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LESSONS FROM THE GUTTER: SEX AND CONTAMINATION IN THE *WAY WE LIVE NOW*

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FELIX CARBURY'S NAME IS A classically Trollopian bit of fun. The heir to the Carbury family estate is dubbed with the Latinate for "happy and fortunate" when Felix is in fact the active agent of its sorrow, loss of fortune, and impending demise. Though Felix's gambling, drinking, and indolence are the practices most dangerous to his family, Anthony Trollope frames his sexual habits as most dangerous to society and young readers. The narrator and other characters aptly call Felix "vicious" (21; ch.2, 132; ch. 17, 540; ch. 71), which is etymologically rooted in "vice." Margaret Markwick's assertion that "viciousness" was Trollope's regular reference to "carnality or sexual licentiousness" (95) is helpful in understanding how Felix, and his fate, are being made to function in the discussion of male sexuality in which the novel engages. As a result of improper sexual liaisons, Felix descends from the status of eligible, aristocratic bachelor to contaminating social pariah. In the process, he ends up walking the streets in a parody of the desperation and police harassment that Victorian fallen women faced; loses his beauty in a symbolic disfigurement that mirrors the ravages of syphilis; and ends up banished not merely from his community but from the entire country. The plot explicitly states that Felix is exiled to prevent him from inflicting *financial* harm on women, but Felix's participation in the extratextual discourse on men's sexuality required that he also be expelled from the *sexual* economy to contain his potential for transmitting sexual contagion.

Trollope's decision to banish Felix looks like simple justice, but is in fact a complex event illuminating an intersection of literature and culture in a particular historical moment. Unlike James Kincaid, who reads Felix's expulsion as the exile of a villain and thus a formal comedic convention (165), Stephen Wall attributes Felix's end to authorial failure, charging Trollope with an inability to sustain the acerbity satire requires. He reads the banishment as a lapse into typical Victorian moralizing, arguing that the "diminished expectations finally visited on [Felix] are ethically retributory rather than artistically logical" (60).

I wish to suggest that Felix's fate is entirely logical when considered in relation to Trollope's artistic commitment to educate young readers through Realist fiction, his fully articulated stance on sexual "falleness," and the public debates over controlling venereal

diseases that coincided with *TWWLN*'s composition and publication. By invoking the discourse of disease, employing it metaphorically, and appropriating for young men the criteria for defining a fallen woman, Trollope uses Felix's fate to teach young male readers that they, too, can fall. The implied warning is that readers should consider sexual choices just as carefully as financial ones. In holding men to the women's standard, Trollope shifts the focus away from the traditionally masculine economic register toward personal responsibility, a move in keeping with the ascendance of the middle class agenda of redefining the standard of gentility from inherited rank to achievable attribute.

I. Realism and Responsibility

IN KEEPING WITH THE "code of the gentleman" to which he subscribed and the exploration of which constituted a theme in much of his fiction, Trollope does not exempt himself from accountability, but advocates for a corollary form of authorial responsibility. Far from constituting unthinking moralizing, Felix's "fall" demonstrates an acute authorial awareness of fiction's cultural work: transmitting values, enforcing prevailing social "laws," and, in the case of the Victorian novel, employing narrative closure in the service of the moral instruction with which the genre is so closely associated. In the chapter of his autobiography titled, "On Novels and the Art of Writing Them," Trollope demonstrated a clear understanding, shared by all satirists, of the power of fiction to render unspoken rules visible and thus eligible for revision. As a self-proclaimed Realist novelist, Trollope repeatedly attacked fashionable fiction for teaching bad lessons: giving readers, especially young women, false ideals and expectations for unrealistic endings. Like Thackeray, he defended his practice of exploring unpleasant topics and describing honestly the consequences of characters' choices by defining literary Realism as a humane practice that makes "misery worthy of alleviation" (*Vicar* i).

Treating *TWWLN* as a form of highbrow conduct literature is neither dismissive nor reductive, but rather congruent with Trollope's declared mission to educate his reader, particularly the famous "young person," of whom Victorian editors and librarians were so censoriously careful:

> [V]ery much good or harm must be done by novels, . . . especially to the imagination, . . . of the young. A vast proportion of the teaching of the day . . . comes from these books. . . . It is from them that girls learn what is expected from them, and what they are to expect when lovers come; and also from them that young men unconsciously learn what are, or should be, or may be, the charms of love.
>
> If the novelist, therefore, can so handle the subject as to do good by his handling, as to teach wholesome lessons in regard to love, the good which he does will be very wide. If I . . . can make young men and women believe that truth in love will make them happy, then, if my writings be popular, I shall have a very large class of pupils. (*Autobiography* 220, 224–25)

Reading *TWWLN* through this lens highlights the importance of younger, seemingly less-central characters such as Felix and lends their frivolous or comedic actions considerably more gravity.

Trollope's description of his mission was composed in retrospect near the end of his life; much earlier, he had published as a preface to his novel *The Vicar of Bullhampton* (1870) a tract that prefigures the pedagogical and artistic beliefs he would delineate in

"On Novels." It bears careful examination because Trollope's final disposition of a fallen young man in *TWWLN* is closely aligned with the positions on sexuality, disease, and fiction that he so carefully established in his defense of the previous novel about a fallen young woman. Though Trollope opens with the hard-nosed professional's assertion that "The writing of prefaces is, for the most part, work thrown away" (*Vicar* i), the document he insists be read has considerable merit; it is a carefully crafted, single-page policy statement that reads like a legal brief and serves, in its formal attention to the Aristotelian rhetorical model, as a claim for authorial credibility and gentility. Trollope declared the Preface to be a preemptive defense against anticipated criticism, but it is also a Thackerayan argument for the socially ameliorative power of literary Realism; a manifesto on an author's right to determine fit content and character arc; a cautionary prescription of the author's moral responsibilities within artistic freedom; an assertion of women's intelligence and moral fortitude as a counter to censorship; and a declaration of the injustice of the sexual double standard.[1]

