his description of Hyacinth, as he stresses certain elements and correlates others, all in order to explain
clearly Hyacinth's complexity, may be seen in his description of his "hero's" working life:

Our young friend's relations with his comrades would form a chapter by itself, but all that may be said of the matter here is that the clever little operator from Lomax Place had in a manner a double identity and that much as he lived in Mr. Crookenden's establishment he lived out of it still more. In this busy, pasty, sticky, leathery little world, where wages and beer were the main objects of consideration, he played his part in a way that marked him as a queer lot, but capable of queerness in the line of equanimity too (XX).

In this passage and others like it, the narrator is in effect telling us how to view Hyacinth: "I mention these dim broodings not because they belong in an especial degree to the history of our young man during the winter of the Princess's residence in Madeira Crescent, but because they were a constant element in his moral life and need to be remembered in any view of him at a given time" (XXXVIII).

Finally, in his efforts to explain and justify Hyacinth the narrator does not hesitate on occasion to disarrange the normal progress of time. In chapter XI, for example, he indulges in a long explanation of the intricacies of Hyacinth's division, and then prefigures the doom which will result from it hundreds of pages--or many months--later: "It might very well be his fate to be divided to the point of torture, to be split open
by sympathies that pulled him in different ways. . . ." Then, by way of further explanation of Hyacinth's doom, the narrator immediately flashes back a hundred pages—or many years—to an elucidation of exactly how Hyacinth had learned of his parentage after his visit with Miss Pynsent to the prison. Such obvious rearrangement of time may work out Hyacinth's complexity for us; but it also reveals the existence of the narrator who is manipulating a combination of self-conscious and realistic devices in the service of his story. The narrator creates Hyacinth explicitly in reference to heroic conventions, but intercedes time and time again to explain the low-mimetic intricacies of Hyacinth's actual situation, and to expose and deflate Hyacinth's romantic pretensions, as he does after Hyacinth's rather ecstatic defense of the "religion of friendship" which he thinks he shares with Paul: "He didn't even observe at that moment," comments the narrator, "that it was preponderantly on his own side" (XXXV).

The existence of the obvious and careful system of reflections and repetitions in The Princess Casamassima in conjunction with the many reminders of the presence of an artful narrator may lead us to view the novel, metaphorically, as a carefully-choreographed dance. While dance must move in time, it depends for its effects
primarily on the spatial coordinate rather than the temporal. Dance is usually performed within a specified space in which the dancers move individually and, assuming a group dance, together, forming configurations, dissolving them, and forming others. The basic characters—the dancers—and the basic elements—the possibilities of movement by the dancers' bodies, the allotted space, etc.—remain the same, as the configurations change. By the end of the dance, the audience has come to a deeper understanding of the possibilities of the various elements with which they were presented at the opening of the dance. That is, the elements themselves have not really changed, but the audience's understanding of them has deepened.

Likewise, in The Princess Casamassima, we are presented with a set number of characters and elements near the beginning of the book. These elements and characters do not alter radically; but, as they move through the book, forming various configurations, our understanding of them grows. For example, perhaps the two most basic elements of the novel are represented by the downtrodden lower class and the privileged aristocracy. These elements appear throughout the novel in various forms (in the persons of Millicent and the Princess, for example, but most notably in the dual heritage and character of Hyacinth) and our understanding of the complexity of their relationship
may become more profound; but throughout the book, in spite of the various configurations which they help to form, they remain the same basic elements. We are constantly provided with new terms of comparison as the elements group themselves into pairs of doubles, dissolve, and form new sets; and in the novel's extravagant use of reflection we must notice a marked similarity to the use of the doubling device in dance. Just as in dance one dancer may effect a certain movement which is simultaneously reflected or later repeated by another dancer, so in this novel the elements and characters reflect each other in appearances, spoken words, and actions, as we have seen.

Novels, like dances, must move through time, but time in *The Princess Casamassima* is often confused or convoluted by the narrator, as when he flashes forward and backward in his efforts to explain fully Hyacinth's polar split. Likewise, when Hyacinth first meets the Princess, the narrator interposes, "He might at that instant have guessed what he discovered later—that among this lady's faults (he was destined to learn they were numerous) not the least eminent was an exaggerated fear of the commonplace" (XIII). The Princess's faults, apparently, like the two halves of Hyacinth, are constant elements which the passage of time does not change (although Hyacinth's perception
of these elements, and ours, may change).

