

1998

A Tale of Two Vicars: Thomas Stothard's and Thomas Rowlandson's Illustrations of "The Vicar of Wakefield"

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<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-n7vs-ks69>

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A TALE OF TWO VICARS:
THOMAS STOTHARD'S AND THOMAS ROWLANDSON'S
ILLUSTRATIONS OF
THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Katherine W. Rawson

1998

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Katherine W. Rawson

Approved, December 1998

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer is grateful to Professor Robert P. Maccubbin for seeing to it that this delinquent, and graying, student finished her degree. The writer also thanks Professors Robert J. Scholnick and Kim Wheatley for their careful reading and quick dispatch of the work.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is an examination of two sets of illustrations, drawn by different artists, for Oliver Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield (1766). The set of illustrations designed by Thomas Stothard in 1792 gives a sentimental reading of the novel, while the set designed by Thomas Rowlandson in 1817 offers an ironic interpretation. A comparison of the text to both sets of illustrations reveals how well the reading presented by each artist is supported by Goldsmith and lends clues as to how two such diverse readings could emerge from one source, a problem that verbal critics of the novel have debated for two centuries.

A careful reading of the illustrations suggests that Stothard followed a formula of sentimentality in keeping with the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility and that Rowlandson followed no formula, using his own keen powers of observation to interpret Goldsmith. As a result, Rowlandson's illustrations offer a more complex reading than Stothard's, and better match the ambiguity of Goldsmith's text. Despite the greater sophistication of Rowlandson's interpretation, both sets of illustrations are supported by Goldsmith to some degree and have value as early interpretations of the novel.

A TALE OF TWO VICARS:
THOMAS STOTHARD'S AND THOMAS ROWLANDSON'S ILLUSTRATIONS OF
THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION AS INTERPRETATION

In his preface to the New York edition of The Golden Bowl, Henry James writes, "I should be in fact tempted here, but for lack of space, by the very question itself at large -- that question of the general acceptability of illustration" (1: ix). I find the question as tempting as James, who was not able to resist pursuing the issue further in his preface. The question "at large," that of the acceptability of illustration, depends on the answers to a series of smaller but equally intriguing questions: How does illustration interact with the text? Does illustration stand as art in itself or is it inextricably tied to the art of the text? Does it limit the author's art, expand it, or serve as comment upon it? How does it affect the reader's impression of the text? And is that effect different for different types of readers?

James tackles some of these smaller questions in his preface. He does so using the example of his dilemma over the appropriate illustration of the 1909 New York edition of The Golden Bowl. He felt that the illustration of the action of his novel would interfere, or impinge, or, worst case,

supersede his own influence on the reader. The text that puts "forward illustrative claims (that is producing an effect of illustration) by its own intrinsic virtue" finds "itself elbowed, on that ground, by another and a competitive process" (1: ix). James describes this muscling of words by picture as "a lawless incident" (1: ix), a phrase that conveys his sense of violation as author. In further comments, he also seems to indicate a feeling that illustration attaches itself to the text and then feeds on it: "The essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with immediate images; and I, for one, should have looked much askance at the proposal . . . to graft or 'grow,' at whatever point, a picture by another hand on my own picture" (1: ix). James objects to the "grafted" nature of illustration in general, but avoids discussing the possibility of the further outrage of an illustration poorly done or ill-chosen as to its effect. The unspoken horror of an inappropriate graft, a limb from a misshapen creature grafted on the lovely body of his text seems to be lurking in James' objections.

James is too sophisticated, however, to yield completely to his darkest paranoia about illustration. How can he deny that art inspires art? In the preface, James concedes that inspiring a "garden" of images in the reader or another artist is a compliment to the author; indeed, he admits that "nothing could better consort than that, I

naturally allow, with the desire or the pretension to cast a literary spell" (1: x). James reconciles his fears and desires about illustration by putting illustration at a safe distance from the text. This distance is both physical and topical. He recommends that "the garden he has prompted the cultivation of at other hands" stand by itself "as a separate and independent subject of publication" (1: x). He also prefers that an artist's images "be not competitive and obvious" or express "no particular thing in the text, but only of the type or idea of this or that thing" (1: xi).