As illustrated by his care neither to obfuscate nor inflame when describing female sexual fallenness as the "subject very difficult to speak of," Trollope distances himself from charges of sensationalism and vulgarity and implies his intention not to exploit the very victims he seeks to help (*Letters* 522). From a rhetorical standpoint, it is a move to underscore his personal and professional integrity. Trollope is both a gentleman and a responsible author who will not participate in the perpetuation of the happy endings and false lessons popular fiction purveys:

> I have introduced in the Vicar of Bullhampton the character of a girl whom I will call, – for want of a truer word that shall not in its truth be offensive, – a castaway. I have endeavoured to endow her with qualities that may create sympathy, and I have brought her back at last from degradation, at least to decency. I have not married her to a wealthy lover, and I have endeavoured to explain that though there was possible to her a way out of perdition, still things could not be with her as they would have been had she not fallen. (*Vicar* i)

Boldly launching the argument with a plot spoiler, he directly challenges readers' expectations about the cultural work a character's arc should perform. Trollope acknowledges that he is employing narrative closure in service of social reform by warning the reader s/he will be denied the satisfaction of seeing Carrie Brattle punished to the fullest extent of the social "law." Though fallen, Carrie is not only retained within the social system, but she is redeemed to the fullest extent that the conventions of literary Realism can allow.

Trollope then defends his choices against those who would argue that representing evil constitutes license and instruction in how to commit evil:

> There arises . . . the question whether a novelist, who professes to write for the amusement of the young of both sexes, should allow himself to bring upon his stage such a character as that of Carrie Brattle? It is not long since . . . the very existence of such a condition of life as was hers, was supposed to be unknown to our sisters and daughters. . .. Whether that ignorance was good may be questioned; but that it exists no longer is beyond question. (*Vicar* i)

As discussed below, Trollope's assertion that the taboo subject is already in circulation is accurate, and both *Vicar* and *TWWLN* constitute Trollope's participation in it. His casual

aside that the merits of ignorance are debatable is a red herring: the remainder of the Preface makes a logical, emotional, and ethical case that ignorance and false information about sexual activity are harmful to young women, and that the practice of condemning and isolating those who have been sexually active is in itself immoral. He is, in effect, shifting the terms of the debate by positioning himself as prosecutor of a higher law than that recognized by the censors:

> Then arises that further question, – how far the condition of such unfortunates should be made a matter of concern to the sweet young hearts of those whose delicacy and cleanliness of thought is a matter of pride to so many of us. Cannot women, who are good, pity the sufferings of the vicious, and do something perhaps to mitigate and shorten them, without contamination from the vice? (*Vicar* i)

The choice of "contamination" is significant for its dual construction: it not only invokes the discourse of physical disease and contemporary debates over the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs), but also relates to the metaphorical contagions in social and ethical realms he is exploring in *TWWLN*.[2] Trollope explicitly intended the latter novel to be a satire of "the profligacy of the age," but he also describes it as an indictment of the pernicious spread of tolerance for dishonesty in all discourses (*Autobiography* 353). The satire turns on the irony of characters' deliberate assessments of the potential for social "contamination" by the Melmottes, a family of dubious origins and financial dealings (63; ch.8, 163; ch. 21). Characters fear social contagion while assiduously ignoring the infectious spread of an ethical disease Trollope frames as so "climbing . . . so rampant . . . that there seems to be reason for fearing that dishonesty . . . will cease to be abominable" (*Autobiography* 354).

In the Preface, Trollope uses the idea of contamination to cast the majority of women in a positive light: contrary to the censors' impulse to "protect" feminine virtue, Trollope asserts women are both intelligent and morally strong enough to withstand exposure to reality. Further on, he reasons that such a risk will result not merely in no harm to the women but also in the potential for an improved reality. Between these two bookends, however, he shifts the language of disease from the figurative to the literal realm to redefine true manhood and to indict those who subscribe to the hypocrisy of the sexual double standard: "It will be admitted probably by most men who have thought upon the subject that no fault among us is punished so heavily as that fault, often so light in itself but so terrible in its consequences to the less faulty of the two offenders, by which a woman falls (*Vicar* i). Much as he does in the inclusive title of *The Way We Live Now*, Trollope includes and implicates himself by the use of the word "us." Making himself just one of the lads is a rhetorical move to soften a harsh blow that might otherwise offend the reader who is being confronted for bad behavior and hypocritical thinking. The use of "us" also makes sense given his largely compassionate treatment in fiction of the "hobbledehoy," an antiquated term Trollope used frequently to refer to awkward young men who are in the process of growing up. Further, his self-implication is consistent with the frank admission in the *Autobiography* that during his lonely young bachelorhood in London, he himself fell into "the temptations of loose life" (51).[3] While there is clear recognition of male desire in casting the offense as "light," Trollope still cites men as most blameworthy for illicit sexual behaviors.

He thus takes a stance analogous to that of the political groups who sought to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs). The CDAs legalized the arrest, medical examination,

detention, and surveillance of women suspected of being prostitutes. Though initially enacted to curb the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among members of the military, the laws were later broadened with the rationale of protecting men throughout the British Empire. In the decade prior to the publication of *TWWLN*, public resistance to the CDAs grew due to perceived abuses by police and doctors and the sense that groundless suspicions legally and practically made every woman a potential target of police and medical intervention, regardless of her sexual status.

The appendix included below traces the history of the CDAs as well as their intersection with the composition and publication of *Vicar* and *TWWLN* to offer a sense of the contemporary public debate in which the novels are participating ideologically.[4] The point is not that Trollope was a mouthpiece for repeal organizations, but rather that the subject was a vibrant social and political issue, and that his works of this period, including *TWWLN*, reflect engagement with an ongoing public conversation about sexual practices. The Preface has much in common with the rhetoric employed by high-profile repeal organizations. In 1869, the year immediately prior to the publication of *Vicar*, the Ladies' National Association (LNA), published in the London *Daily News* "A Petition for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts" signed by 128 women, including Florence Nightingale and Harriet Martineau, the presumed author. The petition asserted that the CDAs should be abandoned for a variety of reasons, not least because they: "apply to women only, men being wholly exempt from their penalties . . . [are] unjust to punish the sex who are the victims of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause, both of the vice and its dreaded consequences" (quoted in Mermin and Tucker 94–95). The echo in Trollope's Preface, and his sympathy to the injustice the LNA describes are unmistakable. Their shared determination that men were the more "faulty" of the two offenders was an unpopular stance, and to some minds an unscientific one. Even the government absolved men. The Royal Commission responded to repeal pressure by forcefully reinscribing the sexual double standard: "With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse" (quoted in Walkowitz 71).

