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The Paradox of Fiction and the Ethics of Empathy: Reconceiving Dickens's Realism

Since the term empathy was coined in the early twentieth century, it has been used to describe not only how a person relates to another person, but also how a person relates to art. In fact, empathy is a concept born of the union between psychology and aesthetics; early accounts of *einfühlung* in German and empathy in English were psychological accounts of how a person relates to an art object.[1] Only later was the definition expanded to describe interactions between people; empathy is now most commonly understood as the act of imagining oneself in another's place and thus "feeling with" another person. In more recent years, scholars have integrated the aesthetic and interpersonal notions of empathy in order to describe our relationships with the "people" within art, that is, with characters. As philosopher James Harold puts it, empathy is "a phenomenon common to our experiences both in friendship and in fiction" (342). Although we know that characters are not conscious subjects, we empathize with them in much the same way we empathize with other people. Philosopher Kendall Walton puts it this way: characters are "fictional sentient beings," and "we often respond to them, empathize with or simulate them, in much the way we do actual people" ("Projectivism" 428).

While modern empathy studies constitute an exceptionally interdisciplinary field of research, the historical integration of psychology and aesthetics has been undermined by disciplinary segregation between fields that examine either empathy with other people—cognitive science, social and developmental psychology, philosophy of mind, and ethics—or empathy with characters—philosophical aesthetics, cognitive psychology, film studies, and literary criticism. As a consequence, an inte-

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grated account of the relationship between narrative and interpersonal empathy has not been fully realized. In this paper, I address this critical lacuna by investigating the principal difference between our relationships with actual and fictional individuals. As I will argue, empathy for people in distress is one of the most powerful motivations for ethical behaviors, significant not only for how we feel towards other people, but also how we act towards them. But empathy for characters in distress poses a much more complicated relationship between imagination, emotion, and ethics. Readers' emotions can be engaged for fictional suffering, but not their subsequent behaviors. This limiting condition poses an interpretive—and ethical—dilemma for any account of empathy with fictional minds.

The ethics of narrative empathy contribute to one of the single most debated issues in modern aesthetics, the so-called paradox of emotional response to fiction.[2] Philosopher Jerrold Levinson provides a useful summary: "Since fictional characters do not exist, and we know this, it seems we cannot, despite appearances, literally have towards them bona fide emotions—ones such as pity, love, or fear—since these presuppose belief in the existence of the appropriate objects" (79). As it is addressed in most of the philosophical literature, the paradox of fiction is limited to discussions of these seemingly contradictory premises.[3] But the impact of the paradox is most evident when we consider not its premises but its repercussions for readers' beliefs and behavior. Whether or not our emotional responses are "bona fide," most readers have had the sensation of being moved by fiction. Indeed, early accounts of sympathy—empathy's conceptual ancestor and etymological cousin—assume that our emotional response to characters in a tragedy is no less universal than our response to the suffering of other men.[4] As Adam Smith notes in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, we might know that suffering is fictional, and yet we nonetheless respond emotionally—and physiologically—as if it were real: "We weep even at the feigned representation of a tragedy" (52). But if "deep distress" (52) exists on the stage—or in the pages of a book—then what is our response beyond weeping? If suffering is "real" then a spectator can try to ameliorate it, but if it is a "feigned representation" then a reader can do nothing to intercede. What, then—if any—are the *ethical* effects of our emotional responses to literature?

In *Empathy and the Novel* and "A Theory of Narrative Empathy," Suzanne Keen has begun to explore this complex relationship between "novel reading, empathy, and altruism" (vii). Although Keen powerfully demonstrates the prevalence of narrative empathy as an "affective transaction" (xv), she ultimately downplays its ethical significance. Keen is quick to credit reading with an array of real-world consequences—from improving readers' vocabulary and knowledge base to creating emotionally satisfying communities of readers to social advancement through cultural literacy (xv–xvi). But she remains, in her words, "skeptical about [ethical] consequences beyond immediate feeling responses" (viii–ix), concluding that those critics who credit reading with improving real-world attitudes and actions exaggerate the effects of relationships with fictional characters. In part Keen's skepticism is in reaction to the sometimes panglossian accounts of the impact of reading. In this regard she cites evolutionary psychologist and linguist Steven Pinker, who argues that storytelling has made us a "nicer" species (48, cited in Keen 2007, xviii). Most notably,

philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that novel reading has the potential to lead to heightened empathy, compassion, and love, which in turn creates better "citizens of the world." As Keen is right to point out, accounts of the positive consequences of reading often fail to appreciate the complexity of affective (and cognitive) response and minimize the ways in which empathy might result in ethically neutral or even deleterious results. But in her own attempt to cast a more critical gaze on the role of reading, Keen does not give the same attention to the ways in which particular authors and texts might have positively shaped the attitudes and actions of historical readers. It is essential that we examine the potential failures of narrative empathy, but also that we give an equally rigorous account of its potential successes.

In what follows I examine emerging research on empathy and reading and propose that the ethics of narrative empathy is complicated, but not undone, by the conditions of belief inherent to the paradox of fiction. Research on discourse processing suggests that readers engage in a metaphorical, or what we might call synechdocal, interpretation of character: taking the part (individual) to refer the whole (group). In this way, readers' emotional responses to fictional individuals can be parlayed into an emotional, *and* ethical, response towards groups of people whom they represent. This synechdocal model of interpretation, I want to suggest, is not only pivotal to the study of narrative per se, but also a critical tool in evaluating the origin and impact of narratives within their cultural and literary context. After reviewing recent psychological research I turn to the Victorian novel as a particularly salient case of how narrative empathy can inform our study of literary history. Using Dickens as a case study, I argue that mid-century concerns over failed empathy, and the attempt to mitigate those concerns by establishing characters' synechdocal function, were integral to the new critical premium on verisimilitude and the rise of realism as the dominant discursive form.

