

Literary History: A Systematic Approach

Lecture 10: The Conventions of Realism (c. 1800-1900 and beyond)

1) What Is Realism?

2) Varieties of English Realism

3) The Evolution of Realism

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1) What Is Realism?

Jane Austen might almost be said to have provided the basic format for the later realist novel [...] She could have claimed, in a sense, to have reconciled the achievements of Fielding and Richardson and made possible a whole new kind of development in the English novel. Walter Scott's contribution was more dramatic and more quickly appreciated. He was the first to describe the forces at work in human society as a whole and to show the individual as the focal point of historical, economic and cultural forces beyond his control [...] he also managed to preserve his confidence in the possible harmony of man's experience and in his essential dignity [...] Consequently Austen and Scott must be understood to have contributed enormously to the development of the Realist novel of the mid-nineteenth century.

(Williams 1974, 10-11)

If Fielding and Richardson provide [...] the thesis against which Mackenzie [and others] attempt an antithesis, Austen and Scott must seem to offer the grand synthesis. And implicit value judgements lurk in such an ordering of the facts.

(Spacks 1990, 238)

If the 'realistic' novel is taken to mean a kind of fiction that results when the artist and his audience share the same assumptions, [...] there will, of course, be different realisms at different times and in different contexts.

(Loofbourow 1974, 257)

There is no doubt that the mid-Victorian novel rested on a massive confidence as to what the nature of Reality actually was [...] The most fundamental common element in the work of the mid-Victorian novelist [...] is probably the idea that human life, whatever the particular conditions, may ultimately be seen as unified and coherent.

(Williams 1974, x/xiii)

[R]ealism is itself intimately and authoritatively connected to the modernist position [...] [N]ineteenth century writers were already self-conscious about the nature of their medium.

(Levine 1981, 3/4)

The classic realist text [...] was characterized by a balanced and harmonized combination of mimesis and diegesis, reported speech and reporting context, authorial speech and represented speech.

(Lodge 1984, 102)

DIEGETIC DISCOURSE ↔ MIMETIC DISCOURSE
(telling) (showing)

narrator's voice – 'dual voice' – character's voice

report – tagged i.d. – free i.d. – tagged d.d. – free d.d.

'tagged' = including introductory verb/clause
free = without introductory verb/clause
i.d. = indirect discourse
d.d. = direct discourse

2) Varieties of English Realism

a) Synthesis > Reflexivity

- Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)
Emma (1816)
- Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley* or *'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814)
- William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair, or, A Novel Without a Hero* (1848)
- George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859),
Middlemarch. A Study in Provincial Life (1871/72),
Daniel Deronda (1876)

William Makepeace Thackeray

Vanity Fair

or

A Novel without a Hero

Chapter I

Chiswick Mall.

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**. A black servant, who reposed on the box beside the fat coachman, uncurled his bandy legs as soon as the equipage drew up opposite Miss Pinkerton's shining brass plate, and as he pulled the bell, at least a score of young heads **were seen** peering out of the narrow windows of the stately old brick house. Nay, **the acute observer might have recognized** the little red nose of good-natured Miss Jemima Pinkerton herself, rising over some geranium pots in the window of that lady's own drawing-room.

»It is Mrs. Sedley's coach, sister,« said Miss Jemima. »Sambo, the black servant, has just rung the bell; and the coachman has a new red waistcoat.«

»Have you completed all the necessary preparations incident to Miss Sedley's departure, Miss Jemima?« asked Miss Pinkerton herself, **that majestic lady - the Semiramis of Hammersmith, the friend of Dr. Johnson, the correspondent of Mrs. Chapone herself**.

