

Representation between Utilitarianism and Liberalism: Focalization in Phineas Finn

MICHAEL DANGO

Empathic Novels

Martha C. Nussbaum's ethics of the novel is a contemporary representation of a classically liberal position. In her account, the ethical role of fictional narrative is to make possible the exercise of compassion: fiction acquaints us with worlds and characters we do not otherwise inhabit, and by being immersed in the conditions and elaboration of a life, we may begin to understand it and thereby be prepared to act more ethically toward similar lives in the nonfictional world.¹ For Nussbaum, fiction allows us to imagine and thereby know the complexity of a life and the complex of convergent influences that inform it, and only with this knowledge, she maintains, can we act democratically and compassionately. Such a role for fiction would in turn seem particularly important in a world where we are simultaneously acquainted with more and more people than we could ever assimilate into associational groups like families or friendship networks and acquainted with more and more barriers that separate the understanding of one group from another, barriers sometimes domesticated as "cultural differences." The role of fiction is then twice over ambassadorial: first, an ambassador of the complexity of a human life and, second, an ambassador of human groups separated by time or place.²

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¹ For Nussbaum, "[a]ll political principles, the good as well as the bad, need emotional support to ensure their stability over time, and all decent societies need to guard against division and hierarchy by cultivating appropriate sentiments of sympathy and love" (*Political Emotions* 2–3); however, because emotions tend to refer to things close and personal, sympathy and love for "distant people and abstract principles" requires "symbols and poetry" (11). For an earlier articulation of compassion as an "expansion of ethical awareness," see her *Upheavals of Thought* (ch. 8). In this article, I sidestep the empirical question of whether novels actually do induce empathy, for which see Suzanne Keen.

² For another recent argument along these lines, see Elaine Scarry's defense of the humanities through the claim, via the work of Steven Pinker and Lynn Hunt, that an "invitation to empathy" is one attribute of literature that contributes to its ability "to diminish acts of injuring": literature "exercise[s] and reinforce[s] our recognition that there *are* other points of view in the world," and "[i]f this recognition occurs in a large enough population, then a law against injuring others can be passed, after which the prohibition it expresses becomes freestanding and independent of sensibility" (42).

Nussbaum's stress on the empathic work performed by fiction inherits an aesthetic tradition that began with nineteenth-century liberalism's emphasis on the role of feeling in social and political life, and her view is in turn more optimistic about the political value of genres like the novel than that of critical commentators on the mid-Victorian novel's cultivation of disciplined subjectivities. Nancy Armstrong, for one, has argued that the novel's differentiation of domestic spaces of feeling in which empathy can be exercised rose out of a resignation from a masculine political sphere, not only trapping femininity in a gendered division of moral labor but also neutralizing politics into mere psychological conditions, such that the disciplinary cultivation of the self comes to look like both the means and ends of actual political work, and women provide the exemplar of how to do it. This distinction of political and domestic space is easy enough to track in the plot of Anthony Trollope's *Phineas Finn* (1867–68), which is my focus in this article, when household interiors provide the scene for the judgment of a parliamentary speech,³ when Phineas continually seeks refuge with Lady Laura after his own parliamentary failures⁴ or later with Violet Effingham to appraise his successes,⁵ or especially when Lady Laura herself, who thought by marrying Lord Kennedy she might achieve some political agency, comes to find instead that the domestic space to which she is consequently allocated silences her political voice.⁶ But at the same time that *Phineas Finn* presents domestic space as an abject arena that absorbs the anxieties of the political, it also mobilizes courtship scenes as structurally homologous to parliamentary debates, not only because both are primarily invested in speech rather than action but because both are, in nineteenth-century Britain, in the process of determining what range of bodies are allowed into their respective discursive economies, especially from the perspective of class. Phineas's anxiety in accessing the space of the Parliament is identical to his anxiety over courting Laura, where his persistent trouble is whether something like love can provide heuristics for breaking from the determination of empirical categories given at birth. Politics and marriage are both deciding, at the same time, who can participate, and both are trying to break from birth as the distributive technique governing inclusion.

In this article, I pursue the political work done by *Phineas Finn*—and, I will argue, by certain formal techniques of the novel more generally—by attending to its amorous scenes as sites that articulate, but also remain resistant to, the values of an emerging liberal regime. In the following section, I first thicken the relationship between text and politics through the theoretical work of Jacques Rancière, who helps us understand how political and aesthetic projects can be synchronized and,

³ E.g., Laura's hearing about Phineas's speech from her husband and then reading it in the newspaper (200).

⁴ "There was but one person in the world to whom he could tell his own humiliation with any hope of comfort, and that person was Lady Laura Kennedy" (151).

⁵ "A good deal was said . . . to Phineas at the clubs, but a word or two that was said to him by Violet Effingham was worth all the rest" (228).

⁶ "She had married a rich man in order that she might be able to do something in the world;—and now that she was this rich man's wife she found that she could do nothing. The rich man thought it to be quite enough for her to sit at home and look after his welfare" (243).

1 at a formal level, coupled, but I also complicate Rancière's account by demon-
 2 strating that his general description of politics belongs more narrowly to the liber-
 3 alism envisioned by a mid-Victorian writer such as John Stuart Mill and enabled
 4 by the proposed electoral reforms of Thomas Hare. Specifically, Rancière's under-
 5 standing of the aesthetic regime as displacing attention from action, orienting it
 6 instead to feelings and other materials previously subordinated to it, finds a special
 7 political analog in the technologies of political representation that Mill learned
 8 from Hare. In the third section of this article, I examine more closely the places in
 9 which *Phineas Finn* seems to have absorbed the liberal idiom as well as Mill's focus
 10 on belief and feelings over and above action, but I also push back on the strict
 11 coupling of aesthetic and political projects by attending to the ways in which
 12 the novel provides an enduring place for a utilitarian aesthetics oriented toward
 13 action. Narratologically, the novel's distribution of focalization in particular—its
 14 management of information regarding characters' interiors and surfaces—spotlights
 15 actions rather than feelings or beliefs in ways that a utilitarian like Jeremy Bentham
 16 would approve of. I conclude by suggesting that this attention to action provides
 17 a pedagogy in nonempathetic sociality that remains relevant today as an alterna-
 18 tive to the psychologically demanding models offered by Nussbaum and other
 19 contemporary liberals.