As can be seen in the Appendix, *Vicar* had been out for a year and there had been significant coverage of and debate about the CDAs in the press when Samuel Smiles published *Character* (1871), the latest volume in his wildly popular conduct literature series for working class men. In *Character*, Smiles agitated for a form of sexual equality the LNA condoned, but that directly conflicted with the practices of his contemporary culture and the stated policy of his government. The precepts and language such reformers employed would evolve over the next two years into the galvanizing cause of the Social Purity movement: to promote men's "sexual continence." Smiles asserted: "A pure womanhood must be accompanied by a pure manhood. The same moral law applies alike to both. It would be loosening the foundations of virtue, to countenance the notion that because of a difference in sex, man were at liberty to . . . do that with impunity, which, if done by a woman, would stain her character for life" (307). Though Smiles and Trollope are writing for two different classes of men, and Trollope is more sympathetic to the force of male desire, they both stand in opposition to the sexual double standard.[5] In addition, Trollope's description in the Preface of the fate he has crafted for Carrie Brattle is imbued with a permanence similar to that of Smiles's "stain." Yet Trollope's commitment to reform is tempered by his commitment to Realism, which requires that even in Carrie's redemption, "things could not be with her as they would have been had she not fallen" (*Vicar* i).

Trollope follows the subversion of the sexual double standard with a brilliant rhetorical move: he counter-intuitively casts the fallen woman as a damsel in distress who is worthy of rescue, and the man who encounters her as her obligated, chivalric defender. In so doing, he simultaneously threatens sexually incontinent male readers with death and chastises upright men for failing to uphold one of the most basic tenets of gentlemanliness: "All her own sex is against her, – and all those of the other sex in whose veins runs the blood which she is thought to have contaminated, and who, of nature, would befriend her were her trouble any other than it is" (*Vicar* i). This is a densely wrought claim that redefines man's "nature" as the high minded impulse to protect women, as opposed to the seducer's brutal urge to satisfy an appetite by using them. The key to this passage is Trollope's emphasis on men's alleged contamination and women's real victimization and isolation. Trollope moves from euphemism to the physicality of the threat, from a stress on "thought," which makes the disease an unproven allegation, to a stress on "she," which makes the vector responsible for a man's infection none other than he himself, "in whose veins runs the blood which *she* is thought to have contaminated." Thus a man's "heavy" punishment for his "light fault" is the real potential for contaminated blood: venereal diseases that can be deadly to himself, to other women including a wife, but most distressingly, to his bloodline if it be transmitted to heirs. This was one of the Social Purity Movement's foundational arguments for sexual continence and it constitutes the primary plotline for Trollope's later novel, *Is He Poppenjoy?* (1877–78), in which a family estate hinges on the frail health of a syphilitic aristocrat's offspring. A sexually careless man can thus infect his property, not just his progeny. The implicit reward for the man of higher "nature" is clean blood and a high branch in a healthy, wealthy family tree.[6]

Trollope then returns to his explicit goal for the Preface: reforming acceptable responses to fallen women. He acknowledges the reader's assumptions about the social policing of fallen women, only to shatter the premise on which they stand:

> She is what she is, and she remains in her abject, pitiless, unutterable misery, because this sentence of the world has placed her beyond the helping hand of Love and Friendship. It may be said, no doubt, that the severity of this judgment acts as a protection to female virtue, – deterring, as all known punishments do deter, from vice. But this punishment, which is horrible beyond the conception of those who have not regarded it closely, is not known beforehand. (*Vicar* i)

Trollope constructs an argument based on Christian charity and forgiveness, not unlike the biblical account of the redemption of Mary Magdalen from her fallen state. The twist lies in employing the Magdalen trope in the service of an argument against censorship and cultivated ignorance for women, which he casually dropped into the introduction of the Preface and here urgently underscores at the conclusion as an indirect claim for the value of treating "difficult" subjects.

Trollope reinforces his credibility by tempering his advocacy for the authorial freedom literary Realism permits with a caveat illuminating that freedom's limits: the author has a responsibility to make the depiction of vice an honest one, or s/he is as morally culpable as a procurer or seducer:

> Instead of the punishment, there is seen a false glitter of gaudy life … which, alas has been more often portrayed in glowing colours, for the injury of young girls, than have those horrors which ought

> to deter. . . . To write in fiction of one so fallen as the noblest of her sex, as one to be rewarded because of her weakness, as one whose life is happy, bright, and glorious, is certainly to allure to vice and misery. (*Vicar* i)

Sally Mitchell finds Trollope to have been true to his rule: "The book's ending is satisfactory enough to keep Carrie from being a martyr, but depressing enough to discourage any girl from wanting to emulate her" (126).

Trollope closes his argument with a reassertion of the novel's social purpose and an emotional claim for how much is at stake: "But it may perhaps be possible that if the matter be handled with truth to life, some girl, who would have been thoughtless, may be made thoughtful, or some parent's heart may be softened. It may also at last be felt that this misery is worthy of alleviation, as is every misery to which humanity is subject (*Vicar* i)." This is why and how Felix Carbury's plotline can be read as the masculine corollary to *Vicar*. Felix, as well as Carrie's seducer, has served in the military. By casting one rural innocent for another, with Ruby Ruggles in Carrie Brattle's stead, Trollope gets to present the seduction from the seducer's point of view, not least to undo the damage of false fiction by teaching young women how to protect themselves and young men "what are, or should be, or may be" not "the charms of love," but rather the wages of succumbing to their worst nature (*Autobiography* 220).