»The girls were up at four this morning, packing her trunks, sister,« replied Miss Jemima; »we have made her a bow-pot.«

»Say a bouquet, sister Jemima - 'tis more genteel.«

»Well, a booky as big almost as a haystack. I have put up two bottles of the gillyflower-water for Mrs. Sedley, and the **receipt** for making it, in Amelia's box.«

»And I trust, Miss Jemima, you have made a copy of Miss Sedley's **account**. This is it, is it? Very good - ninety-three pounds, four shillings. Be kind enough to address it to John Sedley, Esquire, and to seal this billet which I have written to his lady.«

In Miss Jemima's eyes an autograph letter of her sister, Miss Pinkerton, was an object of as deep veneration as would have been a letter from a sovereign. Only when her pupils quitted the establishment, or when they were about to be married, and once, when poor Miss Birch died of the scarlet fever, was Miss Pinkerton known to write personally to the parents of her pupils; and it was Jemima's opinion that if anything could console Mrs. Birch for her daughter's loss, it would be that pious and eloquent composition in which Miss Pinkerton announced the event.

In the present instance Miss Pinkerton's 'billet' was to the following effect: -

»The Mall, Chiswick, June 15, 18-.

Madam, - After her six years' residence at the Mall, I have the honour and happiness of presenting Miss Amelia Sedley to her parents, as a young lady not unworthy to occupy a fitting position in their polished and refined circle. Those virtues which characterize the young English gentlewoman, those accomplishments which become her birth and station, will not be found wanting in the amiable Miss Sedley, whose industry and obedience have endeared her to her instructors, and whose delightful sweetness of temper has charmed her aged and her youthful companions.

In music, in dancing, in orthography, in every variety of embroidery and needlework, she will be found to have realized her friends' fondest wishes. In geography there is still much to be desired; and a careful and undeviating use of the backboard, for four hours daily during the next three years, is recommended as necessary to the acquirement of that dignified deportment and carriage, so requisite for every young lady of fashion.

In the principles of religion and morality, Miss Sedley will be found worthy of an establishment which has been honoured by the presence of The Great Lexicographer, and the patronage of the admirable Mrs. Chapone. In leaving the Mall, Miss Amelia carries with her the hearts of her companions, and the affectionate regards of her mistress, who has the honour to subscribe herself,

Madam, your most obliged humble servant,
BARBARA PINKERTON.

P.S. - Miss Sharp accompanies Miss Sedley. It is particularly requested that Miss Sharp's stay in Russell Square may not exceed ten days. The family of distinction with whom she is engaged desire to avail themselves of her services as soon as possible.«

This letter completed, Miss Pinkerton proceeded to write her own name and Miss Sedley's in the fly-leaf of a Johnson's Dictionary - the interesting work which she invariably presented to her scholars on their departure from the Mall. On the cover was inserted a copy of »Lines addressed to a young lady on quitting Miss Pinkerton's school, at the Mall; by the late revered Doctor Samuel Johnson.« In fact, the Lexicographer's name was always on the lips of this majestic woman, and a visit he had paid to her was the cause of her reputation and her fortune.

Being commanded by her elder sister to get 'the Dictionary' from the cupboard, Miss Jemima had extracted two copies of the book from the receptacle in question. When Miss Pinkerton had finished the inscription in the first, Jemima, with rather a dubious and timid air, handed her the second.

»For whom is this, Miss Jemima?« said Miss Pinkerton, with awful coldness.

»For Becky Sharp,« answered Jemima, trembling very much, and blushing over her withered face and neck, as she turned her back on her sister. »For Becky Sharp: she's going too.«

»**MISS JEMIMA!**« exclaimed Miss Pinkerton, in the largest capitals; »are you in your senses? Replace the **Dixonary** in the closet, and never venture to take such a liberty in future.«

»Well, sister, it's only two and ninepence, and poor Becky will be miserable if she don't get one.«

»Send Miss Sedley instantly to me,« said Miss Pinkerton. And so, venturing not to say another word, poor Jemima trotted off, exceedingly flurried and nervous.

Miss Sedley's papa was a merchant in London, and a man of some wealth; whereas Miss Sharp was an artiled pupil, for whom Miss Pinkerton had done, as she thought, quite enough, without conferring upon her at parting the high honour of the **Dixonary**.