20 21 Representing Beliefs and Feelings: The Aesthetic Regime of Liberalism

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23 Despite their difference in optimism, Nussbaum and Armstrong share a view of
 24 aesthetic texts that takes them to be instrumentalized by political projects. For both,
 25 this makes texts present to the conditions of their creation in order to be submitted
 26 to them. But in *Phineas Finn*, the mirroring of structural challenges in courtship
 27 and in politics also recommends courtship scenes not as the mere repository for
 28 the unfinished business of a political life from which a disciplinary society recom-
 29 mends we resign but also as a means for feeling out political alternatives. By
 30 stressing that the aesthetic project runs parallel to the political project instead of
 31 always having to be wrapped up in it, I argue that a novel like *Phineas Finn* deploys
 32 amorous narrative and the anxieties it collects at least as much to demonstrate
 33 alternatives to dominant political philosophies as to support them.

34 The parallelism I track in *Phineas Finn* owes a debt to the aesthetic and political
 35 work of Rancière, who in the past two decades has presented the clearest account of
 36 how these separate regimes are coupled. The structural homology between poli-
 37 tics and aesthetics is secured, in Rancière's account, by their respective formative
 38 breaks from hierarchical orderings of the given world, which is to say, both are
 39 originally inaugurated as anarchical. For Rancière, politics is first of all an attack
 40 on any system that could identify in the materiality of bodies proof of a right for
 41 rule, thereby rendering rule itself a debatable field undetermined by inheritance or
 42 property (*Dissensus* 35). Politics, as the liberation of rule from the hereditary line of
 43 bodies that had first extended it, is continually and ephemerally a break from the
 44 physical symbolisms that anxiously secured the cohesion of a social order by the
 45 visibility of bodies apparent in it; instead of a debate between visible entities,
 46 politics properly understood is rather the space that provides for the becoming

visible of what had been invisible. In turn, political activity does not include something like speech or debate but instead arbitrates what counts as speech, over and above mere animal noise (*Politics of Literature* 4). Politics, as the supervision of a space in which it can identify new emergences, is therefore self-referential at the same time as it is accretionary, collecting into itself the discourses and bodies it taxonomizes.

The discursive work of aesthetics is, for Rancière, formally identical to politics but applied to a different arena; whereas politics is a regime for the sensible identification of political speech, aesthetics is simply the regime for the identification of art.⁷ But the regimes are intimately mirrored because, just as politics does its identificatory work first through the breaking of a given hierarchy of bodies, aesthetics emerges as the breaking of hierarchies formulated by the regime of mimesis, especially the supremacy of form over matter and of activity over passivity. Like the political suspension of a right to rule lodged in the givenness of bodies, aesthetics suspends “the normal coordinates of sensory experience,” allowing for the emergence of sensible material not already submitted to the aegis of codified categories (*Aesthetics and Its Discontents* 25). It is thus that aesthetics is already political, not because it participates in nameable political projects, but because it carries out the structural protocol of politics—its essential anarchism—in its own consideration of a parallel sensory field.

Although Rancière’s writings draw out a coupling between political and aesthetic projects, they do not articulate how this parallelism is to be understood across time. For Rancière, the aesthetic regime, as the replacement of mimetic regimes of representation, clearly belongs to a historically contingent and delimited period, and he is meticulous in tracking the moments of its revolutionary unfolding from the mid-eighteenth century to the Second World War; aesthetics and its attendant protocols of anarchic absorption are thus squarely within the purview of modernism broadly conceived.⁸ But the breaking of sensible hierarchies of rule is already available as the “secret of politics” encountered by philosophy at its origins, which Rancière traces to Aristotle; that is, politics for Rancière names a formula already drafted in the classical period but apparently available, and essentially unchanged, even in the advent of modernism (*Dissensus* 40). To then synchronize politics and aesthetics would require mapping onto one another a transhistorical and a historically bounded phenomenon, thereby stretching one or the other in order to ensure their homology.

But around the same time that Rancière dates the emergence of the aesthetic regime, the protocols of politics, too, undergo a transformation. In particular, what Rancière describes as the political overhaul of the givenness of bodies in order to

⁷ More particularly, “Literature, in short, is a new system of the identification of the art of writing” (*Politics of Literature* 7).

⁸ Rancière’s fullest statement on aesthetics, tracking the emergence and dissemination of an “aesthetic paradigm . . . constructed against the representative order, which defined discourse as a body with well-articulated parts, the poem as a plot, and a plot as an order of actions,” begins with Johann Joachim Winckelmann in 1753 and concludes with James Agee and Clement Greenberg in 1941 (*Aisthesis* xiv).

1 render visible the speech of different feelings and beliefs finds special articulation
2 in mid-Victorian Britain, which sees alongside the development of the realist novel
3 the development of political technologies for creating proportional and repre-
4 sentative government. Particularly in the late 1850s and 1860s, in which Trollope
5 wrote and set *Phineas Finn*, British political scientists eagerly debated how to make
6 political spaces, especially Parliament, capable of identifying previously invisible
7 political content and speech, and much of the vocabulary of these debates saturates
8 Trollope's novel. "As a portrait should be like the person portrayed," the charac-
9 ter Joshua Monk writes to Phineas, "so should a representative House be like the
10 people whom it represents" (267). Departing somewhat from William Bagehot,
11 who in *The English Constitution* (1865–67) had advocated that the House of Com-
12 mons be a mirror of the people, Monk argues, "not its mirror, but its miniature. And
13 let the artist be careful to put in every line of the expression of that ever-moving
14 face. To do this is a great work, and the artist must know his trade well" (268). As
15 Hanna Pitkin has demonstrated, such a turn to an aesthetic idiom is fully con-
16 ventional by the time of Trollope's writing, but what Monk's letter stresses, by
17 placing portraiture in proximity to the rejected mirror, is the necessary labor of an
18 artist to distort the visible in order to express its true essence (Pitkin 61–62). Monk's
19 artist is not a mimetic painter, but someone who, by capturing the "ever-moving
20 face," is capable of freeing movement from its image. In turn, Monk constructs
21 his ideal of art as much as he does his ideal of politics—both must be dynamic
22 and adaptable—and he ultimately participates less in a transfer of logic from one
23 domain to another and more in a dialectic that simultaneously constructs both. This
24 is the performative work of Monk's letter, whose ostensibly declarative sentences
25 are really aspirational, tasking both the artist and the politician not with a mimesis
26 of appearances but with appearing itself, in particular the rendering visible of
27 opinions that had otherwise been absent from national circulation (Pitkin 63). What
28 Monk thereby also highlights is a specific historical moment when Rancière's
29 understanding of politics emerges simultaneous and coupled with an aesthetic
30 break from mimesis.