When time does pass in the novel, it seems merely to provide for a re-configuration of the same basic elements. For example, when we first see Millicent Henning as a child, Miss Pynsent notices that her "perversity was as great as the beauty, somewhat soiled and dimmed, of her insolent little face" (I). Millicent's chief characteristics here are repeated throughout the novel: over and over again we see evidence of her beauty, her insolence, and her vulgarity (characterized so surely by her irrepressible "Laws!" which rings through the book). Even her embrace of Hyacinth near the end of the work is potentially present from the beginning of their relationship: "She was not a very clinging little creature, and there was no one in her own domestic circle to whom she was much attached; but she liked to kiss Hyacinth when he didn't push her away and tell her she was hateful" (I). Likewise the beauty and nobility of the Princess remain constant in spite of the many different configurations in which she finds herself. Whether she is seen at Medley, at Audley Court, or at Madeira Crescent, she is the same Princess. Her appearance to Hyacinth at Audley Court, after his Continental excursion, testifies to her constancy: "She had put off her splendour, but her beauty was unquenchably bright... In short she held the tric in her hand,
having reduced Lady Aurora to exactly the same simplicity as the others, and she performed admirably and artistically for their benefit" (XXXII). The characters in the novel embody various elements which remain constant amid the constantly shifting patterns. Even within Hyacinth himself, the two elements which make up his divided nature remain, although he may shift back and forth between them. Thus, as John P. O'Neill has observed, "What appears . . . to be a progressive action is rather a working and reworking in dramatic form of the design which James has projected for his hero, an intensification of the terms of the impasses in which Hyacinth finds himself from the very first." 18

As we read The Princess Casamassima, then, our knowledge and understanding of the elements and characters deepen as we see them in different configurations. This deepening, this changed vision occurs within the novel too as Hyacinth's changing understanding mirrors our own: "What was most vivid to him in the deserted field of [Pinnie's] unsuccessful industry was the changed vision with which he had come back to objects familiar for twenty years. The picture was the same, and all its horrid elements . . . yet the eyes with which he looked at it had new terms of comparison" (XXVII). Just as Hyacinth realizes that the elements are the same although his vision may have altered, so we should realize that Hyacinth's
suicide was potentially present in his birth, for the two elements which contribute to his destruction are the same two forces which created him. As Paul Muniment says to Hyacinth, "You're a duke in disguise, and so I thought the first time I ever saw you" (XXXV), so we should realize that the two poles which lead Hyacinth to suicide are part of his very nature; these two poles do not really change, but we get "new terms of comparison" as we watch their appearance in endless patterns, and our understanding of them becomes more profound.

But Hyacinth is a romantic, an idealist, who believes that great changes are possible. He believes that he can somehow resolve the opposing forces which inform him into a coherent, heroic unity which will represent for him "the truth." The question of how we are to view Hyacinth's quest when we have been shown an uncooperative world which is incapable of undergoing the changes which Hyacinth seeks to effect is answered by James's exposure and deflation of his "hero's" romanticism:

The reader will doubtless smile at [Hyacinth's] mental debates and oscillations, and not understand why a little bastard bookbinder should attach importance to his conclusions. They were not important for either cause, but they were important for himself—if only because they would rescue him from the torment of his present life, the perpetual, sore shock of the rebound. There was no peace for him between the
two currents that flowed in his nature, the blood of his passionate, plebeian mother and that of his long-descended, super-civilised sire. They continued to toss him from one side to the other; they arrayed him in intolerable defiances and revenges against himself. He had a high ambition: he wanted neither more nor less than to get hold of the truth and wear it in his heart. He believed with the candour of youth that it is brilliant and clear-cut, like a royal diamond; but to whatever quarter he turned in the effort to find it he seemed to know that behind him, bent on him in reproach, was a tragic, wounded face (XXXVIII).

