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The Novel and the Parish

By

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Abstract

The Novel and the Parish

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My project takes seriously the common, but frequently overlooked charge that the English novel is parochial—that, in Virginia Woolf’s words, “all those good novels” are “without more experience of life than could enter the house of a respectable clergyman.” Restoring “parochialism” to its root sense, I show why the parish itself—a Christian community over which a parson presided for life—became the novel’s primary topos in the nineteenth century and provided its model of temporal experience. Reading the nineteenth century as a moment when the parish disappeared as Britain’s longstanding center of social, political and religious life, I ask why the secularization of national life nonetheless spurred so many novelists to widely embrace the parish’s modes of representation, devotion and authority. Situating the novel within a dense archive of parish gazettes, sermons, tracts and workhouse records, I chart the novel’s response to the retreat of Anglican pastoral authority not as an attempt to restore it but rather to provide the grounds for faith’s active exercise in the face of spiritual and interpretive uncertainty. My project shows how authors reconfigured reading as a form of pastoral work—a close, laborious, yet seemingly unproductive attention to everyday life—that suffused earthly life with latent meaning, and rendered such meaning a function of parochial residence: neither immediately legible through outward reference nor as the extrinsic dispensation of providence, but rather as willfully, if uncertainly, generated by dwelling within the bounds of the text.

I explore how religious institutional practices reorient Victorian reading by highlighting the nineteenth century as a moment when narrative becomes structured by pastoral residence—the ongoing presence of the parson in the novel and the parish. At the center of my project is the recovery of the plot of parish tenure, which begins with the clergyman’s arrival in a small country parish and ends with his leave-taking or death. My chapters trace how this plot originates in the genre of the “parish novel” and reverberates throughout the works of George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, John Henry Newman, Margaret Oliphant, Mrs Humphry Ward, and college novelists. These writers turned the parson’s labor of sustained attention into forms of duration and narrative time. I unearth the surprisingly static figures of pastoral life that come to organize reading: liturgical observance, by which time passes but does not progress; the ritual of “beating the parish bounds,” a cyclical walk that reinforces one’s residence; the modest labor of

function, troubling modernity's overtly teleological energies by converting the fugitive meaning of plot into the felt experience of form. "Life was not a task," writes George Eliot in *Adam Bede*, "but a sinecure." Far from an aesthetic shortcoming, the novel's parochialism signaled literature's new invitation to "dwell." However, pastoral work's peculiarly unproductive quality also rendered it an inelegant fit in our literary history. So finally, I show how Victorian writers simultaneously drew on pastoral experience and provided the terms for its narrative disqualification. By century's end, "parochialism" emerged as a small-minded, but pervasive, cultural sensibility through the novel's contradictory acknowledgment of the parish's obsolescence and an abiding attachment to it. My project at once offers a history of the ecclesiastical and religious practices that have come to inform our reading and rethinks secularization not as religion's retreat from the world so much as its reorientation within reading itself.

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Introduction Belittled Englands

It is 1850, and England is parochial. Its citizens trade the broader imperatives of empire and nation for interests of life closer at hand. West Enders stand accused of “London Parochialism” by a national paper because they pass over the candidacy of the cosmopolitan John Stuart Mill to elect in his stead a politician who promises them a splendid garden on the banks of the Thames (“London,” *Northern Echo*). In doing so, these Londoners “arrogate to themselves the right to speak and act in the name of the greatest city in the world.” Then, there are the “intensely parochial” conservatives of Whitby, Yorkshire, who suspend “all questions, celestial or terrestrial,” to ask only of an elected official, “What will he do for Whitby?” Charges of parochialism fall indiscriminately on everyone from local politicians to national figures such as Neville Chamberlain, who stands accused of “narrow parochialism” in his imperial protectionism (“Parochialism” *The Speaker* 276). Magazines caricature the “narrow-minded” and “Vulgar Parochialist” who “votes in Parliament as he would vote on a vestry against any scheme for improved education, or sanitary improvement if it involved an addition of a penny in the pound to the local rates” (“Parochialism,” *The National Review* 653). William Gladstone earns the moniker “Prince of Parochialists” for his protectionist stance on empire, while an editorial in William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Cornhill Magazine* celebrates “The Parochial Mind” (“Cosmopolitanism” *Saturday Review* 261). Parochialism seemed to be a universalizing impulse that stretched from coast to channel and signified no geographical affiliation—for who, in the preceding accounts, is more parochial than Londoners?—beyond the condition of being English itself.

“We’re parochial,” Simon Pegg observes of his countrymen, “On a global scale, we’re parochial. England is a parochial country” (Pegg). As a cultural sensibility, the term is closely allied with Englishness, so much so that one of its first usages is Ralph Waldo Emerson’s description of “parochial and shop-till politics” in *English Traits* (254). But this was not always so. When, for example, an author in *The Morning Post* refers to “the petty parochialism—if, indeed, it be not a libel upon our parishes to use the term in such a connection,” he gestures to the newness of the term’s coinage (“Petty” 4). From the parish to parochialism: how did a small ecclesiastical community become a cultural habit of mind?

That England discovered its parochialism in the nineteenth century is one premise of this dissertation; that it did so through the novel, a genre that has itself been identified as “parochial” and targeted by Virginia Woolf as literature “without more experience than could enter the house of a respectable clergyman,” is this dissertation’s second. Novelists from Anthony Trollope to George Eliot, and Elizabeth Gaskell to Charlotte Brontë, not only reproduce the topos of the parish life—their fairs, customs, sermons, and clergymen—but also borrow its modest perceptive ambit, its vision of life close at hand. Tracing English “parochialism” back to the Anglican community that bears its name, I suggest that the novel itself produced this cultural sensibility. Parochialism was not just a key aesthetic feature of the English novel, I argue, but also a response to the retreat of Anglican pastoral authority in the nineteenth century.

Parishes were once the center of English life. More than simply ecclesiastical units, they were the primary medium through which economic, political, social, and religious life was conducted. In the eighteenth century and before, as N.J.G. Pounds documents, landlords governed the economic life of the community, while local clergymen extended their power through peaceful—and sometimes quarrelsome—alliances. In addition to delivering local

sermons on Sundays and evenings, parsons would maintain daily ties with their congregation, taking tea with various households, visiting the sick, running Sunday schools, and doling to the poor. The centrality of the parish was mirrored by its geography. As Kristina Hochwender notes, churches were located at the center of town and at its highest point so that Sunday bells could be best heard throughout the parish (1). Seasonal religious and agricultural rituals—as Bob Bushaway as amply documented, and as Charles Taylor has echoed in *A Secular Age*—made the parish’s power legible as part of a unified worldview. Perambulations during rogation week cemented the parish’s bounds in communal memory and performed the parish’s importance as a geographical unit to the culture and beliefs of parishioners.

In the nineteenth century, however, parishes were unseated by national forms of governance. The tight political alliances between landlords, vestry, and clergymen became secondary to regional MPs and their appeals to the newly enfranchised national voting body. As James Vernon notes, parish vestries remained a central part of British political culture, and the parish ran voting practices from 1832 onwards, although their orientation was outwards, towards national politics and the rallying of larger constituencies, rather than inward, towards local representation (Vernon *Politics* 48). Welfare was famously centralized, as poor law reforms moved doling power out of the hands of local curates and into those of government-appointed overseers for larger union houses. Displaced paupers found their way to union workhouses, and settlement laws which provided for paupers claiming residence in certain parishes no longer held over the migratory, quickly urbanizing poor. Longstanding systems of parochial relief ultimately became obsolete as Britain moved further down the path to being a welfare state of the twentieth century. As Keith Snell argues in *Parish and Belonging*, the elimination in 1925 of the parish overseer, a voluntary administrative post responsible for everything from poor relief to burial rituals, was the nail in the coffin of parish welfare.

The parish of the nineteenth century was thus an anachronism: a medieval institution in an age of progressive reform, which magnified the energies of political and social change surrounding it. Above all, the parson—whose routine presence and ministry anchored the parochial community—could no longer be taken for granted, as the Anglican establishment struggled to staff its parishes equitably. G.F.A. Best and Owen Chadwick have described how rampant absenteeism and pluralism spurred the Victorian church to reform and to bring itself in line with other modern forms of work. In *Clergyman of the Church of England*, Trollope imagines that the same relations between “work and wages” that have been fixed in other occupations may soon come to structure the church: “Would that it were possible to enforce upon the bishops, as part of their duty, the task of furnishing annually a statistical return which would show what proportion of the clerical duties in their dioceses was done by curates....No clergyman in our Church has, as yet taken it into his head that there should be any analogy, or any proportion, between work and wages” (93). New faces replaced old ones at the local pulpit when cries of “Old Corruption” erupted against the overpayment of clergy in the 1820s. Clerical livings were redistributed, systems of local patronage were overturned, and attendance at weekly service, under one pastor or another, became a way of expressing preference for how the church should be run. The parish was increasingly fractured by partisanship; high church was pitted against low in the struggle for new appointments, sinecures were dissolved, and the filling of individual offices became charged with partisan victory or defeat. The heightened presence of dissenting Evangelicals, Methodists, and other sectarian groups eroded Anglican authority throughout the century. Although these changes are in many ways tied to broader demographic,

political, and economic trends, the parish was the site where such changes were immediately and concretely legible to Britain's populace.

The economy of the old regime disappeared as parish grounds were enclosed and more rigidly mapped; the majority of the Enclosure Acts were passed in the nineteenth century. The shared harvest and livelihood of labourers and peasants came under common law, which was violently contested in rituals such as Whitsunday dolings, harvest week, and rogation, as Bushaway has described in *By Rite*. And through it all, the parish saw physical change come to its crumbling church walls, picturesque hedgerows, and weedy grounds. Thomas Laqueur in *The Work of the Dead* has given us a vivid picture of how the parish church's lumpy graveyards, with their precise hierarchies, overflowed with bodies and gave way to modern cemeteries. A large number of churches were built and remodeled at the end of the century—an accomplishment tinged with irony as the ratings system for church upkeep became obsolete shortly thereafter. The number of parishes doubled and kept pace with demographic change; over four thousand new parishes were created over the course of the century, a sign of the British population's improbable release from the Malthusian trap.



Novelists' investment in parish life, whether in a "shower of curates" that opens Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, or depictions of a clergyman's living rooms in George Eliot's fiction, or Anthony Trollope's clerical portraits, or Margaret Oliphant's representations of Sunday sermons, was widespread. There is no doubt that the parish and its parsons commanded a complex set of anxieties, reverences, and affections. Trollope asks why progressive England loves its clerics so much. "We are often told that ours is a utilitarian age," he writes in *Clergyman of the Church of England*, "but this utilitarian spirit is so closely mingled with a veneration for things old and beautiful that we love our old follies infinitely better than our new virtues" (36). Clerical portraits such as his "town incumbent" or the "parson of the parish" with whom "we all love to be on familiar terms" can therefore seem to us a transparently nostalgic gesture, an effort to recall an idealized England of the recent past (60). It is a nostalgia that, for novelists, is conveniently bound up in the paternal figures of writers' memories and the ecclesiastical atmosphere of their childhood: Jane Austen's father was a clergyman, and the Brontë sisters followed their father Patrick to the wilds of North Yorkshire, where a parsonage still bears the family name. George Eliot's evangelical Anglican upbringing did not derail her preliminary, though ultimately unfulfilled, plans to compose a map of ecclesiology. According to C.P. Snow, young Anthony Trollope hoped to enter the church. When in his *Autobiography*, Trollope describes his novels' difference from other, more salacious works in their capacity for trite and innocuous moralism, we can't help but hear, in the analogy between the sermon and the novel, a wistfulness for a life unled as a clergyman: "I have regarded my art from so different a point of view that I have ever thought of myself as a preacher of sermons, and my pulpit as one which I could make both salutary and agreeable to my audience" (132).

However, this project suggests that there is more to the novel's preoccupation with parish life; that the parson and his parochial world is more than a bit of authentic, nostalgic furniture for the novel. The authority of the parish did not disappear, but rather transformed; the novel in fact became a new source of its power. Broader arguments have been made regarding the rise of a literary culture in the wake of Britain's secularization, such as William Mckelvy's study *The English Cult of Literature*, which observes via Thomas Carlyle that modern literary authority

grew out of the clerical profession and the church's system of patronage: "The modern author is born when the Church becomes historically forgettable" (26). Many more critics, including Terry Eagleton and Joshua King, have glossed and reprised the Arnoldian conceit that "what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry" (Eagleton 1; Arnold *Complete* 161). That literature took up the work of enchantment and culture that formalized religion left behind frames secularization as a process of religious disappearance—a narrative that accepts the relation between literature and religion as nostalgic.

My dissertation, however, stakes a claim on more precise territory to suggest that formalized religion, in this case Anglicanism, did not so much disappear as reorient itself towards the temporal world, the realm of everyday life, and reading itself. The novel, far from memorializing parish parsons as figures dead and obsolescent, made them present and in fact took up their work. Many of the novel's hallmarks that we now take for granted—especially its capacity to demand sustained, habitual attention—arose from Anglicanism's sharpened practical ethos. That is, as Anglicanism became increasingly understood as a practice and a habit rather than a doctrine or abstract belief, writers turned to the novel as an agent for its transformation. Literature and religion in my account are neither successors to a throne of cultural dominance, nor antagonists, but mutually constitutive allies. As I argue, the novel helped formalize Anglicanism as practical—a set of habits, practices and attentions; Anglicanism, in return, furnished the novel with a model of reading. I suggest, in other words, how each changed the other. It's little coincidence that the avuncular Anglican parson, more than any other religious figure, becomes the focus and grounding figure of nineteenth century fiction. My dissertation seeks to answer why.

I argue that pastoral labor, and specifically, the parson's tenure, became a structuring figure for the novel's work. The plot of tenure, which begins with a parson's arrival in a small country parish and ends with his leavetaking or death, is a narrative familiar to Victorian literature. It from can be found in everything from Elizabeth Gaskell's novels and her biography of Charlotte Brontë, to Margaret Oliphant's *Chronicles of Carlingford*, George MacDonald's novels, George Eliot's short fiction, and Anthony Trollope's *Barsetshire Chronicles*. But its origins and most condensed form lie in a small crop of works I term the *parish novel*, which flourished in the decades from 1850 to 1870. I chart the rise and spread of this plot against the establishment's renewed focus on lay labor, which included the revival of preaching in the nation's parishes, heightened attention to the process of granting and sustaining parish livings, and debates about liturgy, ritual, and other church practices that radiated outwards from the universities. More importantly, I examine how these plots of tenure were imagined to work.

Novelists conceptualized reading as form of pastoral work—a close, laborious, yet seemingly unproductive attention to everyday life—that suffused earthly life with latent meaning, and rendered such meaning a function of residence: neither immediately legible through outward reference nor as the extrinsic dispensation of providence, but rather as willfully, if uncertainly, generated by dwelling within the bounds of the text. Earlier novels, such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, produced forms of reading in which spiritual meaning is secured by providential delivery or allegorical reference. Parish novels, by contrast, understood meaning neither as a foreordained given nor as a quality intrinsic to the text; they offered no such readerly satisfaction. Rather, they framed reading as a form of immanent praxis in which meaning could be generated through sustained attention, in much the same way the parson himself attended to the parish—its minor quarrels, repetitive rhythms, and small episodes—without promise of conclusion or teleological satisfaction. The novel became

more visible as a *period* of attention for the exercise of faith in the absence of certainty, much like the parson's tenure, rather than a vehicle by which meaning could be unearthed. The plot of tenure allowed readers to experience pastoral residence in all its earthly struggle, tedium, and dead-ends; it converted the fugitive logic of plot into the felt experience of form.

By examining the formal rather than topical affinities between the novel and religious discourse, I suggest a substantially different relation between two. The field of Victorian religious literature until recently has struggled with approaches that are simultaneously too broad and too narrow. Broad, in its tendency to read the novel as religious allegory across periods and denominations. Works such as Barry Qualls's *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* and Janet Larsen's *Dickens and the Broken Scripture* approach the work of Carlyle, Brontë, and Dickens as the literary matter into which theological tenets pass. Studies such as these present the novel universally as a repository for and extension of doctrine, taking for granted the isomorphism of literature and religious discourse. Narrow, in reading specific theological debates into novels or in circumscribing their archive to literature explicitly religious in content. Margaret Maison's *The Victorian Vision* and Miriam Elizabeth Burnstein's *Victorian Reformations* offer richer visions of the Victorian landscape of religion by acknowledging differences between Broad Church, Oxford, and dissenting groups, but devote their energies primarily to categorizing each work topically. Such studies, in adopting religion as their frame, also become structurally evangelical; they subordinate a study of aesthetics to religious agendas and often reduce the novel to religion's handmaiden.

My dissertation, by contrast, sees the novel as Anglicanism's heuristic, one which solicits a sort of devotional work but need not present a world fully concordant with Anglican doctrine in order to do so. Unlike other denominations, Anglicanism was not premised on narrative ends. Many religious narratives see earthly life as the reflection of spiritual status and in doing so curiously evacuate individuals of their own spiritual agency. The Scottish antinomianism of James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, for example, accounts for the curious anarchic flattening of narrative after the murder itself: when one sees oneself as elect (even if one is damned), one's subsequent actions can have no impact. *Robinson Crusoe's* bookkeeping Protestantism is validated by Crusoe's ultimate providential delivery from the island—though he has little direct hand in his own escape. But Anglicanism, as this dissertation suggests, has a custodial, rather than terminal form, which simultaneously defines itself against the foregone teleologies of salvation and restores agency to the reading, devotional subject. As the parson handbooks, devotional manuals, and clergymen biographies of the nineteenth century make clear, good religion takes the form of sustained, daily habit, whose ends inhere in practice itself. It also results in a substantially different kind of narrative that does not see itself as teleologically urgent and positions the reader as an agent within (rather than as a student of) it. Rather than hewing closely to religious or doctrinal content in novels, I suggest how spiritual meaning is *generated* through the reader's sustained application to daily life; it is thus dependent on and works in the gap between the secular and spiritual.

One parish ritual best captures how this custodial form of time was merged with regular practice. Beating the parish bounds was a way of maintaining the parish's physical borders and retaining them in the congregation's memory. On rogation days, the vicar would lead the parish in a walk along the edges of the parish, reciting psalms and the litany. Sometimes, congregations would toss little boys into streams marking a boundary or stand them on their heads to help them remember the grounds better (Bushaway 3). Perambulation not only reinforced the parish as a geographical unit, but also merged the parish's religious and agricultural purposes in the

procession's blessings to fields along the walk. Perambulation's circularity and evanescence—and lack of a tangible outcome—points to the importance of Anglicanism as a habit. Borders were to be reinscribed and retained only in the consciousness of its congregation; perambulation's power lay in its seasonal repetition.

The ritual gradually disappeared by the nineteenth century as mapping rendered perambulation, in Pounds's words, "a time-wasting ceremony of little or no practical value" (79).¹ But still, the parish continued to be imagined in nineteenth century literature through "the walk." Eliot expresses affection for the "sunny walk through the fields from 'afternoon church'" in an extended meditation on "Old Leisure" as a pastoral figure, and makes the walk significant as a temporal and sequencing structure in *Adam Bede* (459).² Walking's Romantic connotations of dispossession and vagrancy were rewritten by novelists like Eliot and Trollope, who framed walking and its pedestrian perspective as practices vital to imagining community.³ The perambulation placed clergymen and lords on the level of parishioners; as Bushaway has pointed out, the very hierarchies (church and manor) on which these practices were first built paradoxically became the ways of legitimating the energies of a laboring collective.⁴

Such concrete practices would echo throughout literary history. The features of the novels I study—such as the narrator's embodiment, the close descriptions of church, the alignment of its length to a "living," its small perceptive radius, and even its itemization of character—are techniques or formal protocols that have their roots in the administrative and ecclesiastical structures of the parish. They suggest the extent to which Anglican identity was embedded in writers' everyday life. One anecdote is instructive. When the Dickenses first came to London, they settled at No. 10 Norfolk Street. The address is unremarkable, but for the fact that its rear wall marked the boundary between the respectable parish of St. Marylebone and the seedier St. Pancras, "a parish famous for its desperate poverty, overcrowding, high mortality, crime, and prostitution" (Richardson 46). The Dickenses placed themselves judiciously, if only barely, within the Marylebone bounds, taking pains—even testing their financial limits—to establish themselves in the right parish. Parochial administration affected nearly all elements of life for ordinary citizens. Parson tenure by structural necessity resided in the everyday, so it is little surprise that the novel became its primary representational domain. The novel evidences the new demands being placed on Anglicanism, which increasingly favors habit and practice over purity of belief and doctrine. Changes to formalized religion, as this dissertation suggests throughout, coincided with the novel's rise over the course of the nineteenth century.

I thus approach the dialogue between literature and Victorian religion not through its most valorized theorists, but through materials that show how religion was experienced and lived. That my argument rests in an archive that is not explicitly or overtly religious is precisely the point: in the nineteenth century, Anglicanism was manifest not only in the high theology of Oxford, but in the everyday and the mundane. In reading Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, I focus not on the influence of Thomas Malthus and Jeremy Bentham, but on the parish register and outdoor

¹Pounds observes that "the bounds of Chignall were walked as late as 1815," though Bushaway proposes that certain rituals persisted in the south of England up to the 1880s (Pounds 79).

²Eliot also measures distances by times of walking, something an English parson, who made the rounds of the parish frequently, would also do. She locates, for example, Chase Farm "ten minutes walking distance from the Abbey" (266). This distance structures Adam's discovery of Hetty at a crucial moment in the novel.

³Celeste Langan inverts this dispossession of vagrancy to reformulate walking as a kind of freedom in *Romantic Vagrancy*. As Eliot observes, in "The Natural History of German Life," Riehl "was, first of all, a pedestrian, and only in the second place a political author" (*Selected* 125).

⁴Bushaway notes: "Collective action of the laboring poor which took place on certain customary dates until the mid-nineteenth century, was legitimated by reference to church and manor practice, particularly the annual state services which were celebrated in the parish church, and the structure of manorial organization. Thus, parish perambulations during Rotation Week, Guy Fawkes night celebrations and Oak Apple Day customs were reinforced" (3).

doling; in Eliot's fiction, I turn my eye away from her theoretical models of sympathy and suggest instead how she makes the imperfection of pastoral relations into a sign of its strength. The parish existed not as a cartographic abstraction, but as a lively social ecology. It churned up huge amounts of paper. I draw on parish overseers' reports, censuses, registers, liturgical calendars, parson diaries, tracts on Old Corruption and Poor Law Reform, reports of the Ecclesiastical Commission, village scrapbooks, and ecclesiastical ephemera that centered the Anglican church in the literary imagination. While some of England's literary greats are reclaimed upon death by Westminster Abbey, they are also reclaimed by their parishes: Walter Besant, in the latter years of the nineteenth century, undertook a collection for "a Charles Dickens memorial window in the new parish church at Portsea" ("Advertisement" 4). While the nineteenth century also offers a welter of explicitly theological texts and ecclesiastical critiques, as well as sectarian novels, I read through parson biographies, parish histories, workhouse records and other materials not strictly religious to provide a sense of the fluidity between religious and secular life and to emphasize how readers might not have parsed its divisions in the ways contemporary scholars do.

My project is a rejoinder to exclusively doctrinal interpretations of nineteenth-century novels and aims to show how reading was a messy, not an abstract practice, where certain irreducible particulars of religious life—such as a parson's parsimony or his fondness for cards—were in fact constitutive of the relation readers had to the page. Framing reading as a form of immanent praxis, this dissertation rethinks traditional oppositions between the secular and religious by showing where hermeneutic and devotional interests intersect. It aims to build on contemporary postcritical work by expanding the ecology of postures—devotional, pious, even loving—available to reading.⁵



My first chapter shows how the parish—and specifically, its administration of welfare—comes to define *Oliver Twist, or The Parish Boy's Progress* as Dickens's first "novel." While this work is now synonymous with Dickens's critique of parish welfare, I probe the unexpected resemblance between the novel's and the parish's systems of representation. Like the reformed parish, the novel aggregates its persons and seeks to redistribute our attention across them. I look not to the 1834 Poor Law but to the recently standardized parish register as a form which furnishes the novel certain aesthetic rules for representing characters. The novel's unlikely participation in parochial standards can be understood by looking at a broader shift in the morality of parish welfare less often considered by critics. I reveal what the parish's moral economy offers the novel: reconfiguring the pauper as a figure who not only deserves our sympathy, but whose eligibility for it lies radically and equitably in the open. Though this chapter does not explicitly attend to the parish's religious aspects, it nonetheless suggests how early nineteenth century novelists drew on the parish as a pervasive governing figure of life.

My second chapter sets the grounds for the dissertation at large. I offer a prehistory of the parish plot and trace its concretization through the mid-century genre of the parish novel. I begin by showing how novels of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century struggled to conceptualize pastoral labor as both economically productive and narratively fungible. The parson emerges as a peculiarly unnarratable minor character and counter-figure to dominant narratives like the

⁵ For scholarship in the postcritical turn, see Michael Warner's "Uncritical Reading," Deidre Lynch's *Loving Literature*, and Rita Felski's *Limits of Critique*.

marriage plot and the picaresque in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Richard Graves's *The Spiritual Quixote*, and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Stilling our vision over vicars and clerics alongside more prominent roving Methodists and enterprising heroes, these authors posit that the work of gradual affection resides in the parson's capacity to do little. I then trace the ascendance of the parish novel as a pervasive mid-century genre. I discuss how, in the wake of the disappearance of lay labor across England, parish novelists take up tenure as a narrative function, troubling modernity's overtly teleological energies by converting the fugitive meaning of plot into the felt experience of form. Dwelling on the mundane details of church, the fold of a cassock, or the intoning of a parson before a sleepy congregation, these novels allowed readers to perceive sacred experience in terms both quotidian and remarkably concrete. However, this genre's celebrated capacity to "bore" led both to its obsolescence within our archive of literature and its derogation by its contemporaries.

My third and fourth chapters study how plots of pastoral labor slowly disappear in the face of broader, modernizing reforms in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and *Scenes of Clerical Life* and Anthony Trollope's *Barsetshire Chronicles*; their novels simultaneously inhabit a nostalgic attachment to the parish while recognizing its obsolescence. Eliot uses the parson to ground her "faithful" realism, while simultaneously producing an elevated difference from this genre. I see her fiction engaged in the work of endearment, wherein the narrator's resemblance to the "fatally uninteresting" clergyman—an individual whose peculiar fallibility generates his worth—becomes the grounds both for his value and accounts for her narrator's peculiarly "preachy" quality. Trollope not only enacts the narrative eclipse of the parish plot over the course of the *Barsetshire Chronicles* but also carries "parochialism" into its more modern sense; his novels both enact the semantic shift from the term's earlier, strictly clerical sense ("parochial clergy") to its later one of diminution and inconsequence ("a little parochial nothing").

These chapters thus restore the sense of contest to literary history by revealing how major novelists differentiated themselves from minor ones. "Life was not a task," writes Eliot, "but a sinecure." Far from an aesthetic shortcoming, the novel's parochialism signaled literature's new invitation to "dwell." That this aesthetic does not explicitly appear to work, however, makes it an inelegant fit in our literary history. Pastoral labor's peculiarly unproductive quality made its value increasingly less legible in society at large and provided the terms for its disqualification from contemporary literary history. At century's end, "parochialism" emerged as a small-minded, but pervasive, cultural sensibility through the novel's contradictory acknowledgment of the parish's obsolescence and an abiding attachment to it.

My fifth chapter argues that our lingering attachment to the relations between parson and parishioner enabled new forms of institutional nostalgia. I uncover the figures of pastoral labor at heart in academic fiction and show how they worked to remake the university as a distinctly English institution whose value could, crucially, be taken on faith. Novelists such as Mrs. Humphry Ward and Oxford Tractarians such as E.B. Pusey and John Henry Newman drew on the college sermon's paradoxically familiarizing and exclusivizing effect to render the university as a institution whose value and mystified forms of authority could only be recognized by its pastorate. The topos of the parish parson imbues the college novel with a distinctly inward-facing temper.

A coda traces an emergent view of empire that is decidedly parochial. In the mid-nineteenth century, many Victorians encountered empire's exotic peoples and expansive geographies through publications surprisingly close at hand: parish gazettes. *The Parish Magazine* and *Our Happy Home Union* circulated popular tales of adventuring Victorians, such

as “The Church in Hawaii,” and “Life among the Esquimaux.” These tales reveal a new, quotidian side to the Victorian traveler. Rather than spectacular adventures, these tales capture the minor struggles of global travel: personal discomfort, unexpected inconvenience, and a lack of place to attend church. While many imperial narratives show the gain of outward ventures, these stories unanimously emphasize the merits of return by foregrounding the labor of travel and the relief of coming home. Reflecting the impulses of an increasingly parochial England, parish gazettes discourage exploration by substituting armchair travel for travel itself.

How did an ecclesiastical institution become a figure for a widely shared habit of mind? I argue, ultimately, that the novel not only brought this new figurative sense into modern consciousness, but more importantly, that its diegetic power in fact depended on its ability to parochialize—to engross its readers in everyday life within bounds. Unearthing the novel’s role in the cultural afterlife of the parish prompts a revision to the critical commonplace that Victorian novels uniformly pointed outwards, synecdochally representing larger (imperial, national, global) demographics and patterns. Analyzing the parochialism unique to the Victorian novel sheds light on the extent to which its power dwelt in increasingly cloistered worlds.

Chapter One

Deparochializing Judgment in *Oliver Twist: The Parish Boy's Progress*

What do we take for granted more than *Oliver Twist's* critique of parish welfare? Oliver, asking for “more” in the porridge queue, so epitomizes workhouse abuse that the novel’s status as a “social document, a thesis novel of the first order,” in Gregory Sand’s words, hardly bears remarking (Chittick 19). Critics do remark, if with boredom. The “old tyranny” of the New Poor Law, G.K. Chesterton writes, is “in front of him as plain as the sun in noonday” (1911). The “hard-hearted indifference of the parochial authorities, the scanty allowance of the paupers, and the brutal insolence of office in the beadle” too cheaply exploit “the popular clamour against the New Poor Law,” writes *The Spectator* (Chittick 114–16). The critique of the parish is the blandest part, in fact, of the whole novel. In a “literary recipe” for a “startling romance,” *Punch* suggests adding ingredients such as a “beadle and a workhouse” to lose the “whole flavor of vice” and produce a gruel “strongly recommended for weak stomachs” (39). Heartier interpretive fare, for critics such as D.A. Miller, John Kucich, and Stephen Marcus, lies in the novel’s picture of Newgate criminality or in its dynamics of delinquency and closure.

That Charles Dickens saw in the New Poor Law a dangerous replacement of personhood by populations and the abuses of aggregating paupers is a point as labored as the workhouse itself. Yet the novel curiously reproduces the utilitarian logic of welfare it critiques. The novel, like the reformed parish, frames characters not as individuals but as units of need; the novel asks readers to aggregate, itemize, and weigh those needs within a contained whole, producing its own political economy of attention. Its characters, as Alex Woloch has noted, are less freestanding consciousnesses than subjects who “jostle” for our attention. Correspondingly, the novel makes of Oliver—a deindividuated “item of mortality”—a curious hero. Why should the novel’s most seemingly typical subject be its exceptional protagonist? And why does the novel take up the Poor Law’s logic of aggregation? I argue that looking more closely at the practices, rather than philosophies, of welfare reform allow us to understand the novel’s curious system of character.