31 Perhaps the most robust technology of political appearing during this period
32 was proposed in Thomas Hare's 1857 treatise *The Machinery of Representation*,
33 which articulated an electoral plan John Stuart Mill considered "among the very
34 greatest improvements yet made in the theory and practice of government"
35 ("Considerations" 310). Hare's system of proportional representation allows voters
36 to rank parliamentary candidates from anywhere in the country according to their
37 preferences. If a particular candidate collects a surplus of first preferences in the
38 first count, then some of his votes are reapportioned to second preferences and then
39 third preferences and so on. At the end, each elector has directly contributed a vote
40 to an elected candidate, and so no individual's vote has been wasted as "surplus"; at
41 the same time, because candidates and not parties are elected and because not
42 majorities but only a smaller quota of votes must be attained to be elected, the
43 voting process allows for the appearance of minority views that, because distrib-
44 uted across the nation, might have failed to be elected within any particular district
45 even though in sum they present a nontrivial proportion (Hare 21).
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The force of Hare's intervention and the registration of its effect as political in a novel way is particularly clear when compared to the electoral interventions proposed by the Reform Bills of 1832, 1867, and 1884, which Rancière would be obliged to call not politics but "police," that is, a "partitioning of the visible . . . made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places" (*Dissensus* 39). The Reform Bills, by redistributing parliamentary representation according to geographic place and by expanding the franchise according to economic status, were twice over invested in property as a means of categorizing and securing its citizenry; they had as their essential effect the numerical management of population according to visible means. The technology of the bills can then be characterized not as portraiture but as mapping; not as the expression of an essence but as the decomposition of presence. Most important, the target of the bills was substantive, attending to the ordering and movement of contents within a stable national form, whereas Hare's overhaul of the political machinery itself is essentially formal, taking as his reformist object not the who or what of voting but the how. The radical point, for Hare, is that if you transform the how, then the who gets produced differently as well, for Hare's scheme makes visible minority opinion by making opinion a self-aggregating force built from the bottom up. It is not only that Hare does away with the priority of the geographic, which would then allow for collectives organized around identities or for political investments that transcend place; it is also that Hare makes the collective itself a postponed end rather than the ground of the political process. He nowhere presumes that people have actual physical community or that the communities into which people are born will provide their political and spiritual alliances; instead, through the mediation of the proportional voting process, people might find themselves to be in community with people they do not know from real places with which they do not identify but with whom, by elective affinity, they share political association. Whereas the Reform Bills administered space according to the visible, imagining a neutral ground on which differences of opinion can fairly emerge, Hare instead envisions a virtual space that emerges from difference. In Hare's rendering, the collective becomes inductive, virtual, and performative, built up from and finally sustained only by the different and unmappable opinions of electors freed from the determination of birth or place. For Hare, opinion mediates a sociality that neither presupposes nor relies upon physical bodies or the proximity of physical action.

Hare's shift of focus from physical to virtual space enabled, among other things, a transition from the utilitarianism of the early nineteenth century to the liberalism of the mid-century. For the utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, the goal was to create social settings that induced certain kinds of behavior without having to involve personal beliefs or desires. It was important to Bentham that people be understood to be inhabiting visible institutions: people were members of schools or families or hospitals before they were members of, say, more abstract and spatially distributed communities of discourse. Institutions could then be created that maximized social cohesion while still respecting differences of opinions or, more radically, societies could be formed through institutions that made differences of opinion socially beside the point. Bentham called these ideal institutions panopticons, and although

1 he first developed his theory by thinking about prisons, he thought any institu-
 2 tion could and should become panoptic: when he described the “different, or even
 3 opposite . . . purpose[s]” to which the panopticon could be put, he made a list of
 4 verbs including not only *punishing* but also *reforming*, *instructing*, and *training* (34).
 5 The verbs spotlight Bentham’s ultimate investment in actions, where institu-
 6 tions are designed to induce actions of a certain sort. By in turn impersonalizing
 7 actions—they are the product of spaces rather than persons—society could be
 8 cohered while still respecting the personal differences its members maintain.⁹
 9 Utilitarianism of this sort, Frances Ferguson has explained, “capture[s] the impor-
 10 tance of actions that are not always resolvable into statements of belief,” thereby
 11 “uniting members of a group in a common activity” without having to trace a
 12 circuit of identity that mediates among them (*Pornography* xiv, 3).¹⁰ In a utilitarian
 13 society of panoptic institutions, divergences in opinion and belief would become,
 14 rather than a scission in the social fabric, somehow extrasocial if certain kinds of
 15 action could be cultivated that did not require them.