Although schoolmistresses' letters are to be trusted no more nor less than churchyard epitaphs; yet, as it sometimes happens that a person departs this life who is really deserving of all the praises the stonecutter carves over his bones; who is a good Christian, a good parent, child, wife, or husband; who actually does leave a disconsolate family to mourn his loss; so in academies of the male and female sex it occurs every now and then that the pupil is fully worthy of the praises bestowed by the disinterested instructor. **Now**, Miss Amelia Sedley was a young lady of this singular species, and deserved not only all that Miss Pinkerton said in her praise, but had many charming qualities which that pompous old Minerva of a woman could not see, from the differences of rank and age between her pupil and herself.

For she could not only sing like a lark, or a Mrs. Billington, and dance like Hillisberg or Parisot; and embroider beautifully; and spell as well as a Dixonary itself; but she had such a kindly, smiling, tender, gentle, generous heart of her own, as won the love of everybody who came near her, from Minerva herself down to the poor girl in the scullery and the one-eyed tart-woman's daughter, who was permitted to vend her wares once a week to the young ladies in the Mall. She had twelve intimate and bosom friends out of the twenty-four young ladies. Even envious Miss Briggs never spoke ill of her; high and mighty Miss Saltire (Lord Dexter's grand-daughter) allowed that her figure was genteel; and as for Miss Swartz, the rich woolly-haired mulatto from St. Kitts, on the day Amelia went away, she was in such a passion of tears, that they were obliged to send for Dr. Floss, and half tipsify her with sal volatile. Miss Pinkerton's attachment was, as may be supposed, from the high position and eminent virtues of that lady, calm and dignified; but Miss Jemima had already whimpered several times at the idea of Amelia's departure; and, but for fear of her sister, would have gone off in downright hysterics, like the heiress (**who paid double**) of St. Kitts. Such luxury of grief, however, is only allowed to parlour-boarders. Honest Jemima had all the bills, and the washing, and the mending, and the puddings, and the plate and crockery, and the servants to superintend. **But why speak about her? It is probable that we shall not hear of her again from this moment to the end of time, and that when the great filigree iron gates are once closed on her, she and her awful sister will never issue therefrom into this little world of history.**

But as we are to see a great deal of Amelia, there is no harm in saying, at the outset of our acquaintance, that she was a dear little creature; and a great mercy it is, both in life and in novels, which (and the latter especially) abound in villains of the most sombre sort, that we are to have for a constant companion so guileless and good-natured a person. 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 great deal too round and red for a heroine; but her face blushed with rosy health, and her lips with the freshest of smiles, and she had a pair of eyes which sparkled with the brightest and honestest good-humour, except indeed when they filled with tears, and that was a great deal too often; 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. Even Miss Pinkerton, that austere and godlike woman, ceased scolding her after the first time, and though she no more comprehended sensibility than she did Algebra, gave all masters and teachers particular orders to treat Miss Sedley with the utmost gentleness, as harsh treatment was injurious to her.

So that when the day of departure came, between her two customs of laughing and crying, Miss Sedley was greatly puzzled how to act. She was glad to go home, and yet most woefully sad at leaving school. For three days before, little Laura Martin, the orphan, followed her about, like a little dog. She had to make and receive at least fourteen presents - to make fourteen solemn promises of writing every week: »Send my letters under cover to my grandpapa, the Earl of Dexter,« said Miss Saltire (who, by the way, was rather shabby): »Never mind the postage, but write every day, you dear darling,« said the impetuous and woolly-headed, but generous and affectionate, Miss Swartz; and the orphan little Laura Martin (who was just in round-hand), took her friend's hand and said, looking up in her face wistfully, »Amelia, when I write to you I shall call you Mamma.« **All which details, I have no doubt, JONES, who reads this book at his Club, will pronounce to be excessively foolish, trivial, twaddling, and ultra-sentimental. Yes; I can see Jones at this minute (rather flushed with his joint of mutton and half-pint of wine) taking out his pencil and scoring under the words »foolish, twaddling,« etc., and adding to them his own remark of »quite true.« Well, he is a lofty man of genius, and admires the great and heroic in life and novels; and so had better take warning and go elsewhere.**