Literary critic Ralph Cohen, who, in the 1960s made an exhaustive study of the history of the illustration of the eighteenth-century poem The Seasons, has commented that in James' thoughts we may see the twentieth-century attitude about illustration emerging and with it the reason for the lack of illustrated novels in this century (258). The practice of illustrating literature flowered in the eighteenth century, as the novel emerged as a genre and book publishing exploded into the new marketplace of the middle class. Illustrations were used as marketing tools to entice readers to buy a new edition of an old classic or the first edition of a new classic. The practice of illustrating literature remained strong through most of the nineteenth century, but as we see in James' comments and as Cohen found with his investigation of the illustrations of The Seasons, it waned late in the century to hear its death tolled in the

next.

As twentieth-century readers, we may regard the practice of illustration of adult books as old-fashioned, or perhaps as charming in an unsophisticated childish way, our experience with illustrated books being most likely with children's picture books. However, we may find in the recent spate of movies based on literary classics evidence of a craving for the illustration of literature that in some respects matches that of the eighteenth-century readership. It is interesting to consider what James' reaction might have been to the recent run of movies bearing the titles of his novels. I imagine it would be repulsion. For although the film version stands apart from the book in a physical way, the depiction of specific scenes and characters would be too close for comfort, and there is the possibility, I suppose I must say certainly, that for some viewers of the movie, the film is the first and perhaps will remain the only knowledge he or she has of the novel. And if that movie is "untrue" to the novel, the horror James harbored becomes a reality more ghastly than he could have imagined. What conception would we have of the text's beautiful body if we only saw the grafted misshapen limb?

This is a possibility that did not exist for eighteenth-century readers of illustrated literature. James failed to see that the physical proximity of the illustration to the text kept the grafted nature of the

illustration obvious. And though the undiscerning reader could be unwittingly influenced in his or her reading of the novel by the images presented by the illustrator, he or she is reading a passage of text and viewing the illustration of that passage almost simultaneously, which probably kept potentially outrageous illustrators in check. They could not deviate too widely from the text without being rejected by the reader as a mismatch. This proximity precludes the ugly limb on the lovely body. And for the discerning reader, the proximity might invite inspection of the illustration as commentary or interpretation of the text. For some readers, sorting out which aspects of the text have been faithfully reproduced and which have been modified by the illustrator may translate to a consideration of whether the illustrator has agreed or disagreed with the intent or "message" of the author and thus -- as we hope all interpretation or literary criticism functions -- lead to the reader's deeper consideration of what the authorial intent and the text's actual effect may be. In short, James' images would be in less danger if we brought our Penguin editions of Portrait of a Lady to the theater, and the film was stopped and the lights raised at certain convenient points for us to read and compare passages to the director's rendering of them.

Ralph Cohen puts forward much the same argument for illustration as interpretation in his essay, "Literary Criticism and Illustrations of The Seasons," in which he

states that the comparison of text and illustrations makes "explicit that pictures always involved more than the words, or a selection of the words" (254). Cohen also points out that when illustrations of the same passage by different authors are compared we see that "the same words created different pictures" (254). The more-than the words, the choice of the words, or the imaginative associations that the passage elicited in the illustrator are, Cohen maintains, evidence that illustrations function as interpretation or criticism.

Cohen argues that the twentieth-century insistence on the independence of illustration and texts, as suggested by James, has "excluded non-verbal commentary from the domain of criticism" (258). The consequence, as Cohen sees it, is the narrowing of the range of present and future criticism and the loss or misunderstanding of past nonverbal criticism (258). Cohen has found that illustrations of texts often offer interpretations ignored by contemporary verbal criticism (sometimes picked up in the verbal criticism decades later) and sometimes offer "solutions to such literary problems as emotive unity" (279).

Cohen's viewpoint suggests that the inclusion of illustration in the consideration of the critical history of a work of literature might shed new light on the text, or reveal a more complete picture of contemporary thought about the novel, or offer a solution to a perplexing point in the

text. Because no eighteenth-century text has proved more puzzling to modern critics than The Vicar of Wakefield, and because it was a best seller for a century after its publication in 1762, which means it was published in many illustrated editions, The Vicar may serve as a good test case for determining the value of considering illustration as criticism, and discovering the peculiar demands of analyzing it as such.