16 In contrast, what Mill appreciated most in Hare’s schema was his tasking of
 17 opinion to perform the work of mediating a community across space, and the
 18 parliamentary vision Mill advocated in his “Considerations” further employed the
 19 circulation of opinion with the maintaining of a nation. Mill’s “Considerations”
 20 begins with the question of which governments can be “chosen”: rejecting both
 21 the position that government is merely a “practical art” that can be mastered or
 22 directed and the opposite position that government is a “spontaneous product” that
 23 instead masters and directs its people, Mill argues that a people and its government
 24 are in a more dialectical relationship (205–6). Government is the activity of the
 25 people and adapted to them, “determined . . . by social circumstances,” but because
 26 their activity is wrapped up in government, people are at the same time adapted in
 27 their desires by it (213). That people and their government are mutually adaptive
 28 also means that the failure of one contributes to the decline of the other; in Mill’s
 29 view, a government is also an ephemeral thing that “has to be worked, by men, and
 30 even by ordinary men.” Without “their active participation” to sustain it, govern-
 31 ment will not endure (207). Thus, for Mill, the ultimate evil is “[i]nactivity, unas-
 32 piringness, [and] absence of desire,” states of mind that predispose not only men
 33 but also the governments they sustain to dissolution, and the efficacy of govern-
 34 ment is in large part to be judged by the extent to which it cultivates desires that
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⁹ I am assuming a revision of Michel Foucault’s famous diagnosis of the panopticon as the biopolitical protocol of a disciplinary society, in which power is negatively dispersed and omnipresent, compelling individuals to submit themselves through the discipline and management of their bodies (195–230). In the past decade, it has been left principally to literary scholars to revise Foucault’s appropriation of Bentham. For David Rosen and Aaron Santesso, for instance, when viewed as continuous with a tradition of sentimentality in the eighteenth century (especially via Richardson), Bentham’s panopticon strictly resists the idea of something like the state “tak[ing] over the very consciousness of its citizens . . . rather . . . [Bentham] drew a sharp distinction between the performance that is part of everyday social action and the truth of inner life” (1056).

¹⁰ For a discussion of Bentham’s publics by way of his panoptic educational theory, see also Ferguson’s “Canons, Poetics, and Social Value.”

keep men involved in the work of its own maintenance (252). The value of Hare's scheme, for Mill, is that it ensures the necessary intimacy of this attachment to governmental institutions, because each candidate represents a "unanimous constituency" of those who voted for him rather than a more abstract entity like a party or an identity group: "Under this relation the tie between the elector and the representative would be of a strength, and a value, of which at present we have no experience. Every one of the electors would be personally identified with his representative, and the representative with his constituents" (311). For Mill, it is not only that Parliament would then become a space in which minority opinions, freed from geographic confines, could finally emerge; it is also that they emerge carrying with them the sublimated interests of those who elected them. Each elector is provided with a specific individual with whom to identify as the intimate protector of his own opinion, and therefore Parliament becomes, in addition to the space of circulating opinions, also one of circulating personal attachments. In this economy of projection, Parliament finally miniaturizes its national body and, as Monk wanted, the invisible parts of its body, distributing and promulgating the orchestra of its opinions and the attachments people have to them.

This political philosophy of opinions, which looks to beliefs and the attachments people have to them as the means of mediating a national sociality, is of a radically different worldview from the utilitarian attention to action, and Mill acknowledged as much in his *Autobiography*. Following a mental breakdown that suggests to him that happiness cannot be secured only as the ends of action, Mill writes that he "learnt by experience that the passive susceptibilities needed to be cultivated as well as the active capacities," that attention must be paid "to the internal culture of the individual" in addition "to the ordering of outward circumstances, and the training of the human being for speculation and for action" (121). In turn, "one of the cardinal points in [Mill's] ethical and philosophical creed" becomes "[t]he cultivation of feelings" (122). Mill believed that, without feelings to motor action in addition to providing a judgment of it, the utilitarian orientation toward action could not achieve its designated end of shoring up the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Whereas Bentham had sought to create institutions in which persons develop good habits of acting that do not require the participation or submission of their interiorities, Mill wants systems that properly enlist the interior resources of individuals as a means of securing active participation in the felicific calculus. In turn, whereas Bentham begins with social space and ends with actions, Mill, following Hare, begins with beliefs and ends with Parliament.

When Hare made it possible to conceive of Parliament as a theatre for the presentation and management of beliefs, he inaugurated in a political sphere what Rancière describes in the aesthetic regime as an overhaul of the "hierarchical model of the body, the story, and action" in order to make sensible life the arena and object of representational practice (*Aisthesis* xiv). Hare, by displacing the centrality of physically located institutions and highlighting a community of beliefs unbounded by space, even more precisely dates Rancière's conception of politics to liberalism's mid-century break from utilitarianism. For Bentham, a distribution of the sensible would have kept interiority invisible, whereas for Mill, interiority, circuited through opinion, is conscripted into political service. Following Hare, the

1 mid-Victorian period redistributes the sensible so as to make psychological mate-
 2 rials, rather than social spaces and actions, centrally visible.

3 Rancière would have it that politics and aesthetics are synchronized in their
 4 persistent and simultaneous liberation of feelings and beliefs from actions. In what
 5 follows, however, I argue that *Phineas Finn*, at least, suggests a different relationship
 6 between the representational practices of liberal politics and those of aesthetics.
 7 This is not only because the novel (like all novels) is dialogical in the sense Mikhail
 8 Bakhtin has taught us, which is to say that its digestion of liberal political ideologies
 9 also exposes them to contestation and manipulation.¹¹ Thus the views of Monk, for
 10 instance, are exposed to the dialogic critique of Phineas's landlords Mrs. Bunce
 11 ("What's the use of all the voting, when it means nothing but dry bread and cross
 12 words?" [208]) and Mr. Bunce ("Portrait indeed! Why would we want to have a
 13 portrait of ignorance and ugliness? What we all want is to have things quiet and
 14 orderly" [269]). More important than this dialogism, however, is the fact that the
 15 novel has taken into its content so much of the liberal discourse in which it par-
 16 ticipates that its form becomes available for different ends. Rather than identify
 17 form with content and see them both submitted to liberalism's parliamentary
 18 projects, I see form to be working over and against the content that speaks in it,
 19 following a different logic that at times comes closer to a utilitarianism in Ben-
 20 tham's vein than to a liberalism in Mill's by orienting to action instead of feeling.
 21 The courtship scenes in particular evidence this capacity, and in the remainder of
 22 this article, I turn to a close reading of one exemplary scene in particular.