In keeping with his stance in the Preface that men are more to blame, Trollope refuses to absolve Felix for his treatment of either the feisty farm girl Ruby Ruggles or the wealthy heiress Marie Melmotte. However, in both cases he is careful to emphasize that some of Felix's work has been done for him: bad fiction can teach a good woman to choose a bad man. Marie had "learned from novels that it would be right that she should be in love" but as a result of reading books Trollope considers poor quality for want of "truth to life" (*Vicar* i), "she had chosen Sir Felix as her idol" (749; ch. 98). Melmotte's scoffing dismissal of his daughter's choice of love object and infatuation with the idea of elopement can actually be applied to both of Felix's victims: "A silly little romantic baggage! She's been reading novels till she has learned to think she couldn't settle down quietly till she had run off with somebody" (408; ch. 53). These are much the same faults Ruby's elders attribute to her when she decides to abandon her erstwhile fiancé John Crumb and follow Felix to the city because she considers stolen moments with him to be "a realization of those delights of life of which she had read in the thrice-thumbed old novels which she had gotten from the little circulating library" (145; ch. 18).

In an attempt to infuse Realism into Ruby's false narrative of what life with Sir Felix could be, her Aunt Pipkin threatens Ruby with the symbolic nadir of the fallen woman, and promises to lock her out of the house if she goes out with Felix again: "I won't have you go and throw yourself into the gutter." Ruby objects with an understandable claim to agency, but with an unjustified claim to wisdom that Trollope and the reader know she lacks: "I've thrown myself into no gutter. I know what I'm about" (372; ch. 48). Trollope makes clear that Ruby, poorly educated by bad novels as she is, knows no more of how to conduct her romantic life than she does of the "severity of the punishment" awaiting a fallen woman (*Autobiography* 333). By contrast, Trollope is a realistic novelist who has done right by his readers, teaching us about Felix by associating him with the same feminine fate, and thus foreshadowing the severity of the punishment to come. We are warned early in the novel that Felix "had so groveled in the gutters as to be dirt all over. Nothing short of the prolonged

sufferings of half a life could cleanse him" (61; ch. 8).[7] Thus Trollope's decision that Felix should suffer and be damned is, contrary to Wall's assertion, both artistically logical and structurally consistent (60).

II. Felix's Fall

ASSERTING THAT FELIX "FALLS" over the course of *TWWLN* may seem to challenge reason given how low he stands in the narrator's initial estimation. Trollope introduces Felix as "not very trustworthy. . . . [H]e was then twenty-five, had been in a fashionable regiment for four years, [and] had already sold out" (18; ch. 2). The subsequent inventory of his shortcomings does nothing so well as itemize the ways in which Felix fails according to the criteria of both classes constituting the audience for *TWWLN*. Felix lacks the wealth that would validate his title and the aristocracy; the refinement and "sympathy" for others that would qualify him as a nineteenth-century "gentleman," and the industry, thrift, and sobriety that would constitute middleclass manliness. The narrator declares summarily: "His life was in every way bad" (18; ch. 2).

Lest the reader wonder how Ruby and Marie could love such a man, Felix shares with the heroes of fashionable novels a primary trait that makes them desirable; Felix is strenuously, repeatedly portrayed as a beautiful man, and the description Trollope offers of him is almost a parody of the stereotypical romantic lead:

> His heart was a stone. But he was beautiful to look at . . . with . . . an appearance of aristocratic breeding. His hair . . . was nearly black, and was soft and silky without that taint of grease which is so common with silken-headed darlings. His eyes were long, brown in colour, and were made beautiful by the perfect arch of the perfect eyebrow. But perhaps the glory of the face was due more to the finished moulding and fine symmetry of the nose and mouth than to his other features. . . . It was admitted by men and clamorously asserted by women that no man had ever been more handsome than Felix Carbury. (20; ch. 2)

Beneath Trollope's snarky tone, buried under the description, lies a cruel fact: Felix's beauty is the chief device by which a heartless man is empowered to prey on young women, especially those rendered vulnerable by bad novels. Both Marie and Ruby exclaim often, usually when pressed to give him up, that Felix is "so beautiful!" (91; ch. 11, 329; ch. 43, 617; ch. 80). But in the world of literary Realism, beauty is not truth.

Felix's beauty is more than his calling card and weapon. It is central to the logic of his fate and his function in Trollope's lessons about sex. Margaret Marwick has argued that "profligates" in Trollope's other novels bore symptoms of advanced venereal disease; their loss of teeth, noses, hair, and sanity were coded Victorian recompense for sexual incontinence (93). For example, she reads Trollope's description of Neefit's baldness in *Ralph the Heir* (1870) as being the type "that is peculiarly mean and despicable," and Lord Ongar's preference for "wiggery" in *The Claverings* (1866), as coded references to the syphilitic symptom of alopecia (hair loss). Her reading is reinforced by Trollope's descriptions of such a character as "hard living" or a "worn out debauch" (91). In her thorough catalogue of Trollope's descriptions of nearly thirty male characters according to nine physical criteria, Felix is classed with the villains. But of the three whom Trollope describes as attractive, Felix enjoys the most adjectives; he more closely physically resembles Trollope's heroes

than his villains. This matters, not least because Markwick argues that the descriptions of leading men are coded sexual markers. "In highlighting noses, foreheads, eyes, mouths and teeth, Trollope is telling as explicitly as he can that these young heroes have not got syphilis" (91). In Felix's case, it is not for want of trying.

To be clear: there is no explicit depiction of venereal disease in *TWWLN*. Trollope uses the language of disease figuratively but only in his descriptions of the social "contamination" some characters fear from contact with Melmotte. However, Trollope "makes use of the opportunities availed by unspeakability" (Cohen 1). He employs symbolic language to render a portion of Felix's plotline parallel to Melmotte's: an attempt at sexual swindling by a man who is as irresistible to young ladies as Melmotte is to investors and social climbers. Much as Trollope uses Melmotte to illustrate the results a society can expect when it suspends restraint in quest of individual gain, Trollope uses Felix to convey the ramifications for young men of uncontrolled sexual expression.