CHAPTER I

THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD: THE CRITICAL DEBATE

Literary critics have struggled with the nature of The Vicar since its appearance. Early criticism expressed confusion over whether it was a good or faulty piece, satisfying or frustrating, life-like or unnatural. These opinions are given without much analysis of the elements of the novel or its construction, a sign of the newness of the genre and the inexperience of the new magazine critics in the mid-eighteenth century. Personal accounts by readers of their reactions are more straightforward, but still lack analysis. Fanny Burney reports in her 1768 diary that she was "surprised into tears" while reading the first volume of the novel, and "really sobb'd" while reading the second. She offers her tears as evidence of a feeling of sympathy with the Vicar that satisfies her as a reader (Rousseau 53). Goethe, in a letter to a friend dated 1829, comments on the novel's "benevolent irony," which he finds its chief recommendation (Rousseau 278).¹ Most critics have taken positions on either side of the melodrama/comedy fence ever after. Most modern critics who view the novel as a sentimental work do not find that quality endearing, and a

few who view the text as humorous argue that it is a savage satire (of sentimentality, of the middle class, of the clergy -- take your pick) and not a gentle comedy. There are also critics who straddle the tone fence, saying that the novel is both comic and sentimental. But they make the awkward position most comfortable by calling the first half comedy and the second half melodrama.²

Illustrations of The Vicar of Wakefield have not gone completely unnoticed by critics involved in this debate. Austin Dobson, in the preface to an 1892 edition of The Vicar, gives a brief history of its illustration. This quick survey leads him to remark that "nothing is more notable than the diversities afforded by the same book when illustrated by different artists" (iii). Dobson selects as the most dramatic example of that diversity the illustrations rendered by Thomas Stothard for a 1792 edition and those provided by Thomas Rowlandson for an edition printed by Ackermann in 1817: "The portraits of Dr. Primrose as presented by Rowlandson on the one hand and Stothard on the other are as strikingly in contrast as any" (iv). In evaluating the illustrations as interpretations, Dobson sides with Stothard's presentation of The Vicar, finding that the grace of Stothard's illustrations match the grace of Goldsmith's text (vi). Dobson finds Rowlandson's illustrations an "outrage" (x) and accuses Rowlandson of vulgarizing the Primrose family. "The reader reaches the

last of the 'twenty-four coloured plates' which Ackermann put forth in 1817, and again in 1823, as one escaping from a nightmare" (x).

In 1926, George Saintsbury reverses Dobson's assessment of the two artists' interpretations of The Vicar. And in a 1945 study of all Rowlandson's illustrations for novels, Edward Wolf resoundingly sides with Saintsbury, saying he finds Stothard's engravings of The Vicar "insipid and sentimental" and Rowlandson's "lifelike and humorous" (96-97). In Dobson's, Saintsbury's and Wolf's comments, we see that the illustrations of Stothard and Rowlandson reflect the same schism in interpretation of the novel as found in the traditional verbal criticism and also reflect the twentieth-century rejection of Victorian sentimentalism.³

The only modern critics to give serious attention to illustration of The Vicar are Robert H. Hopkins in "Social Stratification and the Obsequious Curve: Goldsmith and Rowlandson" and Marcia Pointon in "On Reading Rowlandson's The Vicar of Wakefield: Challenging and Subverting the Narrative." Hopkins focuses on the illustrations from Rowlandson's Vicar series that include figures of poor people in a bent posture, which Hopkins argues signifies obsequiousness and correlates with a concern of Goldsmith's about changing class relations in England. "I should like to avoid as much as possible the problem of sentimentality," Hopkins writes, "and focus on social stratification in the

novel" (56). The problem of sentimentality is key to the interpretation of the novel, so Hopkins' reading of a few of the illustrations pertains only to a small and lesser element of the novel.

Marcia Pointon concentrates not on reading Rowlandson's illustrations, but on noting their distribution in the text. She argues that the illustrations of scenes do not come at regular intervals and that Rowlandson illustrates more scenes of the first half of the novel than of the second. Pointon concludes that this "visible absence of pattern undermines the moral and philosophical unity of the text" (116), which she reads as "powerfully biblical" (116). She ignores the problem of interpreting the text and gives little attention to the content of the illustrations.

I propose to read the illustrations of Stothard and Rowlandson as interpretations of the novel and to examine the relationship of the illustrations to particular passages in Goldsmith's text. Noting to what extent each artist has had to add to, amend, or delete elements from the text to maintain artistic wholeness for the illustrations may tell us something about how well the text actually supports either a sentimental or an ironic reading and may give us clues as to exactly which elements of the novel contribute to which interpretation.