23 *Phineas Finn*, Minor Characters, and the Remainder of Action

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 26 In the chapter "Donald Bean's Pony," Phineas finally intends to "declare his love
 27 and ask [Lady Laura] to be his wife" (109). They are both staying for ten days
 28 in Loughlinter, the estate of Phineas's imagined "rival" for Laura's hand, Lord
 29 Kennedy. Early on in the stay, Phineas has had to admit to Laura he cannot, for
 30 lack of funds, accompany her brother (who will become his "rival" for another
 31 hand later on in the novel) as requested to Paris: "I daresay, Lady Laura, you can
 32 hardly conceive how very poor a man I am" (108). The "melancholy tone" in this
 33 admission leads Laura to wonder if "he had been right in going into Parliament,
 34 and whether she had been right in instigating him to do so" (108–9). For Laura, the
 35 question of financial status is immediately linked to the grounds for political status,
 36 not in a determinate but in a practical way; it is a question of whether Phineas can
 37 afford the right to stand for Parliament. But on the day of his intended proposal,
 38 financial status is also for Phineas about the right to love whom he pleases, and
 39 through the financial question, love and political representation are linked as
 40 contingent exercises. Considering she is "the descendent of a line of Earls" and he is

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 11 Unlike a poet, the novelist "makes use of words that are already populated with the social
 intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second
 master." (Bakhtin 299–300). For Dorothy Hale, Bakhtin is continuous with and then paradigm-
 atic of Henry James's novel criticism by promulgating the "social formalism" view "that the
 novel can formally both encapsulate and fix a social world" (5).

“the son of a simple country doctor in Ireland,” is it “fitting that he should ask such a woman to be his wife?” (111). As he approaches her sitting “under the portico before the front door” (ibid.)—not quite in the house of his rival but on the threshold of it—“he argu[es] with himself” over this question, going over and disputing the answers supplied in advance by his birth, “but yet he knew,—knew as well as the reader will know,—that he was going to do that which he had no right to do” (112). Phineas’s concern over the legitimacy of his proposal and his ambivalence over whether he can read this legitimacy according to heredity place him firmly in the political realm as Rancière describes it, not only because the proposal mobilizes the same financial anxieties as political ambition but also because the replacement of a “right” supplied by birth with an “argument” presents the originary political move of freeing bodies and sensible material from the determination of their given categories.¹² The distribution of the sensible allows new attention to visible appearances in the scene, especially Phineas’s “special grace of appearing” and his “handsome” composition, which give to him “a look of breeding . . . which had come to him, no doubt, from the royal Finns of old” (ibid.). Previously, it had only been “supposed” that the Finns might have ancient connections to Irish kings (111), but the force of his physical beauty is now to leave “no doubt”: the freeing of the sensible from the confines of “right” converts mythic history into a present image, in turn converting “royal” from a hereditary fact into an aesthetic attribute. This is not only to say that a new hierarchy replaces an old one—handsomeness replacing birth—but also that the logic of hierarchy is overhauled in the freer dispersal of attributes to images unmoored from an ordering of their place.

But whereas Phineas’s breaking from “right” makes it possible to attend to appearances, Laura is more rigorous about wanting to stay in the realm of the visible when their conversation ensues. After he asks her to sit down because “I have something I desire to say to you, and to say it here,” she replies, “I also have something to tell you, and will say it while I am yet standing. Yesterday I accepted an offer of marriage from Mr. Kennedy” (113). It is important that Laura’s dramatic preemption of Phineas’s proposal is substantively the narration of actions instead of feelings, which thereby sets the terms of their discussion: it is not only that a marriage proposal would be infelicitous because one of the terms of its intelligibility—the marital availability of both partners—has been withdrawn; it is more radically that a confession of love is unfit in a conversation about actions.

¹² A connection between the marital and political realms has also already been suggested by Finn’s “marriage” to the political party, casting him and his Irishness in what Jane Elizabeth Dougherty identifies as a feminine or gender hybrid state: “Phineas seeks a wife with more than the usual zeal because he has established a marriage contract, rather than a social contract, with his party, one which limits his masculine independence” (162). My discussion in this article does not adequately attend to the question of Phineas’s ethnicity and to the other economy it sets up between action and interiority, which in turn we might read as an allegorization of the choice between Fenian violent demonstration and visible but inactive political representation. Still, I would disagree with Dougherty’s claim that, for Phineas, a marital contract replaces a social contract; instead, my central argument is that liberalism sees the coincidence of the two in a shared logic.

1 Laura is interested in the carrying out of acts rather than in the unveiling of interior
2 states that might be said to inform them. This, too, is why it matters that Laura says
3 she remains standing instead of this fact's merely being narrated. Whereas Phineas
4 wants to talk about the "desire" that accompanies speech and therefore to let his
5 speech be an expression of interior motives, Laura wants the only supplement
6 internal to speech to be a narration of the visible, here the arrangement of their
7 bodies. The standing itself may have any number of motives—a desire to retain
8 some sureness of herself in standing or perhaps a fear that, since he looks to her "as
9 handsome as a god," (113) sitting down may forfeit her ability to give the speech
10 she does—but the point is that Laura's directing attention to the materiality of the
11 body avoids any such discussion of its interior psychology.

12 Whereas Phineas had broken the right of birth in order to make visible new
13 aesthetic categories of the body, Laura wants to preempt the next step of opening
14 up the body to make visible new categories of interiority. Laura wants the sur-
15 faces of bodies only, and she attempts a prohibition on confessions. In turn, the
16 remainder of their conversation in this chapter essentially unfolds as a negotiation
17 over the content of the sayable. What began as Laura's preemption of Phineas's
18 speech in order to set the terms of the speech becomes a sequence of more explicit
19 prohibitions, and yet Phineas continues to let his desires exceed her rules. He
20 confesses his love ("No;—no, no; do not say it," she replies) and wonders if he
21 would have "had a chance" if he had proposed a week earlier ("How can I answer
22 such a question, Mr. Finn?") (114). In turn, her negotiation over the sayable must
23 settle for a negotiation over the repeatable: they both consent not to say again what
24 has been said in this scene, and Laura gets the only positive action she asks of him:
25 his wishing her well (115). The clash throughout this scene has not only been a clash
26 of wills, then, but also a clash of discursive philosophies. For Phineas, speech is an
27 expression of his intentions, desires, and speculations, whereas for Laura, speech is
28 itself an action. This is why it does not matter to her if Phineas actually wishes her
29 well when alone in his thoughts; as long as he says so, "all will be pleasant" (113). In
30 turn, this is also a clash over what "matters" in an action: for Phineas, it is the *why*,
31 whereas for Laura, it is the *so what*. He wants to know the intentions behind an
32 action, whereas she is concerned with its consequences. It does not matter to her
33 what informs an action so long as "all will be pleasant," whereas he does not think
34 all can be pleasant if they do not attend to the intentions behind an action.