EMERGING RESEARCH ON EMPATHY AND READING

Over the last two decades psychologists have demonstrated the robust correlation between empathy for other people and a wide range of ethical responses—altruism and prosocial behavior, moral development, interpersonal bonding, and improved intergroup relations.[5] According to the "empathy-altruism hypothesis" proposed by social psychologist C. Daniel Batson (building on earlier theories of David Hume, Adam Smith, Martin Hoffman, and Dennis Krebs), altruistic behaviors are motivated by imagination and emotion, adopting another person's perspective and feeling "other-oriented" emotions like compassion and tenderness.[6] In a typical study, Batson and his colleagues offer test subjects varying processing instructions meant to manipulate empathy; readers are either instructed to imagine how a person feels and feel the full impact of those emotions themselves or to disengage emotionally and remain objective and detached. Subjects who are directed to pursue high empathy conditions not only show more positive attitudes towards others, but are also more likely to help them when given the opportunity to do so.[7] Finlay and

Stephan used a similar protocol to study the effects of empathy on racial prejudice, and they report similar results. White participants asked to imagine how an African-American subject feels and identify with those feelings subsequently report improved attitudes towards African Americans as a group ("Reducing Prejudice"). Emotional perspective taking (trying to understand the feelings of another) has proved especially significant in prompting subsequent helping behaviors; in a study by Patricia Oswald, participants who were instructed to focus on a subject's feelings volunteered 220% more time to help similar students than those who focused on his thought processes, and over 280% more time than those who did not engage in any imaginative perspective taking.

This research suggests that our response to distress in the real world often involves an emotional component and a behavioral one; we feel and we subsequently act. The risk for representations of distress, however, is a divorce of these two responses: emotion without action. Robert Yanal describes the problem in *Paradoxes of Emotion and Fiction*: "[F]iction arouses emotion with motivational force, but with little or no opportunity to exercise it" (61). This inability to intervene in characters' lives (to alleviate distress, for instance) is one of the key differences between our emotional interactions with people and characters. In fact, emotion *sans* action is paradigmatic of how we read fiction. Leda Cosmides and John Tooby put it this way: "[F]ictional worlds engage emotion systems while disengaging action systems" (8). If a real lion were to lunge at us it would evoke "terror *and* flight—the emotion program and behavior are linked" (9). But a fictional version of a lion—however terrifying—does not motivate us to flee. And so, Yanal says, "[o]ur emotions . . . remain unconsummated" (121).[8] Philosophers have pointed to this feature of reading as proof that readers do not believe in the existence of characters and do not forget their "fictional" status (if we did, the argument goes, we *would* flee the lion).[9] But it also has significant ramifications for any ethical theory of literature. We may want to intervene in a literary text—in philosopher Kendall Walton's example, we might want to save the heroine—but we cannot ("Fearing Fictions" 5). As is evident from Walton's case, this limiting condition often affects the one realm that Victorian social problem literature most tried to influence—the ethical response of readers. While it might be prohibitively difficult to aid other people in the actual world (because of economic, cultural, or geographical factors, for example), it is impossible in principle to aid fictional people in a fictional world. Moreover, there is no actual suffering taking place.

The most serious criticism leveled against narrative empathy is that it might actually serve as an escape from real-life ethical demands, allowing readers to congratulate themselves for feeling with fictional characters while simultaneously doing nothing for people in need. The fear that fiction will make readers neglect real-world suffering is a central concern of Elaine Scarry's suggestive essay, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons." Scarry credits imagination with significant ethical consequences: when we imagine other people we are less likely to hurt them; conversely, when we do not imagine them we are more likely to inflict injury or pain. Literature, on this account, would seem to have inherent ethical benefits insofar as it invites and

guides readers' imaginings. But it also poses an inherent danger, Scarry warns, because it encourages readers to turn away from real people to fictional ones: "[T]he very imaginative labor of picturing others that we ought to expend on real persons on our city streets, or on the other side of the border, instead comes to be lavished on King Lear or on Tess" (287). Scarry cites William James, who revealed a similar anxiety that emotional responses to art do not prompt, and might even deter, ethical behaviors in the real world. Invoking Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, James contends that "[t]he weeping of a Russian lady over the fictitious personages in the play, while her coachman is freezing to death on his seat outside" is "the sort of thing that everywhere happens on a less glaring scale" (63). Tellingly, James associates the tendency to expend emotion on characters with the habit of "excessive novel-reading and theatre-going"; immersing one's self too deeply in narrative worlds, he concludes, "will produce true monsters" (63).[10]

Scarry and James both worry that imagining is a zero sum game; imaginings "expended" on fiction come at the expense of actual people in need. But there is no inherent reason that one's fictional imaginings need to forestall or prevent one's imagination—and amelioration—of actual suffering. In fact, modern psychological research suggests that engagement with art can make us more attuned to suffering rather than less so, and more likely to help than turn away. Although C. Daniel Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis has not focused on the effects of fiction, his research methodology suggests the significant role that characters can play in shaping readers' beliefs and behaviors. Inducing empathy for a member of a stigmatized group, Batson and his colleagues demonstrated, *even when he or she is a fictional member*, improves attitudes towards the group and consequently inspires actions that help that group.[11] The second part of this claim is especially significant because changes in belief or attitude do not necessarily precipitate any subsequent ethical behaviors, a proviso that Suzanne Keen emphasizes in *Empathy and the Novel*. According to Batson's research, however, individuals who feel empathy for a member of a stigmatized group are more willing to allocate funds to help that group, even when the individual with whom they empathized would not be helped.[12] Batson's research suggests that rather than excuse or deter readers from ethical behaviors, emotional responses to individual characters can translate into improved attitudes and actions towards people in the real world.

Batson's empathy-attitude-action model demonstrates the potential impact of artistic representations whenever a character is representative of a social group. Batson hypothesizes that there is a three-stage process by which attitudes towards groups can change: first, subjects experience empathic concern for an individual in distress; second, empathizing with the individual leads the subject to value the welfare of the individual target; and third, concern for the welfare of the individual leads to more positive beliefs and feelings (and subsequently actions) for the group. In this manner, the inaction inherent to the paradox of fiction is mitigated by a character's synechdocal relationship with a "class" of people, in the more general sense of a group of people defined by a shared or similar characteristic. The ethical implications of interpreting characters synechdocally are particularly significant for stigma-

tized groups or what psychologists call outgroups, social groups that are perceived as different from one's self and often treated with hostility, bias, and decreased helping behaviors. Significantly, Batson's studies revealed that readers' changes in attitudes were still present two weeks after students read the scenarios, indicating that empathy with characters can have long-term ethical effects. In the case of Victorian literature about poverty, Batson's findings suggest that readers' relationships with individual poor characters can affect their attitudes about poverty and their behavior towards poor contemporaries.