Trollope spends hundreds of pages describing the process by which Felix is destroying himself with vices of all varieties, including injudicious sexual liaisons, which leave him exhausted and literally beaten by novel's end:

> He had eaten and drunk, had gambled, hunted, and diverted himself generally after the fashion considered to be appropriate to young men about town. . . . [H]e was chiefly tormented in these days by the want of amusement. He had so spent his life hitherto that he did not know how to get through a day in which no excitement was provided for him. He never read. Thinking was altogether beyond him. And he had never done a day's work in his life. He could lie in bed. He could eat and drink. He could smoke and sit idle. He could play cards; and could amuse himself with women, – the lower the culture of the women, the better the amusement. Beyond these things the world had nothing for him. Therefore he again took himself to the pursuit of Ruby Ruggles. (510–12; ch. 67)

As Trollope writes it, the taste for amusement and consumption is not unique to Felix; he is engaged in pursuits that though bad are expected for young men of his class. But the paragraph is so constructed as to build up incrementally to the height of vice, which is paradoxically the lowest act to which a gentleman can sink. The single word "again" stresses that this is not the "irregular indulgence" condoned by the Royal Commission, but a habitual practice, an impression underscored by his behavior when Mrs. Pipkin prevents Ruby from going out with him: "Soon after dinner Felix slunk away to some music hall or theatre in quest probably of some other Ruby Ruggles" (515; ch. 67). Felix is not limiting his sexual exploits to a desired lover, since he can feel for no one but himself, nor even to a single victim. He is crossing class boundaries in unsafe ways and via multiple encounters; these are high-risk behaviors that readers understood to increase exponentially his chances of contracting venereal diseases. Trollope discreetly omits an itemized account of Felix's cross-class alliances with potentially contaminating women, but in depicting the trajectory of his inappropriate relationship with Ruby, Trollope teaches that physical harm is a legitimate consequence for a young man who makes poor sexual choices.

The music halls and theaters in the district to which Felix takes Ruby on their dates, and to which he slinks when she is unavailable, also figure heavily in the discourse on the Contagious Diseases Acts. These are the sites of contamination the laws were first enacted to target and where enforcement drew the heaviest press coverage and accusations of abuses.[8] When John Crumb goes to London to find Ruby and bring her home, her

aunt tells him Ruby's "aristocratic and vicious lover" has taken her to one of "them places" where "[t]hey do pretty nearly all that they oughtn't to do" (540, 541; ch. 71). This blunt assessment serves as a reinforcement for any reader who missed Trollope's earlier reference to the highly sexualized atmosphere into which Felix has introduced an innocent if eager farm girl: "They were sitting together at a music-hall, – half music-hall, half theatre, which pleasantly combined the allurements of the gin-palace, the theatre, and the ball-room, trenching hard on those of other places" (328; ch. 43). Trollope's modern editor Frank Kermode indicates that Victorian readers understood those "other places" to be brothels (775). Felix's haunts constitute precisely the environment the CDAs sought to police.

Trollope and his readers knew that Felix's louche behavior fell within the accepted practices by which single young men of the middle and upper classes were taught to satisfy sexual desires by consorting with working class women or prostitutes while they passed the decade between adolescence and a class-appropriate marriage (Tosh 107).[9] However, in describing Felix's seduction of Ruby Ruggles, Trollope critiques the commonness of youthful indulgence in vice by adding a character trait that makes Felix uncommonly dangerous: "[I]n every word he spoke there was a tone of contempt, still he talked of love, and made her promises, and told her that she was pretty. He probably did not enjoy it much; he cared very little about her, and carried on the liaison simply because it was the proper sort of thing for a young man to do" (145; ch. 18). In his weak attempts to woo Marie Melmotte, and his struggle with sexual desire, Felix Carbury technically fits Trollope's description of the hobbledehoy, but Felix is more than awkward. He exceeds the expected behaviors, derives little pleasure from his pursuit, and treats his prey with an overt contempt that underscores the degree of degradation and objectification operating in his relationships. His detachment cannot be excused by boredom, but hints at the moral vacuity his beauty masks. Felix is thus both perfectly normal and shockingly aberrant.[10]

In casting Felix's behavior as an understandable individual response to a socially constructed gender role, Trollope shares the ideological perspective of the LNA's compelling argument that the CDAs create: "a system [whereby] the path of evil is made more easy to . . . [the] youth of England, inasmuch as moral restraint is withdrawn the moment the State recognizes and provides convenience for the practice of a vice which it thereby declares to be necessary" (quoted in Mermin and Tucker 94–95). The LNA's assertion is compatible with Trollope's model of gentlemanliness, especially given their mutual valorization of control and restraint.[11] Echoes of the LNAs outrage at the naturalization of vice can be most clearly heard when Trollope assails his society's resignation to the belief that "boys will be boys" in managing their premarital sexual lives. The most direct articulation of the expectations for young men of Felix's class can be found in the straightforward description of his friend Lord Nidderdale's "family understanding" in which Trollope implies that the systemic tolerance of foul behavior makes parents and friends as morally culpable as the perpetrators:

> It had been an understood thing, since he had commenced life, that he was to marry an heiress.. . . It has become an institution, like primogeniture, and is almost as serviceable for maintaining the proper order of things. Rank squanders money; trade makes it; – and then trade purchases rank by re-gilding its splendor.. . . Nidderdale himself had never dissented . . . had never alarmed his father by any liaison tending towards matrimony with any undowered beauty; – but had claimed his right to "have his fling" before he devoted himself to the redintegration of the family property. His father had

> felt that it would be wrong and might probably be foolish to oppose *so natural a desire*. (435; ch. 57, emphasis added)

Given such a clear outline of the way young men live now, it would be foolish for Trollope to adopt Smiles's inflexible position that "man as well as woman must be pure and virtuous" in equal measure (307). Trollope is too much of a realist to take such a hard line on abstinence. Whereas Smiles's edict can be directly traced to the Protestant Christian ethics that inform all his conduct manuals, Trollope's stance is informed by his intimate knowledge of class practices. By contrast to Trollope's assertion in the Preface that a gentleman's "nature" is to protect a woman in trouble, the aristocracy here defines a man's nature by primitive sexual appetite and acknowledges it only insofar as it impacts the economic register: "so natural a desire" must be accommodated to prevent a non-remunerative or injudicious marriage, and is thus the far lesser of two evils.