This chapter proposes that the novel owes a surprising debt to the new Poor Law’s moral sensibilities towards parochial subjects and that such a debt can be seen in its appropriation of the reformed parish’s practices: the newly itemized parish register, which guards and regulates the boundaries between its units of life, and the workhouse, which frees the pauper from his moral stigma in order to enforce broader rubrics of eligibility. These two figures, I suggest, are invoked throughout the novel, explicitly and not. They are the medium through which Dickens renders Oliver as one in an aggregate of orphans, and they epitomize Poor Law reform’s attempts to render need as socially relative, rather than absolute, and to balance the parishioners’ needs, putting the rate-payer and pauper on more equitable footing. The new objective, standardized, national rubric of welfare that replaced more subjective methods of doling by local parsons and churchwardens shifted welfare’s standard away from friendships and judgments of character towards the public eligibility of one’s claim. As I will ultimately suggest, Dickens capitalizes on the New Poor Law’s shifted focus from character to “item” of need, rewriting relationships between readers and characters in much the same way the Poor Law refigured the relationship between the judging public and needy paupers. I show that Oliver’s privileged standing is in fact a function of his itemized status; the reformed parish’s more objective rubrics allow Oliver’s claim on welfare to not only appear, but to appear *just*. That Oliver is a parochial item—nothing remarkable about him, in fact—is precisely why he invites our care. Dickens thus possesses a

different investment in personhood than first suspected, one that borrows surprisingly from parish reform.



The history is by now familiar, even tired: in 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act enacted sweeping changes to national welfare. The act had been long gestating; growing out of a series of commissioned studies by Nassau Senior and Edwin Chadwick throughout the 1820s and 1830s and propelled by steadily growing currents of political economy, the Act sought to economize and standardize parish aid. Its measures included the elimination of outdoor relief, the installation of professional guardians in place of parish clergymen, and the establishment of tiers of pauper aid for the young, old, and sick. But it is the principle of least eligibility—detering the poor from seeking welfare over paid labor—that concretized our imagination of the Act in the satires, pamphlets, and popular cartoons that circulated in its wake.

Though the Act's punitive aspects linger the most in popular memory, its principles had been long gestating and the need for reform, widely accepted. The Act gave expression to an awareness of the limits on parish resources that sharpened over the late eighteenth century, as costs of aid escalated, and as tensions between close and open parishes made clear that paupers were burdens to parishioners. The Poor Law Commissioners sought to economize relief by reconceptualizing the parish as a finite pool of resources divided among an aggregate, rather than as an independent institution to which appeals for relief would be considered on a more personal case-by-case basis by vestrymen and clergy. The measures that Senior and Chadwick propose in their *Royal Commission for Poor Law Relief Report* tightened what could be claimed from parish rates and standardized treatment of the poor. Smaller local workhouses were consolidated into unions with pooled resources under closer supervision; professional, appointed guardians, rather than individual clergymen or parish-elected overseers, were charged with doling relief according to preset guidelines; and beyond the introduction of certain exceptional categories (aged, infirm, able-bodied, children), each parishioner would have equal claim to relief. The success and equity of the New Poor Law to great extent depended on objectifying individuals as units of need. Its principles were as follows: the extent to which an individual counted was as a strain on resources; individual need was understood as socially implicated; and finally, by consequence of the latter two conditions, the parish pauper and a larger body of parishioners might be opposed. This wider view shaped legislation leading up to 1834; the Sturges Borne (Select Vestries) Act of 1818, for example, installed salaried overseers on parish vestries to make distinctions between deserving and undeserving poor. The Poor Law Amendment Act thus capped a broader shift in the understanding of need as absolute (to be remedied regardless of circumstance) to the understanding of need as socially contingent (to be remedied according to eligibility and available aid). Doles carefully portioned; pauper against pauper, parish against parish.

When *Oliver Twist's* beadle jokes of shuttling paupers between parishes to disburden parishioners, then, he invokes welfare's newer, relativized bent: "We put the sick paupers into open carts in the rainy weather," declares the "porochial beadle," Mr. Bumble, "They are both in a very low state, and we find it would come two pound cheaper to move 'em than to bury 'em—that is, if we can throw 'em upon another parish, which I think we shall be able to do, if they don't die upon the road to spite us. Ha! Ha! Ha!" (131–132). Tensions between parishes arose from welfare's quantitative game: close parishes, in which gentry and church closely managed parish rates and implemented relatively strict laws of pauper settlement, flourished; open

parishes (often urban) with less stringently managed borders were strained by an influx of poor.¹ This rationalized vision of the parish, as a social body strained by multiple claimants for attention, is not just a fact that *Oliver Twist* is amply attuned to, but also a dynamic that novel enacts. Despite the novel's charity, this sense of opposition between parties nonetheless animates John Forster's early critique of *Oliver Twist* in *The Examiner*: "the attempt to elevate the pauper in our sympathies at the cost of the struggling labourer—to leave rate-payers lean with their work and hunger, so that the pauper may be stuffed to the proper extent of comfort" is the novel's "system of curious philanthropy" that "we cannot understand" (581). If, as Ursula Henriques suggests, Dickens leaves behind the "vague literary land of gentle village life" for a "contemporary England, where the traditional unit of the parish has been bureaucratized into a new and disagreeable shape," then this new shape also echoes throughout the novel (Wood 74). The figures of the parish register and the workhouse, which frame its subjects as aggregated units within a contained whole, bear out this reform in both the novel and the culture at large.

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One visual analogue that captures the standardization of welfare, though rarely mentioned by critics, is the parish register. It was a common sight centuries before Victorian England: a dusty tome, roughly the length of a parson's forearm, with inches of parchment sandwiched by heavy leather covers. With some frequency, a parson, clerk, or churchwarden cracked its binding to record all births, deaths, and marriages within parish bounds; its yellow pages were curled from moisture, and in some instances, crumbling. Its entries were narrated as prose paragraphs, reported in full sentences: "William Cooke the supposed sonne of William Richards was baptized November 13th" (figure 1).

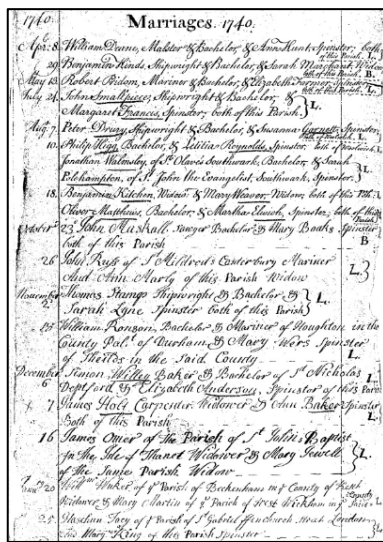


Fig 1. Before 1812

Fig 2. After 1812

In 1812, this changed. The passage of Rose's Act standardized its pages (figure 2). Parliament mandated that new, preprinted "schedules" would replace those musty tomes languishing upon rectory corners; "standardized, printed forms of parochial registration" imposed uniformity upon

¹ For more on the differences between open and close parishes straining under poor relief in the nineteenth century, see Keith Snell, *Rival Jerusalems*.

“old, idiosyncratic manuscript registers” (Basten 43). In place of a parson’s leisurely scrawl, crisp black lines divided categories of information into columns, and entries from each other horizontally. Small numbers printed in corners totaled each entry’s part in the mounting population. Actions were not narrated but listed in preprinted headings, under which each unit so orderly fell. Births, marriages, deaths, starkly itemized.

The novel replicates this formal maneuver for representing life quantitatively, framing *Oliver Twist* as an item of mortality. In the novel’s opening line, quite literally: “in this workhouse was born...the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head of this chapter.” Oliver is not named or even given a gender until the novel’s third paragraph, and throughout the first chapter, in the parish’s surgeon’s eyes, continues to occupy the nebulous status of an “it.” “It’s very likely it will be troublesome,” he recommends, “Give it a little gruel if it is.” Oliver’s curious ontological status has not gone unnoticed by critics. For James Buzard, “the use of ‘item’ inevitably suggests a list, suggests the existence of other items, since no one itemizes that which is singular” (1236). Buzard acknowledges that Dickens’s narrator adopts a “style akin to that of the Mudfog parish authorities themselves, for whom this little being is just another in a series about whose members they wish to trouble themselves as little as possible,” but my gambit is that we can be more precise still: the “item of mortality” more precisely invokes a parish register. Not only does the register constitute the link between the demographic event and how it is stylistically recorded in the novel’s first chapter (it shows us *why* Dickens represents the birth as he does), but it also allows Dickens to play out the consequences of itemization in the circumstances of Oliver’s birth.

How odd it is, that Dickens represents Oliver’s birth. After all, as E.M. Forster suggests, “between Sterne and James Joyce, scarcely any writer has tried to use the facts of birth” for their characters; *homo fictus*, unlike *homo sapiens*, “seldom require it physiologically” (52). Odder, still, that despite taking pains to narrate the event itself, Dickens furnishes no individuating particulars:

Among other public buildings in a certain town, which for many reasons it will be prudent to refrain from mentioning, and to which I will assign no fictitious name, there is one anciently common to most towns, great or small: to wit, a workhouse, and in this workhouse was born: on a day and date which I need not trouble myself to repeat, inasmuch as it can be of no possible consequence to the reader, in this stage of the business at all events: the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head of this chapter. (1)

The opening sentence has the quality of a *form*: it suggests the standard information we might find in a parish register entry such as location, day, date, subject name, and nature of event (birth), but leaves the information itself curiously blank. The narrator deliberately withholds the name of the “certain town,” and notes, still, that it “will be prudent to refrain from mentioning” the day and date. (In *Bentley’s*, by contrast, the town is named Mudfog). Such information would be of “no possible consequence to the reader.” The passage’s point is less to describe the messy act of birth than to furnish its coordinates. Standard information preempts the entry of a subject—here, Oliver—into the novel’s pages; the individual is recorded and aggregated among others.

The parish register is referenced not only in the opening’s form-like introduction but also in its framing of Oliver as a name on a page: “the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the

head of this chapter.” We are asked to imagine Oliver as a textual figment with a claim on our attention, much in the same way that the reformed parish register understands a life to take up a certain amount of textual space. In the pivot from prose to schedule, from the leisurely sentence to the discrete item, the register shifted from imagining the parish as a collection of life (inviting narrativization and explication), to imagining life’s more rigid containment within certain bounds. Sharp, black lines bound each entry and seek to regulate our attention to them; a life takes up space. So regrettable then, that Oliver’s life has not, by dint of being extinguished earlier, “the inestimable merit of being the most concise and faithful specimen of biography” (1). The first chapter raises as a matter of considerable doubt whether the child would survive to bear any name at all”; dwells on the lapse of time, “three minutes and a quarter” between Oliver’s birth and first breath; and concludes finally that his life must be spun out over the course of an entire novel. Pages must be filled with life. The contingency of the written record—whether “the child would survive to bear any name at all”—also points to a problem morbidly familiar to parish-record keeping. Often, the right to entry—the recording of the name itself into the baptism schedule—depended on whether the child would survive to be baptized at all. Demographers note that exact population statistics were often difficult to ascertain because this lapse of time between birth and baptism was seen to be increasing in the early decades of the nineteenth century, an issue further debated by G.M. Burrows in his 1818 *Strictures on the Uses and Defects of Parish Registers* (Basten 43). Here, again, is where the novel and the parish meet: their seemingly exhaustive, totalizing representation of life is here—in the precarious, contingent moments following birth itself—haunted by its alternative.

If Oliver’s birth references the register’s itemized form, then the novel also draws our attention more broadly to their shared function—as, in Percy Lubbock’s definition of the novel, a “picture of life” (9). The parish register was a repository for all demographic data from antiquity to modernity. Elsewhere, Dickens likens his novel to the register. In *Little Dorrit*, Amy’s wedding to Arthur Clennam not only concludes her life in the novel, but also, by signing her name just so, concludes her life in the church’s sequence of registers. “She has come now to the third volume of our Registers,” observes the parish clerk of St. George’s, “Her birth is in what I call the first volume; she lay asleep on this very floor, with her pretty head on what I call the second volume; and she’s now a-writing her little name as a bride, in what I call the third volume” (806). Three volumes of parish registers are likened to three volumes of a novel. Here, though, the figure of the register works as a model of aggregation; it points us to similarities in how both novel and parish represent persons as units of life.

The analogy between the reformed parish register and the novel is more than a convenience; rather, it helps us understand the protocols of itemization throughout the scene of Oliver’s birth and the novel at large. The parish register squares, quite literally, an individual’s claim against others. This sense of opposition between individuals echoes throughout. As Oliver is placed in his mother’s arms, for example, she dies. The act of birth requires taking a life; as one character charges into the novel, another must cease to exist. But the novel also imagines another, frequently overlooked scenario:

Although I am not disposed to maintain that the being born in a workhouse, is in itself the most fortunate and enviable circumstance that can possibly befall a human being, I do mean to say that in this particular instance, it was the best thing for Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred. The fact is, that there was considerable difficulty in inducing Oliver to take upon himself the office of respiration. . . . Now, if, during this brief

period, Oliver had been surrounded by careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom, he would most inevitably and indubitably have been killed in no time. There being nobody by, however, but a pauper old woman, who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer; and a parish surgeon, who did such matters by contract; Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. (1)

Oliver takes his first gasp and survives only in the relative absence of others such as “careful grandmothers, anxious nurses” around him. Here, character is defined as a unit of need—in this case, of air; the air is finite, and thus the character’s need interpolates him socially; and finally, the individual’s claim necessarily displaces others’. Oliver breathes, in short, because a crowd of others do not. And the principle doubles on a super-diegetic level: Oliver’s centrality is simultaneously an effect of, and opposed to, the multiple characters he pushes off the page. That one character’s livelihood only flourishes at the immediate and visible expense of another is a principle repeated throughout the novel. When Oliver is sent off by the parish to be “farmed,” he is received by an elderly woman who superintends the branch workhouse of “twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders.” She siphons off part of each child’s sevenpence-halfpenny’s allowance: “she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them” (4). An inverse case passes before Oliver’s eyes while apprenticing for Mr Sowerberry, the coffin maker; he witnesses a funeral where the death of a wealthy man curiously causes his friends and relatives to rejoice in anticipation of their windfall (42). Such a dynamic extends to Oliver’s own professional life; his livelihood as a coffin-maker’s apprentice depends on the parish’s consistent flow of death. In this sense, his twinned professional roles in the novel (apprentice coffin-maker, apprentice thief) show us the similarities between parochial and criminal activity: one body profits directly off another.

The desire to regulate the boundaries between subjects guides both the reformed parish and the novel, which in itemizing and aggregating characters, also pit them against one another. In this sense, we are not far from Alex Woloch’s idea that Dickens’s characters “jostle”—that spatial presence is a function of character—or critics’ suggestion that Oliver directly pushes an equally deserving pauper from view. “For every Oliver rescued from the rescued from the slums, there remains a poor orphan Dick who blesses the protagonist and then dies off the page,” observes Emily Steinlight (228). As James Buzard argues, Oliver’s counterpart—the orphan Dick whom we might imagine could have lived Oliver’s life—must fall away because “one must be uprooted in order for the other to grow” (1234). All Dickens’s characters are figuratively paupers: both counted as interchangeable “items” within the novel’s picture of life, and constituted by nothing but need. They demand attention, welfare, and fortune from the novel, and by extension, from each other. This sense of opposition sets Dickens’s first novel off from his other work. If his earlier collected sketches, “Our Parish,” allow our attention to wander across an infinitely expandable community of characters—churchwardens and maidens, consumptive curates, beadles and benevolent schoolmasters—then *Oliver Twist*, by contrast, is not so generous. The novel’s tighter focus on Oliver reflects the miserly economy of the newly reformed parish, marshalling our attention on one character at the expense of others.

So much is suggested by scholars taking up biopolitical frames to *Oliver Twist*. “The orphan in Dickens,” Mario Ortiz-Robles reminds us, “gives rise to narrative situations in which the biological and the statistical” work as “dramatic parameters” (89). Specters of Malthus and Bentham haunt the novel’s description of “experimental philosophers” as well as the critical

work of Catherine Gallagher, Emily Steinlight, and Mario Ortiz-Robles. Yet these biopolitical frames inevitably fail to reckon with Oliver himself. How does the novel, in other words, go about making distinctions between its characters? And why does Oliver in particular occupy a privileged status as a protagonist? If Dickens dramatizes the regulation of population, he also foregrounds his protagonist's happy escape from consideration as merely one in the masses. "Dickens's Oliver is the figure that does not fit the set: a pure remainder of population," writes Ortiz-Robles (89). Though Oliver is perceived within the novel's statistical frame, his defining feature is that he also exceeds it. "Surplus population," Steinlight observes, "though structurally necessary to the novel, denotes what the protagonist by definition must refuse to be" (228). Oliver is the exception to the novel's biopolitical rule, and he cuts counter to biopolitics' leveling of subjects. Despite his relatively "weak" temperament, as Woloch puts it, Oliver is unequivocally the novel's protagonist, its providential center, and repository of sympathy. As Forster observes, from the novel's opening moments, "our strong and sudden interest in Oliver" curiously "never after ceases" (581). The coexistence of Oliver's intense typicality and intense exceptionalism constitutes one of the novel's central paradoxes; while the former can be attributed to the novel's biopolitics, the latter cannot. His protagonism inevitably forces critics to abandon their approaches. "Characters from *Oliver Twist* and *Jane Eyre* to *Esther Summerson* and *Pip* all begin as disposable before becoming indispensable," observes Steinlight, "working out their destinies amid scores of others who do not make it into the category of lives worth protecting" (228). For Buzard, Oliver's privileged standing can only be resolved as an act of authorial providence; as both a "perfectly typical Mudfog parish boy," writes Buzard, and one whose "qualitative difference from all the other boys is a premise from the beginning," Oliver proves the novel's "absent contingency"—he is meant to be saved all along (1240, 1241). The randomness of biopolitical selection, it seems, must ultimately give way to authorial or providential election.

Why, to paraphrase George Eliot, always Oliver? Critics leave unanswered why, if Oliver remains a typical parish orphan, he nonetheless captures a disproportionate share of our attention. The answer, I suggest, lies not in the abstractions of political economy and population, but more closely in the protocols of reformed welfare. I show how the novel backgrounds the Poor Law's reforms with the earlier, outdoor welfare that it erased; the moral logic of the reformed parish offers us a way of understanding Oliver's exceptionality *as a function of* his typicality and exposes why Dickens adopts a model of welfare he ostensibly critiques.



Consider this scenario: From Mrs. Comey's door, provisions doled out to the parish are simply not enough to satisfy the poor. A total of "twenty quarter loaves, and a cheese and a half" are gone out, but "them paupers are not contented" (178). A man who has taken a "quarter loaf" and "a good pound of cheese" has the nerve still to demand a few coals with which to toast his cheese. "That's the way with these people, ma'am; give 'em an apron full of coals to-day; and they'll come back for another, the day after tomorrow, as brazen as alabaster." A ragged man knocks at the overseer's door. When offered a pound of potatoes and a half pint of oatmeal, the "ungrateful villain" rejects the dole as useless and threatens to die in the streets. And "he did die in the streets. There's an obstinate pauper for you!" (179). Pauper hunger is an unregulated desire; above a "pound of potatoes" or "cheese and a half" they wish simply for "more."

This is a less considered scene from *Oliver Twist*, one unfamiliar to the novel's typical picture of paupers suffering at the hands of parish authorities. Here, the paupers' needs are considered as individual cases; here, their hunger becomes the grounds for moral judgment. One pauper is greedy, and the other, vindictive. How do we find these paupers supremely unsympathetic? First, we might say, the model of welfare is different; Dickens depicts instances of outdoor relief, an older, earlier model of dole. In contrast to the reformed parish that divides a finite sum into equal doles, the old outdoor system of relief fails to impose a natural limit on what the individual may consume, opening the parish to requests that are either in quantitative excess of, or qualitative difference from, what the parish possesses. Coals, in addition to cheese; money, not oatmeal. And second, this model of welfare links pauperism with moral character. Dickens, here, is more than simply attuned to the differences between the obsolete and the newer, more objective rubrics of the reformed parish. Rather, he uses the contrast between the two to frame Oliver's hunger as a normative deficit and thus to free him from the pauper's negative moral charge.

In the decades leading up to 1834, character increasingly functioned as an unreliable and even damaging rubric for parochial aid. *The Third Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission* faults the old system for its emphasis on personal associations. Churchwardens, clergymen, and amateur overseers doled idiosyncratically, and as Owen Chadwick argues, it was "impossible to take character into account" in populous urban parishes. The chairman of the Droxford union concludes that, after a year of ample parochial relief, "George Gregory is a very bad character" (Driver 41). The unreformed parish's reliance on character and personal ties—held over from ancient settlement laws—made its process of judgment illegible to those outside it. "The most grievous injustice under the old administration of the Poor Laws," writes one commissioner, is the "pattering about 'character'" in which "the squire, the clergyman and the farmer constituted themselves a tribunal for the suppression of vice and the encouragement of virtue" (*Parish and Union* 176). The ties, between paupers and churchwardens, beadles and orphans, that the old system of relief freighted with importance also rendered the parish itself a closed, opaque, and private moral economy. Reformers describe the old parish as a "narrow field of interest" equally "warped by private interest" (Driver 41); "a sort of petty kingdom with its own sovereign will" (Wood 52). The Select Committee of the House of Commons in *Parish and the Union* describe parish guardians who "acted from feeling only"; in taking "the most circumscribed view of the case," they "blindly followed the impulses of excited emotion" (20). But "had their ideas been enlarged by a more extensive consideration of the question, their course would have been modified; but it was headstrong in proportion as their views had been limited to a narrow space" (20). Dole could be overly sympathetic, susceptible to personal favoritism and corruption.

It is this older model that the novel both departs from and seeks to reform. Dickens dramatizes the older outdoor model as dependent on a closed and highly variable system of moral judgment; this system yokes pauperism to "bad character." By individuating and narrativizing their circumstances as stories, the novel invites us to extrapolate moral traits and a rounder conception of their character from their condition of need. The passage enacts a subtle slide from a condition of need to a moral conclusion: the first man is not "grateful" but "brazen" in his search for coals; the other is "ungrateful" and obstinate because he dies vindictively in the streets. Moreover, the absence of a broader standard allows their requests to be perceived less as a normative deficit shared by paupers than as an individual's self-generated, poorly managed excess hunger. And an unrelenting one, too: "Give 'em an apron full of coals to-day," says the beadle, "and they'll come back for another, the day after to-morrow." The subjectivity of all this

judgment is embodied by Bumble, the narrating beadle, who, despite his vilification throughout the novel, nonetheless considers himself “possessed of all the excellences and best qualities of humanity” (207–8).

As James Vernon notes, “the necessary sign of an individual’s moral failure to learn the virtue of labor was gradually displaced...by the discovery that hunger was a collective social problem” (2–3). The twentieth century saw the conclusion of this shift in perspective, but before, parish reformers developed new nationalized rubrics to bring paupers into a new relationship with the public at large; paupers transformed from moral subjects under private consideration into items of need whose eligibility for support could be instead publicly owned. Aggregating doles and standardizing categories was one way reformers threw open the process of eligibility. By relegating decisions about a pauper’s deservingness away from the realm of relative moral judgment about his or her goodness and towards newer national rubrics of “able-bodiedness” and “less eligibility,” reformers implemented a system of pauper representation that was seemingly more equitable and open. Depersonalized, certainly, but more equitable and open. *The Third Annual Commissioner’s Report of 1837* celebrates that a pauper denied relief under the old parish system because “he was a worthless character,” might now be merely considered a “specimen of a class whose habits exhibit” the “evil tendencies” of a system at large (110). Beatrice and Sydney Webb describe “a certain empirical policy as to the administration of relief” as a more equitable and open approach. Public ownership of poor hunger necessitated the erasure of “character” itself. When the discourse of “character” persisted in the wake of reforms, it took on a generalized bent, as when Mr Woolley, an assistant tithe commissioner, witnesses reform’s “almost magical effect” on the “the character of the population, the improvement of the land—such a change!” (Driver 73).

What *Oliver Twist* gives us, then, is more than simply a contrast between the two models of relief. It gives us an enactment of reformed welfare’s protocols of judging and perception in the case of Oliver’s protagonism. The novel assumes parish welfare’s broader shift from subjective and emotionally based rubrics of welfare to broadened, liberalized moral horizons, and inherits the new notion that a pauper’s needs must not only appear, but appear *just*. The pauper’s typicality—his membership within the aggregate of the needy—paradoxically affords him greater standing than as a more fully “characterized” pauper in the eyes of well-to-do ratepayers. Eligibility for support is produced not out of moral character, but from his freedom from it. In this way, we might understand how Oliver’s intense typicality as a parish boy and his paradoxically disproportionate claim on our attention are joined. Oliver is one whose standard, minimal claim makes him an exceptional subject. Divesting Oliver of “character” imbues him with an asset of emptiness.

To see where this best plays out, we can turn to the novel’s most iconic scene, wherein Oliver’s typicality advantageously singles him out. Like Bumble’s paupers, Oliver famously asks for “more” in the porridge queue. Yet Bumble’s paupers’ requests for “more” appear bald and “brazen,” while Oliver’s appeal has remained in popular memory one of Victorian culture’s most sympathetic moments. Why do we spurn Bumble’s greedy paupers even as we indulge Oliver’s hunger? The workhouse it seems, turns his lack of character into a virtue. The scene is worth taking in whole:

The room in which the boys were fed, was a large stone hall, with a copper at one end: out of which the master, dressed in an apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled the gruel at meal-times. Of this festive composition each boy had one

porringer, and no more—except on occasions of great public rejoicing, when he had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides. The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, and with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers more assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. Boys have generally excellent appetites. Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months; at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, that one boy: who was tall for his age, and hadn't been use to that sort of thing, (for his father had kept a small cook's shop): hinted darkly to his companions, that unless he had another basin of gruel per diem, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next to him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye; and they implicitly believed him. A council was held; lots were cast who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel was served out; and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered each other, and winked at Oliver, while his next neighbours nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity:

“Please, sir, I want some more.” (12)

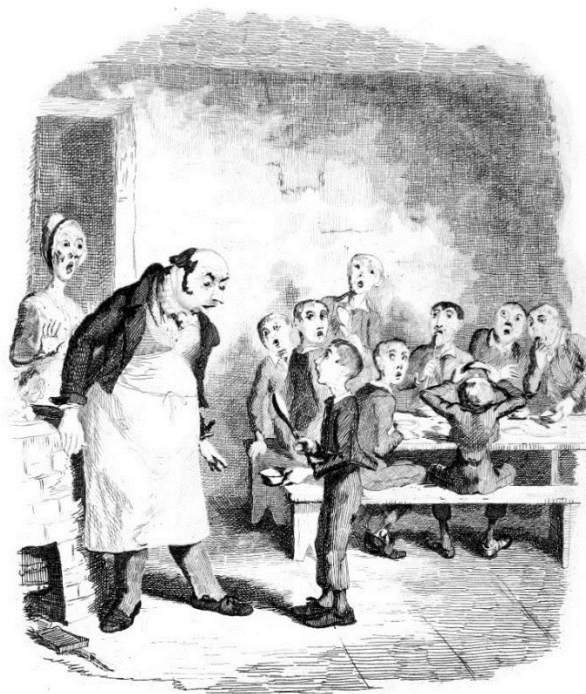


Figure 3. Cruikshank's engraving, from *Oliver Twist*, reprinted in Oxford World's Classics, 1966

In Cruikshank's famous depiction of this scene, Oliver stands in a pool of white light as the master glowers over him (figure 3). His trim, black feet center him squarely in the foreground, apart from the sitting boys, master, and assistant elsewhere in the frame. Yet as our eyes move from his feet to his head, we see that it is not only level with the heads of all the other parish boys but also identical—and difficult to distinguish from the rest. His slim figure disappears into the chorus of boys, whose wide eyes and gaping mouths match his.

The prose reflects the engraving's dynamic. Unlike the scene of outdoor relief which radically individuates each pauper, the workhouse scene positions Oliver as a member in, and then, a representative of the larger aggregate. This, we'll see, allows Dickens to depict his need as part of a collective shortcoming, rather than as a freestanding claim. We are asked, from the outset, to picture the limits of the parish's resources shared by the paupers. There is the space (the "room" or the "large stone hall") that contains the multitude of orphans, the "copper" that contains their doles, the bowls that contain each portion. These images of containment not only evoke the figure of the parish register—which carefully portions and itemizes entry space—but also mirror the reformed parish's economy: one which portions a finite supply ("one porringer" and "two ounces and a quarter" of bread, if lucky) across the multitude. The collective of "the boys" together Hoover their porridge, polish their bowls, stare longingly into the empty copper, and lick their fingers with equal relish. Oliver is neither differentiated from them nor referred to by name until midway through the paragraph. Their hunger is, importantly, normative and shared: "Oliver and his companions" collectively undergo "the tortures of slow starvation."

Like the Poor Law Commissioners, who promote a more objective vision of need, Dickens reframes our judgment towards Oliver's hunger by dissolving his need into an aggregated one. Oliver's request for "more" is framed not as a personal need, but the outcome of a shared, systemic deficit. Their shortfall becomes so acute that one boy, with a "wild, hungry eye," threatens to eat, in addition to his daily gruel, the poor boy sleeping beside him. Dickens turns the tension between two parishioners—one's dole absorbs another—into an extreme, literal act of cannibalization; now, one parishioner will simply eat another. This threat becomes shared among parish boys, who hold a "council" and nominate Oliver as their representative. Passive language evacuates Oliver's request of individual agency: "a council was held," "it fell" to Oliver to approach the master. Collective action ("the boys whispered," "his next neighbors nudged him") rather than individual choice prompts him to rise from the table. Dickens schematizes his action as proceeding from the pressures of the aggregate that literally abut him. As claimant for the master's—and our—attention, Oliver emerges not as one whose natural desire exceeds another's, but as a typification of that hunger. The parochial economy is responsible for systematically producing, distributing, and concentrating hunger into a single pauper. Oliver is less an individual qualitatively distinct from parish boys than he is an unfortunate receptacle for their collective overflow of hunger; his request is the means by which that shared deficit is expressed and realized.

The scene simultaneously singles Oliver out and renders him typical in the extreme. Qualities that critics have often taken as oppositional—Oliver's indistinctness and his elective standing—are here rendered deeply dependent on one another. Taken up as a set of compositional tactics, the protocols of reformed welfare allow us to see Oliver doubly as the victim of the parish's standardization and the singular expression of its failure. Moreover, this aggregation absolves Oliver of the pauper's moral charge. Oliver's place as the representative of the aggregated parishioners allows him to assume their hunger without having to personally claim it. Oliver appeals to us not on the basis of his moral character or intrinsic worth, but as a

casualty of the systemic shortage unfolding before us. His privileged standing amidst the other equally needy parish boys—we might say, his eligibility for our interest—appears not only just, but importantly, *in the open*.