Complementary research by Jémeljian Hakemulder suggests that the narrative focus on individual characters actually results in a more profound impact on readers' beliefs than non-fictional, expository accounts of groups.[13] Hakemulder compared readers' responses to a fictional account of an Algerian woman from Malika Mokkeddem's novel *The Displaced* and a non-fictional account of Algerian women taken from Jan Goodwin's *Price of Honor*. The subject of the novel and essay, the length of the excerpts, and the attitudes of the authors were similar; the primary difference was that the story emphasized the experiences of an individual woman, Sultana, while the essay made broader claims about the experience of Algerian women. The test subjects who read the novel demonstrated more significant changes in attitude than the essay readers, which Hakemulder attributes to readers' propensity to enter fictional worlds and empathize with individuals. Changes in belief were even greater when readers were given reading instructions that further heightened empathetic role-taking. Hakemulder's research suggests that empathy with fictional characters—regardless of their fictionality—is uniquely suited to influence readers' attitudes about social groups. As he summarizes his findings in *The Moral Laboratory*, both novel and essay "primed the same memory schemata, namely, knowledge concerning women in Islamic countries. But, it seems to take a text with a character personifying the issue to change subjects' beliefs" (107).

As we will see, victorian social problem literature is particularly suited for a synechdocal model of interpretation because it made explicit claims to represent the contemporary poor. But contemporary studies of reading demonstrate that readers of fiction routinely draw conclusions about real-life social groups even in the absence of these epistemological claims. In "How Fictional Tales Wag Real-World Beliefs," psychologist Jeffrey Strange maintains that stories about "invented characters in imagined situations" often lead readers to make "judgments about people, problems, and institutions in the everyday world" (264). As Strange observes, much of our time is spent engaged in "virtual encounters" with people, places, and events that do not exist, but despite the "imaginal nature" of these encounters, fictional stories often refer or relate to real social issues like poverty, racism, or, in Strange and Cynthia Leung's study, high school dropout rates. As their findings demonstrate, even when stories are explicitly marked as fictional, narrative interpretation is characterized by a process of "causal generalization" by which readers extrapolate from "narrative case" to "social category" (445). The "wider influence" of narratives, Strange concludes, lies in this "propensity to generalize" (275).

THE VICTORIAN CONCERN WITH EMPATHY: THE CASE OF CHARLES DICKENS

Victorian literature is especially suggestive for the study of narrative empathy because of its own critical premium on emotional response. As Keen observes, sympathy is a term that appears throughout Victorian criticism and fiction because it was "at the center of [nineteenth-century] novelistic practice" (53). Social problem literature, in particular, was predicated on the assumption that readerly emotion would lead to ethical behaviors. If readers cried for fictional suffering, Dickens and many of his contemporaries believed, then they would try to ameliorate the actual suffering they encountered around them. This is a promising account of the ethical power of emotion, but Dickens was also critical of too-keen affect that did not translate into any ethical response, a failing evident in his satire of Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House*. This potential failure of narrative emotion, I argue here, was a central concern of Dickens's career and one that structured mid-nineteenth century literature more broadly. Wary of Skimpole's response (or lack thereof), Dickens attempted to circumvent a similar reaction in his readers by explicating the metaphorical relationship between his characters in distress and the suffering of actual, contemporary people. Accordingly, his vivid portraits of fictional suffering were coupled with epistemological claims of their accurate and faithful relationship to modern society. Together with modern psychological research on reading, these "metaphors of realism" offer a solution to the non-interventionism inherent to the paradox of fiction: readers might not be able to intervene in characters' lives, but they can intervene on behalf of someone "like" them.

The appropriate function of literature—always an open question in artistic circles—was under vigorous debate during Dickens's lifetime. While Victorian literary history often traces a trajectory in which art is increasingly divorced from its moral, political, and didactic effects, many artists at mid-century embraced *l'art utile* over *l'art pour l'art*. In 1859, the professor of English literature David Masson wrote in *British Novelists and their Styles* that the mid-nineteenth century saw, and was seeing, "a great development" of "Novels or Poems of Purpose," due in large part to the vast political changes in Britain and Europe (264). The use of literature for social commentary was not universally acclaimed; Thackeray, for one, satirized novels "with a purpose" in his "Plan for a Prize Novel" and Trollope parodied Dickens ("Mr. Popular Sentiment") in *The Warden*. Some critics complained about "political pamphlets, ethical treatises, and social dissertations in the disguise of novels" ("A Triad of Novels" 575). The critic Fitzjames Stephen was adamant on this point, ridiculing Dickens for his ethical vocation: "We admit that Mr. Dickens has a mission, but it is to make the world grin, not to recreate and rehabilitate society" (15). But to an unprecedented and unparalleled degree, many artists were confident that literature was an appropriate and a powerful means of transforming society, and popular audiences largely accepted this social and ethical function. As George Ford puts it in *Dickens and His Readers*, "there were not many readers [during Dickens's lifetime] who objected to the didactic as such" (81). Indeed, the idea that literature "is or can be an instrument of social amelioration" (Brantlinger 1) is eminently Victorian, a

period when literature was mobilized for any number of social movements—abolition, temperance, animal rights, the franchise, and factory reform to name a few.[14]

Dickens's own ethical objectives were explicit throughout his career; as he wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell about his newly formed journal *Household Words*, its "general mind and purpose" is "the raising up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition" (*Writings* 275). As editor and journalist Dickens could bring an expository approach to the various social and political causes he endorsed, but as an author his primary methodology was to generate empathy: he asked his readers to *imagine* suffering and consequently *feel with* his characters in distress. The power of imagination is a recurrent theme in Dickens's writing and activism. "Do not let us," he exclaimed in 1858, "in the laudable pursuit of the facts that surround us, neglect fancy and the imagination" (*Speeches* 284).[15] In part Dickens wanted to enrich the lives of the working classes with stories and storytelling, but he also saw the power of imagination in stirring sympathy—in the nineteenth century sense of that word—and good works. If middle- and upper-class readers could vividly imagine the suffering they did not themselves experience, he believed, then they would be moved enough to intervene.

Dickens's high hopes for literature are embedded in his wildly popular first Christmas book, which makes a vigorous plea for Christian charity and launched his now-familiar critique of political economy. At the beginning of *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge is characterized not only by his miserliness but by his utter lack of imagination: "Scrooge had as little of what is called fancy about him as any man in the city of London" (14). As a young boy, a lonely Ebenezer had read so eagerly that the characters of *Arabian Nights* and *Robinson Crusoe* appeared as friends, "wonderfully real and distinct to look at" (31). As an adult, however, Scrooge no longer reads fairy tales or novels, and he no longer imagines; he only counts his horde of money. Dickens's "carol" of the miser's transformation and redemption is structured thematically and narratively around the moral value of imagination, a cognitive skill Scrooge learns (or relearns) in the course of his "haunting." Exploiting his supernatural conceit, Dickens literalizes imagination, as Scrooge is led by his spectral guides through visions that simulate empathy for the character and model it for the reader. It is only when Scrooge's own empathy has been cultivated by the four ghosts—when he learns to imagine what it is like in the Cratchit household and feel with Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim—that he is transformed into a philanthropist. Although this section of the story is often left out in its modern retellings, Scrooge "imagines" not only his own past, present, and future, but also what it is like in scenes of suffering, transported by one of the Spirits to "sick beds . . . on foreign lands . . . by struggling men . . . by poverty. . . . In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge" (66).[16] Subsequently his beliefs and behaviors are altered dramatically, evident not only in personal charity—the Cratchit Christmas turkey—but public philanthropy—at the end of the novel Scrooge promises a munificent subscription to the "Poor and destitute" whom he refused to help at the beginning.