35 Substantively, "Donald Bean's Pony" twice over reminisces on the consequences
36 of actions and on a disarticulation of the intentions that inform an action. First, the
37 chapter is from the beginning to the end the dramatization of an intention's failure
38 to be realized: Phineas states his intention to propose but is unable to do so. Second,
39 the chapter is also about the discussion of the intentions of an action that has
40 already been performed: Laura states the fact of her accepting Lord Kennedy and
41 then sees the motives of her action taken up for discussion and analysis. In both
42 cases, an attention to the visibility of the action itself, not to mention its conse-
43 quences, is substituted for attention to the invisible feelings and beliefs that might
44 be said to inform it. It is in this scene and its negotiation over the sayable—torn
45 between Laura's pull to the materiality of the body and the primacy of its action and
46 Phineas's pull to the invisibility of interiorities and the primacy of feelings—that

the ideologies of utilitarianism and liberalism encounter one another. And despite the dialogism of the scene, liberalism asserts its supremacy. Laura's prohibitions are always catching up with what they prohibited, and she cannot help submitting her actions to an analysis of their intentions.

But the parallel presentations of utilitarian and liberal ideologies in the dialogue also points beyond the dialogue to a narrator who is clearly capable of ventriloquizing both, and in turn the substantial debate between Laura and Phineas refers outward to a question of a formal management of their characters. On a formal level, the conflict between utilitarian and liberal understandings of action is played out in a negotiation over what narratology calls external and internal focalization, part of the psychological stance narrators' points of view can take toward their characters. As Susan Sniader Lanser has glossed it, focalization refers to a narrator's "access to characters' consciousnesses"; in an externally focalized narration, the narratable is limited to what is "materially observed" and at its extreme reduces to a photographic behaviorism, whereas internal focalization permits immediate narration of a character's thoughts, feelings, or desires (207). Very few narrations are entirely focalized one way or the other, and for Lanser, the narratological task, rather than categorizing, is to track the movement along the axis that focalization identifies. In *Phineas Finn*, the narration at times seems content with the behavioral picture or the pure image of an action and the materiality it implicates, aligned with a utilitarian understanding that devalues the hermeneutic task of reading interior states. But at other times, the narration cannot seem to help going beneath the surface of characters in order to find internal materials that can further flesh out what an action means or was intended to mean. This distribution of internal and external focalization therefore tracks, on top of a substantive and dialogical exchange between utilitarian and liberal philosophies, the occasional anxiety of needing to know what would otherwise be withdrawn in characters, in order to submit their utilitarian actions to liberal epistemologies.

The anxiety for internal knowledge is particularly on display in "Donald Bean's Pony," and the narration calls increasingly upon internal focalization the closer the chapter gets to the scene with Phineas, Laura, and the marriage question. The paragraph immediately following Laura's revealing her engagement finally makes a plunge beneath the surface of Phineas, whose internal state is narrated in free indirect discourse:

What a fool he had been to let her know his secret when her knowledge of it could be of no service to him,—when her knowledge of it could only make him appear foolish in her eyes! But for his life he could not have kept his secret to himself. Nor now could he bring himself to utter a word of even decent civility. But he went on walking as though he could thus leave her there, and never see her again. What an ass he had been in supposing that she cared for him! What a fool to imagine that his poverty could stand a chance against the wealth of Loughlinter! But why had she lured him on? How he wished that he were now grinding, hard at work in Mr Low's chambers, or sitting at home at Killaloe with the hand of that pretty little Irish girl within his own! (113)

1 There are a number of ways in which this paragraph seems illogical or at least
2 a surprising reversal. Any “secret” in this context would seem to be Laura’s
3 engagement, since Phineas has not yet told her he loves her or wants to marry her. If
4 we are to understand these as the unmediated thoughts of Phineas, then the
5 economy first set up with “secret” and “service” seems particularly peculiar. First,
6 what Laura’s statement of her betrothal had seemed to preempt was precisely the
7 admission of this secret, and so his paranoia of exposure to her “knowledge” is
8 unfounded; and second, if his breaking of “rule” was to liberate feelings and beliefs
9 from the ends of an action, then the bargaining over who gets value out of this
10 fantasized exposure marks an odd about-face. In Phineas’s rendering, his “secret”
11 has become a resource in a fantastic economy over which he imagines Laura to have
12 more control. But this apparently masochistic fantasy, which perverts the fact that
13 he has not yet confessed his secret and therefore imagines that Laura can read his
14 mind without being told, is primarily aggressive; it first demands that Laura’s mind
15 also be available to him. His paranoia over the revelation of his secret is at the same
16 time a presumption that he knows her feelings, whether or not she “cares” for him.
17 His inability to hold onto his secret and “keep [it] to himself” is also a disavowed
18 desire that his secret go out into the world in order to make others intelligible to
19 him, in order to make their own secret feelings and beliefs readable by him.

20 But this aggression is at the same time the narrator’s, directed at Phineas himself.
21 It is after all the narrator who has access to the secret, even if Laura does not yet, and
22 this paragraph enacts an intrusion into Phineas’s consciousness. Whereas a para-
23 graph earlier, the narrator had been content to stand aside as a separate “I” when
24 describing Phineas’s appearance and speculating on his vanity—assuming a cor-
25 relation between Phineas’s appearing to be “unconscious” of his good looks and
26 in fact actually being so (“I think that in truth he was barely conscious of [his
27 appearance]” [112–13])—now the narrator merges with Phineas’s interiority in
28 order to be sure of its content. It is not enough to speculate that Phineas might think
29 himself a fool; the statement of that feeling must be given directly. That is, the shift
30 from a detached narration to free indirect discourse in order to know and express
31 Phineas’s interior enacts formally the same desire that Phineas has in assimilating
32 Laura to the shared knowledge of his “secret”: in order to know her own secret
33 states. Like Phineas, who is uncomfortable remaining at the level of appearances,
34 the narrator perhaps imagines readers themselves uncomfortable without access to
35 Phineas’s internal states and so provides access for them.