By contrast, in Trollope's treatment of Felix's behaviors we see Trollope applying the criteria of the more middle-class ethical register to assert the need for an adjustment to social expectations about sexual freedom for young men. Trollope's novelistic attempts to redefine the gentleman consistently trouble assumptions about men's nature. As Shirley Letwin observes, for Trollope, "[t]he notion that human sexuality is a 'natural drive', which demands satisfaction . . . has no more place in the gentleman's world than the notion that men have a natural need to commit violence" (161). This juxtaposition of sex and violence makes Trollope's depiction of Felix's worst transgression more legible.

While watching a rich, beautiful, and stupid young man ruin himself is a guilty pleasure, watching him attempt to rape Ruby proves too much for most readers and redefines a bad boy as a dangerous man. Trollope's description of the attack on Ruby underscores not just Felix's selfishness and depravity, but also reinforces readers' sense of his level of sexual experience and heightens awareness of the larger social threat Felix constitutes:

> She had left the dancing establishment with her lover; and when they had come to the turn of the passage, there had arisen a question as to her further destiny for the night. Ruby . . . was minded to try her chance at her aunt's door. Sir Felix was of opinion that he could make a preferable arrangement for her; and as Ruby was not at once amenable to his arguments he had thought that a little gentle force might avail him. He had therefore dragged Ruby into the passage. (544; ch. 71)

The shift in language from an almost facetious irony to grim reportage mirrors the descent in the couple's negotiation from flirtation into the violence of a back alley assault. The final sentence is a hard linguistic blow. These are not the maneuvers of a fumbling virgin, nor are they "an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse" (qtd. in Walkowitz 71); they are the *modus operandi* of a predator and an agent of contagion.

Taking Ruby to the music hall effectively introduced a "clean" young woman to a site of contamination. Bringing her back to Islington and assaulting her near her aunt's home performs a reciprocal function: Felix introduces contagion from the "dirty" district, infecting a respectable middle class neighborhood with the behaviors that promote disease and degradation. This is a metaphor for the cycle Smiles, the CDA repealers, and the Social Purity movements all used in their arguments to reshape men's sexual practices. It is also part of the reason why Felix must be expelled from the sexual economy. He is not merely

bad for one or two women, he is bad for the whole neighborhood: the class in which he is shopping for a wife as well as the class in which he is diverting himself while he waits to marry.

When Ruby's fiancé interrupts the attempted rape, beating Felix senseless and destroying his beautiful face in the process, the reader can only cheer. Crumb, a member of the working class, embodies the ethos promulgated by Trollope in the Preface: that a gentleman will "of nature . . . befriend" and defend a woman in trouble. Repaying Felix's violence with violence, Trollope undoubtedly provides "ethically retributory" satisfaction (Wall 60); but more importantly he is drawing an explicit connection between sexual incontinence and personal destruction.

As a result of using his gifts in the service of indiscriminate sexual relations, Felix suffers physical consequences; his loss of beauty functions not merely as a comedic check to his vanity, but more significantly as a symbolic enactment of the ravages of venereal disease. After his beating, the beautiful face, the luxuriant hair, "the fine symmetry of the nose and mouth" that had served as primary markers with which Felix had been identified as disease free can no longer function in that capacity: "both his eyes were swollen and blue; part of his beard had been cut away" and he "had two of his front teeth knocked out" (553; ch. 72, 733; ch. 96). We have the pleasure of laughing at Felix's typically vain and oblivious fretting over his inability to pursue Marie now, for "[h]ow could he kiss his future bride, with his nose bound up with a bandage?" (634; ch. 82). But the subtextual discourse enables Trollope to play humor as a warning. Victorian readers understood a rotting nose to be a sign of advanced syphilis; Felix's damaged proboscis, thatched hair, and toothless lisp can be read simultaneously as a parody and a legitimate symbol of the physical dissipation with which Trollope elsewhere described "debauched" characters as infected agents. Luckily for his potential victims, Felix's face can never again be used as a device for seduction. Doctors say "he will be dreadfully scarred for ever" (553; ch. 72).

In serving Felix his just desserts, Trollope turns the tables and treats a fallen man as others treat fallen women. His reflection on the Preface, written well after *Vicar* and *TWWLN* had been published, echoes Ruby's ignorance, her aunt's threat, and Felix's fall:

> [I]n truth the severity of the punishment is not known beforehand . . . except by those who suffer it. The gaudy dirt, the squalid plenty, the contumely of familiarity, the absence of all good words . . . the flaunting glare of fictitious revelry, the weary pavement . . . and then the quick depreciation of that one ware of beauty . . . hunger, thirst, and strong drink . . . life without a hope . . . utterly friendless. . . . This is the life to which we doom our erring daughters, when because of their error we close our door upon them! But for our erring sons we find pardon easily enough. (*Autobiography* 333–34)

However, Trollope is not pardoning this son easily, but rather offering as a deterrent a vicarious knowledge of "the severity of the punishment." For Felix, too, walks the "weary pavements" under the influence of "strong drink" and "fictitious revelry" after jilting Marie:

> He had played at the Beargarden till four in the morning and had then left the club . . . intoxicated and almost penniless. . . . There could hardly have been a more miserable wretch . . . wandering about the streets of London that night. Though he was nearly drunk, he was not drunk enough to forget the condition of his affairs. . . . [T]rying to make his way to Welbeck Street and losing it at every

> turn, feeling himself to be an object of ridicule to every wanderer, and of dangerous suspicion to every policeman.. . . [H]e steadied himself against a letter-post. . . . Then a policeman enquired into his purposes. . . . Between six and seven he was knocking at the door in Welbeck Street. He had tried his latch-key, but had found it inefficient.. . . He had fallen more than once, and was soiled with the gutter. (388–89; ch. 50)

Though intended for comic effect, the passage ends significantly; the gutter is the metaphor for the place where a sexually fallen young woman lands, and it is a place with which Felix is well acquainted, as Trollope warned us early on (61; ch. 8).

Recall that the CDAs permitted the arrest, involuntary medical examination and detention of any woman suspected of sexual trespass. Felix's staggering journey home is literal streetwalking; the anxiety produced by the menacing surveillance by police is funny if Felix is read as a drunken clown, but harassing or harrowing when considered in light of the experiences of the real women, the "other Ruby Ruggles," Trollope hints Felix had patronized (515; ch. 67).