In writing his "Ghostly little book" (4), Dickens wanted to reproduce his protagonist's redemption—and beneficence—in his audience. Accordingly, the story itself plays a role analogous to that of Marley and the Ghosts of Christmas Past,

Present, and Yet to Come; it helps readers imagine distress and spurs them to intervene. As readers we too are "transported" to scenes of suffering, a kind of imaginative vision that suggests the similarities between our own reading of literature and the visitations of the ghosts. Dickens evokes this role of literary imaginings in the story's preface; as he says of his readers' relationship with his "Ghost Story of Christmas" (subtitle), "May it *haunt* their houses pleasantly" (4, my italics). Dickens's aspirations for his "little Christmas book" demonstrate his optimism about the moral power of emotion, but they also raise significant questions about whether fiction can inspire in readers the kind of ethical endeavors that his character ultimately pursued. After all, a reader in the actual world cannot help a character in a fictional one; Scrooge can aid the Cratchit family *within* Dickens's narrative, but Dickens's readers can do nothing for Tiny Tim. As this scenario confirms, the ethical dimension of empathy is complicated when it is applied to fictional characters.

The fact that we cannot act on fictions is unproblematic for literature that places no demands on readers' behaviors, but it poses a significant problem for sentimentalism, a genre whose pathos and didacticism were intimately related in the nineteenth century. Dickens's own use of pathos to inspire social change is evident throughout his career—in his portraits of the workhouse orphan in *Oliver Twist*, the crippled boy in *A Christmas Carol*, the little sweep in *Bleak House*. During his lifetime he was as loved as a humorist as he was esteemed as a moralist, but it was his readers' tears, not their mirth, that Dickens solicited in his role as advocate for "the poor, the suffering, the oppressed."[17] While later readers were more circumspect in their reactions (Oscar Wilde, famously, laughed rather than cried at Little Nell's death), the powerful emotional responses of Dickens's contemporary readers are well known.[18] Indeed, the emotional effects of reading were especially pronounced in the mid-nineteenth century, a period when, as Kathleen Tillotson has described, "tears were shed more readily, and by men as well as women" (49). But while the reassessment of sentimentalism by feminist critics like Jane Tompkins has emphasized this capacity "to move its audience" ("Sentimental Power" 127), the risk of sentimentalism—particularly when it represents a contemporary social condition like slavery or poverty—is that it will move readers to tears but not to action. Americanist critics like Tompkins and critics of Victorian literature like Mary Lenard are right to evaluate sentimentalism on its own critical terms rather than those retroactively applied under Aestheticism, Modernism, and New Criticism, but might sentimentalism fail on its own terms? If authors inspire affective response without influencing readers' subsequent behaviors, then they cannot realize their didactic intentions.

A decade after *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens betrayed his own fear that readers' tears would have no ethical impact in his portrait of Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House*. Skimpole's improvidence, indolence, and childlike demeanor were widely read as a caricature of Leigh Hunt, the essayist and poet. (Dickens insisted upon Hunt's death that Skimpole's manner was Hunt's, but not his "character").[19] Less examined, however, and much more damning of Skimpole, is his response to art. An amateur artist and musician himself, Skimpole's acute feelings for art do not translate into any ethical commitments. At first glance, Skimpole is a model of affective engagement: "He is all sentiment," Jarndyce says, "and—and susceptibility, and—

and sensibility—and—and imagination" (620). Skimpole himself proclaims to have "sympathy for everything" (625). But if Scrooge's meanness stems from his lack of imagination, then Skimpole's artistic temperament has no more beneficent results. His own lack of sympathy is evident in his recommendation for Jo, the little sweeper boy sick in the next room: "You had better turn him out. . . . He's not safe, you know . . . get rid of him!" (454). With Jarndyce, Esther, and Charley helping the sweep, and all of the servants "compassionating his miserable state" (456), Skimpole is unmoved and unconcerned. He is moved by art, however, and even as Jo lies sick he plays "snatches of pathetic airs" with "great expression and feeling" (457). In fact, when Esther and Jarndyce return he plays them "The Peasant Boy," a ballad that came "into his head, 'apropos of our young friend' " (457). But where he pities John Parry's ballad ("It was a song that always made him cry" [457]), he feels nothing for the boy. His feelings for the song are safely insulated from their modern social referent, even as he realizes that the ballad is "apropos" of the sweeper's condition.[20]

Skimpole's sensibility without social conscience demonstrates Dickens's awareness of the risks of "pathetic" art, and his portrait of Skimpole is a coded warning to his audience about their own interpretive choices. The ethical failure of his character would be reiterated in his readers if they cry for the little sweeper in the novel but do nothing for the boys they encounter in the streets. Skimpole's reaction also suggests a related "failure" of aesthetic emotion: his tears stem not from vicariously experienced suffering but merely the pleasure of hearing it recounted. While the pleasure that accompanies tragedy does not necessarily preclude simultaneous empathy or sympathy (Burke argued that the pleasure of witnessing suffering ensures that spectators remain long enough to help), Skimpole's case anticipates William James's and Elaine Scarry's concern that spectators to fictional tragedy often shut their eyes to the tragedies played out around them. Readers turn away from actual suffering, in other words, in favor of representations of suffering that prompt aesthetic pleasure in the guise of willing tears. Moreover, this turning away has tragic consequences; when Jo is left alone on the streets, after Skimpole is bribed into revealing his location, the boy succumbs to his illness and dies. Dickens's portrait of the callous Skimpole is purposely alienating. Readers' feelings of empathy with Jo (and/or his protectors) are reinforced by their estrangement from a man whose aesthetic sensibility is so rapacious that he takes pleasure even from the suffering of American slaves.[21] Thus Dickens prompts a matrix of emotional responses in his audience, who are asked simultaneously to feel with suffering and to condemn those who do not. Skimpole is his model of how *not* to read.