In a system strained by multiple claimants, the best means of grabbing our attention is to *not* actively claim it; insofar as Oliver's itemization indicates his harmonious adherence to the reformed parish's moral economy, his reticence paradoxically proves a value. We see this elsewhere in the novel, where extreme neglect gets transformed into cause for attention. When Oliver is taken for questioning at the police department, the rowdy exchange between Fang and Brownlow effectively eclipses his presence; he occupies the absent center of debate between litigants and authorities, reappearing only when he faints spectacularly at the sight of the bamboo cane. And this appears across Dickens's later works: in scenes where Florence mutely suffers her father's harsh words—as if she were not there—in *Dombey and Son*; in Chadband's unceasing pontificating over the orphan Jo in *Bleak House*. In these instances, our compassion is prompted not by their heightened visibility in the scene, but rather their unusual effacement.

The mutual dependence between typicality and protagonism is borne out, too, in Oliver's physical presence. While the vivid description of a particular, suffering body is a hallmark of nineteenth-century literature from early slave narratives to naturalist fiction, Dickens rarely deploys this technique. Oliver has few if any distinguishing physical traits; in fact, he hardly has a body at all. Beyond one early line deeming him a "pale thin child," "diminutive in stature and decidedly small in circumference" (5), the novel's descriptions, like Oliver himself, are remarkably thin. In only three moments across the novel is Oliver described in physical terms. Mostly, he exists as a set of emotional states ("pale and terrified"), or passing desires ("hungry"). Dickens likes and repeatedly applies the epithet "little." Although Dickens lavishes whole paragraphs on minor characters and fills our vision with the "snub-nosed, flat-browed" Artful Dodger, or Mr. Crackit's "long corkscrew curls" of a "reddish dye," or yokes characters to memorable items of clothing, such as Mr. Brownlow to his white trousers and golden spectacles, he leaves Oliver to our imagination. We don't even know the color of his hair. Oliver's indistinctness is, in fact, his distinguishing feature. It's an irony not lost on Dickens, when Oliver stands before Grimwig:

"He is a nice-looking boy, is he not?" inquired Mr. Brownlow.

"I don't know," replied Mr. Grimwig, pettishly.

"Don't know?"

"No, I don't know. I never see any difference in boys. I only know two sorts of boys. Mealy boys, and beef-faced boys." (106)

Here, Oliver's unobtrusive appearance is turned into a capacity to signify a larger category—the "mealy boys." His generic insubstantiality is a peculiar innovation not lost on reviewers such as John Bayley, who observes the novel's triumph of making Oliver "free of all human possibility, free in spirit and impulse against all physical and factual likelihood" (86). Oliver exemplifies, for Thomas Lister of the *Edinburgh Review*, that quality of Dickens's characters as "not complete and finished delineations, but rather outlines, very clearly and sharply traced, which the reader may fill up for himself" (85).

"Rather outlines, very clearly and sharply traced": the compositional emptiness critics assign to Oliver returns us to the figure of the "item," for when we look at *Oliver Twist's* serial cover, we see both the finer lines of the engravings, out of which light and shadow and rough

figures emerge, and a larger compositional grid of three columns and five rows that contain them so neatly. Each scene occupies a small, rectangular patch of the page, and while they are all very different, they share a common scale, so that Sikes tumbling from the roof is the same size as Oliver and Rose at the top in a warm embrace (figure 5). Set alongside the earlier *Pickwick Papers* cover (figure 4), on which one figure hunts while another lazily fishes on an open country river, the contrast could not be clearer: *Oliver* is a compositional exercise in managing with greater precision and uniformity the space and characters it presents (figure 6). The organizing lines that run vertically and horizontally across the cover remind us uncannily of the pages of the parish register, which afford even squares to each subject (figure 5). And in the center, in the white space defined negatively by the squares that surround it, is written the name. “*Oliver Twist*” is simultaneously contained within the cover’s neat partitions—his name fills the blank, as it were—and threatens by its outward curving borders, to crowd others off the page. The cover, in other words, reenacts the compositional paradox of the register that echoes throughout the novel. It is where the novel and the parish’s forms of representation are inextricably bound.

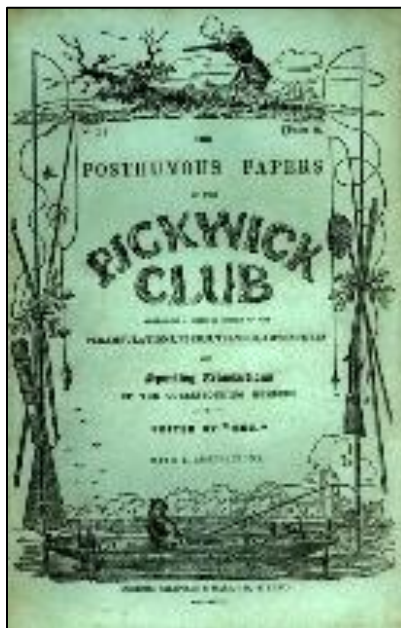


Figure 4. *Pickwick Papers*



Figure 5. *Oliver Twist*

Page 52.

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of *St. Mary*
in the County of *London* in the Year 1863

When Baptized	Child's Christian Name	Parents	Minister	Quota Paid, or other	Register to be kept in
1863 Nov 29 No. 400	John	John Carter	Freight	Steady	Labour Etc. Free
Nov 29 No. 401	Elizabeth	William Seward	Steady	Steady	Labour Etc. Free
Jan 10 No. 411	Lucy Ann	William Spittle	Steady	Steady	Labour Etc. Free
Jan 26 No. 412	George William	George Carter	Steady	Steady	Labour Etc. Free
March 6 No. 413	George John	John Carter	Steady	Steady	Labour Etc. Free
March 20 No. 414	George William	George Carter	Steady	Steady	Labour Etc. Free
March 10 No. 415	Mary Ann	William Spittle	Steady	Steady	Labour Etc. Free
April 26 No. 416	John Carter	John Carter	Steady	Steady	Labour Etc. Free

Figure 6. Parish register.

While Dickens disavows the Poor Law’s outcome and worst abuses, he acknowledges—and even capitalizes on—the shift in the moral economy surrounding it. The cover’s compositional coherence frames Oliver’s protagonistism as the outcome of set of aesthetic rules, an outcome both rational and self-evident. What the reformed parish offers the novel is the same: a rationalized, socialized horizon of aesthetic judgment and a balanced perspective, whose privileging of Oliver resides not in private attachment but in plain view. Dickens throws open the text as a case study in collective standards of welfare eligibility. If the old economy of parish welfare was too “parochial”—too tethered by subjective and narrowed moral vision—the novel deparochializes our relationship to Oliver, shifting the burden of sympathy off our moral judgment of him and onto the system at large. The novel, like the newly reformed parish, asks us to see not a willful pauper but a fated one: a child, as James Kay writes, “pauperized ‘not as a

consequence of their errors, but of their misfortunes” (Driver 96). Such a standard need not be privately owned by the reader as an emotion but can be publicly claimed as a self-evident form of justness.

The novel’s construction of a community standard explains not just the fact of Oliver’s appeal, but also its breadth. Though his earlier sketches circulated to moderate praise, and *The Pickwick Papers* spawned highly lucrative spinoffs, *Oliver Twist* brought Dickens acclaim that would even eclipse his recognized works. Reviewers note the heightened formalism of a “novel”: “romance, novel, history or narrative,” observes the *Quarterly Review*, it was “assuredly an invention *per se*” (Chittick 90). The novel’s ability to elicit not just moral feeling but moral *consensus* made *Oliver Twist* fated to replicate the same displacements of attention in the literary field it entered. *Oliver*, like its eponymous pauper, began to push others out of view. “His new story was now beginning largely to share attention with his *Pickwick Papers*,” relates Forster, “and it was delightful to see how real all its people became to him” (74). His editorship of *Bentley’s Miscellany* brought the London public his writing regularly, and, concedes the *Morning Chronicle*, *The Mudfog Papers* are “a capital piece of satire and ridicule...but what of that?—it is not ‘*Oliver Twist*’” (Chittick 86). For a city crowded—overcrowded—with new journals, stories, and sensational fiction, London was so taken by *Oliver* that they even proposed a trade: “What a pity,” continues the *Morning Chronicle*, “he could not afford us *Oliver* into the bargain. *The Rowland* for the *Oliver* is unexceptionable, and has made us laugh from the time we took it up to the time we laid it down, but *it is not Oliver*, and there is the end of the matter.” Dickens, as John Forster tells it, borrowed time and valuable attention from *Bentley’s Miscellany* to sustain *Oliver’s* success, so preoccupied: “I was thinking about *Oliver* til dinnertime yesterday” (90). He would describe himself “sitting patiently at home waiting for *Oliver Twist* who has not yet arrived” as a way of saying that “his fancy had fallen into sluggishness.” We might consider the dotting attention the pauper receives as *Oliver’s* final, ironic twist: that in seeking our charity, he takes more than his fair share.

Chapter Two

Practical Anglicanism and the Parish Novel

No sight was more familiar to the Victorians than the English parson—hunched over lecterns, intoning from pulpits, reclining in rectory corners with a glass of port. He could be found squinting over the pages of a newly composed sermon or inspecting the local grammar school. He could be found doling allowances to the poor or dining Sundays with the local squire. And ubiquitously, in the nineteenth century, he could be found in fiction. The parson made his rounds in sketches and poems, in pastoral colloquies, and especially novels.

Not only was the parson a figure central to the Victorian novel, but, as I argue in this dissertation, his pastoral labor would come to structure it. Tenure, the practice of residing and ministering within the small bounds of a parish, was an overlooked but increasingly important tenet of nineteenth century Anglicanism. The plot of parish tenure, beginning with the clergyman's arrival in a small country parish and ending with his leavetaking or death, echoes throughout the work of novelists from Elizabeth Gaskell to Margaret Oliphant, Anthony Trollope and George Eliot. The plot's unobtrusiveness belies its ubiquity, whether in Richard Hale's new appointment in *North and South*, the perpetual curacy of Frank Wentworth, or the final leavetaking of Septimus Harding in *The Warden*. This narrative of tenure is firmly embedded in Victorian culture—so firmly that even Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) begins not when the Brontë sister is born, but when her father Patrick arrives as the new minister for the rebellious Yorkshire parish of Haworth. While we might look to any number of canonical novelists for the plot, its origins and most condensed form lie in a minor, mid-century genre that I call the parish novel. Each novel follows the parson, cozily ensconced in a generous living, as he makes his routine parish rounds; each takes the parameters of his tenure—its duration and its modest ambit—as the novel's own.

These novels thus not only represented tenure, but turned it into a literary protocol, replicating the parson's embodied presence and soliciting the sustained, willful attention he demanded. This chapter explores how parish residence came to be so important to Anglicans and why the novel took up the parson's work. England of the nineteenth century began to consider its clergy not so much as active regulators of religious and moral standards as a focal point for a set of devotional energies, emotions, and attentions; religion transformed from an abstract belief to a sustained moral work. Nineteenth century writers increasingly conceived of Anglicanism as a formal activity rather a set of beliefs—a sustained, willful, and habitual attention—whose goals aligned closely with the labor of reading. Novelists likewise reconfigured reading as a form of pastoral work—a close, laborious, yet seemingly unproductive attention to everyday life—that suffused earthly life with latent meaning, and rendered such meaning a function of pastoral residence: neither immediately legible through outward reference nor as the extrinsic dispensation of providence, but rather as willfully, if uncertainly, generated by dwelling within the bounds of the text. In the parish novel, I suggest one intersection of hermeneutic and devotional interests that allow us to rethink sacred and secular temporal experience as one.

These novels, like their parsons, dwelled. They stretched their readers' attentions over the course of the novel, engrossing them in pedestrian matters of everyday life. That they did little more resulted in their obsolescence in the archive of literature, as major novelists such as George Eliot and Anthony Trollope sought to define their literary projects against this genre. In this sequence of chapters, I attempt not only to explain the growth of this genre alongside changes in lay literature and thought, but also to propose reasons for its obsolescence in the archive of

literature. This chapter traces the changes in lay literature that prompted the growth and spread of the parish novel; chapters two and three show how George Eliot and Anthony Trollope draw on the parish novel in their early work, but ultimately defined their own novels against it.

This genre, with its eye on the faithful ground before it, embarrasses a Britain that, as many have argued, looked increasingly forward and outward during this period: towards a national politics and the antipodes of empire. The close perspective it cultivates is as much a faultline in Victorian consciousness as it is a defining feature. So finally, I suggest that the forms of attention this literature demanded can be traced back to the parish itself: in the nineteenth century, the novel discovered its parochialism.



“The typical Englishman regards religion as something intensely practical,” writes Bishop Ward, “It is a life to be lived in the world” (Bowen 374). Such a view is typical to the nineteenth century, in which Anglicanism emerged, in Paul Avis’s words, as “a practical, not a speculative order, one attuned to pastoral care, rather than to maintaining a hierarchical and authoritarian structure of doctrine and discipline” (37). “Anglican theology,” Michael Ramsey adds in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, “is a method, a use and a direction” (Avis 37). Anglicanism long had a vexed identity as a religion constituted by its national, earthly community, but what coalesced in the nineteenth century was a new, invigorated focus on religion’s method and matter: in Martin Jay’s words, the “details of quotidian existence in the family or pious community rather than on the fidelity to doctrinal teachings or the rituals of the church” (21). It is hard to know what sharpened Anglicanism’s practical sensibility, though we might speculate: Tractarian revivals and the work of John Henry Newman, John Keble, and James Anthony Froude, percolated out from the universities in the 1840s and renewed the establishment’s focus on preaching and parish work; government efforts to combat absenteeism and to fund livings via the Queen Anne’s Bounty through the 1820s and 30s made visible England’s shortage of resident parsons; Britain’s lively sectarian culture, animated by roving Methodists and rational Unitarians, led a crop of writers to shore up Anglican identity against dissent. By framing Anglicanism as an institution of social praxis, a church in Charles Marriott’s words of “true living character” rather than “cut and dried dogmas,” writers conveniently distinguished it from Catholicism, with which it shared sacraments, doctrine, and a sense of episcopacy (Bowen 287).

A religious culture defined by its praxis also sees the management and governance of earthly life as worthwhile. Where Anglicanism’s new humanist and practical sensibility found its anchor—where, indeed, it was embodied—was the figure of the parson. Unlike the deans, bishops, and archdeacons higher up in the church, the parson (otherwise vicar, rector, incumbent, and occasionally, curate) held a single parish. His work of residing there and ministering to its inhabitants took on new significance as the site where spiritual practice met lived experience. Alongside the traditional notion of the parson as the representative of God and Church—a notion of him as a somewhat static model for religious conduct—emerged the idea of the parson as a formal agent whose constant presence within the parish provided the grounds for faith’s active exercise. Writers such as Coleridge invested the parson with new importance as one who could simply be “with his parishioners and among them,” as “a neighbor and a family man” or in John Wood Warter’s formulation, one “who goes faithfully in and out among his people” (Coleridge *Constitution* 49; Warter 242). In the parson’s presence, as this chapter will show, religion was no

longer exclusive of, but rather held within, the horizons of everyday life. And tenure, the act of dwelling within the parish, was the primary conduit through which religion would work.

Pastoral labor correspondingly shed its haloed reputation, becoming a manageable practice, something concrete and custodial—akin to housekeeping. When we look at the archive of lay literature that correspondingly flourished with practical Anglicanism, we see a turn from doctrine towards matters of everyday life. Parson handbooks such as E. Munro's *Parochial Work* (1850) and Edward Spooner's *Parson and People* (1865) attempted to standardize the smallest details of Anglican work. Cyril Pocknee's *Parson's Handbook* (1899) prescribes everything from the purchasing of curtains and chancel furniture, to the choice of flowers for the altar—liberally allowing blossoms other than white ones to be displayed on Easter Sunday. Parish histories, which numbered in the dozens during the eighteenth century, were written by the hundreds during the nineteenth century, as clergymen documented the placement of yew trees in churchyards and their annual perambulations of the parish bounds, where little boys would be tossed into streams to better remember them. So popular were parish histories that they spawned handbooks for writing them like Cox's *How to Write the History of a Parish* (1879). Writers made religion into earthly matter, and the parson's life into literature.

And vividly: readers hungered for the matter of their parsons' breakfasts, troubles, and noonday habits. We find a vast appetite for the decor of vicars' living rooms and their Sunday conversations with churchgoers in short stories like Henrietta Louisa Lear's *Tales of a London Parish* (1851), poetry like *Our Parish, and other poems* (1856), colloquies like F.E. Paget's *The Parish and the Priest* (1858), and clergymen memoirs such as *A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith* (1858). Clergymen acquired particularities, quirks, circumstances, and interior lives—what we might call hallmarks of character. Consider the difference, for example, between Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and George Eliot's Farebrother from *Middlemarch* (1872). In the first, the vicar is a moral exemplar and spiritual figurehead; in the second, he is an endearing, minor character with two spinster sisters and a weakness for cards. As William McKelvy suggests in so many words, “the ideal parish priest became a professional version of the genteel Protestant father, a virile figure capable of presiding over a festal board and retiring to a drawing room where his daughters would display accomplishments on the piano.” A welter of pastoral literature in the mid-nineteenth century pictured the parson making his rounds, marrying parishioners, rebuilding churches, and otherwise engrossed in the daily parish work—less a spiritual figure than an individual embedded within the fabric of earthly society.

What emerged in the nineteenth century is different from what we see in the eighteenth. Whereas the nineteenth century literature offers us, as Charlotte Brontë might say, “an abundant shower of curates,” eighteenth century novels tend either to abstract the parson's work and render it irrelevant, or to confine its clerical characters to minor plots and subordinate positions (*Shirley* 1). Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), for example, empties his clergyman protagonist of professional particularity. Beyond mentions of a few sermons and a brief meditation on the advantages of religion over philosophy, little attention is given to formalized religion; the novel transpires within a broader frame of faith and providence. Clergymen more frequently occupy minor roles as advisors, moral commentators, and counter-figures for the protagonist's wanderings. While heroes rove, clergymen dwell. In Richard Graves's *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773), a minor dispute with the local vicar Powell (over whether a door ought to be taxed as a window) sends the Geoffrey Wildgoose rambling across England in an extended flirtation with Methodism. Wildgoose's travels ultimately bring him back home where he once again “heartily concurs with Mr Powell, both by his example and persuasion, to countenance

industry and sobriety in the parish” (273). If Graves’s novel associates the roving energy of the picaresque with the figure of the Methodist preacher, as Misty Anderson has suggested in *Imagining Methodism*, then the status quo is epitomized by the Anglican parson, who has been there all along. If Methodism is the engine of Graves’s plot, then Anglicanism, we might say, is its beginning and its end: resolution returns us to residence in the parish. In eighteenth century novels, the parson’s structural position as a minor character is linked to his capacity to signify constancy, deferral, and the state of doing little.

Earlier novelists—like those later in the nineteenth century—struggled to conceptualize pastoral labor as economically productive and narratively fungible. These two qualities are especially intertwined in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, where both the marital and monetary fortunes of the youngest Bertram, Edmund, depend on his avowed future in the church. His clerical aspirations impede his financial progress; he must wait for the Mansfield living to be vacated by Dr Grant, a “hearty man of forty-five” whom Mrs. Norris nonetheless hopes will “soon pop off” (22). That Edmund’s marriage plot is an exercise in waiting makes him an inconvenient suitor, and Austen gives voice to such anxieties through his potential lover Miss Crawford. “For what is to be done in the church?” she whines, “Men love to distinguish themselves, and in either of the other lines, distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing” (77). The clergyman’s unobtrusiveness and the difficulty of measuring his work troubles her traditional notions of a marriageable hero. Unlike the “soldier and sailor” who seek “heroism, and noise, and fashion,” the humble parson is not of much “influence and importance in society” (78). In fact, “one scarcely sees a clergyman out of his pulpit” (78). Like minor characters who haunt the margins of the novel, clergymen are “so seldom seen themselves” and, even then, have difficulty commanding characters’ attention. “I am not always so attentive,” Henry Crawford concedes, “as I ought to be,” to all of liturgy’s “redundancies and repetitions” (281). In *Mansfield Park*, pastoral labor is not just associated with narrative subordination, but also with the delay of marital satisfaction. “Your cousin Edmund moves slowly,” writes Miss Crawford in a letter to Fanny, “detained, perchance, by parish duties” (327).

Representations such as Austen’s, Graves’s, and Goldsmith’s anticipate the work of later nineteenth-century novelists in confronting the difficulty of narrating pastoral labor. While earlier novelists abstracted the clergyman’s work or subordinated it to dominant narratives such as the picaresque, the marriage plot, nineteenth-century writers turned the everyday stuff of pastoral labor into fiction. One work we might see as a transition between the two is John Galt’s *Annals of the Parish* (1821). Galt follows in the vein of earlier novelists in using the perspective of a parson and his parish to tell a broader tale—in this case of political economy and empire. Comprised of anecdotes told through the eyes of the Scottish Reverend Balwhidder, the novel links each episode to historical developments. The bringing of exotic goods such as the “cocker nut” (coconut) and a parrot tracks the flux of empire; the military garb of the local lady’s son tells the tale of the ongoing American war; the razing and rebuilding of a local mill are the convulsions of industrialization. Yet Galt’s *Annals* also introduces the notion that the parish might be itself a contained world. The novel begins on Reverend Balwhidder’s advent to Dalmailing parish—a year he is keen to note coincides with King George’s ascension to the throne—and does not leave the parish bounds for its duration. Although *Annals* offers the possibility of a fully parochial tale, the parish novel makes tenure more explicitly a preoccupation and turns the attenuated eventfulness of residence *into* narrative, as I will describe, to varying degrees of success.

Pastoral labor, following Anglicanism's practical turn, commanded a new interest by the mid-nineteenth century. Where the parson's labor took its most vivid, condensed, and palpable form was the novel. Between 1850 and 1870, we find a flowering of narratives centered on the parson's tenure. Works such as F.W. Shelton's *The Rector of St Bardolph's* (1853), George MacDonald's *The Seaboard Parish* (1868), Clara Thompson's *The Rectory of Moreland* (1860), John Kendale's *The Vicar of Lyssel* (1860), John Wood Warter's *Seaboard and Down; or, My Parish in the South* (1860), *The Curate of Sadbrooke* (1865, anon.), M.A. Paull's *My Parish and What Happened in It* (1872), and Margaret Oliphant's *Salem Chapel* (1863) and *The Perpetual Curate* (1864) share a basic plot: they universally beginning with the arrival of a newly minted parson of Oxbridge persuasion in a small parish, and end with his departure, whether by leavetaking or by death. Their pages, in other words, span tenures. Reading and temporal experience, in both secular and sacred senses of the word, are here aligned. Thus these novels might not just be considered representations of parish life, but themselves vehicles for a distinct devotional work; how they were written, and how they were asked to be read, tell us something about reading and religion's shared ends, about how Victorians turned pastoral labor from a model of spiritual exemplarity into one of exercise. A theory of reading, and a theory of religious praxis.



The parish novel seeks to replicate two features of the parson's tenure: the period of his residence and his presence. Parsons dwell, and so do parish novels. They evince a fascination with the parson's posture, the rustle of his cassock, the timbre of his voice. The "novelty" and "restrained" power of Oliphant's *Perpetual Curate* compels "intense interest by all the eyes and ears of the congregation" (194–195). Ditchfield's *Parish Clerk* appeases a profounder appetite for the humanizing minutiae of church, describing closely the turn of a hand over a lectern, the quaver of a voice mid-sermon, or the parson's stumble over the chancel step. Parishioners are universally transfixed by Sunday details: how the clerk and curate stand "together in the little vestry, going through all the usual preliminaries," the movement of a dog whipper up and down the aisles, or the suggestive gazes emanating towards the marriageable curate from "under a close bonnet" (Oliphant *Perpetual* 197; Trollope *Thorne* 424). Oliphant's poor, handsome Wentworth, "instead of merely being the Curate of St. Roque's, had become a most captivating enigma, and had made church-going itself half as good as play" (199).

Little is often remarkable in the parson himself; still less, in the content of his sermon. What these novels sought to reproduce instead was the immediacy of his presence. One hallmark of this genre is their thick description of church life, and more particularly, of the parson. While a preoccupation with everyday details is, for the novel, business as usual, in *these* novels, presence is rendered as an important function of pastoral residence. Their miniaturizing perspective allow us to experience his carriage and voice in ways highly specific. The parson's embodied existence was a cornerstone of Anglican thought, which invested his body with a human and godly authority—godly, in fact, because human. The echo between the parson's name and spiritual function is semantically preserved in William Blackstone's legal commentaries; as a "persona ecclesiae," the parson provides the embodied scaffolding for the "invisible body" of church; he "personates" (Blackstone 11:v). "Whenever we behold a parson of the establishment, we shall always think of the Holy Ghost with which he is impregnated" (Wade 28). A parson's work resides not solely in the delivery of doctrine but in the feeling of God that

his presence enables: “the parish clergyman,” writes Anthony Trollope in *Clergymen of the Church of England*, “is designated as the palpable and visible personage of the church of his parish, making by his presence an intelligible reality which, without him would be but an invisible idea” (54). Trollope’s sketch of “the parson of the parish” with his “unquestioned ease over a ruddy fire,” “whiff of old crusted port,” and requisite “mild opposition to the bishop” offers an technical and imaginative specificity, one that plays to a culture of religious investment that has been, from the outset, remarkably concrete (65).

“Nothing that is anonymous will preach,” insists John Henry Newman, “nothing that is dead and gone” (Newman *Idea* 246). For Newman and other Anglican thinkers, the particularity of one’s parish parson—his humanity and his quirks—imbues him with inestimable value. The affective ties he develops over his everyday intercourse with parishioners animate his sermons such that “they hang upon his lips as they cannot hang upon the pages of his book” (Newman *Idea* 246). These novels allow us to inhabit a relation to him grounded in the parish’s distinct purchase on *this* parson, among the other members of the class of clergymen; his particularity grounds his authority. As Brenda Collum notes, “a village usually had a pretty clear idea of the value of its minister” even if its bishop did not (33); the relationship between parson and parish was anchored in their sustained encounters. It is not, therefore, simply the niceties of liturgy that the parish novel hopes to capture, but rather the proximity that the detail indexes and the pastoral presence enabling it. Their plenitude of detail is a function of their perceptive scale. They both dramatize close acts of attention and solicit them from us. Acts of beholding—and the vicissitudes of distraction—are foregrounded in F.W. Shelton’s depiction of Sunday service as a place “the fashions were to be shown forth, the sight gratified, and the ear tickled” (16). Solemn, liturgical niceties coexist with smaller dramas: how a parishioner’s voice cracks and “she is requested not to sing in the choir,” or how “an enterprising grocer, being clerk of the parish,” callously uses the register pages for “wrapping up his grocery commodities,” or how Joseph Hewlett’s *Parish Clerk* catches a parishioner “cracking a nut or a joke” and delivers him a cut “loud enough to wake all the congregation”—but all are united by the diminutive scale of the parson’s ambit (Dyer 2; Hewlett 28).

As Austen writes in *Mansfield Park*, “a parish has wants and claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly resident,” and the value of his presence was for Anglicans a truth universally acknowledged (256). While the parson’s body was commonplace in the parish novel and beyond, it couldn’t be taken for granted by many parishes in the nineteenth century, who were often lacking one. Absenteeism and pluralism (the holding of multiple livings by a single clergyman) were pervasive and England struggled to place a parson in each parish. The problem was well documented in reports from the Residence Act of 1803 and in John Wade’s *Black Book*. Diocesan returns from 1829 “showed less than 42% of Anglican incumbents lived in their parishes” while the 1851 census revealed 1,000 clergy (over half) as non-beneficed.¹ Brenda Collum describes a parson living equidistant from churches in three parishes, conducting morning, noon, and evening services at different ones every Sunday. Though such initiatives as the Queen Anne’s Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commission, and Church Pastoral Aid Society—of which Patrick Brontë was the first beneficiary—sought to fund underpaid curacies, by 1872, as Keith Snell observes, only 40 percent of all parishes had clergy resident (84–90). It was not, then, for sermonic or doctrinal material that readers of the nineteenth century hungered, but rather for the medium of its delivery. Sermons circulated amply in print and flooded the literary marketplace. Robert Ellison and Desmond Bowen note that “sermon-tasting,” the reading of

¹ On diocesan returns, see Colloms, *Victorian Country Parsons*, 18. On the census, see Snell, *Rival Jerusalems*, 84.

anthologized sermons by famous preachers, became common practice around the Victorian hearth; popular preachers, notes one Victorian, “appear again through the press almost before they have left the pulpit” (Ellison 46).

The parish novel, by contrast, supplies the intimacy of lived religion then increasingly evanescent. The parson had the crucial function of guiding and enabling his parishioners’ devotional attention. Writers across the nineteenth century underscored the practical, time-bound aspects of Anglican liturgy and often likened the forms of habitual, sustained attention it demanded with that of reading. For Newman, the parson plays a hermeneutic role for his flock, as an “expounder and dispenser” of scripture rather than as a spiritual figurehead. Because the Bible “does not intrude itself on the notice of men” the “Church in its Ministers forces religion on the attention of the world, it seeks, it speaks, it exhorts, detects, explains, comforts” (Newman “Parish Priest” 5). Pocknee’s *Parson’s Handbook* echoes this function in the parson’s physical direction of the congregation during service. The parson elicits certain postures from the congregation—“taught to stand at the Eucharist” and “at the Collect,” at the saying of *Gloria in excelsis*; then, kneeling at the liturgy—as a way of guiding their attention with “almost mechanical repetition and uniformity” (43). The parish novel’s descriptive thickness, the ways it invites and guides its readers’ small gestures of attention, functions as a proxy for the parson’s heuristic.

The parish novel sought to replicate the immediacy of the parson’s presence, but this genre also sought to reproduce tenure’s temporal experience. For many Britons, the parson’s tenure was most compellingly felt as a span of time: as a period of residence and sustained ministration in a single parish across years and decades. This notion is at the heart of Anglican labor, so much so that a Norfolk parson, for instance, delights at being granted residence in his birthplace: “I was born at Edgefield on December 20th, 1850, in the same room in which I now sleep, and in which I expect to die. A record, surely!” (Lee 41). “The effect of ministerial labour is often imperceptible in the parish as on individuals,” writes Paget, “for a long time” (55). In Paget’s colloquy, the parson is the military “tactician, with a long sight,” or the patient doctor: “as certain medicines have a tendency to accumulate in the human system, apparently inert, and then, after a while, begin to exert some tremendous influence on the patient, so in the parochial system, a long course of medical applications which has appeared to be powerless, may suddenly show itself, as having been really adapted to produce the effect desired” (57–59).

Parish novels take the period of residence as a structuring principle, aligning a pastoral sensation of time with their own. Their pages span exactly the tenure of a young parson, from his advent to his departure or death. Such a temporal orientation is clear in their titles, which point more fully to a span of time, rather than the labor performed in it: Wray’s *Four Years of Pastoral Work*, or Tweddell’s *Fourteen Years in a London Parish*. Time is foregrounded in the seasonal matter of parish life, which counts out the weeks and months of a parson’s service. Routines such as spring fairs, Sunday schools, rogation days, and evening services not only fill their pages—at best, Eliot wryly observes, “the Sunday morning service was the most exciting event of the week”—but also functions as indicators of the years and seasons that pass under a parson’s care (*Scenes* 175). The novel shares a preoccupation with marking time with the archive of lay Anglican literature: clergymen diaries highlight the diurnal cycles of visiting and sermonizing, parish histories revolve around the passing tenures of each clergyman and his earthly life, and liturgical time—the passing of Advent, Christmas, and Lent—is situated within seasonal, ordinary time as the parish becomes more prominent as an agricultural and seasonal unit, as E.P. Thompson describes in *Customs in Common*.