Well, then. The flowers, and the presents, and the trunks, and bonnet-boxes of Miss Sedley having been arranged by Mr. Sambo in the carriage, together with a very small and weather-beaten old cow's-skin trunk with Miss Sharp's card neatly nailed upon it, which was delivered by Sambo with a grin, and packed by the coachman with a corresponding sneer - the hour for parting came; and the grief of that moment was considerably lessened **by the admirable discourse** which Miss Pinkerton addressed to her pupil. Not that the parting speech caused Amelia to philosophize, or that it armed her in any way with a calmness, the result of argument; but **it was intolerably dull, pompous, and tedious;** and having the fear of her schoolmistress greatly before her eyes, Miss Sedley did not venture, in her presence, to give way to any ebullitions of private grief. A seed-cake and a bottle of wine were produced in the drawing-room, as on the solemn occasions of the visits of parents, and these refreshments being partaken of, Miss Sedley was at liberty to depart.

»You'll go in and say good-bye to Miss Pinkerton, Becky!« said Miss Jemima to a young lady of whom nobody took any notice, and who was coming downstairs with her own hand-box.

»I suppose I must,« said Miss Sharp calmly, and much to the wonder of Miss Jemima; and the latter having knocked at the door, and receiving permission to come in, Miss Sharp advanced in a very unconcerned manner, and said in French, and with a perfect accent, »Mademoiselle, je viens vous faire mes adieux.«

Miss Pinkerton did not understand French; she only directed those who did; but biting her lips and throwing up her venerable and Roman-nosed head (on the top of which figured a large and solemn turban), she said, »Miss Sharp, I wish you a good-morning.« **As the Hammersmith Semiramis** spoke she waved one hand, both by way of adieu, and to give Miss Sharp an opportunity of shaking one of the fingers of the hand which was left out for that purpose.

Miss Sharp only folded her own hands with a very frigid smile and bow, and quite declined to accept the proffered honour; on which Semiramis tossed up her turban more indignantly **than ever. In fact, it was a little battle between the young lady and the old one, and the latter was worsted.** »Heaven bless you, my child,« said she, embracing Amelia, and scowling the while over the girl's shoulder at Miss Sharp. »Come away, Becky,« said Miss Jemima, pulling the young woman away in great alarm, and the drawing-room door closed upon them for ever.

Then came the struggle and parting below. **Words refuse to tell it.** All the servants were there in the hall - all the dear friends - all the young ladies - the dancing-master who had just arrived; and there was such a scuffling, and hugging, and kissing, and crying, with the hysterical yoops of Miss Swartz, the parlour-boarder, from her room, **as no pen can depict**, and as the tender heart would fain pass over. The embracing was over; they parted - that is, Miss Sedley parted from her friends. Miss Sharp had demurely entered the carriage some minutes before. Nobody cried for leaving her.

Sambo of the bandy legs slammed the carriage-door on his young weeping mistress. He sprang up behind the carriage. »Stop!« cried Miss Jemima, rushing to the gate with a parcel.

»It's some sandwiches, my dear,« said she to Amelia. »You may be hungry, you know; and Becky, Becky Sharp, here's a book for you that my sister - that is, I - Johnson's Dictionary, you know; you mustn't leave us without that. Good-bye. Drive on, coachman. God bless you!«

And the kind creature retreated into the garden, overcome with emotion.

But, lo! and just as the coach drove off, Miss Sharp put her pale face out of the window and actually flung the book back into the garden.

This almost caused Jemima to faint with terror. »Well, I never!« - said she - »what an audacious -« Emotion prevented her from completing either sentence. The carriage rolled away; the great gates were closed; the bell rang for the dancing lesson. **The world is before the two young ladies; and so, farewell to Chiswick Mall.**

GEORGE ELIOT, *ADAM BEDE* (1859)

CHAPTER 17 - IN WHICH THE STORY PAUSES A LITTLE

THIS Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan!' I hear one of my lady readers exclaim. 'How much more edifying it would have been if you had made him give Arthur some truly spiritual advice. You might have put into his mouth the most beautiful things - quite as good as reading a sermon.'