NARRATIVE EMPATHY AND THE RISE OF REALISM

I have argued that the act of reading frequently prompts an emotional response which in turn shapes readers' beliefs and, according to Batson's empathy-attitude-action model, their subsequent ethical behaviors. For this last step to occur, however, readers must interpret fictional characters to be representative of a social group that they identify in the world around them, i.e. a member of a group of people whom

they *can* help because they are *not* fictional. In the preface to his collected Christmas books, Dickens recalls that they were "intended to awaken loving and forbearing thoughts" (v) in his readers. But he did not merely want his readers to have loving thoughts; he wanted them to engage in concrete ethical behaviors. Without making a connection between (aesthetic) emotion and (real world) action, readers' feelings for fictional suffering have little impact on their subsequent ethical choices. While the research I have described suggests that readers regularly and spontaneously perform this interpretive move, the explicit (and sometimes excessive) epistemological claims of social problem fiction betray the shared anxiety that empathy for fictional suffering will not translate into a real-world response. In the remainder of this paper I will argue that the rise of realism was due in part to mid-century authors' attempts to ensure the ethics of narrative empathy. On this model, realism emerged in an attempt to alter the very reality that it represents, a literary "intervention" in the actual world.

Paradoxically, Dickens has historically been critiqued for his "attack on realism" (Stang 153). But while his portraits of poverty can appear to the modern eye—and even some contemporary ones—to be mired in melodramatic conventions, Dickens frequently proclaimed the veracity of his work, larding "fiction" with frequent assertions of "fact." Mid-century realism is not characterized by detachment and objectivity; instead, it relies upon a system of reference between fiction and modern life. Accordingly, social problem literature was, as Arnold Kettle described Disraeli's novels, "intensely topical" (176). Tellingly, given his anxieties surrounding Skimpole, Dickens was especially adamant about establishing the contemporary relevance of *Bleak House*. As John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson describe in *Dickens at Work*, the novel was "a fable for 1852, related to a large extent in terms of the events, the types, and the social groups which the previous year had thrown into prominence" (179).[22] The novel is chock-full of contemporary reference, not only to the legal system it skewers but to sanitary and housing conditions of the poor, the epidemic diseases that blighted mid-century Britain, the state of pauper graveyards, the slums of St. Giles (aka Tom-all-Alone's) and the "mighty speech-making" (654) about how to set them right. Invoking well-known landmarks of contemporary London further serves to establish the novel's reference in modern society; Jo looks up in bewilderment, for example, at the great Cross on St. Paul's Cathedral. (Dickens is even more explicit in the preface to the Cheap Edition of *Oliver Twist*, when he assures readers that Jacob's Island not only existed when he first wrote the novel, but continues to exist). Two years after *Bleak House*, Dickens was so eager that *Hard Times for These Times* be read as representative of contemporary reality that he was actually uncomfortable with the association of the novel's industrial setting with Preston. He did not want Coketown so narrowly connected to just one city; this conflation, he complained, "localizes . . . a story which has a direct purpose in reference to the working people all over England" (*Nonesuch Letters* 595). By reiterating "times" in both title and subtitle, Dickens affirms the story's contemporaneousness and indicates these times *are* hard times. The fact that the second part of his title is rarely remembered by modern readers—and not even printed on the covers of many modern editions—suggests that twenty-first century readers are not as sensitized to the effects of representing modern life.

Unsurprisingly, the most significant feature of Dickens's realism is the synechdocal function of his characters. In order to avert Skimpole's neglect in his readers, Dickens emphasized that his characters were one of many; the suffering of imagined individuals, he reminded his audience in numerous ways, is like the suffering of "your" contemporaries. Echoing the comparison between "The Peasant Boy" of the ballad Skimpole sings and the modern, urban sweeper of his own novel, Dickens goes on to make Jo's representational role even more apparent with his short, generic name and his reference to "the Sweeps" (564), of whom Jo is only one. When Jo dies the narrator intervenes in the text: "Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us, every day" (677). The first four expostulations refer to the little sweeper, but the fifth gestures outwards; it is not merely Jo who has died but a much larger group of people who are "dying thus around us, every day." Will Fern makes a similar widening gesture in *The Chimes*, as Dickens dramatizes the poor criminal proclaiming that he is only one member of a larger "class" of people. In describing himself Will evokes the "great gulf" between rich and poor: "I only want to live like one of the Almighty's creeturs. I can't—I don't—and so there's a pit dug between me, and them that can and do" (130). He goes on to claim that he is not standing alone but with a whole community of unfortunates: "There's others like me. You might tell 'em off by hundreds and by thousands, sooner than by ones" (130). And in *A Christmas Carol*, the case of Tiny Tim is paired with the "Poor and destitute" on whose behalf Scrooge is asked for a donation—"Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts" (11).[23]

In each of these examples, Dickens employs an apostrophe to audience that intensifies the ethical demands implicit to the synechdocal model of interpreting character. In *Bleak House*, the narrator addresses the queen, the aristocracy, the clergy, and all men and women with "compassion in your hearts." The implication is not subtle; it is the shared duty of the nation to intervene in suffering like Jo's. Of course, they cannot save Jo himself; he is not only fictional but already dead. Instead, Dickens's readers can save those who are "dying thus around us, every day." In *The Chimes*, Dickens employs an even more complex form of apostrophe, as both character and narrator address his readers. Soon after Will Fern's claim that he is one of thousands, he speaks out on behalf of labourers to characters who are themselves metaphorically related to Dickens's audience: "[G]entlemen, gentlemen, dealing with other men like me, begin at the right end. Give us, in mercy, better homes when we're a-lying in our cradles; give us better food when we're a-working for our lives; give us kinder laws to bring us back when we're a-going wrong; and don't set Jail, Jail, Jail, afore us, everywhere we turn" (156). At the conclusion of the book, the narrator echoes Will Fern's admonishment: "O listener . . . try to bear in mind the stern realities from which these shadows come; and in your sphere—none is too wide, and none too limited for such an end—endeavor to correct, improve, and soften them" (182). Dickens's imperative form is softened by the verbs he employs—"try" and "endeavor"—but it is the infinitives that are his real mandate: "correct, improve, and soften." Reminding his readers of the metaphorical relationship between "shadow"

and "stern reality," Dickens cues a particular ethical response in his readers. He doesn't ask readers to lose themselves in the text but to remember ("bear in mind") that which it refers to. Indeed, the object of his imperatives is not the shadows, but the stern realities; "soften *them*," (my italics), he says. As if to forestall dissent, Dickens assures each listener that he can act "in your sphere—none is too wide, and none too limited for such an end." Dickens makes a similar plea at the conclusion of *A Christmas Carol*, reminding his readers that Scrooge's transformation is a model for them to follow. The narrator tells us that Scrooge "knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge," and he further admonishes, "May that be truly said of us, and all of us!" (90). Indeed, Dickens's most lasting legacy might be the conflation of the Christmas spirit with charitable giving. Scrooge's largesse is especially fitting, as his feelings for the crippled boy are translated into a more general munificence.