Where the parish novel diverges from pastoral literature, however, is in how it makes time felt. The time of reading becomes, above all, palpable in what the novel does *not* do narratively; its relative uneventfulness demands a peculiarly laborious form of attention. Parish novels do not do much. They offer small, often disconnected episodes of the sort that occupy a parson's time: clergymen face "petty trickery" and gossiping congregants (or, in Shelton's chapters, "a little trouble in the Church choir"); the good Reverend Chalmers struggles with some cows: "he was unable to make satisfactory progress with his sermon one whole forenoon, because some tricky and overreaching farmer in his neighborhood drove two calves into the field of his glebe" (Boyd *Recreations* 89). Oliphant's Carlingford parish "has no particular interest" (*Perpetual* 1). The genre's formal principle is enacted in miniature in Boyd's *Recreations of a Country Parson*, which skips from incident to incident:

Anyone sick in the parish? How was church attended on the Sundays you were away? How is Jenny, who had the fever; and John, who had the paralytic stroke? How are the servants? How is the horse; the cow; the pig; the dog? How is the garden progressing? How about fruit? How about flowers? There was an awful thunderstorm on Wednesday; the people thought it was the end of the world. Two bullocks were killed; and thirteen sheep. Widow Wiggins' son had deserted the army and had come home. The harvest-home at such a farm is tonight: may Thomas go? What a quiet little world is the country parish: what a microcosm even the country parsonage! (9)

The plot of tenure is, in short, not much of one. The lack of dramatic interest that defines this genre makes the period of reading felt *as a period*: time to be marked and filled from the novel's beginning to its end, from the parson's advent to his departure. Parish novelists are not unaware of this; they often associate the labor of attention in the absence of an organizing drama with the vigilance and workfulness that pastoral labor demands. In *Parish and the Priest*, Fisherford parish contains "no controversies and party-strifes; no squabbles about gown or surplice; no Church-rate contests; no fat farmer making himself a lay pope; no church in ruins" (2). The poor Rector of St Asaph's suffers for weeks "under a cloud from the tittle-tattle of his tittle-tattling little parish," while Spooner's parson seeks refuge from his "perpetual stream" of annoyances (Shelton *Rector* 222; Spooner *Parson* 46). Yet "you are interested in all these little matters," reminds Boyd's parson narrator, "not because you have grown a gossiping, little-minded man, but because you know it is fit and right and good for you to be interested in such things" (9). The novel's engrossment in the granular experience of parish work is not a sign of aesthetic neglect so much as a formal attempt to give pastoral labor its full, temporal weight. As Robert Evans suggests in the preface to *The Rectory of Valehead*, his "multitude of minute and irregular incidents" "make their impression rather by their accumulation and unceasing action, than by their importance" (iii). What the plot of tenure allowed readers to experience that explicitly spiritual literature did not was the sustained, sometimes uncertain effort of pastoral application: its lulls and prosaic doings, its dead ends and tedium.

The parish novel not only represents pastoral labor, but takes it as a narrative function, converting the fugitive logic of plot into the felt experience of form. These novels depart from other religious genres in that they neither explicitly link earthly and spiritual action, nor do they yield providential gratification. They tap into an Anglican preoccupation with time, a phenomenon documented by scholars such as Krysta Lysack, Joshua King, and Deidre Lynch. These scholars have suggested that Anglican literature aims to guide readers' habits: in the

devotional rhythms of Christina Rossetti's poetry; in the *The Christian Year*'s desire to "align private reading with the ecclesiastical calendar and Prayer Book" (King 147); in the synchrony of "pages and pendulums" in John Clare's ritual of "reading *The Vicar of Wakefield* through every winter" (Lynch 154). However, unlike the literature Lysack and others describe, whose forms of time are isomorphic with the sort they ask readers to occupy, syncing readers and liturgical calendars, the parish novel aims to produce a response against, rather than a harmony with, the text's formal procedures. In this sense, the genre hews closer to the ethics of labored, religious habit that ground Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*—which conceptualizes the value of habitual, daily attention in the form of an "aphorism every morning for their occasional meditation"—or John Sheppard's *The Suppliant*, which withholds a receptivity to the divine until "you have willfully taken it up yourself" (Coleridge *Aids* 152; Sheppard 64). In order "to exercise a vivid, apprehensive faith," Sheppard recommends "a rigorous reservation of a certain and fixed period, in each day, for religious exercises" such as Fénelon's "little intervals," "to maintain in your heart a habit of religion" (93, 200). "How practicable and important it is," he writes, "to habituate ourselves to interpose mental devotion" (265).

It is not difficult to see how the work of attention that the parish novel solicits from its readers is bound up with the work of devotion. Parish novels transformed the parson from a spiritual exemplary to a conduit for the exercise of sustained, incremental attention. If church increasingly became a site where the anxieties of distraction were entertained, as in Shelton's lament that "the House of God was not a place where prayers were to be said" but rather "where the fashions were to be shown forth," then the parish novel positions itself as a site where habits of attention can be better cultivated (13). But it is not without difficulty: parish novelists acknowledge this as they explicitly contrast teleological forms of heroism and romance with their own work. Boyd's parson, "writing amid daily work and worry, of daily work and worry, and of the little things by which daily work and worry are intensified and relieved" is not "the writer of fiction" who is the "absolute monarch" "rapt away into heroic times and distant scenes, and into romantic tracts of feeling" (418). In Shelton's novel, the "mutual relations which spring up between a pastor and his people" entail "an unartistic form" of various incidents "in the rambling order in which they have occurred" (335). Rather than follow a foreordained narrative or structural law, these novelists consciously capture the labor and effort of sustained attention by transforming it into the reader's. They coax an affective response from a narrative lack.

In an age when the parson's residence in the parish could no longer be taken for granted, the parish novel reproduces the experience of pastoral tenure—via its close description, pastoral presence; via its attenuation, his residence—but it is in its heuristic that we see best how Anglicans conceived of the continuity between sacred and secular life. It rendered both reading and pastoral devotion a function of time. I will sidestep here contemporary redefinitions of secularity to say simply that before Charles Taylor's work, Anglicans understood everyday life as the foundation of spiritual existence, rather than its antagonist; and the subject's sustained application to earthly trials close at hand, a form of devotional exercise. The aesthetic response undergirding this genre makes clear that the novel's everyday matter was also the stuff of temporal experience, and at times, the ontological cases for religious praxis and the novel itself overlap. In Oliphant's *Perpetual Curate*, for example, the Anglican clergyman Frank Wentworth pleads with his brother, the Catholic Gerald not to leave the Church of England. Gerald loves the purity of doctrine and certainty of belief that Catholicism avails: "My dear Frank, I want a Church which is not a human institution" (110–111). But Frank launches a convincing counterargument: in pursuit of "a perfect Church, a symmetrical system of doctrine," he argues, "you lose the use of

your existence!” Frank’s argument for Anglicanism is equally an argument for the experience of Oliphant’s novel. A perfect doctrine obviates the need for a life lived through it. It obviates the doubt, the priestly hassle, the troublesome parishioners—and the novel that exists to describe it.

We no longer read parish novels as a genre, whether because we’ve lost sight of its organizing principles, or whether, because it eludes certain rubrics that contemporary novel criticism favors (action, romance, recit) we have assimilated it into other descriptive genres such as the sketch or travelogue. But the parish novel and the plot of tenure registers in authors and publishers’ account of the marketplace, and in the work of more recognized writers. Trollope, for example, sought to satisfy his publisher’s taste for “an English Tale, on English life, with a clerical flavor” with a “morsel” of “a biography of an English clergyman” (*Autobiography* 112). His *Chronicles of Barssetshire* enact permutations of the tenure plot. *The Warden* opens on the tenure of Septimus Harding and ends with his leave-taking, while the advent of another parson, Arabin, inaugurates a tenure subplot. *The Last Chronicle* concludes with two tenures ending: Crawley’s resignation of his post and the death of the much loved Harding. Were we to cast a wider literary view, we might see that what replaced the parish novel was, for instance, the genre of parson detective fiction—G.K. Chesterton’s Father Brown series, C.C. Benison’s *Father Christmas*, or James Runcie’s *Grantchester* mysteries—which restores the novel’s teleological drive by turning the parson’s social know-how towards sleuthing.

Above all, perhaps, major novelists were keen to distinguish their own work against the parish novel, with its cloistered perspective and leisurely approach to plot, for if the genre’s intended response was religious edification, then the response it often received was varieties of boredom. Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* opens on three curates from three adjacent parishes at dinner, debating “not on politics, nor on philosophy, nor on literature—these topics were now, as ever, totally without interest for them—not even on theology, practical or doctrinal, but on minute points of ecclesiastical discipline, frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all save themselves” (8). Brontë punctures the tranquility of their repast with the entrance of Mr. Helstone, who bears more urgent news about dissent and machine-breaking and reprimands the three leisurely curates for their frivolity—implicitly distinguishing her novel, with its interests in industrial reform, from the more quotidian parish genre. Even George Eliot points to the novel’s capacity to bore. The mismatch between an accelerated readerly drive and pastoral time is evident, for instance, in the impatient Mrs Linnet of “Janet’s Repentance,” who takes up “the biography of a celebrated preacher” but confines “her perusal to the purely secular portions” in order to “make rapid progress through a large number of volumes.” “Wherever there was a predominance of Zion, the River of Life, and notes of exclamation,” writes Eliot, “she turned over to the next page; but any passage in which she saw such promising nouns such as ‘small-pox,’ ‘pony,’ or ‘boots and shoes’ at once arrested her” (*Scenes* 187). Linnet’s error is twofold: not only does she mistakenly parse the spiritual from the “secular,” but she also eliminates the novel’s temporal work for the sake of “rapid progress.”

Though contemporaries such as George Eliot and Anthony Trollope rejected the aesthetic parameters of the parish novel and sought to define their own fiction against it, their work nonetheless bears traces of it and registers the parson’s value. Eliot’s peculiarly loveable parsons index not a broader, atmospheric humanism, but rather a more precise sense of the affection that accrues over pastoral tenure—the notion that time itself endears. Trollope’s permutations of the tenure plot throughout the *Barchester Chronicles* reflect the parson’s increasing distance from liberal modernity, and brings the term “parochial” closer to its contemporary meanings—as one of nearsighted inconsequence.

A close, sustained, if seemingly “unproductive” attention formed the grounds for Anglican practice in the nineteenth century. But its pastoral and ecclesiastical meanings would ultimately fall away, as this form of attention and its byword, “parochialism,” shifted in meaning over the course of the nineteenth century. As the next two chapters will suggest, the semantic trajectory of parochialism and its sensibility did not transpire independently, but came about alongside developments in literary history. Writers began to associate the parish not with its ecclesiastical duty, but with the scale and importance of life it occupies, carrying the term closer to its modern profile. We see this especially in Trollope’s fiction, where the term opens up from its ecclesiastical meanings in his earlier works—“parochial duty,” “parochial clergy” in *Barchester Towers* (1857)—towards a more generalized sense of diminution and inconsequence in later ones: “a little parochial nothing,” “a parochial quarrel,” “parochial quiescence” in *The Vicar of Bullhampton* (1870); a sire’s “parochial solitude” in *Doctor Wortle’s School* (1881).

By the 1870s, “parochialism” commanded a newer, reinvigorated life as a term of insult. It was, as Joshua Toulmin-Smith puts it, a widely shared tendency of British politicians to “sneer at Parish Vestries and to hold what they are pleased to call ‘parish squabbles’ as beneath them” (3). “Parochialism” is rife in Victorian vocabulary as a habit of mind in critiques of Toryism (“the conservative mind is intensely parochial”), of Gladstone (“the Prince of Parochialists”), and radicals alike (“the petty parochialism which the modern school of Radicals seems bent on introducing”) (“London Parochialism,” “Parochialism or Imperialism,” “The Petty Parochialism”). An editorial in Thackeray’s *Cornhill Magazine* celebrates the habits of “The Parochial Mind,” while another in *The National Review* caricatures the “narrow-minded” and “Vulgar Parochialist.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the term’s first, figurative usage to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1856 *English Traits*; the newness of its coinage is reflected in *The Morning Post*’s observance of “the petty parochialism—if, indeed, it be not libel upon our parishes to use the term in such a connection” (“The Petty Parochialism”).

To write a literary history of the parish novel is to suggest how the parish, with its quaint churches, officious rectors, and intimate if institutional ties, furnished the novel with one model of temporal experience. But it is also to show how a perspective transcends its modest ecclesiastical origins to become a broader cultural sensibility and habit of mind. If a common, but frequently overlooked charge is that the Victorian novel is parochial, that, in Virginia Woolf’s words, “all those good novels” are “without more experience of life than could enter the house of a respectable clergyman,” then this chapter suggests the novel’s surprising, unacknowledged debt to such respectable clergymen (52).

Chapter Three

Anthony Trollope and the Rise of Parochialism

Anthony Trollope's *Barsetshire Chronicles* famously dwell—too closely and too long—on matters of clerical life. Engrossed, as Henry James would put it, in “the manners and feelings that prevail in a cathedral town,” the gossip of “between a bishop and a bishop's lady” in the “episcopal bedroom” and the controversies of Sunday service, Trollope unfurls an ecclesiastical expertise “without haste” and “without rest” that is “too small a measure of his knowledge of life” (390). If Trollope's inexhaustible affection for the minutiae of lived religion strikes us as parochial, and reminds us of the parish novel, then so does his novels' narrative attenuation. “The finish, such as it is, comes later, from the slow, gradual, sometimes heavy accumulation of small incidents,” Henry James writes, “These incidents are sometimes of the smallest; Trollope turns them out inexhaustibly, repeats them freely, unfolds them without haste and without rest” (387). There is the lurking sense that, despite the length and temporal breadth of the series, very little happens. “There isn't anything of the plot in the narrow sense,” observes C.P. Snow, “Trollope didn't take much trouble about plots” (81). James finds Trollope lacking a coherent, governing system; too absorbed in his sociologically accurate accounts of clerical manners, social graces and faux-pas, his novels feel diffuse, as if so many endearing character portraits hang loosely upon a plot. This epitomizes for James a distinctly English ideal of formlessness: “according to that ideal it is rather dangerous to be definitely or consciously an artist—to have a system, a doctrine, a form. Trollope, from the first, went in, as they say, for having as little form as possible; it is probably safe to affirm that he had no ‘views’ whatever on the subject of novel-writing” (385).

My second chapter described the rise of the genre of the parish novel amidst changes within Anglicanism and its practice. The parish novel's ability to capture the form of pastoral labor, I suggested, was also the reason for the genre's obsolescence. The uneventfulness of parochial tenure translated into narrative tedium, and for readers, varieties of boredom. While the parish novel was relatively shortlived as a genre, and while it no longer commands scholarly attention, its effects can be felt across a range of major writers and their works. This chapter suggests one site in the work of Anthony Trollope. I turn to his *Barsetshire Chronicles* as a series that both assumes the narratives of the parish novel and revises them. Not only are Trollope's novels thematically resonant with the parish novel, but they are also formally congruent. We find the reception of parish novels mirrored in critiques of Trollope, whose readers express frustration with his novels' deliberate pace. It is easy to see, for example, George Eliot's bored Mrs. Linnet, who skims to the end of clergyman biographies, in John Kenneth Galbraith, who suggests parsing Trollope's more sanguinary plots from his baggy clerical matter. Where Trollope “digresses at length on the clerical scene,” he advises, “the accomplished reader will . . . slide over these passages” and “move on to where the story resumes, and without the slightest feeling of guilt” (xi). An early reviewer likewise expresses impatience with Barset's “unpromisingly ecclesiastical twinge” (Hochwender 44).

There are few writers for whom duration is more critical a term, concern, and obstacle than Trollope. Though Thackeray would rival his works for sheer length, and Eliot would more explicitly thematize duration and borrow its musical origins as a feature of her own artistic practice,¹ Trollope is the Victorian novelist for whom duration is most frequently and explicitly a *problem*. Recent analyses of Trollope have discerned his game-like webs of marital and

¹ See Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), on George Eliot, Wagner, and duration.

professional possibilities, and his upward, if haphazard, trajectories of careerism only by abstracting them from their bulky exposition—and, even then, have betrayed some impatience: “After seven-hundred-plus pages,” Daniel Wright wonders more broadly, “if a moment of clarity doesn’t come now, then when?” (1121).² His novels appear as the site where the slowness of his novels collides in more pronounced ways with the modern pace of reading. The argument of this chapter is twofold: first, that the parson serves Trollope as a crucial figure for narrative delay, as one whose labor resists the teleological rubrics of the emergent liberal economy—its beginnings, ends, and the drive from one to the other. Second, that the temporal dilation of his novels grows out of the disjunctures that Trollope creates between the parson’s parish and the accelerated pace of modern life. The slowness of his novels have less to do with intrinsic, measurable amplitudes of the text such as length or pace, and more to do with the difference registered between the demands of moving on (or up), and the parson’s impulse, however obsolescent, to dwell.

This chapter asks, in other words, that we see the clerical focus of Trollope’s novels in active conversation with their form. We like to strip Barsetshire’s characters of their clerical garb—preferring to see them as modern bureaucrats or suitors. We prefer to disaggregate Trollope’s modern plots from their musty, ecclesiastical baggage, projecting them as plots of professionalism, marriage, or bureaucracy, while forgetting how Trollope implicitly renders the novels as a period of “residence.” For six novels and twelve years of publication, we dwell with his clerics in Barset. Pastoral labor is a fundamental concern for Trollope, who muses on the difference between a bishop’s take and a parson’s in *Framley Parsonage*: “How pleasant it was, too, that one bishop should be getting fifteen thousand a year and another with an equal cure of parsons only four!” (186). Trollope repeatedly points us to the difficulty of knowing and quantifying the value of pastoral labor as productive work—a difficulty then haunting England’s reforms of clerical compensation. The parson was one site where the quantifying values of modernity met the antiquated professional structures of England, and Trollope’s work suggests so in both theme and form.

Like the parish novelists, Trollope narrates the tenures of his clergymen in ways that formally acknowledge their protracted spans of time. The period of Septimus Warding’s cure at Crabtree Parva, for example, stretches from the end of the first volume of the Chronicles, *The Warden*, to the very end of *The Last Chronicle of Barset*. Like the parish novel’s precursors such as Jane Austen and Richard Graves, however, Trollope finds the parson stubbornly resistant to narrative economy, a peculiarly still figure whose deliberation contrasts with the values of a modernizing world. I trace these concerns through three permutations on the parish plot: the wardenship of Septimus Harding, the arrival of Reverend Arabin to Barchester, and the relinquishing of Reverend Crawley’s cure in Hoggstock. While parish novels find a formal harmony between the novel and the parson’s tenure, linking their durations and settings, then Trollope’s work is premised on the imperfection of such a fit. His novels memorialize the parish, for they take us from to plots of tenure to ones of succession. Trollope stages pastoral labor’s entanglement with wider, politicized imperatives; if the parish novel nostalgically pictures the parson, Trollope’s novels enact their fading. What we find by the end of the Barchester Chronicles—the end, too, of the 1870s—is a sense of the parish as a set of relations hemmed in by modern imperatives, rendered both irrelevant and obsolescent.

² More recent accounts of Trollope’s plots tend to anchor them in action, desire and ambition: see, for example, Nicholas Dames’s “Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition” in *Victorian Studies* 45.2 (2003) or Rebecca Richardson’s “A Competitive World: Ambition and Self-Help in in Trollope’s *An Autobiography* and *Three Clerks*” in *The Fortnightly Review* (2012). We forget, however, how many underachievers populate his novels; this essay, by contrast, proposes that his more commonly studied narratives of ambition might be reframed by considering failed modes of action, or action not taken up.

The Chronicles' distance from metropolitan centers at times echoes Ian Duncan's label of "provincial" or "regional," or Lauren Goodlad's "rootedness."³ My chapter proposes that we also consider "parochial" as a term that Trollope participates in making. In capturing the parish's diminished stature within modern life, Trollope's fiction completes the affective arc that the parish novel begins: our sense of parochialism as *parochial*. The Chronicles look back on the parish as a governing structure tinged by the recognition of its obsolescence. The affection for parsons that his novels cultivate, then, is as much a faultline in the Victorian consciousness as it is a defining feature. Through Trollope's fiction, Victorian readers developed a new, figurative orientation towards the pastoral world, and a new cultural coinage: its parochialism.



As Trollope describes in his autobiography, his first publisher requested "an English tale, on English life, with a clerical flavor." Trollope delivered *The Warden*, what he called "a morsel" of "a biography of an English clergyman" (120). Trollope's sociological familiarity with the church, and his affection for it, played well to a Victorian literary marketplace with an appetite for parson biographies and other sketches of parish life. Trollope was raised in the Anglican Church by a mother whose own literary pursuits at times hewed closely to the portraits of church life he would later become famous for. Fanny Trollope was well known for her travelogues and social novels, but *The Vicar of Wrexhill*, a tale of courtship in a small parish, looks forward to the matchmaking of her son's *Barchester Towers*. Whether by familial inheritance or upbringing, Trollope's talent for clerical portraiture is evident not just in the rich sociological field that his novels take in—from deans to prebendaries to minor curates—but also in the ways that the hierarchies and distinctions between clerical offices curry meaning.

Trollope's interest, like that of the parish novelists, was less in the minutiae of doctrine and religious allegory, than in the lived experience of Anglican religion. While reluctant to engage in contemporary theological debates or in the anti-Catholic polemic so popular among his peers (and his mother), Trollope takes a firm interest in Anglican culture, practice, and the church as a professional and social body. His collected sketches of *Clergymen of the Church of England* evince an awareness of Anglican principles that links him to parish novelists. When Trollope describes the parish clergyman "as the palpable and visible personage of the church of his parish," he echoes the principle that the parson's central work consists in embodying the presence of God; the technical and imaginative specificity with which he depicts the "parson of the parish," and his "unquestioned ease over a ruddy fire," the "pleasant flavour" of "old crusted port" that follows him, and his requisite "mild opposition to the bishop," executes the notion that pastoral labor consists of "making that by his presence an intelligible reality which, without him, would be but an invisible idea" (54).

³ See Ian Duncan's "The Provincial or Regional Novel," from *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Blackwell, 2005) and, on Barchester as an "auto-ethnographic synecdoche," Lauren Goodlad's *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Oxford UP, 2015).



Figure 1. From Henry James, “Anthony Trollope.” *The Century*, July 1883.

C.P. Snow hypothesizes that Trollope was once destined for a career in the church. And while Trollope never donned a cassock, many of his professional concerns as a writer would be expressed in terms of clerical labor. In his autobiography, Trollope suggests that his purpose of moral guidance aligns him more closely with the clergyman than with his fellow novelists, who are more willing to deal in “sin” for the sake of entertainment. “I have regarded my art from so different a point of view that I have ever thought of myself as a preacher of sermons, and my pulpit as one which I could make both salutary and agreeable to my audience,” he writes, “But the novelist, if he have a conscience, must preach his sermons with the same purpose as the clergyman, and must have his own system of ethics” (185). His novels, however, furnish him the descriptive apparatus to preach “his sermon as perhaps no clergyman can preach it” (186). The novelist’s capacity to show by moral example, rather than to tell, and to elicit a wariness from his audience—“Oh! not like that;—let me not be like that!”—outstrips the humble preacher’s (186).

Other analogies to pastoral work are less explicit. A preoccupation with the difficulty of accurately remunerating work runs throughout his novels and animates his discussion of church

livings in *Framley Parsonage*. The moral work of writers, like that of parish parsons, has neither palpable effects nor quantifiable outcomes. As much as Trollope laments the inequitable compensation within the church that has persisted since medieval times—“that one bishop should be getting fifteen thousand a year and another with an equal cure of parsons only four”—he also suggests the impossibility of making “any approximation” “towards a fair proportioning of the pay to the work” that the modern “over-bold reformer” undertakes (186). That “Ecclesiastical work [is] to be bought and paid for according to its quantity and quality!” is a proposition just short of absurd, and it echoes Jeremy Bentham’s earlier remarks on fixing pastoral compensation with any sort of “mathematical nicety”: the “extent of labour, prima facie, best inferred from the number of parishioners—what reasoning!” (186, 509). Bentham mocks attempts to align a congregation’s “chance of salvation” with any “quantity of money” (509). For Trollope, authorship and pastoral labor are similarly interpolated into economies by the “edict of a utilitarian, reforming, matter-of-fact House of Parliament” to which they are stubbornly resistant (187).

Trollope’s familiarity with contemporary debates surrounding the legibility and value of pastoral labor inform his fiction. By the time he had begun writing *The Warden*, England had been struggling through the reform of clerical pay. A population boom and inequitable church funding resulted in a deficit of paid pastoral labor. What replaced the idealized system of a single parish for a single parson was an ecclesiastical world increasingly polarized: on the one hand, generously compensated upper churchmen with multiple livings and sinecures, and, on the other, financially desperate curates to whom the majority of pastoral work fell. Outcries had begun with the publication of John Wade’s *Black Book* in 1820. Efforts to even out inequitable pay between clerics of different ranks and between parsons of parishes largely eluded ecclesiastics, reformers and politicians. Government initiatives such as the Queen Anne’s Bounty and the Ecclesiastical Commission sought to standardize and supplement parish livings, but found that the religious quality of parish work did not yield easily to quantification.⁴ Parsons were radically outnumbered by their parishioners, especially in the growing urban parishes, and by dint of poor compensation, were forced to take up multiple posts to survive. Pluralism—the holding of multiple livings—and absenteeism were rampant, as the Church of England struggled to distribute its clergymen evenly across the nation’s parishes.

The settlement of a single parson in a single parish had become an increasing rarity in Britain’s clerical landscape. The parish novel’s picture of the parson comfortably ensconced in a generous living was thus a reflection of an increasingly obsolescent condition. If such an idealized, cozy image of the parson exists in Trollope’s writings, then it is always qualified by an awareness of the parson’s obsolescence. In *Clergyman of the Church of England*, his portrait of the English parson is tinged with preemptive nostalgia: “Such is the English parish parson, as he was almost always some fifty years since, as he is still in many parishes, but as he will soon cease to become” (65).



The formal harmonies of the parish plot—its precise, untroubled correspondence between the parson and the parish, a life and a living—only appear so when we look at an ecclesiastical history that no longer takes them for granted. As Trollope observes, “Our present arrangement of

⁴ For major accounts of this history, see Owen Chadwick’s *The Victorian Church*, G.F.A. Best’s *Temporal Pillars*, and Desmond Bowen’s *Idea of the Victorian Church*.

parochial incomes is beloved as being time-honoured, gentlemen-like, English, and picturesque” (186).⁵ Certainly, there are snatches of such picturesqueness throughout the Chronicles. Mark Robarts receives the generous Framley vicarage upon leaving Oxford at the outset of *Framley Parsonage*; *Doctor Thorne*’s Caleb Oriel delights “in lecterns and credence-tables,” and brings “all the paraphernalia of Anglican formalities” to his adoring congregation at Greshamsbury (134). Yet Trollope’s fiction builds on the parish novel by placing the parson and the parish within a broader ecclesiastical world that moves more quickly—narratively, ambitiously—than he does. Barset is nothing if not sociologically abundant, populated by a hearty smattering of bishops, deans and prebendaries alongside garden-variety parsons. But the parson himself anchors three central plots. In *The Warden*, Septimus Harding’s cozy benefice of £800 and care of twelve bedesmen comes into question under the political oversight of John Bold. In *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, Reverend Crawley’s cure of Hoggstock parish is threatened when a £20 cheque falls inexplicably into his hands. And in *Barchester Towers*, the shy wooings of the newly arrived Reverend Arabin collides with the ambitious advances, professional and romantic, of the pluralist Vesey Stanhope.

Each of three plots, I suggest, register the disjunctures between the parish and the wider world. They offer a rejoinder to the parish novel’s untroubled plot of tenure and the parson’s deliberate, receptive ethos. In *Barchester Towers*, this pastoral ethos is most visibly at play in the charming, but stubborn figure of Reverend Arabin, whom Trollope makes representative of the parson class as a whole. Arabin’s tenure as a “poor curate of a small Cornish parish” makes him a “humbler,” “better,” and “happier man,” and teaches him that “the highest laws for the governance of a Christian’s duty must act from within and not from without” (171). Upon leaving Oxford, he is “inclined to look upon the rural clergymen of most English parishes almost with contempt” but only because of “his ambition” “to do somewhat towards redeeming and rectifying their inferiority and to assist in infusing energy and faith into the hearts of Christian ministers” (171). The only cleric referred explicitly to as a “parish clergyman” (by Miss Thorne), he is distinguished by his parochial labors from his dilettantish peers: Bishop Proudie, who has a curate for his parish, or even worse, Vesey Stanhope, who has “the cure of three parishes” but “had resided in Italy for twelve years,” making him not only a pluralist and an absentee but also a defector to Rome (61).

More importantly, Trollope expresses Arabin’s pastoral ethos—a sustained attentiveness to the world about him—as a form of courtship. As I’ve detailed in chapter two, pastoral labor was built on a professional model that privileges skillful receptivity over immediate action: “The country parson is, or ought to be,” suggests John Wood Warter, “a man of much observation” (255). Trollope depicts Arabin as lover whose reticence and patience in love, his willingness to wait upon the response of his object of pursuit, Eleanor Bold, sets him against the zealous Reverend Slope. Slope’s ambitions are legible not just in his evangelical leanings, but in his fervent pursuit of the Barchester deanery and Eleanor Bold’s hand in marriage. He ingratiates himself to the Barchester ladies at pulpit, manipulates high-church talk in his favor, and sends Eleanor letters complimenting her “silken tresses” (240). If Trollope’s Barchester characters can be set on a spectrum—with pastoral figures such as Harding and Arabin on one end, and socially ambitious schemers such as Miss Proudie, on the other—then Arabin occupies the latter extreme.

By contrast, the parson in love knows his own inconsequence. Arabin is rather “deficient in confidence in woman” and “though forty years old, as in love without being aware of it”

⁵ The term “picturesque” was itself coined by the Anglican Vicar of Boldre, William Gilpin, in his 1768 *Essay on Prints*.

(277). His reticence creates delays. On a morning walk with Eleanor, he is given the opportunity of revealing his long-simmering affection but makes his action contingent upon hers: “How easily would she have forgiven and forgotten the archdeacon’s suspicions had she but heard the whole truth from Mr. Arabin. But then where would have been my novel? She did not cry, and Mr. Arabin did not melt” (281). Where Slope overestimates, Arabin underestimates: he could have done more than he thought capable. The contrast between Slope’s overdetermination and Arabin’s reticence suggests two modes of clerical comportment, and two cosmological outlooks: one which sees the world through according to universalized game-like scenarios of cause and effect, favors of credit and debit, and another which, importantly, refuses.