Certainly I could, my fair critic, if I were a clever novelist, not obliged to creep servilely after nature and fact, but able to represent things as they never have been and never will be. Then, of course, my characters would be entirely of my own choosing, and I could select the most unexceptionable type of clergyman, and put my own admirable opinions into his mouth on all occasions. But you must have perceived long ago that I have no such lofty vocation, and that I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath.

Sixty years ago - it is a long time, so no wonder things have changed - all clergymen were not zealous; indeed, there is reason to believe that the number of zealous clergymen was small, and it is probable that if one among the small minority had owned the livings of Broxton and Hayslope in the year 1799, you would have liked him no better than you like Mr Irwine. Ten to one, you would have thought him a tasteless indiscreet, methodistical man. It is so very rarely that facts hit that nice medium required by our own enlightened opinions and refined taste! Perhaps you will say, 'Do improve the facts a little, then; make them more accordant with those correct views which it is our privilege to possess. The world is not just what we like; do touch it up with a tasteful pencil, and make believe it is not quite such a mixed, entangled affair. Let all people who hold unexceptionable opinions act unexceptionably. Let your most faulty characters always be on the wrong side, and your virtuous ones on the right. Then we shall see at a glance whom we are to condemn, and whom we are to approve. Then we shall be able to admire, without the slightest disturbance of our prepossessions: we shall hate and despise with that true ruminant relish which belongs to undoubting confidence.'

But, my good friend, what will you do then with your fellow-parishioner who opposes your husband in the vestry? - with your newly appointed vicar, whose style of preaching you find painfully below that of his regretted predecessor? - with the honest servant, who worries your soul with her one failing, - with your neighbour, Mrs Green, who was really kind to you in your last illness, but has said several ill-natured things about you since your convalescence? - nay, with your excellent husband himself, who has other irritating habits besides that of not wiping his shoes? These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people - amongst whom your life is passed - that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people, whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire - for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience. And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this, in which we get up in the

morning to do our daily work, that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields - on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice.

So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in spite of one's best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult. The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin - the longer the claws, and the larger the wings, the better; but that marvellous facility which we mistook for genius, is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion. Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings - much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth.

It is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise. I find a source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions. I turn without shrinking from cloud-borne angels, from prophets, sibyls, and heroic warriors, to an old woman bending over her flower-pot, or eating her solitary dinner, while the noonday light, softened perhaps by a screen of leaves, falls on her mob-cap, and just touches the rim of her spinning-wheel, and her stone jug, and all those cheap common things which are the precious necessities of life to her, - or I turn to that village wedding, kept between four brown walls, where an awkward bridegroom opens the dance with a high-shouldered, broad-faced bride, while elderly and middle-aged friends look on, with very irregular noses and lips, and probably with quart pots in their hands, but with an expression of unmistakable contentment and good-will. 'Foh!' says my idealistic friend, 'what vulgar details! What good is there in taking all these pains to give an exact likeness of old women and clowns? What a low phase of life! - what clumsy, ugly people!'

But, bless us, things may be lovable that are not altogether handsome, I hope? I am not at all sure that the majority of the human race have not been ugly, and even among those 'lords of their kind,' the British, squat figures, ill-shapen nostrils, and dingy complexions are not startling exceptions. Yet there is a great deal of family love amongst us. I have a friend or two whose class of features is such that the Apollo curl on the summit of their brows would be decidedly trying; yet to my certain knowledge tender hearts have beaten for them, and their miniatures - flattering, but still not lovely - are kissed in secret by motherly lips. I have seen many an excellent matron, who could never in her best days have been handsome, and yet she had a packet of yellow love-letters in a private drawer, and sweet children showered kisses on her sallow cheeks. And I believe there have been plenty of young heroes, of middle stature and feeble beards, who have felt quite sure they could never love anything more insignificant than a Diana, and yet have found themselves in middle life happily settled with a wife who waddles. Yes! thank God; human feeling is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth: it does not wait for beauty - it flows with resistless force and brings beauty with it.