Obviously Hyacinth, with his heightened perceptions, has been presented to us as more than simply "a little bastard bookbinder"; but it should also be obvious that his decisions are not going to be important for "either cause," because the elements which make up both causes will never change no matter what Hyacinth decides to do. Nicely juxtaposed to Hyacinth's youthful quest for truth is Mr. Vetch's more seasoned philosophy:

The idea of great changes . . . took its place among the dreams of his youth; for what was any possible change in the relations of men and women but a new combination of the same elements? If the elements could be made different the thing would be worth thinking of; but it was not only impossible to introduce any new ones--no means had yet been discovered for getting rid of the old. The figures on the chessboard were still the passions and jealousies and superstitions and stupidities of man, and their position
with regard to each other at any given moment could be of interest only to the grim, invisible fates who played the game—who sat, through the ages, bow-backed over the table (XXVIII).

Since the elements remain the same as the chessmen or dancers move, Hyacinth will always see "a tragic, wounded face" behind him if he turns in either direction. Mr. Vetch's philosophy and James's exposure of Hyacinth's romanticism are alike in another significant way, apart from their insistence on the unchanging nature of the elements composing the world; for, just as James's narrator states that Hyacinth's decision is important "for himself," so Mr. Vetch takes a stand for individual humanity, for a humanism quite different from the revolutionary concern for "the people." For Mr. Vetch says at one point, "The way certain classes arrogate to themselves the title of the people has never pleased me. Why are some human beings the people, the people only, and others not?" (XXXVII). What Mr. Vetch knows, and what the Princess comes to recognize as the artificiality of her own romanticism is exposed, is that "differences between ideas are less consequential than the impersonal nature of all ideas."19

The only thing of value in an ironic world of unchanging elements, where idealism and change are exposed as sterile, unviable, impersonal ideas, is individual humanity; thus,
Mr. Vetch and the Princess each try, vainly, to save Hyacinth's life—to save the "self" for which Hyacinth's decisions are important.

Unfortunately, both attempts are futile: paradoxically, Mr. Vetch's last effort wherein he extracts the second oath from Hyacinth only serves to push Hyacinth forward to his suicide, and the Princess arrives at Hyacinth's bedside too late. For Hyacinth's "self" is too bound up in the poles which are tearing it apart to be saved. Moreover, Hyacinth's identity is too dependent on the romanticism which he has embraced as a remedy for his split to survive his recognition that such romanticism is revealed to be entirely artificial when compared to the real "personal stain" which would result from his repetition of his mother's revolutionary act. Unity is not possible in a world where conflicting elements are denied the possibility of change; hence, the "truth" which Hyacinth's quest demands is unattainable, and Hyacinth cannot live without his ideals. Whether we view the characters in the novel as dancers or as chess pieces, we are still faced with a certain number of fixed principles: a limited number of elements, a limited number of possible moves, and a limited space in which to play the grim game or dance the danse macabre. In a sense, Hyacinth's death does not eliminate any element with which we were presented.
at the beginning of the novel, for the two ideas which have formed him are still present in external society, and they are still, of course, unreconciled. What Hyacinth's death does eliminate is a "self": a living, perceiving, potentially creative human being; Hyacinth has diminished by the last pages to "something black, something ambiguous, something outstretched" (XLVII). The mind to which certain perceptions and decisions were important is extinguished; the youth who had embarked on an impossible romantic quest is dead; and a "thing" is left in a world of impersonal elements which continue to combine and re-combine without changing.

Hyacinth's story is neither romantic nor tragic, as some critics have supposed. For romance can only take place in a world which supports the hero's idealistic quest, and tragedy depends on its world's possibilities of change and regeneration. And the world of *The Princess Casamassima*, characterized most grimly by its "terrible mystic far-off stars, which appeared . . . more than ever to see everything of our helplessness and tell nothing of help" (XLIV), can neither support idealism nor submit itself to tragic sacrifice. Hyacinth and the Princess play out what they think is romance or tragedy in an ironic world which exposes the artificiality of their pretensions just as surely as the reality of Audley Court exposes
the artificiality of the romance which its name promises: "Audley Court, with its pretty name, which reminded Hyacinth of Tennyson, proved to be a still dingier nook than Lomax Place" (VII). The narrative pattern of The Princess Casamassima may in fact be best described as an ironic parody of romance; and since we must recognize that the low-mimetic realism which informs the novel can exist only in relation to the high-mimetic romance against which it is defined, we are enabled to experience the conventionality and palpable form of the novel--and thus, once again, to comprehend the quality of our aesthetic delight.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 4


2James, p. 62.