If we observe in Slope a verbal excess—how full he is of opinions, and offensive speeches and bad letters!—that indicates to us overdetermined efforts to consummate political and marital ends, we constantly observe Arabin in states of speechlessness or withheld action: “glib as was his tongue in pulpits and on platform, now he could not find a word wherewith to express the plain wish of his heart” (286). When Miss Thorne brings the shy lover to Miss Bold, the point of this scene is almost entirely what Mr. Arabin does *not* do:

She felt that *if he looked at her*, he would at once see that she was not at ease.

But *he did not look at her*. Instead of doing so, he left the fire-place and began walking up and down the room. Eleanor took up her book resolutely, but she could not read, for there was a tear in her eye, and do what she would, it fell on her cheek. When Mr. Arabin’s back was turned to her, she wiped it away; but another was soon coursing down her face in its place. They would come—not a deluge of tears that would have betrayed her at once, but one by one, single monitors. *Mr. Arabin did not observe her closely*, and they passed unseen. (464)

He had only to ask. Ah! But that was the difficulty. Did a minute suffice for all this? Nay, perhaps it might be more than a minute.

“Mrs. Bold—” at last he said, and *then stopped himself*. (465) (my emphases)

Arabin’s repeated deferrals—moments in which action is not taken up—more broadly reflect a pastoral ethic: an apprehensiveness towards socially thick and contingent moments. The parson is distinguished by his receptivity to the world around him. These moments turn Arabin into a figure for narrative deceleration. His actions are not simply framed as contingent (a choice between two different actions) but withheld (a possible action that did not happen). These moments thus appear conspicuously as delays, against which the plot strains towards its inevitable ending. There is no question that Mr. Arabin will marry Eleanor Bold; Trollope’s narrator has in fact told us as much midway through the novel: “But let the gentle-hearted reader be under no apprehension whatsoever. It is not destined that Eleanor shall marry Mr Slope or Bertie Stanhope” (126). These delays mark, as Peter Brooks might call it, the “deviance from the straight line” between a story’s beginning and its end, the “arabesque or squiggle” that makes us conscious of our impatience for marital consummation (104). While other characters like Slope, Proudie, Archdeacon Grantly, or Miss Thorne work to create narrative momentum by filling appointments and arranging trysts, Arabin, by contrast, decelerates the plot.

Like Jane Austen and Robert Graves, Trollope represents the parson as a curiously unnarratable figure, a still center within a mobile plot. Arabin’s resistance to the appropriative energies of politics and reform are reproduced more broadly in the discursive economy of the

novel. Generally, characters in *Barchester Towers* traffick heavily in opinions: about Sunday schools, dissenters, the Hebdomadal Council, and most of all, about each other. Opinions are ostensibly the energy on which the system of patronage runs. Characters constantly attempt to rally others to their opinions in order to meet political ends. Opinions define political actions (Miss Proudie, for example, leverages her intimacy with her husband against Reverend Slope), and they are taken up with the ultimate end of changing (says Archdeacon Grantly to Septimus Harding: “You’ll find yourself of a different opinion before a month is gone” [39]). Opinions generate a narrative economy: they arise from a desire, fulfill an intention, and are a means to an end. Less interested in the substance of opinion than their use, Trollope foregrounds how opinions are mobilized politically. Yet notice how Arabin resolutely refuses to hold them: “It is the bane of my life that on important subjects I acquire no fixed opinion. I think, and think, and go on thinking, and yet my thoughts are running ever in different directions” (463).

Arabin holds no opinions because the novel associates him with a different, less circulatory kind of discourse: belief. It is unusual that a novel about the church should employ the term so scarcely (thrice in almost five hundred pages), and more unusual still that it is associated with a single character: at Oxford, he pants “so eagerly to give signs of his belief” (170). While opinion implies one’s participation in a larger economy of changeable positions, belief is inward and resists being circulated or even expressed. Arabin’s faith is known only by “a continual play of lambent fire about his eyes” (173). Arabin holds to a set of tenets that are resistant to being circulated and thus short-circuits the discursive economy of the novel that very much depends on *arguing things*, on moving its characters from one rhetorical position to another. And later, applied to his reticence in courtship: “He believed, still believed, with the sort of belief which the fear of a thing engenders, that Mrs Bold would probably become the wife of Mr Slope” (278).

If Arabin appears resistant to the circulatory, superstructural power struggles that drive Trollope’s plots, then Trollope makes this explicit in the parson’s function within the novel’s narrative economy. He frequently associates pastoral figures with narrative delays, moments when the reader must slow down and assume the parson’s leisurely pace. When the narrator pauses to describe Arabin’s arrival at to the parish of St. Ewolds, he laments that there is “no mental method of daguerrotype or photography” that can communicate his character with “unerring precision” (167). While this digression suggests aspirations to pictorial accuracy, it also evinces an implicit desire for descriptive expediency. While a photograph communicates character in a glance, the “full character” of Arabin takes an entire chapter. Prose, and characters “fill” space: Arabin “is worthy of a new volume” and, “will fill a conspicuous place in it” (167).

When Arabin fails to disclose his feelings for Eleanor—thus prolonging Eleanor Bold’s frustration with him and delaying their marital union—Trollope justifies this choice by asking: “But then where would have been my novel?” (281). Arabin’s delays are aligned with the novel’s temporal dilation; his inability to act and resolve his relationship with Eleanor lends the novel more material. “We must not pass over the wooing so cavalierly,” chastens the narrator, “It has been told, with perhaps tedious accuracy, how Eleanor disposed of two of her lovers at Ullathorne; and it must also be told with equal accuracy, and if possible with less tedium, how she encountered Mr. Arabin” (460). That such tedium is necessary (it “must” be told) equates the novel with the time spent reading it. For similar reasons, the narrator warns the “gentle-hearted reader” against hasty reading elsewhere (127). In a lengthy digression following the Stanhope sisters’ speculation on Bertie’s marriage prospects, the narrator proposes ways in which the outcome of the marriage plot might be spoiled: either by taking a “peep into the third

volume” or by soliciting the ending from someone who has read the novel before (127). Such practices, often discouraged by an author hoping to sustain suspense (Trollope cites Radcliffe), elide the process of reading the novel in favor of attaining the end. Trollope’s narrator trenchantly insists that the novel’s effects lie in their unfolding, rather than in the end: “What is the value of those literary charms which are absolutely destroyed by their enjoyment?” (127). Against the logic of suspense which depend on the ending’s revelation, Trollope short-circuits his reader’s anticipations by dispatching with his own ending preemptively: “It is not destined that Eleanor shall marry Mr Slope or Bertie Stanhope” (126). By severing the end from its function within the reader’s affective economy of anticipation and revelation, he evacuates suspense and restores the process of reading to the novel’s purpose.

More broadly, the Chronicles are given to asides which link its pastoral figures to a decelerated pace of reading and point to our strained attention. In *Barchester Towers*, the narrator is “forced to speak of sacred things” as the “tedium of a sermon” stretches across an entire chapter (44). The Chronicles are rife with moments that consciously stretch our attention across pastoral affairs, indexing the time taken to make a pastor’s acquaintance or to take in “all the best glossy clerical hats” at Sunday service (43). Harding’s entrance into *Barchester Towers* occasions the narrator’s admission that it is “hardly necessary” to give “any lengthened biography of Harding,” though he continues to recount *The Warden*’s events in full over the course of a chapter (9). Trollope’s Chronicles, in other words, simultaneously link clerical affairs to their exaggerated occupation of readerly time and give air to our impatience. When we express, along with his narrator, that “anxious longing for escape which is the common consequence of common sermons,” our complaints about Trollope are already part of his intended effect: the novels make conspicuous work of reminding us our impulse to skim through his narratives (46).

Like the parish novelists, who analogized the span of the novel with the parson’s tenure, Trollope conceptualizes the novel as a period of time. Where he differs is in his depiction of the parson as a professional class whose ways of life are conspicuously out of alignment with the world at large. Whereas the parish novel fully entertains the deliberate, residential pace of parish work, the Chronicles are visibly eager to move on. Parsons constitute an inconvenience for his readers and for their fellow characters; they are curiously out of sync with Trollope’s world at large. When Harding, for example, leaves his quiet corner of Barchester to see his lawyer in London, he finds that his appointment has been delayed until 10pm: “What an hour!” (215). He, and we, must wait a full chapter for the plot to move on: as Trollope titles it, “A Long Day in London” indeed. Such dilatory feelings also attend the introduction of Arabin in *Barchester Towers*, who is late not only to the story—arriving after the first full volume and at the beginning of the second—but also inexcusably time-taking. Finally, Trollope’s chapter titles suggest that the similarities between Harding and Crawley lie in their stubborn resistance to leaving their pastoral post—*well after* it has been recommended to them: “The Warden is very Obstinate” (chapter 18) falls immediately before “The Warden Resigns” (chapter 19); “The Obstinance of Mr Crawley” (chapter 68), before “Mr Crawley’s Last Appearance in his own Pulpit.” Parsons are curiously out of step with modernizing energies, not only in their “obstinate” attachments to a set of antiquated relations but also in their temporal relations to the rest of modern society. Our sense of his novels’ duration are sharpened because his novels are visibly torn between the modernizing, impatient energies of narrative—to move along, to get on with it—and the antiquated desire to dwell.

The Chronicles' pastoral figures occupy a diminished role in Trollope's political worlds, preferring to act as "the best of masters" for aging bedesmen or a "poor curate of a small Cornish parish" (*Warden* 271, *Last* 171). If, on one hand, Trollope figures the rift between pastoral labor and modern society as a temporal one, then, on the other hand, he depicts it as a spatial one. Whereas parish novels take parish bounds as their own spatial limits, filling their pages with local concerns, then the Chronicles of Bassetshire set the parish within a wider political and geographical world, whose modern reforms threaten to eclipse it. Two plots transform the parish novels' plots of tenure into plots of succession. In doing so, they highlight the modern difficulty of weighing and valuing pastoral labor—its resistance to attempts at quantification.

In *The Warden*, the first of the series, the Reverend Septimus Harding holds a snug and well-compensated benefice of £800. Under his care are the twelve aging bedesmen of Hiram's Hospital. In *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, the Reverend Josiah Crawley faithfully attends the working-class Hoggstock parish, a living which he has held since *Framley Parsonage*. Both novels are dedicated to the protracted question of whether they will continue to hold them, and in both, this question unfolds on radically divided terrains: the public realm where reformist discourse meets high-church politics, and a pastoral realm naïvely deaf to it. Though Harding's wardenship has gone unquestioned for "many, many years—records hardly tell how many," the newly arrived John Bold plants doubt as to the "integrity of parsons" (41). By John Hiram's original charity, the bedesmen receive twopence a day, while Harding's living has grown generously. Reverend Crawley's fitness for tenure is questioned when a £20 cheque falls inexplicably into his hands at the beginning of *The Last Chronicle*.

A pastoral post becomes the occasion for an ever-widening circle of public debate on the legitimacy of clerical compensation. Harding's wardenship becomes fodder for the widely circulated *Jupiter*, and a target of satire in national tracts by sensationalizing authors Dr. Pessimist Anticant and Mr. Popular Sentiment (caricatures of Carlyle and Dickens, respectively). For Bold, Harding's appointment is simply one abuse in an abstract program by which he seeks no less than "the reform of all abuses; state abuses, church abuses, corporation abuses... abuses in medical practice, and general abuses in the world at large" (15). For Towers, the allure of attacking Harding lies in finding a common enemy for Anticant and Sentiment in their pamphlets "Modern Charity" and "The Almshouse." For both Bold and Towers, the relationship between parson and parishioner is alienable—convertable to other forms of power and exchange. For the church, the incident of the stolen cheque likewise becomes shorthand for Crawley's ruined character; his isolated lapse in judgment becomes the means of generalizing about him. The anecdote is retold in country clubs, lawyer's offices, episcopal drawing rooms and over breakfast. The incident's textual amplification, and especially the repetition of the phrase "the cheque for twenty pounds," suggests how the infraction takes on a representative valance, becoming a metonym for his character. We may notice how often the church refers to Crawley according to abstract and essential categories: "clergymen," "thief," "gentleman." Such an "opinion [is] expressed so freely" among Barchester that it all seems "now to be all of one mind" (62). The novel's enlarged circles of public discourse make clear the relatively contained ones that the parish occupies.

Within the parish, however, their ministrations are good. Crawley maintains his duties; he "preached to the people of his parish on that Sunday, as he had always preached" and continues his visits with the brick-makers, farmers, and other residents of his cure (42). The "stories told

from mouth to mouth” of Crawley’s parochial commitment (“how he had worked with his own hands for the sick poor to whom he could not give relief in money, turning a woman’s mangle for a couple of hours, and carry a boy’s load along the lanes”) belie Barchester’s notion of his character as “a clergyman turn thief” (466). While Barchester’s high church deals in absolute categories (such as “clergyman,” “gentleman,” and “thief”), Crawley’s working-class parishioners perceive his guilt to be situational. “If a man ain’t paid for his work by them as is his employers,” concedes the brickmaker Dan, “he must pay hisself” (121). The novel reveals the opposition between the public’s view and the parish’s: one, in which the crime signifies character, and the other, in which the incident is the exception to an otherwise faultless life. Trollope likewise divests Harding’s parishioners of their clout. The bedesmen are “passive spectators” to Harding’s controversy—sympathetic, but cajoled by Bold into signing a petition to oust him (45). They express hesitation when confronted by Bold’s reformist enthusiasm, an opposition made clear in the contrast between the “high pitch” of Bold’s calls for reform and Archdeacon Grantly’s “loud” exasperation, and the bedesmen’s relative muteness of judgment: “not a sound came from the eleven bedesmen” (6, 10, 67). On one side, pastoral loyalties; on the other, circulating rumors and modernizing energies that threaten it.

Both are plots of tenure, turned into plots of succession. Harding and Crawley leave their pastoral posts: Harding’s wardenship passes to Mr. Quiverful as he retrenches to Crabtree Parva, a parish he held as a minor canon; Crawley is replaced by the itinerant Mr. Thumble, who barely resides in the parish. These have been read as slow-gestating, individual moral decisions—a coming into liberal consciousness, for Elaine Hadley—that coincide with the geographical widening of the novel’s discursive worlds. The rumors of the wardenship’s impropriety bubble from within Barchester to London and then England at large; *The Last Chronicle*’s circles of gossip expands from the relative privacy of George Walker’s dining table eastward to Silverbridge, Framley, and finally throughout the diocese of Basset. The numerical sums of money—the abstracted value of the parish living—circulate widely, too, in ways that recall the scandalous sums uncovered by John Wade’s *Black Book* in 1820. *The Warden*’s £800 is repeated nearly 20 times; Mr Crawley’s “twenty pounds” is repeated over eighty times over the substantially longer *Last Chronicle*. The public’s preoccupation with such sums at once points to the simultaneous flattening of narrative information and its ease of circulation and repetition across the two novels. The discursive and geographical widening of his plots coincides with the dissolution of the pastoral relationship. What Trollope dramatizes, in short, is the act of leaving the parish behind. Occupying a larger world, we lose sight of the parson and his.

While the parish novel depicts pastoral work, Trollope dramatizes how pastoral labor is perceived and valued. Rather than granting pastoral labor its full narrative weight as the parish novel does, the *Chronicles* highlight the difficulty of determining its value in the first place. Pastoral labor’s incommensurability with modern rubrics is evident both in Trollope’s explicit rants against pay doled out in “portions so infinitesimally small that working clergymen can hardly live” in *Framley Parsonage*, and in the fissures between the parish and the modern world (187). Pastoral presence within the text is no longer celebrated, as it is in the parish novel, but visibly circumscribed; the parish’s diminutive territories match its subordinated position within the text and modern world at large. The *Chronicles* move us from the valuation of pastoral labor to its obsolescence.

Trollope’s backward-looking glances concretize our sense of loss, especially as new curates enter the parish to take the parson’s place. As Mr. Quiverful assumes Harding’s old post, the bedesmen realize, “They were to change the best of masters for a possible bad one, and to

lose twopence a day each man!" (271). When the itinerant Mr. Thumble first assumes the pulpit at Hoggstock, he is regarded by everyone "as an intruder" (728). But good riddance—for "the moment the service was over he got into his gig, and was driven back to Barchester" (729). Unlike Crawley, who is "generally to be found in the parish," Thumble is "neither seen nor heard of again in the parish during the entire week" (718, 729). Thumble's itinerancy and absence from the parish gestures to England's newer, strained state of parochial residence.

What replaces the representation of parochial labor, then, is the act of fondly recounting it. "There is no ecclesiastical figure," remembers James, "so good as the first...so happy as the admirable Mr. Harding" (389). Pastoral labor is always accompanied by an acknowledgement of its obsolescence. Chapters such as "Mr. Crawley's Last Appearance in his own Pulpit" and "The Last Scene at Hoggstock" wistfully punctuate leave-takings, as do closing words: "No, no, no, not Warden now," Harding concedes at the end of *The Warden*, "only precentor" (284). Harding's death at the end of the *Chronicles* as a whole is perhaps the most powerful of these. As he is scarcely present between the series' first volume and its last, it reminds us of *what we were missing*. The funeral scene itself patterns this logic precisely: "Up to this day no one would have said specially that Mr Harding was a favourite in town," but "now that he was gone, men and women told each other how good he had been. They remembered the sweetness of his smile, and talked of loving little words which he had spoken to them" (834). His old parishioners return, too. Of the distinguished attendants at the ceremony, Trollope lingers on the "blind man, very old, with a wondrous stoop" led between the sexton and verger; this is "John Bunce, bedesman from Hiram's Hospital," and of the dignitaries in attendance, "none perhaps there had known Mr Harding better" (835). But Bunce is not the only reminder of Harding's pastoral charge, for the narrator, overlooking his posts as the rector of St. Cuthbert's, and the precentor of Barchester Cathedral, restores him to his original pastoral title, as "Septimus Harding, formerly Warden of Hiram's Hospital" (835). If the parish novel remembers the good work of the resident parson, the *Barchester Chronicles* shows us the act of leaving it behind.

Trollope offers us a picture of pastoral labor, conspicuously condensed, set aside. The parish's limited berth is, thus, also a narrative one. Whereas the parish novel adopts pastoral labor as a narrative protocol, the *Chronicles* enact the disappearance of parish work from its pages. While the first fourteen chapters of *The Last Chronicle* are dedicated solely, almost obsessively, to Crawley's scandal, this plot receives increasingly intermittent treatment over the course of the novel as other plots (the courtship between Lily and John, the prospects of Conrad Dalrymple) begin to emerge and eclipse the clerical plot. By novel's end, Crawley himself only appears in two or three chapter segments, the poignancy of his departure overshadowed by the deaths of major characters: Mr. Harding and Mrs. Proudie. We watch as the parish plot becomes almost imperceptibly crowded out by others. Trollope's novels thus relegate pastoral affairs to a minor plot, rather than immersing us fully within them. A similar pattern guides the *Chronicles* as a whole: the first novel, *The Warden*, focuses most intensely and coherently on a single instance of tenure. The second, *Barchester Towers*, doubles the clerical offices to be filled, but introduces a number of marital subplots that dilute the focus on the church. Later works, *Framley Parsonage* and *The Small House at Allington*, would see marital plots eclipse the ecclesiastical ones. As Trollope says of *Framley*, "There was much Church, but more love-making" (*Autobiography* 191).

The disappearance of the parish plot over the course of *Barchester Chronicles* is apt for a historical moment which remembers its parsons more than it encounters them. As a rejoinder to the financially secure, complacent, often sentimentalized picture of the parson the parish novel gives us, Trollope's work reminds us that such a picture, at least in modern times, is improbably cozy. His series, rather, is defined by the anxieties surrounding this form of labor, and by its fissures: between the parish and its ecclesiastical world, between the relative security of pastoral ties and the currents of ambition circling it. Trollope's break with the parish novel is also, crucially, a generic break: if the parish novels represent pastoral labor in its fullness, his novels accept the fundamental uneventfulness at the heart of parochial tenure, preferring to conspicuously move on from depictions of pastoral labor that dwell too long. In ways more oblique than, say, parson detective fiction, the *Barchester Chronicles* represent the terminus of the parish novel by setting the events of tenure into teleological relation with the world at large. But by the late nineteenth century, even his leisurely rendered scenes of clerical life would fall out of vogue: as Nicholas Dames writes, the "familiar and reassuring girth of Eliot and Trollope yielded to the comparative brevity of Stevenson, Kipling and Wells" (207).

Trollope's refiguring of the parish and pastoral ties would extend beyond the novels themselves into a larger semantic field. Trollope completes the etymological arc that parish novels begin. If in the earlier genre, the parish is associated with a sustained, close, sometimes boredom-inducing form of attention to the immediate world, then in the *Barchester Chronicles*, the parson's close attention to his flock constitutes his political naïvete and his own instrument of obsolescence. His "parochialism," in other words, renders him inconsequential. Trollope's novels capture the disjuncture intrinsic to the term in depicting the tension between his novels' parochializing effects and the restless, forward-moving pull of modern life. Witness the curious semantic trajectory of "parochial" across his novels: opening from its strictly topical sense in earlier works—"parochial duty," "parochial clergy" in *Barchester Towers* (1857)—towards a more generalized sense of diminution and inconsequence in later ones: "a little parochial nothing," "a parochial quarrel," "parochial quiescence" in *The Vicar of Bullhampton* (1870); a sire's "parochial solitude" in *Doctor Wortle's School* (1881). His novels newly associate the parish, not with its ecclesiastical duty, but with the scale and importance of life it occupies, carrying the term closer to its modern profile.

By the 1880s, it was, as Joshua Toulmin-Smith put it, a widely shared tendency of British politicians to "sneer at Parish Vestries and to hold what they are pleased to call 'parish squabbles' as beneath them" (8). The term "parochial" became a popular insult, signifying a small-mindedness out of step with modern life, in Tory critiques ("the conservative mind is intensely parochial"), attacks on Gladstone ("the Prince of Parochialists"), and on radicals ("the petty parochialism which the modern school of Radicals seem bent on introducing").⁶ The coinage of this term in popular culture, alongside novels that critics have labelled quintessentially liberal, is no small coincidence. If, in D.A. Miller's view, *Barchester Towers's* liberal "tolerance" is nonetheless dependent on its portraiture of "clerical infighting," then he points to a dialectical impulse to indulge and disavow the petty matters of everyday life that unites Trollope's fiction with Victorian consciousness at large (114). A semantic change in a literature that feels parochial: that both relishes the intimate conflicts within a congregation and its disjuncture from the abstracted good form of liberal modernity.

⁶ "London Parochialism," *The Northern Echo* (Darlington, England). Saturday, December 1, 1877. Issue 2460. "Parochialism or Imperialism," *The National Review*. London: WH Allen & Co, Vol IV, 1885-1886. "The Petty Parochialism," *The Morning Post* (London, England), Thursday, June 7, 1894. 4.

Chapter Four George Eliot's Endearing Parsons

I. Endearments

Eliot's parsons are prone to faults. Her churchmen are disposed toward stinginess, mild forgetfulness, a tendency to ramble, a lack of talent with interior decorating. Poor Amos Barton cannot spell:

It was very much the same sort of letter as most clergymen would have written under the same circumstances, except that instead of *perambulate*, the Rev. Amos wrote *perambulate*, and instead of "if haply," "if happily," the contingency indicated being the reverse of happy. Mr Barton had not the gift of perfect accuracy in English orthography and syntax; which was unfortunate, as he was known not to be a Hebrew scholar, and not in the least suspected of being an accomplished Grecian. (19)

Barton's careless orthography, on which Eliot dwells for a paragraph, is typical of the flaws that mark her other clergymen. It is mild and forgivable; his spelling mistakes "surprise the ladies of his parish" who expect more from his Oxford breeding, but not his "clerical brethren" who have "gone through the mysteries" of university education themselves (19). Barton's bad spelling—which Eliot calls one of his "deficiencies"—functions less as a marker of a moral shortcoming than as an irreducible sign of character. Many of her clergymen are likewise defined by such innocuous faults. Mr Gilfil, for example, grows increasingly "close-fisted" and parsimonious during his tenure in Shepperton (74); he is also charmingly absent-minded, forgetting "to take off his spurs before putting on his surplice" and only becoming "aware of the omission by feeling something mysteriously tugging at the skirts of that garment" when he ascends to the reading desk (69). Mr. Farebrother of *Middlemarch* has a weakness for cards; Mr. Irwine, *Adam Bede*'s rector of Hayslope, is a hapless pluralist.

The "irritating fault" or "unlovely oddity," as Eliot terms it in "Mr Gilfil's Love Story," so often characterizes her clergymen but garners little remark largely because Eliot herself downplays it (166). Bearing lightly on the parson's behavior, it is less a moral shortcoming than a mild quirk that might possess a favorite uncle; her parsons, like Amos Barton, are "more apt to fall into a blunder than a sin" (49). Though these foibles range in kind—from carelessness at the lecture, to a tendency to over-gesticulate, to an inappropriate love of cards—what they universally share is an effect: the fault, though "unlovely," spurs even greater affection toward its bearer. In *Milby*, a sneaking avarice is not only tolerated, but indulged: "Old Mr Crewe, the curate, for example, was allowed to enjoy his avarice in comfort, without fear of sarcastic parish demagogues" (177). In fact, "his flock liked him all the better for having scraped together a large fortune out of his school and curacy." The parson's fault endears us, and his flock, to him.

Eliot's parsons comprise a species distinct from those moral centers of earlier eighteenth-century fiction such as Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* or John Galt's Reverend Balwhidder in *Annals of the Parish*. In these models of Anglican morality, the work of the clergyman depends on his elevation within the spiritual community; he is a representative of God and an embodiment of his presence. Eliot, by contrast, pursues a model of pastoral kinship based on lateral relationships between parson and flock. Our encounters with her clergymen depend on a recognition of a humanizing flaw, a flaw that at once endears us to him and cultivates a shared membership within a pastoral community. Her *Scenes* and novels do not reinforce the parson's

intrinsic value so much as reorient the terms by which his value might be understood by his parish; his fallibility, we might say, generates his peculiar worth. In this sense, Eliot's parsons are continuous with those of the parish novels. As I argued in chapter two, a renewed interest in the earthly matters of religion followed from Anglicanism's practical turn; the parson's life and its details became popular material for writers and biographers. The parson, especially in the parish novel, became less a moral abstraction and more a particularized (we might say humanized) individual. Where Eliot differs from the parish novelists, however, is in turning the relationship between parsons and parishioners, and parsons and readers, into an active process, whose values are rooted in Anglican tenure. I argue in this chapter that Eliot's fiction is engaged in the work of endearment, wherein affection is solicited over sustained, daily encounters and through distinctly Anglican forms of attention. The parson's ties to his parish are not reducible to easily recognizable merits—either ministerial skill or moral rectitude—but are instead contingently produced out of exchanges with his parishioners. Endearment marks the point where a fault can be understood as a value. Their appreciation of his bad spelling indexes his time in their company; endearment, in short, is parochial.

Eliot's achievement is to bring us into the parish, to move her readers into the embedded and highly particular relationships that are not legible from outside the pastoral community. While endearment comes to define a variety of her minor characters, from Arthur Rann to Arthur Brooke, I trace this style of encounter back to its clerical origins, revealing Eliot's to debt those cassoed figures she once deemed "fatally uninteresting" (274). Despite critical disavowals of Eliot's interest in the explicitly theological and the oft-cited letter from George Henry Lewes to John Blackwood labeling her *Scenes of Clerical Life* "purely secular," Eliot, I suggest, can be read within a larger, distinctly modern shift in how the English perceived pastoral labor, its value, and its function (Lewes 1855). England of the nineteenth century, beginning with Coleridge, began to consider its clergy not so much as active regulators of religious and moral standards as a focal point for a set of devotional energies, emotions and attentions. Religion transformed from an abstract belief to a sustained moral work.

Literature was able to capture, importantly, the *experience* of religion. Eliot shares this notion with the parish novelists, who were her contemporaries. Parish novelists showed readers the value of the parson's sustained attention and ministration; they turned the tedium of tenure into a form of readerly edification, to great effect. Eliot gently mocks this in her portrait of Mrs. Linnet, in "Janet's Repentance," who skips over the parson's moral musings to "make rapid progress" through the tome. Eliot's interest in the pastoral relationship—though similarly influenced by Anglicanism's practical turn—serves different aesthetic aims. Rather than adopt the conventions of tenure as parish novelists do, Eliot patterns the form of affection between her parsons and readers after pastoral ties. For Eliot, the pastoral relationship is a form of possession and love dependent on the length of the parson's residence and his proximity to his constituents. The endearing flaw—how he appears to Eliot's parishioners and her readers—indexes distinct Anglican values of embodiment and time.

Crucially, Eliot's narrator not only depicts this relationship, but also seeks to reproduce it with her readers. The preachiness critics have frequently ascribed to her narrator is a clue to the broader ways clericism inspires Eliot's narrator. Like her parsons, her narrator is given to didacticism and individuating quirks; like her parsons, the narrator moves in embodied ways and in small circuits throughout the parish. Eliot's narrator practices what he or she preaches. My chapter concludes, then, with the suggestion that Eliot engages with Anglican principle as a process and a method. Anglicanism affords Eliot representational techniques: a model of

characterization and a perceptive experience she seeks to impart to her readers. As much as her novels strive to expand her readers' moral horizons, they also parochialize.

II. Parochialism

The curate Mr. Crewe is not impervious to “an ingenuous vice or two.” He borrows liberally from parish proceeds, accruing a sizeable sum for “his deaf little wife,” and shirks his academic responsibilities, “having exhausted the resources of erudition earlier in life” (177). He “read[s] nothing at all now,” his mind “absorbed in the commonest manners” (177). And yet Milby parish has for the old curate a peculiar love: “his flock liked him all the better for having scraped together a large fortune out of his school and curacy.” “The parishioners,” in fact, see “no reason at all why it should be desirable to venerate the parson or any one else” (178).

A tolerance—even an indulgence of—Mr. Crewe's scholarly sloth and petty avarice here goes hand in hand with an inclusion within his parish. Though Crewe is “not spoken of in terms of high respect” by the parishioners, he nonetheless has nothing to fear from a “sarcastic parish demagogue” who might wander in (177). Eliot frames appreciation of Mr. Crewe's foibles as an exclusive kind of knowledge, limited to the parishioners who know him well. The schism in Crewe's approval implies a difference between strangers and parishioners, and a difference between early acquaintance and longstanding pastoral ties. It implies, as well, a narrative trajectory between the two, which her novels will seek to effect.

Eliot gives us this metaphor: “This was a good old-fashioned characteristic in a parson who had been part of Milby life for half a century: it was like the dents and disfigurements in an old family tankard, which no one would like to part with for a smart new piece of plate fresh from Birmingham” (178). Like dents in an old tankard, the parson's loveable flaws index his prolonged ownership. The parson has been in Milby “for half a century,” which no “new” piece can rival. If both parson and tankard—like the “smart new piece of plate”—are treated as marketable objects, given to exchange and replacement, then here, Eliot also finds the limit where their value as *belongings* overtakes their value as commodities. Nothing is so special or cherished about the parson beside the fact that he is *theirs*.