The synechdocal function of Dickens's characters is emblematic of the "on the ground" realism that characterized social problem literature and its popular reception. While critics like George Henry Lewes lambasted Dickens's work as "exaggerated, untrue, fantastical, and melodramatic" (143), characters like Jo and Will Fern were nonetheless understood by Dickens's readers to represent actual people who inhabited the contemporary world.[24] His characters did not have specific real-world referents (although Jo's experience at the inquest echoed an actual case); instead, one poor character "stood in" for the poor. Tellingly, Lewes himself observed this tendency to interpret Dickens's characters for their representative function, or as tokens of a type: "His types established themselves in the public mind like personal experiences. . . . Every humbug seemed a Pecksniff, every nurse a Gamp, every jovial improvident a Micawber, every stinted serving-wench a Marchioness. Universal experiences became individualized in these types; an image and a name were given, and the image was so suggestive that it seemed to *express* all that it was found to *recall*" (146). Although these examples do not carry the ethical implications of Tiny Tim or Jo, they speak to the kind of case-to-category generalization that modern scholars have observed. Lewes goes on to argue that while Dickens's distortions of reality are obvious to the critic and "cultivated" reader, they go unnoticed by his enthusiastic audience.

> Give a child a wooden horse, with hair for mane and tail, and wafer-spots for colouring, he will never be disturbed by the fact that this horse does not move its legs but runs on wheels; and this wooden horse, which he can handle and draw, is believed in more than a pictured horse by a Wouvermanns [*sic*] or an Ansdell. It may be said of Dickens's human figures that they too are wooden, and run on wheels; but these are details which scarcely disturb the belief of admirers. Just as the wooden horse is brought within the range of the child's emotions, and dramatizing tendencies, when he can handle and draw it, so Dickens's figures are brought within the range of the reader's interests, and receive from these interests a sudden illumination, when they are the puppets of a drama every incident of which appeals to the sympathies. (146)

Lewes's analogy tells us much about realism as he conceives it and as the "mass of men" do (146). The wooden horse lacks technical skill and verisimilitude; the horse paintings of Richard Ansdell and Philips Wouwermans, on the other hand, are both characterized by their technical proficiency and almost photographic mimesis.[25] It is the wooden horse, though, that is "believed in" by the child, because it is "brought within [his] emotions, and dramatizing tendencies." His condescension suggests that "popular" readers are simply unable to see through Dickens's distortions, but Lewes does not fully appreciate the distinction inherent to his analogy. While he finds the paintings more "realistic" because of their style, both toy and painting refer to the same subject. And just as a child does mistake wheels for legs or "wafer-spots" for a naturalistic coat (but nonetheless interprets a toy as a representation of the animal), readers were moved by Dickens's "fantastic" style while at the same time understanding it to refer to something very real.[26]

In a recent "sourcebook" on *Bleak House*, critic Janice Allan similarly fails to appreciate the distinction between our modern expectations of a realistic style (informed in part by Lewes's influential criticism) and Victorian readers' interpretation of realist subjects. Allan describes realism as endorsing a particular relationship between art and reality, signaled by the language of "mirror, portrait, *daguerreotype*, transcript, etc." and also a particular style: "[T]he novelist's language and style should be as unobtrusive as possible" in order "not to draw attention to the novel's inherent and inevitable artificiality" (20). Dickens, she concludes, was obviously not a realist, and moreover, "did not see himself as a realist" (20). His style "is actually much closer to that associated with fantasy, fairytale, and grotesque" (21). Allan turns to the preface of *Bleak House* for corroboration, in particular Dickens's claim that "I have purposely dwelt on the romantic side of familiar things." But she ignores that in the same preface Dickens goes to great pains to support the "truth" of his representations, going so far as to defend the scientific evidence for spontaneous combustion! Dickens's defense is in response to none other than Lewes, who criticized him in the *Leader* for perpetuating an unscientific falsehood. Dickens responds in the preface that there are about "thirty cases [of spontaneous combustion] on record" (6) and goes on to present evidence of the two most famous.[27] In fact, Dickens was often an eloquent defender of realism, despite his own penchant for romanticism and sensationalism. His introduction to *Oliver Twist*, for example, was a manifesto for a new kind of realism in response to the sensationalist Newgate novels: "I had read of thieves by scores. . . . But I had never met (except in HOGARTH) with the miserable reality." And in his 1848 preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens not only describes his own research on the state of boarding schools in Yorkshire but also invokes subsequent legal cases and personal correspondence that prove that his fiction is only "a faint and feeble picture of an existing reality." Tellingly, Dickens refutes purported claims that the abusive Mr. Squeers represents any one Yorkshire schoolmaster by proclaiming that he is "the representative of a class, and not of an individual."

Both Lewes and Allan disregard what Dickens himself suggested about the relationship between *what* one describes and *how* one describes it. As recounted in the

Life of Dickens, Dickens argued that "the exact truth" must be in any description, but "the manner of stating the truth" is what sets literature apart from exposition. "It does not seem to me to be enough to say of any description that it is the exact truth. The exact truth must be there; but the merit or art in the narrator, is the manner of stating the truth. As to which thing in literature, it always seems to me that there is a world to be done. And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like . . . the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment" (353). The stakes as Dickens describes them are high; literature will only survive because of the "fanciful treatment" of truth. But this version of fancy is not in opposition to reality; instead it is a way of describing reality in such a way that engages readers' *imagination* and *emotion*. Tellingly, Lewes himself remarked upon this appeal, Dickens's characters "are brought within the range of the reader's interests," he argued, because every incident of his dramas "appeals to the sympathies" (146).