7Trilling, pp. 58-64.

8Ward, p. 132.


Henry James, Roderick Hudson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), chapter IX. All future references are to the New York edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by chapter numbers.

James, The Art of the Novel, p. 74.

Ward, p. 12C.

Viola Hopkins has noticed, in reference to this painting, that "The sad, introverted, rather delicately featured young man in the foreground, somewhat dwarfed by the monumental figure of Liberty, could be for all the world a representation of Hyacinth!" ("Visual Art Devices and Parallels in the Fiction of Henry James," 1951; rpt. in Henry James: Modern Judgements, p. 107).

The comparison of Paul's surname to the word "monument" is of course made explicit in chapter XII of the novel, where Millicent refers to Paul as "Mr. Monument (what do you call him?). . . ."

J. A. Ward has commented on the self-conscious elements in the novel in his book The Search for Form: "Our sense of the presence of other literary works is increased by the numerous references to titles, characters, and authors of nineteenth-century novels" (p. 132). He also has compiled a rather extensive list of these references.

O'Neill, p. 58.
The same critics who see Hyacinth as heroic tend to view his fate as tragic (see footnote 11).
CHAPTER 5

It should be clear by now that the novels of Thackeray, Trollope and James which I have examined are similar in many important respects. All of them, for example, are realistic; that is, all make use of certain devices designed to produce the illusion of verisimilitude. These works ground themselves in representational, identifiable settings often involving a reflection of actual historical events and the introduction of hardly-fictionalized versions of actual historical figures (e.g., Napoleon in *Vanity Fair*). They present us with a great deal of descriptive residue, as well as with psychologically complex, low-mimetic characters who are guided by mixed motives and who are highly individualized and clearly differentiated from each other within each novel. And often the narrators of these works explicitly link their worlds with the world of the reader as they implicate the reader repeatedly in the morality and actions of their novelistic domains.

But the works which I have examined are also self-conscious, as they deploy a set of devices designed to
reveal the artificial nature of the works themselves and of literature in general. Experiments in style such as *Vanity Fair*'s Vauxhall scene and disclaimers of artifice such as *Barchester Towers*'s outspoken rejection of suspense-building tricks obviously expose the verbal nature and the fragility of the artificial structures which these novels are revealed to be. Likewise we are invited to ponder the problematic nature of "realistic fiction" as these works disclose the artificiality of the doubling device, indulge in multiple representations of the same event, and present us with self-conscious narrators who amorphously slip in and out of their own narratives. Often the tendency of these fictional narrators to lecture their reader is somewhat confusing, as it may appear to be an "intrusion" of something external to the novel's story; the outside world is also bafflingly present as we watch historical personages such as Napoleon influence the lives of fictional characters such as Amelia Sedley. All the novels I have discussed take form as they parody certain literary conventions, usually heroic or comic romance; and such ironic inversion is always self-conscious as well as double-edged, since it simultaneously reveals its own artifice as well as that of the convention it attacks. Finally, within each novel the characters' tendency to role-play
or to adopt heroic poses calls attention to the fact that they themselves are nothing more than verbal constructs. This role-playing is especially self-conscious when characters such as Hyacinth Robinson adopt roles to offset ontological insecurity: like Don Quixote, Hyacinth wants to "become a book" in order to become more "real" than he feels himself to be.¹