This, we might say, is the bid of endearment: to transform the fact of sustained, parochial presence into a non-transferable value unto itself—understood only by the parishioners who keep his company. Endearment is, importantly, restricted to the parishioners of a parish; its boundaries define this form of feeling. Others might visit “harsh blame” on the parson's “trivial erring life” where his parishioners see it as a mark of fidelity. The differences it inscribes between constituencies is evidence of the parson's long tenure in his parish and subsequently a value for his parishioners. Eliot's descriptions perform the work of linking pastoral foibles to the parish he belongs to; Reverend Barton writes “very much the same sort of letter as most clergymen would have written under the same circumstances”—placing him within the ecclesiastical profession at large—but his mistake, “instead of *perambulate*, the Rev. Amos wrote *perambulate*,” marks him as Milby's own and provokes a response from “the young ladies of his parish,” especially “the Miss Farquhars” (19). The possessive is frequently associated with the parson's flaw. When Barton's parishioners discuss the wide practice of preaching extempore, they distinguish *their* parson by the fact that he cannot: “our parson's no gift at all that way,” observes Mr. Hackit, “when he tries to preach wi'out book, he rambles, about and doesn't stick to's text; and every now and then he flounders about like a sheep as has cast itself, and can't get on'ts legs again” (10). It is precisely Barton's incompetence extempore—known only to his churchgoing

congregation—that convinces Mr. Hackit and his companions that they'd rather not have anyone else. "I like Mr Barton," says Mrs Hackit, "I think he's a good sort o' man" (11).

The parson's quirks that fail to be grasped by the outsider—whether a roving "parish demagogue" or a neighboring congregation—marks the parish off from the rest of the world. The parish becomes the limit for endearment, its own center of emotional reference. Eliot not only suggests the clergyman's shortcomings, but relays the reader's position through them, framing the appreciation of the parson's particularity as contingent on our view from within the parish. Catherine Gallagher has unearthed in Eliot's characters a dialectical play between particularity and generality, between reference and departure from it, that produces their sense of immanence. Gallagher's account of Eliot's capacity to play with our sense of what is probable—and to surprise us with it—is by now definitive. The endearing flaws I have discussed could be considered under Gallagher's theory, though what I wish to highlight is how these deviations from a type are shaped and informed by parish membership, at least in George Eliot's early fiction. Eliot's readers are contingently and historically "placed" as much as her characters might be. A character's avarice polarizes, repulsing some while appealing to others; Milby's love for their "dear old" vicar is inextricable from their being his congregation (203). It is little coincidence that the social life of her early fiction takes the form of the parish. Eliot stages the knitting together of parson and parish, framing endearment as the slow outcome of the parson's labor over the course of his tenure. As we'll see, endearment is the inevitable result of a distinctly Anglican pastoral labor: the sustaining of attention over long, even life-long, spans of time, the recognition of a shared membership in a pastoral community, the cultivation of devotion through habitual, willful and quotidian acts.

III. Anglican character

Anglicanism emerged out of the nineteenth century with a modern sensibility as, in Paul Avis's words, "a practical, not a speculative order, one attuned to pastoral care, rather than to maintaining a hierarchical and authoritarian structure of doctrine and discipline" (16). "Anglican theology," Michael Ramsey adds in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, "is a method, a use and a direction" (ctd. in Avis 29). My second chapter discusses Anglicanism's renewed focus on preaching and lay labor. I describe parish tenure's rising importance to Anglican culture in an archive of lay literature and in the parish novel. In this chapter, I show how Eliot registers the changing role of the parson and his tenure's values in her own fiction. Alongside the traditional notion of the parson as the representative of God and Church—a notion of him as a static model for religious conduct—emerged the idea of the parson as a formal agent whose constant presence within the parish provided the grounds for faith's active exercise. This reconceptualization of pastoral labor, from one of exemplarity to one of exercise, is legible in Eliot's characterization of her parsons. Their endearing flaws reflect two of pastoral labor's new, practical values: the duration of his tenure and his lateral position within the community.

The value of long tenures accompanied a larger shift in focus within Anglican culture on earthly time. As writers began to focus more intently on Anglicanism as a practice, as a habitual form of devotion, they also made a greater effort to acknowledge earthly time within ordinary or Christian time. Parson diaries highlighted the diurnal cycles of visiting and sermonizing, parish histories revolved around the passing tenures of each clergyman and his earthly life, and liturgical time—the passing of Advent, Christmas, and Lent—was situated within the passing of the seasons. The passage of earthly time between Sundays and services was increasingly seen as

an opportunity for worshippers to carve out time for private devotion. John Sheppard's *The Suppliant*, an occupant of Eliot's bookshelf, notes the challenge of carving out time for devotion among "secular business." The parson's role as a facilitator for worship and as a constant presence was abundantly evident to Anglican thinkers, writers, and to Eliot herself. The parish novel highlights duration by inviting readers to conceive of the time of reading alongside its periods of tenure, stretching the plot of tenure to match the length of the book. Eliot condenses the plot of tenure, but registers the value of its duration in the particular flaws that her parishioners come to find affecting over time. She also gestures to pastoral labor's temporal function in her narrative pauses over characters.

If on the one hand, the parson was valued for the length of his tenure, then on the other, he was valued for his proximity to parishioners. Eliot dramatizes this in her depiction of Reverend Tryan in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, who settles in the chapel-of-ease at Paddiford Common to allow parishioners who are further away to attend service regularly. Anglican pastoral ties are immediate and embodied. The centrality of face-to-face, habitual intercourse in T.S. Eliot's formulation of the parish in *The Idea of a Christian Society* is not "solely religious, and not solely social," but rather "religious-social." The parish is not, for T.S. Eliot, an ideal, but rather a lived community with a shared "centre of interest" "small enough to consist of a nexus of direct personal relationships, in which all iniquities and turpitudes will take the simple and easily appreciable form of wrong relations between one person and another" (31). For Anglican thinkers such as William Blackstone, John Wood Warter, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the parson performed the crucial work of embodying God's presence before his congregation. It was enough, as Coleridge once said, for the parson to be "with his parishioners and among them" (*Constitution* 49). As we will see, not only does Eliot's mode of describing clergymen position them "on the level" with parishioners who see their own flaws mirrored back to them, but her narrator's pedestrian perspective also evokes a parson on his rounds.

Eliot ultimately engages with Anglicanism as a formal activity, rather than a set of doctrines or principles. When critics discuss Christianity (or its critique) in Eliot's work—as Erin Nerstad does in her recent study of "evangelical insight" as a form of sympathy—they too narrowly interpret Eliot's interest in religion as doctrinal and theological rather than practical and lived. The way that religion itself operates in Eliot's fiction is not so theoretical. Even if Eliot's parishioners are not acquainted with the finer points of Anglican doctrine, they've internalized its practice; for example, Mrs Poysner, though not particularly devout, has a working knowledge of catechism. The parson, we might speculate, is interesting to Eliot because unlike deans, bishops, and other ecclesiastical figures, he represents the juncture of belief and practice; the parish represents the site where the spiritual practice inheres in lived experience. Eliot perceives the building of pastoral ties, like the process of reading, as a form of understanding only available through highly particular experience. The parson's peculiar lovability is built over time, rather than theoretically given; his "unlovely oddity" follows not from moral judgment, but personal relations. While Eliot certainly thematizes and represents pastoral life, the parallels she makes between the practice of religion and the practice of fiction are, ultimately, formal—and should be understood as such.

IV. Long Tenures

Let us return to Eliot's metaphor for Mr Crewe as "a parson who had been part of Milby life for half a century": "it was like the dents and disfigurements in an old family tankard, which no one

would like to part with” (178). This metaphor, importantly, associates pastoral affection with the passage of time, not just in the explicit language of “half a century,” or “old” contrasted with a “fresh new piece” of ceramic, but also in the “dents and disfigurements” that accrue with age. The longevity of the tankard’s possession, likened to the parson’s tenure, is marked out in its flaws.

The quirk, the “irritating fault” that the parson possesses, Eliot suggests, becomes legible as loveable only after a period of time. Like the “dent,” the parson’s fault becomes both a sign of belonging and a thing itself to love. Eliot gestures to a notion then in wider circulation: that the time the parson spends with the parish is more important than his moral perfection. Dwelling within parish bounds from day to day constitutes the basis of his irreplaceability. “A parish has wants and claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly resident,” Sir Thomas reminds us in *Mansfield Park*, “and which no proxy can be capable of satisfying to the same extent” (256). Following the notion of Anglicanism as a habit of the everyday rather than a permanent belief, tenure—the period of a parson’s residence, from the moment of inheritance to his leavetaking or death—became increasingly valued as a measure of a parson’s efficacy. And, as the British grappled with pluralism and absenteeism as a pervasive employment problem well into the 1850s, tenure could not be taken for granted. The span of a parson’s residence in the parish became a sign of his fidelity to it.

Eliot’s *Scenes of Clerical Life* not only registers the value of tenure in relationships between parishioner and parson, but also adopts it as a structure. The plot of tenure, beginning with the clergyman’s settlement in a parish and ending with his departure or death, echoes throughout her fiction. “Janet’s Repentance” begins with the arrival of evangelical Reverend Tryan to the chapel of ease in Paddiford Common; the story ends with his death and subsequent secession by Mr. Walsh. Eliot lingers on the words on his gravestone—“two years officiating curate at the Paddiford Chapel-of-Ease, in this parish”—which punctuate her tale with our awareness of his time of residence (301). “Amos Barton” likewise ends on the Reverend’s departure for a parish in a distant manufacturing town, leaving behind “general regret among parishioners” and with a new vicar, Mr. Carpe (62). We forget how closely Eliot’s sketches hew to clerical tenure as a plot, taking its cues for natural beginnings and endings, producing a harmonious coincidence between a “living” and a life. Echoes of the parish plot extend even further into her later work. While Reverend Irwine is *Adam Bede*’s resident clergyman, the novel might also be read as a tale of settlement that brings the roving Methodist preacher Dinah from a state of vagrancy to one of residence, enacting her marriage to Adam alongside her ultimate settlement within the parish of Hayslope.

Eliot’s fiction replicates the conditions of parish tenure, linking the passage of diegetic time to the time of the parson’s residence. Like Eliot’s parishioners, readers reside with the parson over the course of his tenure. Her narratives subsequently effect a similar emotional arc in readers and parishioners, imparting to both a wistfulness after his departure, whether it is by the posthumous appreciation of the work of Mr Gilfil as a “dear old Vicar,” or the depiction of the “heart aches,” “sad good-byes,” and the “separation from the loved and familiar” that attend Amos Barton’s giving up of the Shepperton curacy (166, 63). These endings are more emotional beats than tragedies; they evidence the slow, habitual accrual of affection that we have hardly been aware of. The moral lessons of her sketches are coterminant with the parson’s tenure. Our experience of residence is accentuated by the spatial restriction of her fiction; taking its setting almost exclusively as the parish bounds, her fiction asks that her readers, like her parishioners, dwell there for the span of her narrative. *Scenes of Clerical Life* transpire fully within Milby and

Shepperton parishes. *Adam Bede* largely confines her characters to Hayslope parish, whose binary geography establishes the novel's central drama: one branch of the road from the green leads up to the church while the other sloping path leads down to the Methodist Dinah's open field. When characters—such as the ill-fated Hetty—do venture beyond parish bounds, it is with the dread of falling under another parish's jurisdiction: "To Hetty the 'parish' was next to the prison in obloquy" (339). Her parish, Milby, is the limit where parochial sympathy runs out and systemic, impersonal welfare begins. The novel's parochialism is best expressed by Mrs Poyner: "I should be loath to leave th' old place, and the parish where I was bred and born, and Father afore me. We should leave our roots behind us, I doubt, and niver thrive again" (315).

The convention of parish residence that shapes Eliot's work grows out of an understanding of pastoral labor as a function of earthly time. The healthy pastoral relationships of *Adam Bede* are, as Rector Irwine acknowledges, a matter of lengthy residence: "the relation between us as clergyman and parishioners came of age two years ago, for it is three-and-twenty years since I first came among you, and I see some tall, fine-looking young men here, as well as some blooming young women, that were far from looking as pleasantly at me when I christened them, as I am happy to see them looking now" (242). Only over the protracted spans of his life, "three-and-twenty years," can the parson's value be grasped—can he be made "dear"—and often, only to his parish. As Brenda Collum notes, "a village usually had a pretty clear idea of the value of its minister" even if its bishop did not (33). Eliot's parsons do not work by their symbolic or moral exemplarity as Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* does, nor do they compel by their powers of preaching, as Humphry Ward's do in *Robert Elsmere*. Eliot's Amos Barton has, by Mr. Hackit's words, "no gift" at preaching, "neither that flexible imagination, nor that adroit tongue" (10, 22). Mr. Gilfil's produces sermons so formulaic that even Tom Stokes can produce "an uncommon clever" mock-sermon after them, "having a text, three divisions, and a concluding exhortation beginning 'and now, my brethren'" (73). If anything, their incompetence at the pulpit underscores their inadvertent impact through the life they live: "Amos failed to touch the spring of goodness by his sermons, but he touched it effectively by his sorrows; and there was now a real bond between him and his flock" (62–3). As Eliot adds of Irwine's doctrinal interests: "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" (164). Eliot's emphasis on the life lived before the congregation echoes John Henry Newman's notion that the Anglican minister "preaches in his life even more than in his words" (25). The parson's active company from day to day and hour to hour is its own form of spiritual exercise.

Her sketches and novels not only make this time made palpable as "residence," but also as quotidian time. In *Adam Bede*, the ringing church bell modulates all activity, from the closing of Jonathan Burge's workshop to Hetty's milking of the cows. The novel not only synchronizes its moralizing with the Anglican lectionary, with its "septunary structuring" of events evoking the "lectionary lesson associated with the Feast" as Mary Wilson Carpenter argues, but the novel also more basically centers its narrative developments on parish events such as Sundays, preaching, church, games and suppers (33). Anglicanism manifests as calendrical and habitual, the stuff of the long durée and the everyday. Eliot's interest in the temporal aspect of Anglican labor emerges in church. Where her parsons fall short in eloquence, they succeed out of sheer persistence. Reverend Amos Barton has "neither that flexible imagination, nor that adroit tongue" to "convey religious truth within reach of the Fodge and Fitchett mind" (22–23). His

words “[turn] on unleavened bread” (23). Yet parishioners nonetheless benefit from the habit. “‘We’ve had a very good sermon this morning,’ was the frequent remark, after hearing one of the old yellow series, heard with all the more satisfaction because it had been heard for the twentieth time; for to minds on the Shepperton level it is repetition, not novelty, that produces the strongest effect; and phrases, like tunes, are a long time making themselves at home in the brain” (72). Here, Eliot locates the effectiveness of the sermon in duration and familiarity. In Shepperton, the parson’s shortcomings—his misjudged sermons—turn into another merit: his capacity to hold their attention again and again, so that his work may take hold over “a long time.” Eliot suggests that Anglicanism works better as a formal practice rather than a learned content. “Lex orandi, lex credenda”: belief proceeds from prayer. We can see similar thinking in moments when the physical habit of Anglican ritual overtakes comprehension, such as in Mrs. Poyner’s command of the catechism—despite her unlearnedness—or the image of Adam Bede hunched over his Bible on Sundays, “lips moved in semi-articulation” (445).

In depicting Anglicanism as a process of belief that unfolds over time, a habit facilitated by a willing clergyman, Eliot is not alone. Writers across the nineteenth century underscored the practical, time-bound aspects of Anglican liturgy and often likened the forms of habitual, sustained attention it demanded with that of reading. Such attention was not to be taken for granted. As early as 1708, William Beveridge’s tract on *The Great Necessity and Advantage of Public Prayer* muses that “Our thoughts being so very quick and nimble, so unconstant and desultory, that it is difficult to keep them close to the Work we are about, so as to serve the Lord without Distraction.” He thus offers tips for “keeping your eye only upon him” during prayer, framing devotion as a form of attention: “While the Exhortation is reading, hearken diligently to it, and take particular Notice of every Word and Expression in it,” he recommends, “When Prayers or Collects are read...you must repeat them in your hearts.” Eliot turned to John Sheppard’s *The Suppliant* for a picture of a “vivid, apprehensive faith” which is generated not “by bare belief, but by an attempt to conceive or image to ourselves”; Sheppard frames religion as an imaginative capacity available to one who has “willfully taken it up himself” (93). Moreover, this ability to exercise attention must be scrupulously maintained over time. He offers the exhortation to “be obstinately constant to your devotions at certain set times” to “maintain in your heart a habit of religion” (200).

The parson could be a guide, or a spiritual coach. For John Henry Newman in his sermon “A Parish Priest and His Charge,” the parson plays a hermeneutic role for his flock, as an “expounder and dispenser” of scripture rather than as a spiritual figurehead. Because the Bible “does not intrude itself on the notice of men” the “Church in its Ministers forces religion on the attention of the world, it seeks, it speaks, it exhorts, detects, explains, comforts” (“A Parish Priest” 5). Cyril Pocknee’s *Parson’s Handbook* echoes this function in the parson’s physical direction of the congregation during service. The parson elicits certain postures from the congregation—“taught to stand at the Eucharist” and “at the Collect,” at the saying of *Gloria in excelsis*; then, kneeling at the liturgy—as a way of guiding their attention with “almost mechanical repetition and uniformity” (43). More recently, scholars such as Krysta Lysack, Joshua King, and Deidre Lynch have suggested that Anglican literature elicits certain habits of reading through its temporal structures: in the devotional rhythms of Christina Rossetti’s poetry; in the *The Christian Year*’s aim to “align private reading with the ecclesiastical calendar and Prayer Book” (King 147); in the synchrony of “pages and pendulums” in John Clare’s annual ritual of “reading *The Vicar of Wakefield* through every winter” (Lynch 154). What I have suggested here is that parish tenure—the parson’s slow, hardly noticed period of residence—

constitutes yet another rhythm of Anglican life. More than that, it structures Eliot's sketches and novels, cultivating the peculiar affection we feel for her clergymen.

Their influence was thought to be cumulative, not immediate. When writers describe the work of the parson, their analogies to other realms of labor emphasize sustained observation and application, realms in which time itself yields success, since "the effect of earnest ministerial labour is often imperceptible in parishes as on individuals, for a long time" (Warter 55). In F.E. Paget's work, the priest is the military "tactician, with a long sight," who must approach his parish with "a great deal of strategy" or the doctor who must above all be a paradigm of patience: "as certain medicines have a tendency to accumulate in the human system, apparently inert, and then, after a while, begin to exert some tremendous influence on the patient, so in the parochial system, a long course of medical applications which has appeared to be powerless, may suddenly show itself, as having been really adapted to produce the effect desired" (55). "Colleges and professors" may produce a "sound divine" and furnish the "general principles" of theology, "but nothing save experience, and for the most part a long experience," reminds Paget, "will enable you to carry those principles into detail" (59).

Eliot's picture of "Old Leisure" at the end of *Adam Bede* expresses a nostalgia for these slow rhythms of ecclesiastical life. Her narrator longs for lazy Sunday afternoons, "Sunday books" falling open "always in one place," "a sunny walk through the fields from 'afternoon church,'" and the "Sunday Sermon" (459)—and he frames such affection through the language of pastoral labor. Such a life measured out in Sundays and other ritual observances is exemplified by the gentlemanly "Old Leisure" who sleeps "from the text to the blessing," and who likes "the afternoon service best, because the prayers were the shortest" (459). For him, "life was not a task," but "a sinecure." For Leisure, the value of church lies not so much in its perfect practice but in its repeated practice—"for had he not kept up his charter by going to church on the Sunday afternoons?" (459). If there is something endearing in Old Leisure—Eliot's portrait of a clergyman—it is because his familiarity outstrips his admirability. To be endeared to her parsons is less to respect them than to acknowledge the length of their company.

"I earnestly entreat the Reader to pause a while and join with me in reflecting on the preceding Aphorism," enjoins Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection* (152). Many Anglican writers would find value in stilling their readers' attentions as an exercise in willful devotion. There are many ways of reading Eliot's famous "pause" in the seventeenth chapter of *Adam Bede*, though nearly all of them forget that the pause is ultimately about a rector. While Eliot's address to her readers seeks to distinguish her novel from the sermon's "truly spiritual advice," the act of stilling our attention over the imperfect Rector Irwine gestures to her novel's participation in the same moral work (159). Such a pause allows us to make Eliot's characteristic distinctions between the "loveable" and the "handsome" (161). By pausing, she entreats her reader to arrive at new attitudes towards "your fellow-parishioner who opposes your husband in the vestry" or "your newly-appointed vicar" whose preaching falls short, or to "the clergyman of my own parish" who is "perhaps too corpulent" (163). Pastoral relations are the language through which Eliot invites us to suspend our moral judgment, and she points out the necessity of small increments of time—here, of readerly time—for fellow parishioners to become endearing to us.

V. "With his parishioners and among them"

A humbler dynamic between parson and parishioner took hold in the nineteenth century, one rooted in habitual intercourse. "This, at least, we can do, My Brethren," writes Newman, "we can

habituate our minds to view each other in the relation of Pastor and charge” (“A Parish Priest” 7–8). If one value that emerged from this new relation was the parson’s temporal presence—his residence in the parish over time—then the other was his relatability. This is at work in Eliot’s depiction of Mrs. Linnet’s literary company in *Janet’s Repentance*:

On taking up the biography of a celebrated preacher, she immediately turned to the end to see what disease he died of; and if his legs swelled, as her own occasionally did, she felt a stronger interest in ascertaining any earlier facts in the history of the dropsical divine. (188)

Mrs. Linnet looks into the parson’s biography to see herself: whether he suffers the same swollen feet “as her own occasionally did.” The weakness of his constitution is much more than dramatic material; it is a mortal reminder of their shared humanity, if only in the medically mundane. Eliot’s parishioners often seek attachment to their parson on such unhallowed terms. Mrs. Linnet’s interest in literary clergyman echoes Mrs. Poysner’s love of Amos Barton’s poor preaching: “When he preaches about meekness, he gives himself a slap in the face,” she observes, “He’s like me—he’s got a temper of his own” (10).

Eliot’s parishioners turn the parson’s trifling weaknesses into a measure of his worth. We can understand her parishioners’ endearment to his swelling feet and bad temper as part of Eliot’s broader attempt to articulate the new, emerging shape of pastoral relations. If parochial residence describes the length of his encounter with them, then their vulnerabilities describe the *position* of that encounter. No longer is the parson a vaunted spiritual representative; rather, her parsons appear unguarded, shed of their elevated standing, reflecting the increasingly commonplace ideal of the clergyman who merely “faithfully goes in and out amongst his people” (Warter 242). Anglican writers and thinkers of the early nineteenth century imagined a lateral, rather than vertical, relationship. “The clergyman is with his parishioners and among them,” Coleridge writes, as “a neighbor and a family man” (79). Broad Church reformers and Anglican thinkers such as Coleridge, who grappled with the vicissitudes of incoming evangelicism, saw new value in parsons on the ground. They believed permanent residence could counter the waves of incoming enthusiasm from Methodism and other dissenting groups.

The representation of the parson in Eliot’s fiction reflects the new lateral position the clergyman occupies relative to his flock, as an individual embedded within the parish and fully vulnerable to its gaze. Though Lewes would later tout the sketches’ interest in the parson’s earthly mundanities as a “purely secular” literary innovation to John Blackwood, we can see a precedent interest in the parson’s *deshabille* both in Jane Austen’s fiction and in the clergymen biographies that saturated the literary market by Eliot’s time. In other words, Eliot’s dressed-down parsons are continuous both with contemporary literary characterizations of pastoral labor and the broad church’s shift in pastoral thinking that occurred earlier in the century.

What these humanizing details also indicate—what, say, we might glean from an improbable love for a gouty disposition or a hot temper—is a broader emphasis on the encounter between the parson and parish rather than theological lessons imparted. As with the rhythms of parish residence that run throughout her fiction, here Eliot stresses the experience of religious encounter, thus framing Anglicanism less as a stable set of beliefs or a transmitted doctrine than as an activity: the parson’s relationship with his flock is built on humanized moments where such details might be gleaned. That, for example, Reverend Tryan falls so short of the “perfect snuggery” we might imagine for a clergyman (with “strong ecclesiastical suggestions in the

shape of the furniture,” with a “portrait of an eminent bishop” over the mantel, and an “easy chair with a Gothic back”) requires Eliot to reproduce the intimacy of standing in his shabby living room, taking in his “clumsy straight-backed arm-chair, covered with faded chintz” and an “ugly slap-dash pattern on the walls” (231). While he may fall short of our idealized decorous clergyman, our encounter with Tryan’s “unconstrained poverty” suggests that the man in practice “accepts the vulgar, the commonplace and the ugly, whenever the highest duty seems to lie among them” (232). Placing us literally in close quarters with her parsons is one of Eliot’s most common descriptive protocols. What we take for granted is that such immediacy effects an answer to the more abstracted moralizing question Eliot poses to us: “But, bless us, things may be loveable that are not altogether handsome, I hope?” (161). Our coming to love Tryan, not in spite of, but *because of* his ugly furniture is only possible through our particular encounter with him “on the level,” as Eliot might put it.

We see similar moments when ground-level encounters resolve ideological opposition into gentler feelings. Rector Irwine’s pluralism and lazy theology are, considered abstractly, inexcusable. “But whatever you may think of Mr Irwine now, if you had met him that June afternoon riding on his grey cob, with his dogs running beside him,” Eliot observes, “you must have felt that, however ill he harmonized with sound theories of the clerical office, he somehow harmonized extremely well with that peaceful landscape” (62). And, if Irwine’s moral imperfections are still unpalatable to us, then Eliot asks us to consider his face before he addresses his congregation: “I beseech you to imagine Mr Irwine looking round on this scene, in his ample white surplice, that became him so well, with his powdered hair thrown back, his rich brown complexion, and his finely-cut nostril and upper lip; for there was a certain virtue in that benignant yet keen countenance, as there is in all human faces from which a generous soul beams out” (178). This reorientation of our affection depends on the particular, contingent exchanges between parson and parishioner; endearment crucially foregrounds the *activity* of the pastoral encounter rather than the abstracted relation. Framings such as “I beseech you to imagine” or “if you had met him that June afternoon” reiterate the particularity of each encounter. In this sense, as a practical emotion, endearment patterns the value and process of Anglican experience. Pastoral ties grow out of our perceptive exercise, rather than the pastor’s exemplarity.

Reverend Tryan’s living room is one site where our encounter with the parson produces a surprising affection for him. We also make the rounds with Eliot’s parsons at card tables, in a dining rooms with squires, in parlors with aging sisters. If pastoral labor began to be reconceptualized, as I’ve been suggesting, as a formal activity—a set of movements and positions—rather than as abstract governance, then Eliot’s fiction reproduces this same sense of formalization in her narrator’s casual circuits throughout the parish. The parson, in other words, is not just the subject of Eliot’s narrative gaze, but also the figure for its movement. The narrator offers us, in other words, a formal correlative for the clergyman.

The parson’s ability to traverse a small community by foot, to pass innocuously in and out of domestic and public spaces to remain fully embedded within the parish, was increasingly seen as vital to the church. Bishopric and diocesan views of England’s ecclesiastical landscape were by mid-century available through attendance records and religious censuses, but only the parson could provide the church with a view from the ground. Parish visiting—weekly rounds to dole supplies to the out-door poor, to visit schools, to care for the invalid, and to take tea with the parish ladies—made the local clergyman’s presence pervasive and routine.

Eliot's narrator adopts a strikingly similar form of movement. We find her narrator, of course, in the clergyman's usual habitus, describing the unremarkable interiors of Hayslope church, the intoning of a parish clerk in the choir, or gazing up the nave in the discomfort of Milby's pews. But her narrator also traverses into parishioners' living rooms, parlors, and workplaces with an observational, rather than primarily narrative, intent. Even before the centrifugal drama of her sketches take shape, Eliot disperses our attention even-handedly across the parish, visiting Mrs Hackit's tea-party in "Amos Barton" or the Linnet's hearth in "Janet's Repentance." That the narrator moves independently of her sketches' central characters should not be taken for granted; nor should we take for granted the semi-embodied presence that enables such casual interest, producing the effect of conversation overheard.

"I will show you the roomy work-shop of Mr Jonathan Burge," her narrator announces at the start of *Adam Bede* (13). Eliot's early fiction is filled with entrances into spaces that underscore the narrator's modest embodied presence. Rather than an invisible omniscience that naturalizes the passage from scene to scene, Eliot's narrator pauses in thresholds and between households to highlight his movement as movement: "Let me take you into that dining-room, and show you the Rev. Adolphus Irwine, Rector of Broxton...We will enter very softly, and stand still in the open doorway" (*Adam* 49); "So we may leave Cross Farm without waiting till Mrs Hackit, resolutely donning her clogs and wrappings, renders it incumbent on Mr Pilgrim also to fulfil his frequent threat of going" ("Amos" 13). The embodiment of Eliot's narrator has been widely observed, most recently by Cristina Richieri Griffin, who argues "the productive intimacy gleaned from proximate and embodied experiences" of the narrator can be traced back to Feuerbach's grounding of sympathy in the senses (475).

I suggest something simpler: that these deictic moments evoke a parson on his rounds, both in her narrator's neighborly courtesy and in his embodied presence on his walk among parishioners. If, on one hand, as I've argued earlier, Eliot's fiction mimics pastoral residence in its spatial restriction to parish bounds, then, on the other hand, her narrator's movement within parish bounds play out the parson's tracks. Of this, Eliot is explicit. We go literally step-for-step with Reverend Tryan when Eliot opposes a "bird's-eye glance" of him with the pedestrian view: "Any one looking at him with the bird's-eye glance of a critic might perhaps say that he had made the mistake of identifying Christianity with a too narrow doctrinal system; that he saw God's work too exclusively in antagonism to the world," runs her critique, "But I am not poised at that lofty height. I am on the level and in the press with him, as he struggles his way along the stony road, through the crowd of unloving fellow-men" ("Janet" 228). The parson's path "along the stony road," which theological pedants cannot see, is also the path of Eliot's narrator. What's more, Eliot here associates her ground-level movement with the horizontality of pastoral labor; whereas ecclesiastical critics are enmeshed in abstract doctrinal squabbles and Tryan's academic negligence from a "bird's-eye view," the "view on the level and in the press" with the parson affords her narrator a perspectival advantage in the pastoral domain, the domain of the "life and death struggles of separate human beings" (229). Eliot's narrator not only traces the parson's steps through the parish but here explicitly takes the parson as pedestrian company.

"When you walk by his side in familiar talk," chides Eliot, you see "the difference [in] the impression a man makes on you" from when "seen from a lofty historical level" (62). A parson with "no very lofty aims, no theological enthusiasm," and who frankly feels "no serious alarms about the souls of his parishioners," and who is described by a "travelling preacher" as a man "given up to the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life; hunting and shooting, and adorning [their] houses" (62): what is his value? To encounter Rector Irwine everyday affords us a

different opinion. While the view of the “ecclesiastical historian” sees a cleric deficient in “alms-giving” and “theology,” the narrator finds the offending rector “not vindictive” and rather “tender to other men’s failings.” Eliot frames such positive revelations as particular, derived from interaction and experience over time, and above all, narratively embedded. We only perceive this “by entering with them into their own homes, hearing the voice with which they speak to the young and the aged about their own hearthstone, and witnessing their thoughtful care for the everyday wants of everyday companions” (63). This ground-level knowledge is the novel’s strength and is always specific. “I have an affectionate partiality towards the Rector’s memory,” confesses the narrator, much like Adam, who is a “warm admirer” and “partial judge” of Irwine as well (166). Eliot positions us within the parish and suggests how the parson’s model of ground-level experience elicits a mirroring response; the parson’s own generosity towards his flock elicits the same in them.