In *Bleak House*, Dickens offers his own compelling analysis of how depicting the modern world is integral to his ethical objectives. Dickens mounts a scathing critique of those who insist on historical rather than contemporary subjects, "ladies and gentlemen of fashion. . . . On whom even the Fine Arts, attending in powder and walking backward like the Lord Chamberlain, must array themselves in the milliners' and tailors' patterns of past generations, and be particularly careful not to be in earnest, or to receive any impress from the moving age" (173). These wealthy spectators refuse to be affected by art; in order to preserve their own "languid and pretty" lives, they banish "ideas" and agree "to put a smooth glaze on the world, and to keep down all its realities" (173). Their aesthetic stance, Dickens suggests, does not only "keep down" modern life *realism*, but the reality itself. This satire of those who will only support historical art complements an earlier "glimpse of the world of fashion" (17): "There is much good in it; there are many good and true people in it," he determines, "[b]ut the evil of it is, that it is a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun" (17). Despite the purported goodness of the wealthy, Dickens suggests that they are willfully ignorant, stopping up their ears with cotton and wool so as not to be disturbed by the reality of the modern world. The tastes of this "world of fashion" are in stark contrast to Dickens's own contemporary subjects. Although readers can, like Harold Skimpole, insulate their aesthetic appreciation from their ethical commitments, Dickens insists that fiction penetrate the "jeweller's cotton" that would shut out the suffering of the modern world.

Despite Lewes's and other critics' complaints that his characters were caricatures, more sympathetic reviewers praised Dickens's representation of "real," contemporary suffering. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, for example, argued that his scenes of humble life have such "force and accuracy" that they "exonerate him from the charge of either exaggeration or flights of fancy" (170). *Britannia's* review *A Christmas Carol*, meanwhile, praised Dickens's "sympathy for human suffering . . . not for imaginary and fictitious distresses but for the real grinding sorrows of life."[28] If this critic is any indication, then Victorian readers demonstrated the kind of metaphorical interpretation of fictional characters that gave their reading a "real-world" applica-

tion. While the *Britannia's* review suggests that Dickens, and by extension his readers, experience sympathy *not* for "fictitious" but for "real" distress, I have argued that there is instead a causal relationship between the two. Readers who respond emotionally and empathetically to characters can then extend their empathy and compassion beyond the confines of the text. This model of narrative empathy is pithily contained in a cabman's spontaneous eulogy of the author upon his death. "Mr. Dickens was the gentleman who looked after the poor man. We cabmen were hoping he would give us a turn next" (reported by Henry Dickens, Ford 81). These remarks not only reflect Dickens's reputation as a defender of the poor, but also reveal the cabman's confidence in the ethical consequences of fiction. If Dickens dramatized one member of his profession, then it would transform readers' responses to the profession as a whole.

Batson's and Hakemulder's research confirms the cabman's predictions, and Dickens's own novelistic practice suggests that he wanted to capitalize on readers' propensity to interpret characters synechdocally. However, proving that narrative empathy had particular consequences for historical readers' beliefs and behaviors still faces methodological hazards. After all, we cannot interview nineteenth-century readers or have them complete reader-response questionnaires. Louis Cazamian acknowledged this difficulty in his own capacious study of *Le Roman Social en Angleterre*.[29] Despite his commitment to tracing the social and political influence of social problem fiction, Cazamian concedes that it is "impossible to produce exact documentary evidence of a book's moral and emotional impact" (293). Even psychological research that demonstrates the prevalence of narrative empathy as a fundamental feature of discourse processing does not guarantee a subsequent ethical response. Empathy varies by individuals' disposition, mood, and cognitive abilities; moreover, for both modern and historical readers there is no guaranteed correlation between narrative empathy and ethical intervention. The emotions prompted by characters may dissipate once a book is laid down, and a "reengaged" action system often turns to selfish rather than altruistic pursuits. Even in the mid-nineteenth century, for which the emotional effects of reading are well documented, the subsequent leap from emotion to action is less certain. Two years after *A Christmas Carol* was published, Caroline Norton conceded, "To what good actions that small book gave birth, / God only knows" (154). But she remained convinced that literature could bear good deeds; although "we know not" what compassion was prompted by Dickens, "we know good thoughts, well told, / Strike root in many a heart, and bear a hundred-fold!" (154). Norton's own faith in the ethical power of literature is demonstrated in *The Child of the Islands*, from which this tribute is taken; for over two hundred pages she admonishes the prince and his subjects to imagine and care for the poor. For compelling evidence of the tangible consequence of reading, one need look no farther than Dickens's "ghostly little book," which sold six thousand copies in its first week in 1843 and was soon reprinted for the first of hundreds of times. In the spring after *A Christmas Carol's* release, *The Gentleman's Magazine* credited the story with a surge in charitable giving: "More extensive kindness has been dispensed to those who are in want at the present season than at any preceding one" (170).

ENDNOTES

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1. Philosopher Robert Vischer's *Über das optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik* (1873) was the first significant treatment of *einfühlung*, which was the critical term in his psychological theory of art. In *Ästhetik* (1903–1906), psychologist Theodor Lipps drew further connections between how a person relates to an art object and to other people. Edward Titchener, who translated *einfühlung* into English in 1909, was a psychologist who applied the concept of empathy to a theory of aesthetics, and Vernon Lee, who defined *einfühlung* and later empathy as a key feature of aesthetic perception was an author, art critic, and amateur psychologist.

2. Since the paradox was first articulated by Colin Radford in 1975, it has been addressed in some form in virtually every edition of *The British Journal of Aesthetics* and *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Significant treatments include Lamarque, Walton, Currie, and Part 1, "Paradoz of Fiction," in Hjort and Laver's collection.

3. I will not catalogue the "solutions" to the paradox here, although a number have been proposed. The two main camps deny either the premise that existence beliefs are necessary for emotional responses (e.g. Peter Lamarque, who argues that we "mentally represent" characters or events rather than "believe" in them) or the premise that we have bona-fide emotional responses towards fiction and fictional characters (e.g. Kendall Walton, who argues that we instead have "pretend" or "make-believe" emotions).

4. Although an etymological and conceptual shift has greatly curtailed the meaning of sympathy to the less radical notion of pity or condolence, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it indicated "the quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others" (*OED*, s. v. "sympathy"). Although the history of both terms is complex, this historical understanding of sympathy is closely aligned with the modern notion of empathy. For a discussion of the two terms see Eisenberg and Wispé.

5. On altruism and prosocial behavior, see Barnett, Davis, Eisenberg, Krebs, Krebs and Russell, and Oswald. For an overview of psychological research on empathy and prosocial behavior, see Bierhoff, especially Chapter 9, "Empathy," Chapter 13, "Altruistic motive system," and Chapter 14, "Empathy-related responding and emotional regulation." On moral development see Hoffman. On interpersonal relationships see Brems and Sohl and Cousins and Vincent. On intergroup relationships see Finlay and Stephen and Stephen and Finlay.