If it is clear that the novels of Thackeray, Trollope and James share these characteristics, then it should also be clear by now that they are not the only novels to combine the modes of realism and self-consciousness. They are in fact representative examples which have especially troubled critics because of their mixture of modes; actually, many of the most interesting novels frequently studied today deploy in varying degrees a mixture of realistic and self-conscious strategies. It is obvious, for example, that Robert Alter can only claim Don Quixote for his self-conscious cause by choosing to ignore the many realistic signals which the novel emits, or by choosing to subordinate them and interpret them in relation to the self-consciousness which he sees as the major intent of the novel. Likewise, many novels usually taught as prime examples of realism—say, Middlemarch or Jude the Obscure—find their forms quite self-consciously in relation to other literary conventions which are continually invoked (by George Eliot's "intrusive narrator"
or by the Christ imagery, for example, in _Jude_) as counterpoints to the actual situations. Few critics would question the assertion that Dickens is almost always simultaneously self-conscious and realistic: the invocation of the fairy-tale convention in _Little Dorrit_, for example, not only reveals the realism of Amy Dorrit and of her imprisoning world which denies the assumptions of romance and impinges even on Amy's marriage; it also reveals the artificiality of this ironic realism which bounces off fairy-tale romance. And many modern novels are of course explicitly written as experiments in a mixture of modes: _Ulysses_ is probably at once the most realistic and the most self-consciously artificial novel around. Likewise, the self-consciousness of Samuel Beckett's trilogy and the aesthetic delight which it affords enable one to read this most ironic and, one could argue, realistic work without feeling the need to commit suicide. An even more recent novel, _Ragtime_, points out the dangers of bringing too much of the outside world into an avowedly artificial work: many critical discussions of this novel have circled around whether too many liberties are taken with the historical names Harry Houdini, Evelyn Nesbit and Emma Goldman as they have been incorporated into the novel, assigned apparently quasi-fictional personalities and actions, and placed on the same plane of artificiality with the novel's other characters, identified simply as Mother, Father, and Younger Brother.
Novels which combine realism and self-consciousness and which give privileged status to neither mode are able to examine far more interestingly than could any unified, wholly self-conscious novel Robert Alter's argument that "fictions are never real things, that literary realism is a tantalizing contradiction in terms." And it is no wonder that novels which simultaneously assert their realism and their artifice have posed insurmountable problems for critics who insist upon the mutual exclusiveness of the two modes. Perhaps the Russian Formalists have best articulated the necessity for a general critical reorientation toward such literature. Starting from the belief that literature should be viewed from a linguistic standpoint instead of from the cultural, biographical, social, or psychological standpoints which had long been embraced by critics of various schools, the Formalists have argued for a distinction between two basic kinds of language: practical language and poetic language. Practical language, the language in which we normally converse, persuade, demonstrate, etc., has no autonomous value and exists merely as a means of communicating information. In contrast, poetic language, the language of art, exists primarily to call attention to itself as language. In poetic language the elements have autonomous value and their practical aim retreats to the background. Thus, since all novels are verbal constructs formed from poetic
language, they all are equally artificial. And once it is agreed that all literature is artificial, then distinctions may be made among the literary modes and narrative patterns into which the verbal elements group themselves.

Boris Tomashevsky, for example, distinguishes between two literary "styles":

Two literary styles may be distinguished in terms of the perceptibility of the devices. The first . . . is distinguished by its attempt to conceal the device; all of its motivation systems are designed to make the literary devices seem imperceptible, to make them seem as natural as possible—that is, to develop the literary material so that its development is unperceived. But this is only one style, and not a general aesthetic rule. It is opposed to another style, an unrealistic style, which does not bother about concealing the devices and which frequently tries to make them obvious. . . .

Tomashevsky's distinction is clearly parallel to the one often made by critics between realism and self-consciousness. However, it should be noted that Tomashevsky's distinction is made in terms of the function of literary devices rather than in terms of a work's intention to mirror reality; moreover, Tomashevsky neither uses his terms evaluatively, nor states that the two styles may not be combined in the same work. Likewise, Northrop Frye distinguishes among the four narrative patterns of romance, comedy, tragedy and irony; but he also argues that these patterns
usually combine in complex ways to produce a single individualized work.