Eliot’s narrator is famous for her preachiness—given, in Jesse Rosenthal’s terms, to “occasional harangues” (4). Critics have attributed her clericism to a general didacticism and a tendency to over-moralize. Her writing was, to her contemporaries, so redolent of a clergyman’s, that Lewes, before revealing her identity, commonly referred to her as his “clerical friend” (Peterson 49). In many ways, the identification of her narrator as a clergyman is an obvious choice: a natural consequence of her subject matter, her abundant familiarity with Anglican practice, and the sermonic tone that suffuses her voice. Her interjections are littered with phrases that sonically recall the Book of Common Prayer or Biblical verse (“more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” [“Janet” 270]; “All honour...to the beauty of form! Let us cultivate it to the utmost” [*Adam* 162]), and borrowings from the sermonic tradition. The line that closes her summary of Adam’s grief at the end of *Adam Bede*—“Let us rather be thankful that our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible force”—for example, invokes the exhortation of a sermon (435). What I have suggested, however, is yet another option: that the clericism of George Eliot might be located in the *protocols* of clerical labor. The conventions of time and the types of encounters that defined Anglican labor generate the peculiar affection we feel for her clergyman characters; endearment necessitates pastoral work.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Eliot’s clergyman narrator, who goes in and out among parishioners, is himself endearing, at once idiosyncratic and deeply human. His sweeping moralisms (“the trivial erring life which we visit with our harsh blame, may be but as the unsteady motion of a man whose best limb is withered” [166]) so typical of sermonic speech, are also repeatedly grounded by a “we,” encompassing its speaker within a spiritual community of shared humanity. The preferences for her own characters that her narrator airs—over and against broader rubrics of beauty or merit—circumscribe her narrator as embodied, subjective, and prone to fault. “Mine, I fear, is not a well-regulated mind,” her narrator confesses, “it has an occasional tenderness for old abuses; it lingers with a certain fondness over the days of nasal clerks and top-booted parsons, and has a sigh for the departed shades of vulgar errors” (“Amos” 5). That the narrator’s weakness for the parsons of yore is *his own weakness* humanizes him, much in the same way that that his inexplicable preference for Adam endears. Though, “of course, I know that, as a rule, sensible men fall in love with the most sensible women of their acquaintance,” her narrator concedes, still, sensible Adam loves the difficult Hetty, and “for my own part, I respect him none the less” (318). Her narrator, in other words, is particularized by his irrational love for his characters. If endearment depends on logic of exceptionality—*my parson* rather than a parson—then the narrator’s idiosyncratic preference for Adam both dramatizes the act of endearment, and produces it by the narrator’s own deviation from the mean.

Despite Eliot's disavowal of explicit interest in religion and distaste for its laymen—"I cannot understand why, as a body, the Clergy are so fatally uninteresting," she writes, on J.A. Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith*—her fiction would be suffused with the language of faith (267). "Here I find myself alighting on another of the Vicar's weaknesses," she writes in "Mr Gilfil's Love Story," "which, if I cared to paint a flattering portrait rather than a faithful one, I might have chosen to suppress" (74). "Faithful," associated here with the "Vicar's weakness," opposes the falser "flattering"; the term repeatedly appears across her novels to describe an accuracy of description: her "faithful realism." In *Adam Bede*, she invokes a "source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence" (161); her narrator's strongest effort is "to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in [her] mind" as opposed to a "flattering" one (159). That her "faithful realism" was in some way coming to replace the practice of faith was not lost on her. "The men that write books, Carlyle says, are now the world's priests, the spiritual directors of mankind," she writes of Froude's *Nemesis of Faith*, "the minds of all of us, from highest Lords to enlightened operatives, are formed in reading rooms...by all the shrewdest, and often the most worthless, novel writers or paper editors" (267). Novel-reading's moral teachings, however meager, come to fill the vacuum of spiritual guidance left by the nation's clergymen who prefer to spend time "getting livings," "yet even this is better than nothing, better than that people should be left to their pulpit teachers, such as they are" (267). If Eliot's vision of the novelist smacks of frustrated hopes for the parson—"they might do something, these Clergy, if they would go to work over this ground"—then she herself would come to occupy the role (267). On account of her "charismatic force," Gordon Haight observes, women became "devotionally (even pathologically) attached to her" (27). Many came to attend service at the Priory, a Sunday service at her and Lewes's shared home in what is now Primrose Hill. Eliot would continue to attend Unitarian, Anglican, Calvinist and other dissenting services throughout her life because, in Haight's words, "she who ministered also needed to be ministered unto" (27).

Chapter Five College Parochialism

“You consider Tuition as a species of pastoral care, do you not?”
—John Keble, *Memoirs* (1869)

The appeal of the academic novel, writes Merritt Moseley, “can be difficult to explain” (11). And in traversing this genre’s repetitive terrain of quadrangles, “quirky” (if donnish) “life-giving humanistic intellectuals” and its diegetically-impooverished realm of “creative writing courses and English studies,” which are, as Gore Vidal puts it, “activities marginal (to put it tactfully) to civilization,” it is not hard to see why (180). The earliest iterations of the academic novel such as *Reginald Dalton* and *Verdant Green* appeared in the nineteenth century, while works like *Lucky Jim*, *Changing Places* and *On Beauty* continue the tradition today. All, however, manage to be simultaneously “too sensational and apocalyptic,” as Elaine Showalter puts it, and utterly quotidian (121). If their conflicts are not ugly, then they are boring: “The daily life of a professor,” concedes Showalter, “is not good narrative material” (121). The heated squabbles over departmental appointments and scholarly territory often appear, as David Lodge says, “comically disproportionate to the passions they arouse,” but perhaps, he speculates, this “relatively harmless” quality to the novel’s conflicts is the “ultimate secret of the campus novel’s deep appeal” (263). Despite their ironizing, storm-in-a-teapot perspective, these novels also enable us to freely and deeply invest in departmental meetings, toothless rivalries and petty administration in a fashion “safely insulated from the real world and its sombre concerns.” Turning the small into the sublime, academic novels, in some sense, allow us to be parochial.

Universities cultivate a certain parochialism—not only in a figurative sense, but also, as in a more precise, historical one. As I argue here, writers remade the university in the image of the parish over the nineteenth century. The analogy between parish parson and university preacher unfolds almost ubiquitously across Victorian fiction and literature. Chapel-going, sermons, and pastoral care became central to representations of Oxford and Cambridge, even as they remained inessential to the university in practice. It was widely acknowledged that chapel was not well attended, and that dons and fellows comprising the university’s preaching body were less educators than quaint figureheads. Yet writers across the century lovingly invoked the image of the parson, transforming the university for hundreds of readers into a set of pastoral ties both intimate and familiar. This analogy continues to resonate today, when Sheldon Rothblatt invokes the Whiggish view of Oxbridge as “parochial, archaic and anachronistic,” or when Geiger labels the early American university as “small, parochial, and inherently religious in outlook” (Rothblatt 18; Geiger 2). Pastoral language still circulates throughout conventions of academic life. We hope someday to make “tenure,” a professional distinction we share with the parish parson; in addition to chapel, Oxford still has its rectors and wardens. To “profess” is not only to teach, but to take religious vows. This chapter will both uncover the figures of pastoral labor at heart in academic fiction and show how they worked to remake the university as a distinctly English institution whose value could, crucially, be taken on faith.



From a historical standpoint, what is surprising is not just that these writers revive a vestigial, out-moded imagery, but also that such imagery promulgates an academic vision seemingly on the wrong side of history. As the story goes, the university emerged from the nineteenth century

both modern and secular, transformed from reclusive monasteries into disciplined research institutions. The flourishing of the natural sciences and the bureaucratization of schools in Germany, Prussia, and Scotland led Britons to question the workings of their own. Sleepy, clerical Oxford and Cambridge lagged behind, and the reasons—to reformers—were manifold: their exclusively Anglican identity barred dissent and free thought; areas of study favored by clerical fellows such as classics and theology overshadowed the natural sciences; powerful colleges hindered the development of a university-wide professorate geared towards research. At best, Oxford and Cambridge were little more than finishing schools for young gentlemen or paddocks collecting aimless youth for a life in the ministry. Advances in education, so writers argued, were elsewhere. Such as Scotland: the merits of Edinburgh and Aberdeen were pitted against Oxon's "broadly humanized tutors" in William Hamilton's essays for the *Edinburgh Review*. Or on the Continent: in *Higher Schools & Universities in Germany*, Matthew Arnold looked to European ministries of education as models for British reform. To French education theorist M. Renan, Oxford seemed like a "strange relic of the past," a "purely humanist and clerical" institution for "a gilded youth that comes to chapel in surplices" with an "almost total absence of the scientific spirit" (Tillyard 174). The English don, whom Sheldon Rothblatt observes was "a clergyman in the first instance, not an academic" adopted the life and concerns of the former (454). "The typical Oxbridge fellow," writes William Clark, "unless a hopeless slacker or hardcore academic, was headed one day for a vicarage or parsonage" (25). As Edward Gibbon recalls, they were "easy men" whose "days were filled by a series of uniform employments: the Chapel and the Hall, the coffee house, and the common room, till they retired, weary and self-satisfied, to a long slumber" (Clark 22). Implied associations between the university's clerical heritage and its academic shortcomings resonated throughout critiques of the nineteenth century. Pastoral life, in other words, represented what a liberal, modern university needed to leave behind.

My aim is less to describe the English university's well-known clerical heritage or to reprise broader debates over higher education's humanist or utilitarian ends, than to investigate the parish's curious symbolic significance to writers and novelists at this particular moment. Why did novels return us consciously to such dated figures of pastoral life, even as the university sought to modernize? To answer will require passing over a broader history of links between the Church of England and its universities that is undeniably rich: that universities were, from the first, professional training grounds for the clergy and seen by some Victorians as "no more than an ossified degree mill[s] for aspiring clergymen" (Stone 8); that fellows held cures and preached regularly beyond university bounds; that advowsons—the right to nominate parish priests—fell largely to the colleges; that deeper loyalties between colleges and particular parishes were rehearsed in college chapel, where local benefactors displayed their arms and sometimes required fellows to preach sermons in their praise; that the early nineteenth century saw the formation of aid societies, such as the Cambridge Clerical Education Society, to fund lay training in the colleges. This history has been well canvassed by historians of the nineteenth century. The university's ecclesiastical vintage is beyond question, but how and why it took on a new weight in the nineteenth century is worth exploring. I am concerned with how the preacher at the pulpit remained a compelling vision for a remarkably varied number of writers, in ways that cut across sectarian affiliations: from William Gladstone to John Henry Newman, from F.D. Maurice to Thomas Arnold and Charles Kingsley, and from Cuthbert Bede to Humphry Ward. Even as university legislation sought to remake collegians into educated subjects arguably more abstract—free of denominational identity, upwardly mobile and untethered to class, unattached

to the college's dense, trivial social networks and manicured quadrangles—Britain could still love its professors as parsons.

I study the rhetorical work of this analogy—a work that is double-edged and at times contradictory. The rise of the academic novel popularized university culture, making Oxford's cloistered halls more widely available to readers who had never attended. On one hand, the topos of the parish makes Oxford comforting to a Britain confronted by the strange dress, language, and ritual of academic life. Nothing is more “through and through English,” writes the *Edinburgh Review*, than “her ministers,” who, “though called and set apart by authority for their office, are not cut off either by training or tradition from other men” (479). No figure more democratic and widely appreciated, it seems, than the parish parson. Yet on the other hand, this analogy has an exclusivizing effect. At the same time that the metaphor of the parish imbues the university preacher with a wide layman's appeal, it also draws our attention to the very circumscribed limits of pastoral presence: that the parson's radius of influence is both small and highly specific; that the novel represents precisely what its readers cannot experience themselves. Scenes of sermonizing—as I will show—have the paradoxical effect of both drawing us into the parson's ambit and leaving us out. The immediacy of chapel not only mystifies the parson's authority, but crucially limits judgements of its value to the community of believers within his reach. The university's parochialism then becomes more than just an emblem of its clerical heritage, but a powerful structure of faith: a logic of justification that is itself self-absorbed.



Given their “remarkable sameness,” the plot of the earliest academic novels—such as *Reginald Dalton* (1823), *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1859), *Godfrey Davenant at College* (1856), *Truth Without Fiction* (1838), *Christ Church Days* (1867) and *College Debts* (1870)—hardly bears recounting, but Mortimer Proctor will do so anyways. “The freshman, armed with parental advice from either a father who is a country vicar or a widowed mother who plans to live in penury to educate her son, arrives at the university aboard a coach driven by a cigar-smoking, horn tootling undergraduate” (1). There he encounters rioting collegians, disgruntled servitors, and dons as old as the halls they haunt. He might wear the wrong set of gowns; he will almost inevitably find himself in the middle of a boat race. It is all so foreign and strange, but there is one place that reminds him of home. In Cuthbert Bede's *Verdant Green*, the eponymous freshman steps into St Mary's to hear the University sermons, which invite him to think back to “the plain and highly practical advice which the rector, Mr. Larkyns, knew how to convey so well and so simply to his rustic hearers back home” (82). Then, there is *Tom Brown at Oxford*, whose first morning service invites comparisons to his own parish church. While St. Ambrose chapel is considerably more ornate, Tom Brown chooses, rather, to describe it to his sister Geordie as “a quaint little place” (20). Smaller, even, than his home church: “about the size of the chancel of Lutterworth Church. It just holds us all comfortably.” In Charles Astor Bristed's *Five Years in an English University* (1851), such comparisons to home are even transatlantic: he finds chapel “the fittest place” for introducing the “powers of the college” to his American readers for its sense of routine and familiarity, even if it “differ[s] in size and architectural beauty” from their home church (31).

There is more, of course, to their homely tint than meets the eye. Later I will explore such scenes in greater depth to offer a more nuanced account of their analogy between parish and

university; while the figure of preacher at lectern draws obvious parallels, these scenes also recognize the context of their delivery. Historically speaking, university sermons were distinguished from “parochial” or “plain” sermons by their elevated language and academic temperament. Unlike parish sermons which would move quickly beyond script to furnish a set of practical exempla, university sermons tended to grapple more with scripture’s historical and interpretive exigencies. Parish sermons lasted no more than half an hour, while university sermons could run twice as long. But there is little doubt that these moments here are meant to resonate as a resolutely familiar feature of life. “The sermon’s ubiquity in British life,” as Keith Francis writes, is recognized “from the smallest village parish to the open air at Epsom Downs” (42). While the novel pursues college life with abundant anthropological interest, representations of university sermons bridge the gap between the college’s strange halls and the broader British public.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Humphry Ward’s *Robert Elsmere*. Though known mostly as a tale of conflicted spiritual identity, the novel rehearses a surprisingly traditional trajectory for the university youth. Robert, like so many of the academic novel’s protagonists, follows his father’s footsteps into the gated squares of Oxford and back outward as inheritor of his father’s parish. Oxford reminds him of this; as he treads the Lime Walk of Trinity Gardens “his mind admitted the strange picture of himself occupying the place which had been his father’s; master of the house and the parish” (51). In *Robert Elsmere*—as in academic novels writ large—the son becomes a (spiritual) father, and the university student, a curate.

While the novel transpires after Robert’s graduation, it remains firmly tethered to Oxford’s halls and quadrangles, its cricket field and river. Robert returns to the grounds with his mother, and the campus lays on them “its old irresistible spell; the sentiment haunting its quadrangles, its libraries, and its dim melodious chapels stole into the lad’s heart and alternately soothed and stimulated that keen individual consciousness which naturally accompanies the first entrance into manhood” (50). Of all the spells that Oxford lays on them, none is more powerful than the sermon’s. Robert, in his exhibitioner’s gown, takes his mother to chapel on Sunday, where she is taken by the “strange brusqueries and simplicities of manner and phrase—simplicities so suggestive, so full of a rich and yet disciplined experience, that they haunted her mind for weeks afterwards—[and] completed the general impression made upon her by the Oxford life” (53). She looks upon the “scores of young faces” upturned towards the speaker and their “full unison of the hymns” (53). Chapel takes hold of her with an “extraordinary intensity.” And though she has never attended Oxford herself, she exits St. Mary’s “tremulous and shaken, leaning on her son’s arm” (53).

Ward renders the culture of Oxford in terms of chapel and sermon, hymn and congregation, for a number of reasons. To mainstream Britain, the chapel is instantly legible as a site of common union and moral edification. The terms by which Sunday sermon appear here are undeniably democratic: the preacher’s words are received by the congregation’s uniformly worshipful faces; they sing in unison. Ward makes of college ritual a collective exercise in worship, where even Mrs Elsmere—who comes as a stranger to campus—may belong. Her wholehearted surrender to the words of Henry Grey indicates the extent to which she functions as a proxy figure for Ward’s readers; despite having never attended Oxford in the first place, we—like her—are brought into the university’s pastoral ken, made to feel both like tourists and entirely at home.

Pastoral labor is a particularly thick investment for the novel as a whole. Ward charts three movements for her young protagonist: first, as an Oxford graduate under the tutelage of the

preacher Mr Grey; then, as a parish parson for his father's old curacy at Murewell; and finally, as a workingman's preacher in the slums of London. Robert's pastoral circles widen and take him farther away from college grounds; his escalating conflicts of faith lead him to leave the Church of England. To the novel, however, parish work is not a departure from, but rather an extension of, what Robert has learned in college. "The forces of imagination and sympathy" first cultured in his academic work are "precisely the same forces at work in Elsmere's parish plans, in his sermons, in his dealings with the poor and the young" (197). Although Robert leaves Oxford behind, the novel conceives of his repeated returns to campus, his mourning of his mentor's passing, and his turning of pastoral sermons into tales of Christ for poor laborers, as a testament to the college's enduring ethos. "Seems like a parson somehow," remarks a London mechanic, "But he ain't a parson" (456). Oxford is where Robert falls under the tutelage of Henry Grey, and he recalls with great love that "it was Henry Grey's influence, in all probability...that saved for Elsmere the life of thought" (270). "The man's whole presence, at once so homely and so majestic," provides the template for Robert's parish work (346). Though this novel is about the loss of faith, it evinces an unflagging fidelity to the ideal of pastoral labor.

College through the eyes of Humphry Ward is a pastoral experience, where we rub shoulders with university greats with the routine intimacy of our local parish parson. Her novel magnifies the familiarity of college ritual by framing it in terms of the parish: a provost's sermon that should be academic business as usual is turned into profoundly affecting congregational worship; Robert's encounters with Henry Grey, whom we later learn has only met with Robert a few times, provides his pastoral inspiration for life. If this generalized sense of pastoral affection begs coherence—associated neither strictly with a denomination nor with an educational school—it is because the analogy between parish parson and university preacher taps into a well of much broader, unifying, cultural attachments.

"Certainly," writes Edward Burne-Jones, "I never thought I should devour a book about parsons" (Ward *Recollections* 245-6). Though we have largely forgotten it now, *Robert Elsmere* experienced a legendary popularity. In its first year, the novel sold 40,000 copies in Britain and 200,000 in America. "Circulating libraries," by Ward's recollection, "fretted to death for copies" (244). The novel's serious-minded tussles with orthodoxies of the day, its intellectual presentism, and its pieties were among its attractions—but it would not be a stretch, either, to count among them the novel's fondness for pastoral life. "All that renders life desirable," Gladstone admits in his review, is "the formation of an ideal parish" at Murewell (9). Ward's turning of Oxford's rarefied air into a set of more tangible and exportable parochial practices was part of the novel's appeal. While Robert Elsmere is Ward's hero, his gaze is perpetually turned back to his college mentor, Henry Grey; this is a figure inspired by the Oxford fellows who glided through Ward's youth: T.H. Green, mostly, but Matthew Arnold and John Henry Newman, too. *Robert Elsmere* is thus as much a retrospect and extension of Ward's pastoral-collegiate *Recollections* as it is a novel: "the vision of the preacher, in those who saw it," she writes there, "is imperishable" (139). She describes hours spent "looking out from those dark seats under the undergraduates gallery" in St. Paul's, the stir of the procession, and the voice "high and penetrating" from the chancel. Newman, Pusey, and Liddon—famed Oxonians, all—would take the pulpit before her, "but to me," she insists, "these great names were not merely names or symbols as they are to the men and women of the present generation" (136).

We find a confusion of sentiment when other Victorians look back at college, one which conflates professors with parish parsons—and bears out less as clean ideological stances than as a generalized, and rather fond, tone. When Victorians like Ward remember university, they see

grand figures of history modulated by a set of humbler encounters and attachments. Gladstone was Newman's longstanding ideological adversary but could still recall the man's quiet charm at the pulpit, and when asked, "which of Newman's writings will be read in a hundred years?" conceded "I think all his parochial sermons will be read" (Dessain 43). Lytton Strachey, in *Eminent Victorians*, says what he will about Matthew Arnold, but leaves his system beyond dispute: "The final, the fundamental lesson could only be taught in the school chapel; in the school chapel, the centre of Dr. Arnold's system of education was inevitably fixed" (172). And who could forget Arnold, himself, preaching? Ward is just one who remembers: even in her later years, she recalled making "acquaintance with Oxford" in "the crowded lecture hall" with her uncle at the pulpit, observing "the manner and personality of the speaker, and my own shy pride in him—from a great distance" (56, 58). "Every phase of the Church service seemed to receive its supreme expression in his voice, his attitude, his look" (58).

Retrospective visions of Oxford—like ones cited here—often take the frame of pastoral worship. Love of one's parson cuts bafflingly across ideological partisanship to something more fundamental: to come up in university is to be marked by social privilege, but to sing the preacher's praises as if he were the local parson is to be prosaically and universally English. That college simply provides the occasion for such homespun devotions diffuses our sense of the university's remoteness: the parish offers the university's highly formal culture a familiarizing cast. I have only begun to excavate the breadth of the university's parochialism—its improbably varied figures, its pervasiveness in novels and memories alike—and will soon turn more closely to the rhetoric of this metaphor and its ramifications, but would like to pause on one final case.

Few in the mid-Victorian period have less in common with Humphry Ward and her leanings towards a historical Christianity than John Henry Newman, whose affection for ritual, sacrament, and a reenchanting Anglicanism is well known. What Newman shares with Ward, however, is a profound appreciation for the pastoral labor of college. "What is true of a parish priest applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to a University preacher, who, even more, perhaps, than the ordinary parochus, comes to his audience with a name and a history, and excites a personal interest, and persuades by what he is, as well as by what he delivers" (*Idea* 426). Pastoral labor is at the heart of his pedagogical theory in *The Idea of the University*. It also anchors how he conceives of the Oxford movement. While many regarded his growing high church extremism—and ultimate Catholicism—as an insidious betrayal of the English faith, look at how he describes the Oxford Movement in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*:

I had lived for ten years among my personal friends; the greater part of the time, I had been influenced, not influencing; and at no time have I acted on others, without their acting on me. As is the custom of the university, I had lived with my private, nay, with some of my public, pupils, and with the junior fellows of my college, without form or distance, on a footing of equality. Thus it was through friends, younger, for the most part, than myself, that my principles were spreading. They heard what I said in conversation, and told it to others. Undergraduates in due time took their degree, and became private tutors themselves. In this new status, in turn, they preached the opinions which they had already learned themselves. Others went down to the country, and became curates of parishes. Then they had down from London parcels of the Tracts, and other publications. They placed them in the shops of local booksellers, got them into newspapers, introduced them to clerical meetings, and converted more or less their rectors and their brother

curates. Thus the Movement, viewed with relation to myself, was but a floating opinion; it was not a power. (58)

Newman describes the movement as a process of affiliation and exchange in which principles spread through pastoral influence. Their transmission is so casual: his fellows merely “heard what [he] said in conversation” and “told it to others.” His undergraduates take their degrees and their orders and return to their parishes to preach what “they had already learned themselves” unbidden. That the Oxford movement passes through a knitted system of university and pastoral influence is echoed, crucially, by Newman’s description of it as *a period of residence* rather than as a political campaign. Like a parson, he simply “lived for ten years” in the company of fellows and parishioners “without form or distance.” His provocative tracts, so often credited with eroding faith in the establishment, are not worming their way through minds of credulous readers, but are in the hands of responsible “curates of parishes” and “local booksellers” at clerical meetings. Even for his students who do not take up curacies, Newman conjures the language of parochial labor, for they become private tutors who “preached” the movement.

The most immediate consequence of presenting the Oxford movement as a pastoral one is to absolve Newman from direct responsibility; as a “floating opinion” and “not a power” the movement is recast as process of sociable exchange rather than personal conquest. But the broader consequences of this passage are more powerful still: to naturalize the movement’s spread as a parochial phenomenon, a structure located in the ancestral “old Orthodoxy” of “Oxford and England” and in “the custom of a university.” Rather than a Romish perversion of Anglican practice, the Oxford movement is in fact Anglicanism’s apotheosis—it passes through familiar “clerical meetings, and convert[s] more or less their rectors and brother curates.” The pastoral metaphor puts the movement’s terms in a cozy, familiar language and places a human face on a theological movement. Thus Oxford could be loved for its parsons and not its polemics.



To think of the university as a parish, and its preachers as parsons, is to replace an elite Tory image with a more democratic and convivial one of an institution attuned to the need of its publics. To reimagine university life as parish life, interspersed with rituals of churchgoing and avuncular rectors, is to diffuse what is potentially alien and ideologically suspect about college with a sense of pastoral care that feels both comforting and universally British. I have thus far suggested that the parish promotes a substantial *widening* of the university’s appeal. But the pastoral metaphor does more than simply sentimentalize; rather, it substantially reconfigures the terms of the university’s value and how we understand them. At the same time—and in ways contrary to the popularizing ethos I have just described—the parochial metaphor also promotes a certain *narrowing* of the university’s constituency. As I’ll suggest, this analogy crucially remakes the university into an institution that rests on certain grounds of faith, answerable not to a general public but to a small, faithful pastoral community. Novelists invoke parochial belonging to allow certain claims about the university’s value to pass unarticulated. Through the lens of pastoral labor, the university preacher becomes a mystified figure whose authority resides within an exclusive community of believers, and subsequently whose authority, while felt, need not be fully explicated. What the parish finally furnishes the university is an image not as an institution beholden to external calls for modern research and output, but as an institution whose value, in small part, resides in justification by faith alone. The analogy of parson to preacher not only overlays the broader structures of belief onto academic work but also circumscribes those to

whom the university's value might be made legible—a circumscription that accounts for the peculiarly inward-facing temper of academic fiction.



Preaching, there is no doubt, works by immediacy. “Nothing that is anonymous will preach,” insists Newman, “nothing that is dead and gone” (*Idea* 426). In his *Idea of the University*, he describes not only the requisite traits that a preacher ought to possess (“talent, logic, learning, words, manner, voice, action”) but also unfolds an implicit case for how preaching gives heft and force to inanimate knowledge:

There is something more, then, than composition in a sermon; there is something personal in preaching; people are drawn and moved, not simply by what it is said, but by how it is said, and who says it. The same things said by one man are not the same as when said by another. The same things when read are not the same as when they are preached. (425)

The university is less a repository for the cold transmission of knowledge than the site of a “living teaching.” In this, Newman is not alone. His forerunner Richard Whately, who would eventually leave Oxford for parish work, sees pastoral labor as “very much parallel to Oxford education, with lectures (sermons) being important in so far as they form a nucleus for tutorial-based education” (Ellison 89). Accounts of university preaching would not only link sermons to pastoral intimacy, but would emphasize the necessity of personal delivery in inflecting meaning. How very different Newman’s earnest, feverous delivery, marked by a “peculiar intensity of voice and thought” would be from Pusey’s “sad and severe” expression, his “thin, querulous voice that was hardly audible,” and “motionless” posture that betrayed “not a gesture throughout the sermon” (Webber 508, 505). Newman, who preferred manuscript reading to speaking extempore, nevertheless “used the power of his voice to overcome the distance a manuscript imposes between preacher and audience” (Ellison 90). The notion that untold meaning inheres in a look, carriage, or gesture resonates throughout accounts of the Oxford preacher. The brilliance of Liddon’s sermons, insists Ward, could really only be felt in person. On paper he “lacked logic” and “the sense of history,” so his “great mark was made, of course, by his preaching, and not so much by the things said as by the man saying them” (*Recollections* 135, 35).

This emphasis on sermonic presence comes, not coincidentally, when printed sermons were more widely available than ever. An 1827 editorial in the *Monthly Review* declared sermons, along with novels, the most widely published forms of literature (Gibson 20). Newman’s parochial sermons would make publishing history: in 1868, over twenty-five years after he famously resigned his post at St. Mary’s, a republication of his addresses would nearly sell out. Rivingtons, we know, published at least ten volumes of the Tractarians’ plain sermons. Circulars such as *The Penny Pulpit* (1830s–1870s) made popular preachers’ words cheap and available for any occasion. What we might call the “cheapening” of the sermon coincided, paradoxically, with an impulse to appreciate what was not in print: the momentary, ephemeral nature of the spoken word; the immediacy and gesture of the preacher. Those who passed through Oxford’s orbit in the nineteenth century would seek to reinvigorate the university sermon as a charismatic event. “Multitudes flocked” to see Pusey at Christ Church (Ellison 45); St. Mary’s was always “full when Newman preached, thronged usually by not less than 500 or 600 graduates” (Dessain 44).

Oxford nostalgics do more than simply wax poetic over favorite dons; rather, they render exclusive the sermonic material that was then becoming popular and widely accessible. To read a sermon is one thing, but to attend Oxford—to sit at Newman’s feet or take in the splendor of St Mary’s at noon—is to cherish certain forms of inarticulable knowledge. “They hang upon his lips as they cannot hang upon the pages of his book,” Newman writes in *The Idea of the University*. The university preacher “knows his sheep, and they know him”; his students benefit from the “direct bearing of the teacher upon the taught, of his mind upon their minds, and the mutual sympathy which exists between them” (426). There are, of course, times when this pastoral investment in the university links up with broader, rationalizing cases for personal influence within the humanist academy. But still, there is no denying that such moments of sheer charisma imbue the sermon with a quality that can be neither reasoned nor quantified, and so reframe college chapel as invaluable, and even divine.

Novels traffick amply in these sentiments, as *Robert Elsmere* does in describing the young freshman at Henry Grey’s sermon:

Much of the sermon itself, indeed, was beyond him. It was on the meaning of St. Paul’s great conception, “Death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness.” What did the Apostle mean by a death to sin and self? . . . Mr Grey’s treatment of these questions was clothed, throughout a large portion of the lecture, in metaphysical language, which no boy fresh from school, however intellectually quick, could be expected to follow with any precision. It was not, therefore, the argument, or the logical structure of the sermon, which so profoundly affected young Elsmere. It was the speaker himself and the occasional passages in which, addressing himself to the practical needs of his hearers, he put before them the claims and conditions of the higher life with a pregnant simplicity and rugged beauty of phrase. Conceit, selfishness, vice—how, as he spoke of “pitiful, earthly self” with its passions and cravings sank into nothingness beside the “great ideas” and “great causes” for which, as Christians and as men, he claimed their devotion. (61)

Ward locates the sermon’s value in pastoral delivery. The speaker’s presence communicates more than words or logic: it is through “the speaker himself” and his “pregnant simplicity and rugged beauty of phrase” that young Elsmere learns. The emphasis on pastoral delivery, however, does more than simply rehearse a set of familiar associations. Rather, as I wish to suggest, it modifies the terms by which the university’s value can be considered.