All honour and reverence to the divine beauty of form ! Let us cultivate it to the utmost in men, women, and children - in our gardens and in our houses. But let us love that other beauty too, which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy. Paint us an angel, if you can, with a floating violet robe, and a face paled by the celestial light; paint us yet oftener a Madonna, turning her mild face upward and opening her arms to welcome the divine glory; but do not impose on us any aesthetic rules which shall banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world - those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs, and their clusters of onions. In this world there are so many of these common, coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy, and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes. Therefore let Art always remind us of them; therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things - men who see beauty in these commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them. There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities: I want a great deal of those feelings for my everyday fellow-men, especially for the few in the foreground of the great multitude, whose faces I know, whose hands I touch, for whom I have to make way with kindly courtesy. Neither are picturesque lazzaroni or romantic criminals half so frequent as your common labourer, who gets his own bread, and eats it vulgarly but creditably with his own pocket-knife. It is more needful that I should have a fibre of sympathy connecting me with that vulgar citizen who weighs out my sugar in a vilely assorted cravat and waistcoat, than with the handsome rascal in red scarf and green feathers; - more needful that my heart should swell with loving admiration at some trait of gentle goodness in the faulty people who sit at the same hearth with me, or in the clergyman of my own parish, who is perhaps rather too corpulent, and in other respects is not an Oberlin or a Tillotson, than at the deeds of heroes whom I shall never know except by hearsay, or at the sublimest abstract of all clerical graces that was ever conceived by an able novelist.

And so I come back to Mr Irwine, with whom I desire you to be in perfect charity, far as he may be from satisfying your demands on the clerical character. Perhaps you think he was not - as he ought to have been - a living demonstration of the benefits attached to a national church? But I am not sure of that; at least I know that the people in Broxton and Hayslope would have been very sorry to part with their clergyman, and that most faces brightened at his approach; and until it can be proved that hatred is a better thing for the soul than love, I must believe that Mr Irwine's influence in his parish was a more wholesome one than that of the zealous Mr Ryde, who came there twenty years afterwards, when Mr Irwine had been gathered to his fathers. It is true Mr Ryde insisted strongly on the doctrines of the Reformation, visited his flock a great deal in their own homes, and was severe in rebuking the aberrations of the flesh - put a stop, indeed, to the Christmas rounds of the church singers, as promoting drunkenness and too light a handling of sacred things. But I gathered from Adam Bede, to whom I talked of these matters in his old age, that few

clergymen could be less successful in winning the hearts of their parishioners than Mr Ryde. They gathered a great many notions about doctrine from him, so that almost every church-goer under fifty began to distinguish as well between the genuine gospel and what did not come precisely up to that standard, as if he had been born and bred a Dissenter; and for some time after his arrival there seemed to be quite a religious movement in that quiet rural district. 'But,' said Adam, 'I've seen pretty clear, ever since I was a young un, as religion's something else besides notions. It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing - it's feelings. It's the same with the notions in religion as it is with math'matics, - a man may be able to work problems straight off in's head as he sits by the fire and smokes his pipe; but if he has to make a machine or a building, he must have a will and a resolution. and love something else better than his own ease. Somehow, the congregation began to fall off, and people began to speak light o' Mr Ryde. I believe he meant right at bottom; but, you see, he was sourish-tempered, and was for beating down prices with the people as worked for him; and his preach ing wouldn't go down well with that sauce. And he wanted to be like my lord judge i' the parish, punishing folks for doing wrong; and he scolded 'em from the pulpit as if he'd been a Ranter, and yet he couldn't abide the Dissenters, and was a deal more set against 'em than Mr Irwine was. And then he didn't keep within his income, for he seemed to think at first go-off that six hundred a-year was to make him as big a man as Mr Donnithorne: that's a sore mischief I've often seen with the poor curates jumping into a bit of a living all of a sudden. Mr Ryde was a deal thought on at a distance, I believe, and he wrote books; but as for math'matics and the natur o' things, he was as ignorant as a woman. He was very knowing about doctrines, and used to call 'em the bulwarks of the Reformation; but I've always mistrusted that sort o' learning as leaves folks foolish and unreasonable about business. Now Mester Irwine was as different as could be: as quick! - he understood what you meant in a minute; and he knew all about building, and could see when you'd made a good job. And he behaved as much like a gentleman to the farmers, and th' old women, and the labourers, as he did go to the gentry. You never saw him interfering and scolding. and trying to play th' emperor. Ah! he was a fine man as ever you set eyes on; and so kind to 's mother and sisters. That poor sickly Miss Anne - he seemed to think more of her than of anybody else in the world. There wasn't a soul in the parish had a word to say against him; and his servants stayed with him till they were so old and pottering, he had to hire other folks to do their work.' 'Well,' I said, 'that was an excellent way of preaching in the weekdays; but I dare say, if your old friend Mr Irwine were to come to life again, and get into the pulpit next Sunday, you would be rather ashamed that he didn't preach better after all your praise of him.'