Literature is always formed from other literature, and the elements, devices and patterns which inform individual works remain constant although their functions change from work to work. The identification of the patterns and elements which remain constant in literary evolution is thus important not because it allows us to call an individual work "ironic" or "realistic" and think we have said all there is to say about it, but because it encourages us to apprehend how each work achieves its own particular form by combining identifiable elements and patterns which assume new functions as they impinge upon each other, expose and deform each other, and comment upon each other in new ways. It is precisely this conjunction of the identification of modes and patterns and the realization of the fluidity of their functions which enables us to see that Mary Thorne's comedy is different from Eleanor Bold's, and that James's exposure of the comic pattern is different from Trollope's; and our perception of these differences results not only from the juxtaposition of various narrative patterns in each case, but also from the juxtaposition of various realistic and self-conscious devices. In his depiction of Christina Light, James invokes the comic marriage so that its artificiality may be exhibited and linked with the artificiality of
Christina's romantic aspirations; in *Barchester Towers* the values of Eleanor Bold's comedy are upheld simultaneously as the pattern itself is revealed to be artificial; in Mary Thorne's novel the avowedly artificial comic pattern may be seen to be entirely appropriate to the verbal creature who plays it out. James's irony is always different from Thackeray's, and Thackeray's is different from Trollope's, although all three use romance as a springboard for the articulation of their irony. Josiah Crawley, Johnny Eames, William Dobbin and Hyacinth Robinson all represent the kinds of heroism which these novelists allow to prevail as viable alternatives to romance; but these characters are, of course, vastly different, with vastly different fates, each one dictated by the demands of its unique novel.

The Russian Formalists considered an understanding of the fluidity of the functions of literary devices to be important primarily because it is inextricably linked with an understanding of the function of literature itself. Literature exists, the Formalists argued, not to reflect life as we know it, but "to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception
is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. 
Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important." Because literary conventions and modes exist on the same level of artificiality, they may be combined. And because they may be combined in ways that change their functions and "make them strange," their combination leads us to artistic perception of the palpableness of form, a perception which is "an aesthetic end in itself" and which yields pleasure.

The juxtaposition of apparently conflicting modes such as realism and self-consciousness, then, and the juxtaposition of apparently conflicting narrative patterns may lead to aesthetic delight as they expose each other and throw each other into relief. But such juxtaposition may also lead to hopeless confusion on the part of the reader. How, he may ask, can a novel be realistic and, at the same time, self-conscious? How can Trollope both uphold and deny romantic comedy? Such questions are obviously important, and the Formalists have tried to answer them by positing the existence of a "center of dominance" within each literary work: "The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure." That is, each literary
work finds its individual expression as it places a group of elements in the foreground; and that group, the "dominant," subordinates or deforms the remaining elements in an effort to unify the work and give it coherence.

However, the works of Thackeray, Trollope and James which I have examined seem to deny the existence of a modal dominant. It would be difficult to say whether Vanity Fair is "more" realistic or "more" self-conscious; it is, in fact, difficult to separate the two modes since they not only contradict each other but also depend on each other, and the same device often works to increase the novel's realism and to stress its artifice. And this perception leads to a rather large body of questions which I cannot hope to answer within the scope of this study but which are at the center of what seems to me to be the most interesting critical dispute going on today. I am referring to the dispute between proponents of deconstructionalism such as J. Hillis Miller and proponents of a humanistic positivism such as M. H. Abrams or Wayne Booth. The questions involved are many and are complicated: where do the "meanings" of a text lie (in the words? in the reader?)? must—or can—a text be coherent? or do texts specifically set out to frustrate a reader's drive for coherence as they present him with infinite possibilities which can only be made understandable by the blocking out
or subjugation of some elements in favor of others?

My study does not demand (fortunately) that I attempt to answer these general questions. I have only attempted to show that the works of Thackeray, Trollope and James—and, by implication, the works of many other novelists—are informed by the apparently conflicting modes of realism and self-conscious artifice. But my study may ultimately raise some of the same questions over which critics such as Abrams and Miller are battling; and it does show, I think, that at least in the works I have examined, contradictory modes have been operating side by side, opposing and exposing each other, and frustrating critics for years. Indeed it does seem that novelists who write works which refute themselves in this way have learned, with Beckett's narrator of Part II of Molloy, that the fundamental law of composition is contradiction: the chapter which Moran writes begins, "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows," and ends, "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining." Since Moran is creating himself and all the levels of reality which his circular chapter seeks to convey, the reader is finally effectively blocked from determining in any satisfactory way whether or not on any level of reality it is raining, and whether or not it is midnight.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 5


2Alter, p. x.


6Roman Jakobson, "The Dominant," trans. Herbert Eagle, first delivered as an unpublished lecture, 1935; rpt. in Readings in Russian Poetics, p. 82.

7This debate may be followed in Critical Inquiry, 2 (1976) and 3 (1977).


Kincaid, James R. "Bring Back The Trollopian." NCF, 31 (June, 1976), 1-14.