I shall discuss all six illustrations produced by Stothard for the 1792 edition of the novel, focusing on how

they relate to each other and to the text to form a consistent reading. Then I shall look at seven of Rowlandson's twenty-four illustrations for the 1817 edition and discuss how Rowlandson achieves a different, though also consistent, interpretation of the Vicar. I shall conclude by looking closely at three illustrations of Rowlandson's that depict scenes of the novel also treated by Stothard in an attempt to reveal how the artists produced such opposite readings not only of the novel in general but of individual incidents in the text.

CHAPTER II
STOTHARD'S VICAR

Thomas Stothard was born in London in 1755. The son of the owner of a thriving tavern, Stothard received a solid education in country day and boarding schools. When his father died in 1770, he was apprenticed to a Huguenot silk weaver and designer in a district of London known as Spitalfields (Bennett 1). The designer and his wife encouraged Stothard's interest in drawing. Though Stothard did a few illustrations for John Harrison, publisher of Novelist's Magazine, while still an apprentice, his employment by the London booksellers did not really take off until he was a student at the Royal Academy, which he entered at the completion of his apprenticeship in 1777 (Stephen and Lee 18: 1320-1324).

The expanding book market in the last quarter of the eighteenth century provided Stothard with a means for making his living and mark as an artist. With the repeal of the perpetual copyright law in 1777, publishers were quick to reissue the classics. Along with luxury editions of these favorites, publishers like John Boydell, John Cooke, and John Harrison started printing the classics by the

"numbers," or as weekly serials priced within easy reach of a wide market. One of the main attractions of these serials was the illustrations (Bennett 7-9).

Stothard rode the crest of this wave in book illustration. He became expert in producing designs for copper engravings and did not engrave his own work, which allowed him to produce more designs not only for book illustrations but also for other products (Hammelmann 68-69). A. C. Coxhead, one of Stothard's two biographers, remarks that he illustrated everything "from bank notes to concert tickets and the like. . . . A title here, a vignette there is to be found in school books, cookery books, sporting books" (30).⁴ From this variety, we see that although Stothard bore the title R.A. (Royal Academician), which was granted him in 1794 based on submissions of historical paintings to academy exhibitions, he did not consider himself above making a living designing the most modest of art commodities (Bennett 22-23).

Stothard supported a large family well with his earnings. He was enormously popular and astoundingly prolific. It is estimated that he produced nearly 5,000 designs for book illustrations alone before his death in 1834 (Hammelmann 68-69). That number naturally raises questions about quality. Stothard found early in his career that he was successful at exploiting sentimental scenes, which were all the rage with a particular audience of the

time. Churning out design after design, he soon relied on this marketing tool almost exclusively. Though his work suffered from the repetition, his popularity did not (Hammelmann Beaus 68-69). He illustrated all the great canonical eighteenth-century prose authors -- Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, Sterne, Swift, and Defoe (Stephen and Lee 18: 1320-1324). Though the tone of the works produced by these authors varied (and the tone within a single work often was inconsistent), Stothard applied the same artistic interpretation to all. His audience ate it up, as they did his illustrations of Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield (Bennett 31, 33).

In 1792, Stothard produced six designs for the illustration of a handsome edition of The Vicar printed by E. Harding and J. Good. For those who interpret the novel as sentimental, Stothard's designs are thought to match the tone of the novel exceedingly well. Dobson remarks, "so natural is it to associate the grace of Stothard with the grace of Goldsmith" (vi), and Coxhead comments that "there is so much sympathy between the art of Stothard and that of Goldsmith -- the same love of beauty and innocence" (116). Shelley Bennett, a modern art historian, who has extensively studied Stothard's style, finds the designs not so much responsive to Goldsmith as to the book market of the late eighteenth century. She calls Stothard's illustrations of The Vicar "interpretations" and describes them as being

"entirely in sympathy with contemporary tastes" (33).