The next time Felix encounters the police, after Ruby has rescued him from John Crumb's beating, he is taken into custody and examined, though presumably in a more respectful way than would be a suspected young woman: "He was to be carried in a cab by one constable to Bartholomew Hospital, who would then take his address so that he might be produced and bound over to prosecute" (546; ch. 71). Though Felix is released from the hospital voluntarily, he finds while hiding his shameful wounds at home that he has been placed under a sort of house arrest: "[T]he dominion of Sir Felix in his mother's house had been much curtailed. His latch-key had been surreptitiously taken away from him, and all messages . . . reached his hands through those of his mother" (632; ch. 82). His domestic incarceration, though only temporary and certainly mild by comparison, echoes the detention of suspected female sexual agents; he is not merely treated like a fallen woman, he is effectively unmanned.

When Felix's wounds have sufficiently healed, and boredom has compelled him to surmount his vanity and be seen in public, his attempts to interact with members of his class show just how far he has fallen. Knowing his liminal position, he approaches his club "in a creeping hesitating fashion" (733; ch. 96). But the old gang has heard of his transgression. As a result his reputation, such as it was, is no longer under his control. He has been reassigned the identity of a fallen man and a social pariah, and faces the "severity of the punishment" Trollope would have readers learn from a book rather than life. When he tries to engage his former friends in conversation Felix experiences "the contumely of familiarity, the absence of all good words" and finds himself "utterly friendless" (*Autobiography* 334): "'Come into the smoking-room, Dolly,' said Nidderdale. 'I can stand most things, and I try to stand everything; but, by George, that fellow is such a cad that I cannot stand him'" (734; ch. 96). Nidderdale's response is both hypocritical and an example of social policing; it is the acknowledgement of a sexual trespass and assertion of a social boundary of the sort Trollope argues is so damaging to young women. When Felix manages to get himself seated nearby in the dining room, the other young men destroy all hope of redemption and isolate him socially, physically, and permanently. "Lord Grasslough, who had finished his dinner, walked out of the room. . . . The other men who had been together had quickly followed him, leaving Sir Felix alone" (736–37; ch. 96).

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Even his family participates in turning Felix into a "castaway" (*Vicar* i). His mother anguishes over his behavior, but Mr. Broune will not let her subject herself to Felix's financial abuses any longer. Lady Carbury decries in the same language as Felix's sexual victims what will be lost if she permits Felix to go on destroying himself with gambling and drink: "He is so handsome." But Broune counters with Trollope's lesson: "What has his beauty brought him to?" (755; ch. 99). Broune then succeeds in getting Lady Carbury to do to her fallen son what Trollope sought to deter parents from doing to their fallen daughters: Felix is essentially turned out of her house. The message is obvious: gone are the days when "[f]athers & mothers will forgive anything in a son . . . but the 'fallen' daughter is too often regarded as an outcast for whom no hope can be entertained" (*Letters* 524). Shortly thereafter, Felix is deported to the Continent. Though by no means as isolated, destitute, or desperate as a sexually fallen woman, Felix is as socially outcast, as sorrowful as a young aristocratic bachelor in a satirical novel can be in his "abject, pitiless, unutterable misery, because this sentence of the world has placed [him] beyond the helping hand of Love and Friendship" (*Vicar* i).

Felix's fall, his metaphorical walk in the shoes of the class of women he participated in destroying, and his final expulsion enable Trollope to make the case for men's sexual accountability, even as he sympathizes with the difficulties of navigating bachelorhood. In so doing, he is not advocating prudishness or rigid chastity or attempting to subvert entirely the social and economic systems that predicated the sustenance of a class on economically judicious marriages. That would be too radical. Rather than suspend the rules, Trollope seeks to revise them, and if not the rules, then at least human response to those who break them, much as he attempted in *The Vicar of Bullhampton*.

As a form of conduct and educational literature, *TWWLN* is a rich repository. Ruby learns on her honeymoon with John Crumb what real passion and love can be: "When she was alone with the man, knowing that he was her husband, and thinking something of all that he had done to win her to be his wife, she did learn to respect him" (723; ch. 94). Marie learns that "go where she might, she would now be her own mistress (635; ch. 82). Felix, as Trollope emphasizes, is constitutionally incapable of learning anything. But the lessons he provides for "the sweet young hearts of those whose delicacy and cleanliness of thought is a matter of pride to so many of us" are highly instructional: do not let this happen to you; be careful what you read; forgive your daughters more and your sons less; and the free ride for men is over, so sexual choices should be considered as carefully as financial ones.

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NOTES

1. In his determination that readers grasp the moral of the story, Trollope included in his autobiography the Preface in its entirety.
2. Critics also use the language of disease when discussing *TWWLN*. Tony Tanner argues that Trollope's inclusive use of "we" in the title implies that "[i]n a society based on financial avarice, it is all but

impossible to avoid contagion" (261). Hyson Cooper describes Trollope's treatment of the "unmanly" gentlemen as an attempt to purge "his pernicious qualities from the society whose health and happiness he threatens" (130). James Kincaid argues that in *TWWLN*, "England itself has not become diseased but has lost its power to detect disease in others" (167). The latter is useful in considering how we may read Felix's physical degeneration.