The scene frames Oxford’s charge as a matter of faith: students are “Christians” and “men” claimed in “devotion” to the preacher; Mr Grey is framed as an elect figure through which the higher word of God and Oxford passes. Religion is not simply Grey’s topic of choice, but an animating principle of his method. Pastoral presence suffices where one’s ability to follow the sermon’s argument does not. The limits of apprehension realized here do not so much point to the sermon’s intrinsic illegibility, than they do to the sermon’s qualitative difference from rational knowledge. In a way that is somewhat academic—wherein justification is secured by a closed community of believers—what is abstruse and “metaphysical” about Grey’s sermon appears less as a failure of logic than a transcendence of it.

Relatedly, the topos of faith allows Ward to present the sermon’s fruits as private and undisclosed acts of revelation. The sermon itself, we might note, passes undescribed. Grey’s exact “metaphysical language” and “rugged beauty of phrase” is withheld from us; only its effects are legible across the body of congregants and through Robert, who is “profoundly

affected.” The structure and logic of faith—the notion that instinctive belief resists full explication—allows Ward to represent Grey’s work as a broadly *felt* congregational response and cancels the imperative to fully parse Grey’s words, meaning, or argument. Registering the sermon as a set of pastoral feelings rather than an articulate lesson has the effect of mystifying Grey’s work; the sermon’s worth is not directly or openly apprehended as it is more generally *believed* by his parishioners.

Pastoral iconography has the double effect of mystifying the academic’s authority and rendering its grounds exclusive. A full understanding of the sermon, Ward hints, is available only through the bounded atmosphere of Oxford itself, to the select and small audience within the parson’s immediate presence. Ward presents Oxford as a closed system, built on the mutual recognition between an appreciative pastoral community and a charismatic preacher. In this sense, there is a self-ratifying logic at work: place, voice, preacher and presence supplant “argument” or “logical structure” as a measure of the sermon’s worth. The very conditions under which the sermon’s value might be recognized are precisely the ones withheld from the reader. A sermon’s words are widely reproducible to readers, but pastoral immediacy is not. While we are invited into St. Mary’s, we are nonetheless reminded of our exclusion from it. Her novel bears out an exclusionary logic that depends on advertising the gap between those “profoundly affected” by the sermon at hand, the readers who witness these effects secondhand.

A rendering of Oxford preacher as parson is a rendering exclusive of Oxford itself, and the haptic language Ward uses to describe pastoral influence only further emphasizes the contained, exclusive circles in which the good work of the preacher operates. Everywhere in Ward’s novel, spectators are contorted into poses of reverence: the physical positioning of the “bowed figures” indicate the congregation’s “recueillement,” the “slight elastic figure of the platform,” the “gesture of the long arms and thin flexible hands” (455). In *Robert Elsmere*, sermons are so immediately absorbing that listeners are literally bent with attention. Preaching touches: when Elsmere tells the life of Christ in his final workingman’s sermon, his “quick nervous sentences issued and struck, each like the touch of a chisel” (455); the Provost’s sermon makes a “general impression” on Robert’s mother (53). In the presence of Mr Grey, whose “force was so strong,” Robert feels “seized and penetrated,” filled with a potent admiration (61). Seized, penetrated, impressed: the language of touch—the language of physical contact—pervades the novel’s accounts of preaching and presents congregational response as an enveloping feeling, the inner workings of which remain largely closed off to readers. The physical immediacy of pastoral contact implicitly draws attention to her readers’ remove from the scene. Ward’s descriptions sharpen the distinction between reading about a sermon and experiencing one.

When feelings of being “touched” *are* invoked by *Robert Elsmere*’s readers, they are accompanied by implicit claims of membership in the university’s pastoral circles. Edward Burne-Jones feels that the novel threads “through intricacies of parsons so finely and justly” that he is “back again five and thirty years and feeling softened and subdued with memories [Ward has] wakened up so piercingly” (*Recollections* 245). But what Burne-Jones means when he claims to be “piercingly” moved is that he remembers his *own* time at Oxford, studying theology so long ago. These novels generate a nostalgia for Oxford that also functions as a kind of cultural capital. Representations of college sermons throughout the nineteenth century produce two opposite feelings—membership in and exclusion from the university’s pastoral reach—both of which can be traced back to the doubled function of the parochial analogy. Although *Verdant Green*’s first chapel reminds him of the rector and “rustic hearers” of his own parish, “the

abstrusely learned and classical character” of the sermon also reveals “the very different characters of the two congregations” (82). The majority of “those who had on previous Sundays been his fellow-worshippers would open their blue Saxon eyes, and ransack their rustic brains as ‘what could ha’ come to the rector’ if he were to indulge in Greek and Latin” (82). Despite chapel’s familiar parochial frame, the bits of Latin in *Verdant Green*’s sermon—“arma virumque cano, rusticus expectat, sub termino fagi”—and the sermon’s fragments of indecipherable Greek in *Peter Priggins: The College Scout* foreground the reader’s place outside of the university’s esoteric, learned realms. As much as these novels in Hook’s words offer readers “an insight into what goes on *in Oxford*,” they also reinscribe very exclusive forms of parochial belonging onto the sensation of reading, reproducing the hierarchies between Oxonians and not, or as Bede puts it, “the appropriateness of each class of sermons to its particular hearer” (82).

Oxford’s pastoral atmosphere, in this light, is simultaneously engrossing and excluding. Engrossing, because pastoral atmosphere itself—the parson’s relation to his flock, the speaker’s charisma—yields inexpressible spiritual and moral lessons and propels our absorption into its rarefied air. Excluding, because the uniquely circumscribed quality of pastoral influence continually reminds us of our standing beyond it. Now in conclusion, I trace out how these double sentiments circulated more broadly and how Oxford’s parochialism was consolidated as form of response in the public’s divided accounts of John Henry Newman as a parish preacher. The parish becomes, for Newman, a contradictory site where his dedication towards the university could be valued, yet where, by the fact of his circumscribed reach, it could not be widely understood.



Long after Newman left the English church, those who were at Oxford remembered the sermons he gave at St. Mary’s. Matthew Arnold recalls “the charm of that spiritual apparition, gliding in the dim afternoon light through the aisles of St Mary’s, rising into the pulpit, and then, in the most entrancing of voices, breaking the silence with words and thoughts which were a religious music—subtle, sweet, mournful” (Robinson 244). Though many had high praise for “the simplicity and beauty of [the] prose” of these “uncontroversial parochial sermons,” it was most frequently his quavering voice, with “its broad intonation, in which a strong native homeliness lingered under the gentleness of accent,” that would bear description in memoirs and fictional accounts by those who had attended (Gilley 5, Ward 61). Especially compelling was the “occasional long pause” that could “thrill his hearers to an almost unbearable degree” before “the silvery voice in its wonderful clear tones broke the spell, and restored the nerves with its calm eloquence” (Middleton 131). He would preach every Sunday from his ordination in 1828 until his retirement to Littlemore parish in 1843, and though a number of accounts during this time hint that chapel was typically under attended, St. Mary’s was always “full when Newman preached, thronged usually by not less than 500 or 600 graduates” (Middleton 131).

Newman was not so loved beyond Oxford. Preceding his break from the English Church and his formal reception into Catholicism in 1845, the Establishment grew increasingly wary, sending emissaries from London to investigate what they called a “so-called Anglo-Catholic monastery” “in process of erection at Littlemore” (*Apologia* 173). The press reported widely on Newman’s professorial activities as conspiratorial; suspicious of his charismatic hold over the undergraduates and the increasing influence of the Tracts, they described his Oxford post as a shrewd opportunity for seeding ecclesiastical agitation. In the face of these allegations, Newman’s colleagues and students expressed what can only be termed unwavering fidelity: “He is supposed to have been insidious,” says Froude, but appears “on the contrary, the most

transparent of men” (201). Before his congregation, he “taking some Scripture character for a text, spoke to us about ourselves, our temptations, our experience” (204). Mark Pattison insists that Newman’s eyes were focused squarely on his labors for Oriel rather than on any overarching political agenda: “there is no sign that he had any loftier conception of the duties of a tutor than his friends H. Froude and Mosley. Newman was then in Anglican orders; he had the charge of a parish—first St. Clement’s, then St. Mary’s; he spent much time upon the preparation of those weighty sermons by which he first became famous, and which were the foundation of his influence with young men” (59). Pattison, then a don, breezily dispels the rumor that being initially turned down for a tutorship led to foment (“that a college disappointment gave birth to the ‘Tracts’”), and that a political slight, rather than a purer instinct for theological discovery, drove Newman’s shifting views. “This is laughable,” he adds, “Those who have known anything of Newman will understand the flimsiness of the view” (59). Ward, likewise, would confirm the purity of Newman’s character in her “vivid impressions” of those years. Though other tutors such as Pattison, then rector of Lincoln, might fling “gibes” at Liddon and Pusey, Newman saw nothing but respect: “No one whoever came near to Newman could afterwards lightly speak ill of him” (*Recollections* 105–107).

A deep schism registers in attitudes towards Newman. Outside the academy, skepticism of his theological fervor and his growing followers. Inside, warm regard for him as the Vicar of St. Mary’s or as one newspaper called him, “the parish priest of the Diocese of Oxford” (*Apologia* 173). This dissonance, I would suggest, depends on the boundary between a parish and a public, and one’s position in either; the form of love for Newman is parochial and thus can be understood not only as channeled through pastoral fidelity, but also as reasserting key forms of belonging to Oxford and the university. He spoke “not like a theologian in his lecture hall or his study, but as a pastor” (Dessain 44). If university folk remained sharply intellectually divided on matters of his subscription, they nonetheless agreed on his “wonderful pastoral sense” (Middleton 83).

On certain counts, it is little surprise that Newman is one of the nineteenth century’s best remembered preachers. After all, as Jeremy Morris observes, “parochial renewal was really at the heart of the Tractarian enterprise” (408). The Oxford Movement sought to reinvigorate the Church of England as much in the halls of the university as in the outlying parishes. Sermons were aimed at “ordinary parish congregations” and the movement was “not so much written as preached” (Morris 403). Others in Newman’s company were better known for their parish work. Keble spent forty years ministering in the parishes and thirty while he was lecturer of poetry at Oxford; by Victorian lore, he seemed to be merely a “curate from a country village [who] had appeared on a drowsy summer day, and in his quiet, earnest manner, and without flashing rhetoric, had told the leaders the truth” (Webber 489). But the love for Newman seems both in excess of such routine allegiances, and profoundly, even fetishistically, committed to the recovery of each detail of his pastoral address. A number of luminaries passed through the university at this time—Arnold and Gladstone among them—and they picture with unusual precision how Newman preached and how he walked to chapel (he “glided through Oriel Lane with swift noiseless step,” “passing along in his characteristic way, walking fast without any dignity of gait, but earnest, like one who had a purpose” [Middleton 183]). They remember his short, even steps as he ascended to the lectern and his downturned mien. In *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (1886), Froude dwells on “a pause during ‘The Incarnate Son’ sermon,” when the “low clear voice, of which the faintest vibration was audible in the farthest corner of St. Mary’s” suddenly broke, and it was “as if an electric stroke had gone through the church, as if every

person present understood for the first time the meaning of what he had all his life been saying” (Ellison 89). And in *MacMillan’s*, John Campbell Shairp memorializes in verse “the voice that from St. Mary’s spake / voice so intense to win men, or repel, / Piercing yet tender, on these spirits fell” (Barnard 865). They remember his final 1843 sermon at St. Mary’s before departing for Rome, “The Parting of Friends,” which evoked “the mutual love and loyalty of his companions” and how deliberately he draped his sash over the altar railing as a gesture of departure (Giley 11). And they remember him still: “Is it only fancy that makes us see Newman to-day in the garden of Trinity, the Common Room at Oriel, walking swiftly and noiselessly down the High Street from Oriel Lane, or kneeling in the aisles of St. Mary’s?” (Middleton 183).

Memories of Newman read as an archive of moments and gestures, one which does not testify to great deeds or scholarship so much as bear collective witness to the man’s intensity, figure, and bearing. Memories so immediate as to perform a momentary erasure of his audience’s other ideological commitments: what is most striking across retrospective accounts of Newman—and there are many—is how remembering him at the pulpit entailed forgetting all that he stood for. Even his political and theological adversaries would take up “the custom to go and hear him on a Sunday afternoon at St. Mary’s” (Dessain 43). Gladstone concedes a weakness for his parochial sermons; even Charles Kingsley is mesmerized by how “perfectly still he stood...trusting to eye and voice alone” (Parker 166). The ease with which Newman’s enemies inhabit an affection for him speaks to the universalizing function of pastoral respect; even those who scorned his increasingly thorny stance on apostolic succession or his use of ritual could love a parish parson.

One feature of pastoral fidelity is its curiously unproblematic standing alongside other theological or sectarian alignments—as if a universalizing faith towards God and Oxford accommodates all manner of quarrel. But the response towards Newman also expresses other properties of pastoral love which have echoed throughout my accounts of Oxford; these aspects, interconnected and mutually reinforcing, are nowhere more visible than in the response to Newman. In closing, I delineate these properties of pastoral fidelity and show how they work together.



As in descriptions of Arnold in Ward’s *Recollections* or Henry Grey’s sermon in *Robert Elsmere*, Oxonians dwell on Newman’s intonations, pauses and momentary postures in a way defined, above all, by presence. Meaning lurks in every turn of phrase and lilt of voice. To emphasize so earnestly what can be gained in the presence of Newman by sight and sound is to also reserve his value to those nearest to him. Statements of love for Newman are phatic, functioning as much as an act of description as an affirmation of the describer’s proximity to the great preacher. Thus while such immediacy animates Newman’s persona for many distant readers, it also serves to circumscribe our sense of the public to which he truly belongs. Newman serves a loyal pastorate: this is the grounds for Mark Pattison’s defense of him as a consummate clergyman who is seen from afar with suspicion, but who serves with loyalty his “curacies in the city or neighbourhood of Oxford,” who takes “pains with [his] sermons,” and is “in short, steeped in parochialism” (57). It’s no secret that Newman took his pastoral work seriously; he rebuilt St. Clement’s church, wed the local butcher’s son, met students, and graded them harshly. The overfixation on Newman’s bearing as a source of wisdom ratifies the proximate relationship to the preacher at the same time that it refutes perspectives beyond his pastoral ambit as incomplete or unjust.

Secondly, and relatedly, encounters with Newman as parish parson—rather than, more remotely, as a writer of the Tracts or fomentor of Romanism—cultivate his worth as a form of charisma. As with Robert Elsmere before Henry Grey, the logic or structure of Newman’s sermons is not valued so much as an unspoken quality that inheres in his presence. Newman is possessed of a *je ne sais quoi* that brings his congregation to the limits of description. Repeated invocations of his voice as “most entrancing,” “intense,” paradoxically “piercing yet tender” at once imbue these encounters with a sense of wonder and leave its exact workings unarticulated. To speak of effects in place of causes—Froude’s describing Newman’s pause “as if an electric stroke had gone through the church,” for example—is to mystify the experience. Parishioners of Newman thus emphasize their relation to him not only as an immediate one but as a sanctified one; a matter of faith and personal election resistant to explication or exportation. Belief in Newman’s worth acts as form of justification that contains its own criteria.

Two features—proximity and faith—on which love of Newman depends thus gestures to a third: exclusivity. The rhetoric that circulates around Newman secures the university as a pastoral site where the negotiation of parson love with other rational commitments is suspended. This peculiar loyalty to Newman, they say, can *only* be realized as a parishioner. To occupy the same chapel, to witness him crossing the high street, to hear his voice: these are reserved for his faithful pastorate. The sharp break of opinion between those within the university and without should be read as an effect a parochializing rhetoric that secures its own legitimacy of sentiment by doing so within circumscribed limits. Newman’s acolytes collaterally broker Oxford’s cultural capital, since the coherence and legibility of their pastoral fidelity paradoxically depends on its illegibility to those who stand outside. Such self-containment is reflected in Newman’s own defense in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Fed up with the “incessant misrepresentation” surrounding him, Newman withdraws “from all public discussion of Church matters of the day, or what may be called ecclesiastical politics” to employ himself “in the concerns of [his] own parish and in practical works” (*Apologia* 174). He returns to the parish of Littlemore, along with a few “young clergymen” (“laymen, or in the place of laymen”): “I believe I am consulting for the good of my parish, as my population at Littlemore is at least equal to that of St. Mary’s in Oxford, and the whole of Littlemore is double of it. It has been very much neglected; and in providing a parsonage-house at Littlemore, as this will be, and will be called, I conceive I am doing a very great benefit to my people” (*Apologia* 175–176). Newman’s withdrawal to Littlemore is symbolic. It aligns the direction of his work with the flock he serves and renders what remains nobody’s business. “Of course I can repeat your Lordship’s words that ‘I am not attempting a revival of the Monastic Orders,’” he retorts to a London bishop, “I am attempting nothing ecclesiastical but something personal and private” (*Apologia* 176). Reclaiming his labor *as parochial* denies outsiders the means to articulate its meaning and value.



“Strain not your sight at distant objects; rather use a glass” (Newman *Letters* 68). In his second undergraduate year at Oxford, Newman’s doctor diagnosed him with shortsightedness, crediting prodigious reading for it: “Those who have a disposition to be shortsighted, books, contracting as they do muscles of the eye, are apt to make more so” (68). It’s little coincidence that Newman, like many academics, developed such bookish eyestrain, but it’s also possible to read this as an episode in how universities curiously foreshorten our perspectives. Newman, like the students he would eventually teach, is taught to read, think, and value life in close quarters. So taken is he with the campus’s minutiae, in his first days as an undergraduate, that he writes home to his

father about the butter dishes in the Trinity dining hall and sightings of Keble on the high street (“with what awe did I look at him!” [17]). This chapter has read the university’s myopics as more than an academic sensibility—as, rather, an explicit reinvigoration of the university’s pastoral culture in the nineteenth century.

Descriptions of Newman as parish parson announce a shared investment in his presence in, and commitment to, the institution at hand. Read not just as devotion, but as a style of devotion, Oxford’s attachment to Newman reveals certain properties of pastoral love. These properties, as I have hope to have shown, both operate widely in the literature and memoirs of the university and crucially reframe the university as an establishment whose value can be, partially, taken on faith. The parish parson and university preacher become twinned images around which the value of the institution is organized because they carry simultaneously the sign of a higher power and the function of making this authority legible. Both figures, also, crucially demarcate certain limited radiuses of control, justification, and fidelity. The university’s parochialism emerges as a way of relocating proof of worth from broader movements of reform to circles nearer: to the students, professors, and pastorate that constitute the university.

Conclusion Empire through the Parish Gazette

The British Library contains hundreds of parish gazettes. Also known as parish magazines, or church gazettes, these small booklets are no larger than the width of your hand, bound between two flimsy, light blue paper covers. Their paper is thin and cheap, so you can see the letters printed on the opposite side, and most times feel them. Their frontispieces, often adorned with trefoils copied from the local church, are the only things that do not change from month to month; within, you find a rotation of church events, notices, wedding and baptism announcements, rate increases, and ads for available pews. Their matter, in short, is both quotidian and thoroughly parochial. They index the years lived out within parish bounds, month by month. While earlier in the century, parish gazettes display vestry decisions or election results, by the mid-century, many include reprinted sermons and evangelical lessons alongside the poetry and literature that litter its pages.

As publications go, these gazettes did not travel far. Typically their circulation was congregational; they reached the dozens in rural districts and might be passed around to a couple hundred in populous urban parishes. Two—*Our Happy Home Union* and the *Parish Magazine*—did especially well under the editorship of J. Erskine, the vicar of Derby, and reached national circulation. But in most cases, these gazettes would not leave the diminutive radius of the parish; many would not get past the church gate, and most, like the evangelical tracts that went largely unread, would moulder on the lectern. They would not leave the parish, but in the 1860s, their stories looked far: to the fishing villages of Northumberland, to Hawaii and the islands of the South Pacific, to the Swiss Alps and out to India. Parish gazettes took us to the arctic north of the Esquimaux and down the Seine in wooden, hand-carved canoes. This conclusion, then, will think about how the parish gazette looked to the antipodes of empire even as its own ambit remained firmly parochial. I suggest how Victorians encountered empire's exotic peoples and expansive geographies through publications surprisingly close at hand.

"The Church in Hawaii," published in the June 1866 issue of *Parish Magazine*, is a story that spans eight pages and two-hundred years, from Captain Cook's first arrival in Hawaii in 1778 to the more recent visit by Bishop Staley in 1861. Captain Cook makes landing after thousands of miles from the Oregon coast, and what we learn is not how he diplomatically finesses a safe passage for his crew, nor how he braves the threat of shipwreck on the treacherous coasts, but rather how terribly difficult it is, once landed, to find a place to worship. The natives have their festival of Makahiki, but it is all illegible to the poor captain, who longs for the comfort of his pew at home. He and his crew perform their own service on the beaches of the Big Island to a score of baffled natives, and Cook remarks with some annoyance that "even if a man did not know English, or even if he were deaf, still he might understand what was passing by what he *saw*" (6). The trip—and the Hawaiians—will ultimately take Cook's life, so the whole endeavor is, in a sense, not entirely worth his while. But by Bishop Staley's landing in Honolulu in 1861, the faith has now taken root. The King has so graciously translated the Book of Common Prayer into the Hawaiian language, and a small chapel sits on the shore of the island. The bishop can now give a splendid service and sit contently as if entirely in England, excepting the tropical breeze that blows through the nave.

Colonization in this tale is not conquest but convenience. "The Church in Hawaii" indexes not a greed for the riches of empire, but merely a longing for all of the features of homey England, and for the parish church especially. Other tales operate by a similar dynamic. In "Life

among the Esquimaux,” the explorer Mr. C.F. Hall journeys northwards on an Arctic expedition. He sees polar bears and ice flows; he wears newly skinned pelts and rides an open sled day after day. Finally, however, it is not the cold but the cuisine that bothers him. “A man who can eat a whale’s blubber raw, drink a cup of hot seal’s blood,” he remarks, “must have an iron constitution and a wonderfully powerful stomach” (15). What Hall would not give for domestic comforts. All of this killing, fishing, and sledding is so tiresome: would it not be better to put one’s feet up at home?

Just like the explorer Hall in “Life Among the Esquimaux,” the young English gentlemen of “A Canoe Voyage Through Europe” in the 1867 *Stinchcombe Parish Magazine* finds himself terribly inconvenienced by the labor of his travel. He has gone through all the trouble of building his own canoe from sturdy English oak, naming it—perhaps misguidedly—the *Rob Roy*, trimming it up nicely with cedar and bedecking it with a blue silk Union Jack, only to have the fine finish scuffed on the rocky jetties of Calais.



Figures 1 and 2. From “A Canoe Voyage Through Europe.”

The canoe is “paddled by his own arms” and pulled by them on land (8). In a series of engravings that trace the journey in full, we watch as he lugs his canoe through gaping crowds and fields of wheat. Though “few people had more thoroughly enjoyed their summer tour than he,” the tale also invites us to imagine with great detail how troublesome it all is (12). There are no life-endangering exploits here, but simply a myriad of minor irritations: personal discomfort, unexpected inconvenience, the awkward gazes of strange folk. After an exhausting summer, the Englishman is pleased to set foot again on the shores of Britain.



Figure 3. From “A Canoe Voyage.”

The Englishman’s canoe brings me to another point: that, through the pages of the parish gazette, we sit with the poor fellow in his canoe through all sorts of unseasonable and ugly weather, so that we might not have to do so ourselves. The attitude expressed in many of these tales is one of mild admonition. For example, against visions of those well-toured Alps that so many Victorians have romantically imagined, the *Parish Magazine and Monthly Register* warns in an 1866 story plainly titled “Avalanches,” that the “thousands of English tourists who annually visit the lovely valleys of Switzerland during the summer” and extend their stay beyond a sunny June are subject to a rather “long and dreary winter” (11).

In many ways, the parish gazette presents a milder but substantially different view of empire that we find in better-known works of adventure such as, say, H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. Whereas Haggard’s tale, which comes at the end of the century, incentivizes our turn outward with the glorious if unfortunately cursed riches of an African king and figures the journey out as a heroic story of violence and survival, the stories that we find in the parish gazette attend to the merits of return by foregrounding the irritating labor of travel and the overwhelming relief of coming home. Yet even in Haggard’s tale, the narrator hints at the frustrations of travel. He does not “propose to narrate at full lengths all the incidents of our long journey up to Sitanda’s Kraal” which are at least as arduous to recount (36). In such “a journey of more than a thousand miles from Durban,” the “last three hundred or so” are plagued with the “frequent presence of the dreadful ‘tsetse’ fly, whose bite is fatal to all animals except donkeys and men.” Forced to make their way by foot on account of the fly, the explorers find their experience too “wearisome” even for narrative: “I shall not—with one exception to be presently detailed—set them down here, lest I should render this history too wearisome” (36). Even Haggard’s epic tale is haunted by an irritation that its telling elides. If we look closely, tales of global venture which at first appear as a radical break from, or at least incongruous with, the domesticated matter of the parish gazette—its sermons, Sunday school stories, and local character—may speak more closely to its affection for home than we may initially think.

There and, more importantly, back again: the ethos of the empire through parish gazette tracks outward only to wend its way wearily home. In closing, I consider two tales that reflect

back onto the stories I've just described. First, the story of "The Discontented Squirrel," which we find in the April 1859 issue of J. Erskine's *Our Happy Home Union*; and second, "Rolling Stones," which we find in the September of that same year.

In Erskine's gazette, there is a squirrel who has passed a peaceful two or three years of his life very happily under the same tree, when he begins to grow discontent: "What! Must I spend all my time in this spot, running up and down the same trees, gathering nuts and acorns, and dozing away months in a hole? I see a great many of the birds, who live in this wood, ramble about to a distance wherever they like to go, and at the approach of winter, they set out for some far off land, so that they enjoy summer weather all year round" (56). He climbs to the top of his cozy oak and looks to the horizon. "I dare say," says the squirrel, "I could easily reach to that blue ridge, which I see from the tops of the trees" (56). The journey, however, is more easily said than done for the poor squirrel, who halfway to the ridge, finds his provisions spent, and himself "hungry and shivering" (57). He is caught by a passing eagle, the hard labor of his travel wasted, when he is dropped into a nearby tree: "But what was his pleasure and surprise, to find himself in the very tree which contained his nest. 'Ah!' said he, 'my peaceful and happy home! If I ever am again tempted to leave you, may I undergo a second time all the miseries which I have now so wonderfully escaped'" (58). It is not the leisure of travel, but the warm pleasure of return that this tale indulges with relish. That the tired squirrel may wish upon himself "a second time all the miseries" alludes to the work of the tale itself: to show the hassle and limited gain of outward venture before the stirrings of travel take hold. "The Discontented Squirrel" concludes with a saying: "The first sure symptom of a mind in health is rest of heart and pleasure found at home" (58).

Finally, we have "Rolling Stones," in *Our Happy Home Union*, which makes the case for staying in one's place by a spectacular confusion of metaphor: "The Greeks of old time used to say that Sisyphus, a wicked prince, was punished after his death by having to roll a stone up a hill, and as soon as he got it to the top, it rolled down again, so that his labour never had an end. You may be sure that that stone never gathered any moss. If it had been left on the hill-side, it would by degrees have been covered with patches of green moss or grey lichens, but as the proverb says 'a rolling stone gathers no moss'" (145). The squirrel is now Sisyphus, who loses all the moss he might otherwise have gathered for apparently no real gain at all. The essay's opening mixes myth with proverb in a way that both associates the moss that accrues with inaction and time with the green, fertile and mossy grounds of England, and also suggests the task of travel as itself Sisyphean. In the tale itself, we witness the adventures of an "honest farmer, who has been trying one place after another, and not making much money in any of them, because he has not stayed at them long enough to do so" (146). The story describes the lure of capital in the colonies. The farmer "hears wonderful stories of how rich men become in a few months in Australia, so off he rolls to the land of gold, but he gathers no money-moss there, for after many months' hard toil, he comes home to begin again at the bottom of the hill, after a weary climbing in search of the money-moss, which would have grown over him, if he had stayed steadily working at his farm" (146). Though the Australian loam might be grand and golden, it is still England's soil that truly rewards sustained dedication. "Rolling Stones" takes as its conclusion a line from Mackay's hymn on coming back from America to England on the good ship *Europa*: "Rolling home, rolling home, rolling home, dear land to thee! / Rolling home to merry England, rolling home across the sea!" (150).

When we reckon the medium with the message, these stories of glorious empire take on a homier luster. We might draw two conclusions: first, that tales in the parish gazette dramatize England's vast reach to new territories, to show just how much more pleasantly one's time might otherwise be spent at home. These stories—in contrast to more glamorous tales of conquest and riches—reveal a new, more quotidian side to the imperial wanderer, one in which fantasies of far lands give way to the realities of the journey itself: minor irritations, strange foods, inconvenience, and spent labor. Secondly, these tales not only depict empire but seek to supplant our desire for it. Stories of empire in the parish gazette serve the double function of representing empire's splendors and short-circuiting our desire to see them: that we can encounter the primitives of the South Pacific, witness a funeral procession in the plains of western India, or see the Esquimaux's latest catch on the Arctic ice flows in the pages of the parish gazette is reason enough to stay home. A glimpse of a few pages, and nothing more, is just enough for the English reader, who, like the publication itself, is content with a life within parish bounds.

Turning a widened ken into close comfort: the tales of the parish gazette replace their seeming fascination with life abroad with a complacency towards it. Their small circulation throughout the parish thus mirrors their blinkered perspective. This is a surprising view of an England that looked increasingly outward in the 1880s and derived no small part of its power and identity from imperial expansion. But the desire to act out returns to its borders, I suggest, is an impulse no less quintessentially English. Victorian parish gazettes reflect not the attractions of exotic lands, but the impulses of an increasingly parochial England, whose interest resides in empire only as a reflection on the goodness of life close at hand.



Figure 4. John Constable, *Sir Richard Steele's Cottage, Hampstead: A View of London*. 1831. Oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

The parish looks out onto broader horizons it would rather ignore. We find a domestic, visual corollary to these tales in John Constable's 1831 painting *Sir Richard Steele's Cottage, Hampstead*, alternately titled *A View of London*. From the horizon, the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral rises up. Smoke from a passing train clouds our view of London's church, mirrored by

wisps of steam from East End factories and Constable's signature grey clouds above. This is modern London. But the view in the foreground is different: a group of bonneted travelers rumble down a dusty, unpaved road on a cart that is powered by horses, not steam. The bustle of Hampstead fills our view, drawing our eye momentarily away from the abstracted form of Spitalfields' Christ Church at which all lines of perspective converge. In the lower left corner, a lone figure in a straw hat looks down at the ground in front of her, indifferent to the grandeur of the view. This, in Constable's words, is "a view of London," too. London is both ordered by the grand Church, yet ultimately interested in its own foreground; here, Constable manages to make modern London look so very parochial.

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