36 However, the turn to property and then to Mr. Low and “that pretty little Irish
37 girl” conclude the project of searching out “secrets” with a move away from beliefs
38 and feelings and a return to external focalization. At first, the reprise of the con-
39 cern over poverty as a disqualification of any claim Phineas could make to Laura
40 seems a regressive reemergence of the “rule” Phineas was supposed to have left
41 behind. Nonetheless, its force at this particular moment is to remove Phineas’s
42 personal responsibility for his intention’s failing to become an action. The rule is an
43 impersonal distribution of narrative possibility, and the responsibility for his aim’s
44 becoming unrealized belongs to the world rather than to Phineas. That is, through
45 free indirect discourse’s orchestration of overlapping social and personal views,
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Phineas seems to submit himself to the social view in order to depersonalize his disappointment.¹³ He acknowledges a deficiency in his self-sovereignty in his inability to make for himself an exception from the rule to which he is submitted. Like the rhetorical questions of the Bunces, however, the rule here becomes as much aspirational as declarative; Laura has never mentioned property as a gatekeeper to matrimony, and Phineas's insistence this must be the reason for his rejection—and apparently the only reason—is an attempt to understand his life as already legislated by a rule he, if not owns, at least understands. An epistemological project replaces a psychological project in order to evacuate the scene of the feelings upon which Phineas had otherwise legislated his break of the rule. It is as if the “secret” realm to which Phineas wants to penetrate in order to shatter the force of visible appearance is unbearable for him, and it returns him to the categorical logics that order and declare interior states without accessing them.

Thus it is not only that a shift to internal focalization through free indirect discourse allows anxious readers to access knowledge not provided to other characters in the novel; it is also that it allows Phineas, in this case, to depersonalize himself by positing a more general view or rule of feelings. This depersonalization continues in the paragraph by being projected onto Mr. Low, who provides not a psychology but a scene for Phineas's “work,” and ultimately onto the unnamed Mary (“the reader I hope will not quite have forgotten Mary Flood Jones,” the narrator will soon have to remark [118]), who provides only her physical hand. This turn to activities and material bodies marks a revenge upon Phineas's foray into attempting to read “secrets,” and characters start to name contexts that house his own psychology rather than psychologies themselves. This would seem in line with Alex Woloch's discussion of the work minor characters do in nineteenth-century novels in facilitating the fuller characterization of protagonists; as these characters are flattened into eccentric characteristics or particular qualities, they become available as a resource through and against which protagonists are fleshed out more fully. Thus it is not surprising Mr. Low and Mary show up, indirectly, at the moment of Phineas's psychological crisis and in the middle of the paranoia of his “secret”: they are instrumental in Phineas's becoming a character who can have a secret, that is, a depth psychology in distinction to the mere surface of a “pretty” hand. But their appearance also alludes to modes of relationality Phineas could practice that do not require the high demand of transparency he is fantasizing and demanding in this scene with Laura. That is, the distortion and flattening of character that turns Mr. Low into his chambers and Mary into her hand are also evidence of an attention to actions that need not be complicated by the symptomatology of intention. The desire for work or for Mary's hand is a desire to have no desire, to have actions that are not readable as expressions of interior motivation.

¹³ My economy between the personal and impersonal borrows from Frances Ferguson's work on free indirect discourse in *Emma*. For Ferguson, free indirect discourse provides a “communal stance” that gives meaning to characters and their individual stances while also ensuring they do not become reducible to it (because then they “would become indistinguishable from one another” [“Jane Austen” 165]).

1 Mr. Low and Mary therefore logically conclude the trajectory of this paragraph
 2 toward a depersonalization of Phineas, because they absorb him into the space
 3 of their impersonal distortions in order to render Phineas as either pure activity
 4 (“work”) or pure body (“hand”). This is a fantasy of a collective impersonality,
 5 displacing the messiness and pain of personal attachment. But because free indi-
 6 rect discourse has coupled Phineas and the narrator, not only providing a dialectic
 7 between personal and social perspectives but also implicating the reader in a
 8 differential economy of interior access, this emergence of depersonalized minor
 9 characters is, at the same time as it is a coping mechanism for Phineas, also a
 10 training for readers like Phineas.¹⁴ Whereas Trollope’s protagonist must make his
 11 interior available for reading, minor characters are permitted into the novel with
 12 the lower requirement of merely acting; but it is precisely because they present
 13 actions instead of confessions of their souls that minor characters become a place of
 14 refuge from the circumlocutions and extension of Phineas’s subjective anxieties.
 15 They persist, too, as a training for how to act when these anxieties become too great,
 16 that is, how to replace the unbearable weight of subjectivity with actions that need
 17 not be determined by interior psychologies.¹⁵ Minor characters are not only, as
 18 Woloch claims, a resource for the rounding out of protagonists, sublimating their
 19 potential for depth into the realized depth of someone like Phineas; they are also
 20 occasions for readers to inhabit a relationality wherein the depth of the other
 21 recedes and is in no way required, where it is possible to be intimate without a
 22 baring of souls, and where activity rather than emotion mediates a collectivity that
 23 declines the liberal terms of virtual mooring. Thus despite the ascendancy of liberal
 24 discourse in the exchange with Laura and the contagion of a demand for interior
 25 states to make themselves available, the persistence of external focalization and its
 26 apprehension of minor characters directs attention to actions and frees actions from
 27 the determination of the interior states that free indirect discourse nonetheless
 28 claims to provide a technology for accessing.

29 A pedagogy of orienting to actions without the mediation of interiors is also
 30 on offer in the self-avowed political scenes of the novel—for instance, when Trol-
 31 lope reflects upon his practice as a “poor fictionist” in narrating the events of “A
 32 Cabinet Meeting” (214). Trollope admits a writer such as he is often “wrong in his
 33 description of things in general” and “is moved to tell of things of which he omits to
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 14 If D. A. Miller has drawn attention to how free indirect discourse brings narrator and character into “ostentatiously close quarters,” then I am arguing it furthermore brings character and reader into a close, but incomplete, arrangement of interior access: affording a readerly fantasy of omnipotence while also frustrating that fantasy when it comes to minor characters. (59).