3. Mark King has written persuasively about Trollope's treatment of the hobbledehoy. See especially "'Most Fellows are Bad Fellows': The 1870's, *The Way We Live Now*, *The Prime Minister*, and the End of the Victorian Gentleman."
4. This table was compiled with the research assistance of Fiana Muhlburger and supported by an Emerson Humanities Collaboration Grant from Ithaca College. I am profoundly grateful for both.
5. Shirley Letwin affirms this stance and argues that Trollope "firmly rejected the view that women have a natural obligation to be more chaste than men," and "regularly dismissed the notion that a man who trifles with a girl's affections may be excused because 'men are not like women'" (162).
6. Felix certainly engages in behavior befitting Stephanie King's helpful term "financial promiscuity," her discussion of which accurately asserts that a Victorian man's uncontrolled sexual activity could negatively affect his financial well being (par. 2). However, King situates the behavior within the fiscal register without considering sexual practices in their own right, and money is not the only thing Felix has trouble keeping in his trousers.
7. It is significant that the only other character associated with the gutter is Melmotte, who identifies himself as a "boy out of the gutter" and is regarded by Roger Carbury as "dirt in the gutter" (477; ch. 62, 117; ch. 15). This makes genealogical sense of Georgiana's snide reference to Melmotte's daughter as "the very sweeping of the gutters" (169; ch. 21).
8. The CDA repeal groups received a significant benefit from media coverage of the death of Mrs. Percy, a music hall entertainer who was arrested with her daughter and accused of prostitution. She refused to be examined and was blacklisted from music halls and thus employment. After writing a protest letter to the *Daily Telegraph* complaining of police brutality and intimidation Mrs. Percy committed suicide to vindicate her and her daughter's reputations (Walkowitz 110).
9. So accepted had been this practice that his mother, Lady Carbury, includes without censure or concern a suitor's sexual past in her consideration of a marriage proposal, dismissing from his character assessment the "passionless remnants of the vices of his youth" (239; ch. 31).
10. Hyson Cooper categorizes Felix as a common Trollopian character type: "the gentleman who is not a man," which is Trollope's distinction between inherited title and moral "manliness" (127). Such a character "threatens the domestic space" (136) by presenting a veneer of good manners that masks moral emptiness (139). Cooper argues that Trollope deploys these characters "in a way which forces [readers] to confront their worst suspicions about the upper classes, while also offering them the satisfaction of seeing the danger eliminated" (152).
11. While this is not the place to rehearse decades of scholarship on the role of self-control in the Victorian redefinition of the gentleman, Andrew Dowling's compact description illuminates the connections, which help in considering the extent to which Trollope was using Felix to resist the double standard even as he participated in parts of the discourse surrounding men's sexual "nature." "Self discipline, earnestness, control and restraint were . . . the key terms in Victorian moral discourse; terms that were constantly defined in relation to images of excess, dissipation, chaos and ungoverned desires. Victorian women might 'fall' but Victorian men had already fallen . . . to achieve even a semblance of civilization, they had to rigidly repress their 'natural' perversity (22)."

July 29, 1864	Parliament passes first statute, considered temporary, legalizing sanitary inspection of prostitutes in specific military depots to control the spread of venereal diseases among enlisted men in 11 garrison and dock towns in England and Ireland.	
1866	Second statute of the CDAs makes the system permanent and allows police close surveillance of registered women (Walkowitz 78).	Trollope publishes *The Claverings*, which includes a secondary character with coded symptoms of venereal disease.
1867	Civilian doctors and government authorities organize a campaign to extend the CDAs, broadening the focus beyond military men. "Association for Promoting the Extension of the CDAs of 1866 to the Civilian Population" forms.	Trollope publishes *The Last Chronicle of Barset,* which includes a tertiary character punningly named Onesiphorous Dunn: "He was actually called Siph by his intimate friends" (Markwick 93).
1868	The third statute widens the sphere of the CDAs to cover all of England and its territories.	
1869	The National Association forms in response to aggressive efforts of civilian doctors to police suspected women's bodies. The National Association's refusal to invite women to participate results in the formation of The Ladies' National Association (LNA), which publishes in the London *Daily News* "A Petition for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts" signed by 128 women, including Florence Nightingale and Harriet Martineau.	Trollope composes *Ralph the Heir*, which includes a secondary character with coded symptoms of venereal disease.
1870	*The Forcible Inspection of the Women for the Army and Navy by the Oligarchy Considered Physically*, by J.J. Garth Wilkinson cites "a medical lust of handling and dominating women" supplemented with the "police lust of hunting and persecuting women" (Walkowitz 108). Political journal, *The Shield,* first published by Josephine Butler to promote the repeal of the CDAs. Gynecologist William Acton publishes *Prostitution*, which describes health risks for prostitutes and clients.	Trollope publishes *The Vicar of Bullhampton,* which he prefaces with an assertion that men are the more blameworthy party in the creation of fallen women and in their own "contamination" by venereal disease.
1871	The Royal Commission defends its double standard: "There is no comparison to be made between prostitutes and the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of natural impulse" (qtd. in Walkowitz 71). Samuel Smiles publishes *Character* in which he mandates sexual chastity for men as well as women.	

APPENDIX: Timeline of the Contagious Diseases Acts and Trollope's Related Works

	The Ladies' Protest publishes a petition with 124 prominent signatures in the *Daily News*. By this time 57 repeal groups with 811 members subscribe to both Ladies' Protest and LNA.	
1872	Northern Counties League and Midlands Electoral League organize to promote CDA repeal during parliamentary and municipal elections in the provinces.	
1873	The National Society for the Promotion of Social Purity founded to advocate male as well as female sexual continence (Mitchell 126, Bristow 83).	Trollope begins writing *The Way We Live Now.*
	An Exposure of the False Statistics of the Contagious Diseases Acts published.	
1874	The Liberal Party loses elections; the national media loses interest in CDAs since the Conservative Party is pro-CDA.	*The Way We Live Now* begins serial publication
	Former Cabinet Minister and Liberal M.P. Sir James Stansfield gives a speech to promote: "ending the conspiracy of silence" against the acts and attempts to repeal them (qtd. in Walkowitz 97).	Trollope commences writing *Is He Popenjoy?* the central plot of which rests on the weak health of a syphilitic lord's progeny.
1875	The Working Men's National League forms in Liverpool under the sponsorship of LNA.	June: Book form of *The Way We Live Now* appears before serial is complete
	Stansfield encourages formation of National Medical Association to enlist medical support for the repeal.	September: Final installment (number 20) of *The Way We Live Now* published
	Media frenzy over the suicide of Mrs. Percy, a music hall entertainer arrested and accused of being a prostitute.	Trollope finishes *Is He Popenjoy?*
1879–1882	Repealers' careful lobbying leads to governmental Committee of Inquiry on CDAs, which continued to meet and hear testimony on and off until 1882.	
	In 1880 Liberal party restored to power; new members, including Stansfield, staff the committee.	
1883	CDAs suspended.	
1886	CDAs officially repealed, March 26.	

APPENDIX: Continued.

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