6. *The Altruism Question*. See also "Empathy and Altruism." There has been much debate in psychological and philosophical circles about what constitutes a truly altruistic action, i.e. one meant to help another rather than oneself, or even if there is such a thing as true altruism. I will bracket this conversation, although it is worth mentioning that Dickens did appeal to some egoistic motivations (preventing civil strife, for example) in order to encourage prosocial—or other-helping—behavior.

7. While non-experimental reading, i.e. reading outside of the psychological laboratory, does not come with comparable processing instructions, sentimentalized narratives like Dickens's carry *de facto* directions to imagine and feel with particular characters in distress.

8. Scholars have offered different explanations for this phenomenon. Literary critic Norman Holland offers a neurological account, arguing that two different brain systems operate when we read fictions: the prefrontal cortex suppresses behavior while the corticolimbic system continues to process emotions as in real life. Developmental psychologist Paul Harris develops a similar model in terms of cognitive and emotional appraisal systems. When we process a fictional story, he argues, we appraise emotions as if the events were real while we simultaneously perform ontological

analysis that asks whether events are real or fictional. While the results of the latter inhibit behavioral responses, they "do not necessarily impinge on, or redirect, the [emotional] appraisal processes" (66).

9. Thus, *contra* Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief," we do not forget that what we are watching or reading is not real. Paul Harris presents evidence that children can distinguish between reality and make-believe from a very young age, even when immersed in highly fantasized worlds. See *The Work of the Imagination*, in particular "Imagination and Emotion."

10. Even excessive indulgence in music, James contends, can have deleterious effects: "One becomes filled with emotions which habitually pass without prompting to any deed, and so the inertly sentimental condition is kept up." The "remedy," James advises, is never to "suffer one's self to have an emotion at a concert, without expressing it afterwards in *some* active way. Let the expression be the least thing in the world—speaking genially to one's aunt, or giving up one's seat in a horsecar, if nothing more heroic offers—but let it not fail to take place" (63).

11. These findings are summarized in two papers that work in tandem: "Empathy and Attitudes: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Improve Feelings Toward the Group?" and "Empathy, Attitudes, and Action: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Motivate One to Help the Group?".

12. These findings were more robust for nonfictional representatives of social groups, perhaps because the study's prompt that a character was fictional undermined his synechdocal function (unlike social problem literature, which emphasized how fictional characters were representative of the contemporary poor).

13. "How to make alle Menschen Brüder: Literature in multicultural and multiform society." This study is also reported in Chapter 4 of Hakemulder's *The Moral Laboratory*.

14. In 1849, Benjamin Disraeli described his own decision to use literature as one emerging from that cultural and historical moment. "It was not originally the intention of the writer to adopt the form of fiction as the instrument to scatter his suggestions, but after reflection he resolved to avail himself of a method which, *in the temper of the times*, offered the best chance of influencing opinion" (*Coningsby* xi, my italics).

15. *Hard Times* is his most well-known meditation on this theme; Thomas Gradgrind's educational system of "nothing but Facts," along with his methodological commitment to statistics and philosophical loyalty to Utilitarianism, leaves no room for imagination or the arts. It leaves no room for charity, either; Gradgrind's later political writings argue "in the main, that the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist" (160). Tellingly, Gradgrind stridently disapproves of imaginative literature; when his children are caught spying on the circus, he wonders if they have been "reading anything? Whether, in spite of all precautions, an idle story-book can have got into the house?" (20).

16. This abridgement is telling. Not only were Victorian audiences more comfortable with openly didactic narratives, but the nature and possibilities of readers' responses are different for contemporary and historical readers. Because the suffering Dickens recounts is no longer "here and now" it does not place the same kind of ethical demands on modern readers, who cannot ameliorate distress that no longer exists. However, the synechdocal model of interpretation I have proposed can also be extended beyond contemporary social groups. Modern readers of *A Christmas Carol*, for example, might also be moved to charitable giving.

17. From the inscription to Dickens's tombstone: "He was a sympathiser to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world."

18. *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Dombey and Son* are often cited as paradigms of Victorians' intense emotional engagements with characters; when Little Nell died, Gertrude Himmelfarb recalls, "readers all over England wept" (407). This response waned as the century progressed, suggesting the ways in which practices of reading—and emotions themselves—are historical artifacts. For accounts of this shift in Dickens's critical reception, see Ford and Lenard.

19. "Leigh Hunt: A Remonstrance" was originally published in *All The Year Round* (December 23th, 1859) after the publication of *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, edited by Hunt's son. For more on the literary scandal of Skimpole, see Forster, volume III: 5-8.

20. Like Jo, the peasant boy of Parry's song is an orphan "thrown on the wide world doom'd to wander and roam" (1).

21. "I dare say [slaves] are worked hard," Skimpole concedes, "I dare say theirs is an unpleasant experience on the whole; but they people the landscape for me, they give it a poetry for me, and perhaps that is one of the pleasanter objects of their existence" (273).

22. As early as Humphrey House's *The Dickens World*, critics have noted that Dickens himself was often "behind his times" in his social critique, despite his own claims to depict modern life.

23. In a similar move, a suffering weaver in Disraeli's *Sybil, or The Two Nations* considers himself one of "six hundred thousand" all "driven from our innocent and happy homes" (115).

24. For John Forster's defense of Dickens against Lewes's critique see *The Life of Charles Dickens*, "Dickens as a Novelist, 1836–1870."

25. Richard Ansdell and Philips Wouwermans were a contemporary English painter and a Dutch baroque painter, respectively. Both specialized in hunting scenes.

26. While Lewes meant the analogy as an insult, his comparison has actually become pivotal to one of the most influential modern theories of narrative, postulated in philosophical aesthetics by Kendall Walton and in developmental psychology by Paul Harris. On both Walton and Harris's account, narratives act similarly to "props" in children's make-believe; they guide imagination and stimulate emotional reactions even as readers remain aware of their fundamental unreality.

27. For more on this exchange, see Haight.

28. Social problem literature was consistently evaluated—in praise and critique—in terms of truth, facts, and reality. A review of Kingsley's *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet* in *Blackwood's* recounts the dire straits of the poor in England and hails them not as fictional detail but as "stern realities—grim facts which it is impossible to gainsay" (594). In *The White Slaves of England*, John Cobden describes Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong: Factory Boy* as "a fiction merely in construction, a truthful narrative in fact" (162). And the Athenaeum concludes of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, "The truth of it is terrible. The writer . . . has described misery, temptation, distress and shame as they really exist" (1050).

29. Written in 1903, Cazamian's *Le Roman Social en Angleterre* was the authoritative work on nineteenth-century social reform fiction through much of the twentieth century.

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