15 My reading of *Phineas Finn*, it should be admitted, runs contrary to Trollope’s own account of his attachment to the writing process. The return to writing *Phineas Redux*, in particular, grew from being “frequently allured back to my old friends,” that is, his characters:

So much of my inner life was passed in their company, that I was continually asking myself how this woman would act when this or that event had passed over her head, or how that man would carry himself when his youth had become manhood, or his manhood declined to old age. . . . As to the incidents of the story, the circumstances by which these personages were to be affected, I knew nothing. They were created for the most part as they were described. I never could arrange a set of events before me. (Autobiography 319–20)

learn the nature before he tells of them" (ibid.). This tendency toward error is particularly dangerous, Trollope explains, when it comes to "the august matter of a Cabinet assembly," which he presently narrates (215). No one but a cabinet minister can have access to the narrated scene, and so it is not only that Trollope could get some facts wrong (as, for instance, "dahlias bloom[ing] in June" [214]), but also that there are no facts to go upon. Like an actor unable to access the interior states of other actors, an author cannot access a cabinet meeting in order to report upon it. It is therefore fitting that characters like the prime minister are minor characters in *Phineas Finn*, making the most politically prominent also the most psychologically withdrawn.¹⁶ "A Cabinet Meeting," too, is narrated almost entirely through external focalization. The chapter begins with an extended description, not of any characters but of a "large dingy room," remarking on its carpets, the arrangement of chairs, and the number of windows (215). Voices slowly enter the scene, but more than two pages pass before any speech is given, the narration instead focusing on the clothing of the ministers or else on information that "all the world knows," such as their respective titles or birthplaces (216). Finally, the ministers are arranged and their conversation begins. But this is a conversation that occurs without benefit of any diegetic information; for two pages, the dialogue unfolds without a break for descriptions of what the ministers are thinking or feeling. It is only once the meeting has concluded and Mr. Monk is walking home that we learn "there was something of a feeling of disappointment at heart" in the outcome of the meeting (221); but this small piece of psychological information comes almost as an afterthought, as if the time for feeling arrives only after the political decisions have been made. The dialogue has had a force of its own, and the political decision making has occurred without consultation of what people feel or even believe, apart from what they expressly say. In this "slight sketch" of the cabinet meeting, then, political decisions on the national scale remain untethered to individual intentions and motives. But it is by making minor characters the bearers of political action—even as their interiors, like the cabinet meeting, remain inaccessible—that Trollope again orients the novel toward actions rather than a liberal theatre of feelings and beliefs as the properly political material, even as the novel elsewhere elaborates the psychological lives of major characters in order to cultivate their attachment to political forms.

¹⁶ Trollope's declining to present too much interior information of avowed political figures was, in part, an attempt not to appear to be caricaturing real political figures in his time. When the *Daily Telegraph* accuses him in March 1868 of providing an unjust portrait of Mr. Bright in his fictional Turnbull, Trollope writes to the editor, "The character I have drawn has no resemblance to the chairman of the Board of Trade in person, in manners, in character, in mode of life, or even in the mode of expressing political opinion. . . . I intended neither portrait nor caricature, and most assuredly I have produced neither" (*Letters* 1: 468). Even a decade later, he relates to Mary Holmes, "though in former novels certain well-known political characters . . . have been taken as models for . . . fictitious personages . . . it has only been as to their political tenets. There is nothing of personal characteristic here. . . . They are pure creations; and (as I think) the best I ever made" (2: 692–93). Trollope's ability to decouple "political tenets" from "personal characteristics" is one way in which an attention to actions (over and above emotions) persists even in their attachment to personages.

1 The form of *Phineas Finn*, which distributes attention among characters in
 2 order to make the actions of others bearable without full intentional information
 3 and which treats action as both political work and subjective refuge, continues to
 4 recommend a utilitarian pedagogy in a liberalizing world. Against a view of liberal
 5 empathy, the persistence of external focalization at the limits of character prac-
 6 tices a mode of relating to and coexisting with bodies that do not freely offer their
 7 feelings and beliefs. This aesthetics, rather than stressing how the destruction of
 8 an action/passion hierarchy frees passion for an object of narrative elaboration,
 9 points out how this decoupling also frees action to become available in a world
 10 without coming already packaged with feelings or beliefs. An effort to think about
 11 and develop actions without passions is progressively more important in a political
 12 context in which it has seemed increasingly untenable for a consensus around
 13 feelings or beliefs to be achieved: for people to simply develop enough compassion
 14 for other groups of people, for instance, in order to understand themselves as
 15 belonging together. In the wake of the election of Donald Trump as president, and
 16 in a geopolitical discursive landscape that has seen a preponderance of differ-
 17 ences of opinion and cultural practice, contemporary liberals like Martha Nuss-
 18 baum and Elaine Scarry have recommended the utility of fiction in accommodating
 19 and providing access to otherness, and they have doubled down on a program of
 20 empathy that seeks to cultivate understanding of the feelings and fantasies driving
 21 the other half of their citizenry. But this has had the surprisingly demanding effect
 22 not only of exposing otherness to imperial appropriation but also of requiring
 23 people to have the right feelings and dispositions—have done a sufficient amount
 24 of internal moral labor—before they can act ethically in rapidly expanding social
 25 settings: empathy names the recognition and knowing digestion of others' inter-
 26 iorities as a means to an end.

27 In contrast, a classic utilitarian like Bentham thought it was possible to achieve
 28 the ends of social harmony more directly, without having to plumb the resources of
 29 psychology and without having to demand every individual perform the work of
 30 interior exposure and curiosity. What mattered was how people acted and not a
 31 disciplining of their souls. If today the moral labor required by liberalism seems at
 32 times unsustainable, we may wish to revisit this orientation to action, an orientation
 33 that continues to live on in the form, even if not in the content, of some of the most
 34 liberal of novels. In *Phineas Finn*, the form works against its content, opening up
 35 different relations to politics than the one on which Rancière has insisted, and there
 36 is much to learn from the kinds of relation this form makes habitable.

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 40 MICHAEL DANGO is a PhD candidate in English at the University of Chicago, where he is also
 41 a residential fellow in the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality. His book in progress
 42 is "Style Today: A Taxonomy of Actions."
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