'Nay, nay,' said Adam, broadening his chest and throwing himself back in his chair, as if he were ready to meet all inferences, 'nobody has ever heard me say Mr Irwine was much of a preacher. He didn't go into deep, speritual experience; and I know there's a deal in a man's inward life as you can't measure by the square, and say, "do this and that 'll follow," and, "do that and this 'll follow." There's things go on in the soul, and times when feelings come into you like a rushing mighty wind, as the Scripture says, and part your life in two a'most, so as you look back on yourself as if you was somebody else. Those are things as you can't bottle up in a "do this" and "do that;" and I'll go so far with the strongest Methodist ever you'll find. That shows me there's deep, speritual things in religion. You can't make much out wi' talking

about it, but you feel it. Mr Irwine didn't go into those things: he preached short moral sermons, and that was all. But then he acted pretty much up to what he said; he didn't set up for being so different from other folks one day, and then be as like 'em as two peas the next. And he made folks love him and respect him, and that was better nor stirring up their gall wi' being over busy. Mrs Poyser used to say - you know she would have her word about everything - she said, Mr Irwine was like a good meal o' victual, you were the better for him without thinking on it, and Mr Ryde was like a dose o' physic, he griped you and worreted you, and after all he left you much the same.'

'But didn't Mr Ryde preach a great deal more about that spiritual part of religion that you talk of, Adam ? Couldn't you get more out of his sermons than out of Mr Irwine's?'

'Eh, I knowna. He preached a deal about doctrines. But I've seen pretty clear ever since I was a young un, as religion's something else besides doctrines and notions. I look at it as if the doctrines was like finding names for your feelings, so as you can talk of 'em when you've never known 'em, just as a man may talk o' tools when he knows their names, though he's never so much as seen 'em, still less handled 'em. I've heard a deal o' doctrine i' my time, for I used to go after the dissenting preachers along wi' Seth, when I was a lad o' seventeen, and got puzzling myself a deal about th' Arminians and the Calvinists. The Wesleyans, you know, are strong Arminians; and Seth, who could never abide anything harsh, and was always for hoping the best, held fast by the Wesleyans from the very first; but I thought I could pick a hole or two in their notions, and I got disputing wi' one o' the class-leaders down at Treddles'on, and harassed him so, first o' this side and then o' that, till at last he said, "Young man, it's the devil making use o' your pride and conceit as a weapon to war against the simplicity o' the truth." I couldn't help laughing then, but as I was going home, I thought the man wasn't far wrong. I began to see as all his weighing and sifting what this text means and that text means, and whether folks are saved all by God's grace, or whether there goes an ounce o' their own will to 't, was no part o' real religion at all. You may talk o' these things for hours on end, and you'll only be all the more coxy and conceited for 't. So I took to going nowhere but to church, and hearing nobody but Mr Irwine, for he said nothing but what was good, and what you'd be the wiser for remembering. And I found it better for my soul to be humble before the mysteries o' God's dealings; and not be making a clatter about what I could never understand. And they're poor foolish questions after all; for what have we got either inside or outside of us but what comes from God ? If we've got a resolution to do right, He gave it us, I reckon, first or last; but I see plain enough we shall never do it without a resolution, and that's enough for me.'

Adam, you perceive, was a warm admirer, perhaps a partial judge, of Mr Irwine, as, happily, some of us still are of the people we have known familiarly. Doubtless it will be despised as a weakness by that lofty order of minds who pant after the ideal, and are oppressed by a general sense that their emotions are of too exquisite a character to find fit objects among their everyday fellow-men. I have often been favoured with the confidence of these select natures, and find them concur in the experience that great men are over-estimated and small men are insupportable; that if you would love a woman without ever looking back on your love as a folly, she must die while you are courting her; and if you would maintain the slightest belief in human heroism, you must never make a pilgrimage to see the hero. I confess I have

often meanly shrunk from confessing to these accomplished and acute gentlemen what my own experience has been. I am afraid I have often smiled with hypocritical assent, and gratified them with an epigram on the fleeting nature of our illusions, which any one moderately acquainted with French literature can command at a moment's notice. Human converse, I think some wise man has remarked, is not rigidly sincere. But I herewith discharge my conscience, and declare, that I have had quite enthusiastic movements of admiration towards old gentlemen who spoke the worst English, who were occasionally fretful in their temper, and who had never moved in a higher sphere of influence than that of parish overseer; and that the way in which I have come to the conclusion that human nature is lovable - the way I have learnt something of its deep pathos, its sublime mysteries - has been by living a great deal among people more or less commonplace and vulgar, of whom you would perhaps hear nothing very surprising if you were to inquire about them in the neighbourhoods where they dwelt. Ten to one most of the small shopkeepers in their vicinity saw nothing at all in them. For I have observed this remarkable coincidence, that the select natures who pant after the ideal, and find nothing in pantaloons or petticoats great enough to command their reverence and love, are curiously in unison with the narrowest and pettiest. For example, I have often heard Mr Gedge, the landlord of the Royal Oak, who used to turn a bloodshot eye on his neighbours in the village of Shepperton, sum up his opinion of the people in his own parish - and they were all the people he knew - in these emphatic words: 'Ay, sir, I've said it often, and I'll say it again, they're a poor lot i' this parish - a poor lot, sir, big and little.' I think he had a dim idea that if he could migrate to a distant parish, he might find neighbours worthy of him, and indeed he did subsequently transfer himself to the Saracen's Head, which was doing a thriving business in the back street of a neighbouring market-town. But, oddly enough, he has found the people up that back street of precisely the same stamp as the inhabitants of Shepperton - 'a poor lot, sir, big and little, and them as comes for a go o' gin are not better than them as comes for a pint o' twopenny - a poor lot.'

b) Subjective Emphasis

- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847)
- Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1849/50)
Great Expectations (1860/61)
- Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847)

c) Condition of England Novels (“obj.”)

- Benjamin Disraeli, *The Young England Trilogy*:
Coningsby, or The New Generation (1844)
Sybil, or The Two Nations (1845)
Tancred, or The New Crusade (1847)
- Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton. A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848)
North and South (1855)
- Charles Dickens, *Hard Times. For These Times* (1854)

3) The Evolution of Realism

a) “Objective” Reality?

- “objectivity”, science, naturalism
- the marginality of naturalism in England
- Thomas Hardy as an example for the preservation of literary meaning on a naturalistic basis.

b) The Subjective Perception of Reality

- the discontinuity of consciousness and reality
- Henry James’s anatomy of subjective identities cut loose from social context/community (e.g. Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* 1880/81)
- the subjectivization of narrative acts (e.g. Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* 1897, *The Heart of Darkness* 1902)
- limitations of narrative authority are compensated by artistic self-confidence

c) The Literary Representation of Reality

- synthesis as an effect of literary conventions
- problems of accessibility/difficulty
- literature as one specialized discourse among others, but still claiming general significance

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