Stothard's designs follow the formula of sentimental literature of the eighteenth-century. Janet Todd, who has dissected the characteristics of this type of literature observes that "the techniques of sentimentalism vary according to genre and time, but most works function through a plot of sudden reversal" (4). Most literary critics who have classified The Vicar as a sentimental novel, or at least the second half of the book as falling into that category, rely on plot as the foundation of their argument.⁵

The plot is undeniably stock. In the opening of the novel we find a vicar, Charles Primrose, and his family living a happy life in the town of Wakefield. Primrose and his wife, Deborah, have six children: George, Olivia, and Sophia, who are all three of marrying age; Moses, who is sixteen; and Dick and Bill, who are referred to as "little ones." Though Primrose makes a living as a vicar, he has relied mostly on his own private wealth for support. The unexpected loss of that personal fortune sets off a chain of events. The engagement between George and Arabella Wilmot, the daughter of a wealthy clergyman, is broken by her father; George must leave his family to seek his own means of support in London; and the Primroses must leave their home in Wakefield.

The Vicar rents a farm several towns away, and the family journey to their new abode. Along the way, they meet

Burchell, who appears to be a man who has squandered his fortune and now wanders the countryside, relying on the goodness of the farmers for shelter and food. Burchell is in fact Sir William Thornhill, the rich uncle of Squire Thornhill from whom the Primroses have rented their new farm. Burchell travels several miles with the Primroses and as the family crosses a flooded stream, saves Sophia from drowning. Burchell visits the Primroses several times after they have taken up residence at their new farm and shows an interest in Sophia. Squire Thornhill soon introduces himself to the family and shows an interest in Olivia.

The Primroses try to discourage Burchell's suit and encourage the Squire's. When the Squire fails to propose, Olivia is promised to a neighboring farmer, but she elopes with the Squire. The Primroses are unaware of the identity of Olivia's abductor or of her whereabouts, but the Vicar sets off on a journey to discover her. He finds instead his son George, who is an actor in a traveling troop; and eventually the Vicar also finds Olivia, destitute in a tavern. Olivia reveals that it is the Squire who has undone her.

From this point, the plot twists come fast and heavy. When the Vicar returns home he finds his house afire and the Squire engaged to Arabella. The Vicar insists that the Squire is already wed to Olivia, and in retaliation the Squire throws him in debtors prison for not paying his rent.

The family deceives the Vicar into thinking Olivia dead so that he will give up claims of her marriage to the Squire and in so-doing might be released from prison, but the Squire is unforgiving. A cohort of the Squire attempts to abduct Sophia, who is saved by Burchell. George shows up in prison sentenced to death for attempting to duel with the Squire for his sister's honor. The Vicar prepares for his son's execution and his own death by despair, when Burchell arrives as Sir William Thornhill and saves the day.

In one scene, it is revealed that Olivia is alive and legally married to the Squire, that George will be set free and can now marry Arabella, and that Sir William Thornhill wishes to marry Sophia. Sir William moves the whole family to an inn, and the two couples are married by the Vicar in a double ceremony. After the weddings comes news that the Vicar's fortune, previously thought lost, is now found and returned.

As Todd notes, this type of plot provides scenes in which one emotion is suddenly interrupted by another contrasting emotion, thereby throwing both into high relief and making a tableau of the emotional moment (5). In sentimental literature of the time, these moments were designed to arouse in the reader deep sympathy for a character and "an emotional even physical response" (Todd 2). This response, in turn, indicated the reader's sensibility, or "capacity for extremely refined emotion and

a quickness to display compassion for suffering" (Todd 7).

The first reversal in the plot is the loss of the Primroses' fortune, and Goldsmith does describe the Vicar's breaking this news to his family; however, Stothard ignores this highly emotional scene, choosing instead as the first scene of his series George's taking leave of the Primrose family (Stothard, Plate 1), an event that occurs in the aftermath of the loss of fortune. Stothard's rejection of the first reversal scene probably has to do with its focus on money, as a depiction of the family heartbroken over the loss of material possessions would not establish the characters as virtuous and deserving of sympathy.

Instead, Stothard gives us the painful separation of the family -- a scene in which Stothard can establish the close and loving nature of the family and the role of the Vicar as a protecting and supportive father. In the text, the Vicar narrates the departure of George with deep feeling:

The separation of friends and families is, perhaps, one of the most distressful circumstances attendant on penury. The day soon arrived on which we were to disperse for the first time. My son, after taking leave of his mother and the rest, who mingled their tears with their kisses, came to ask a blessing from me. This I gave him from my heart,

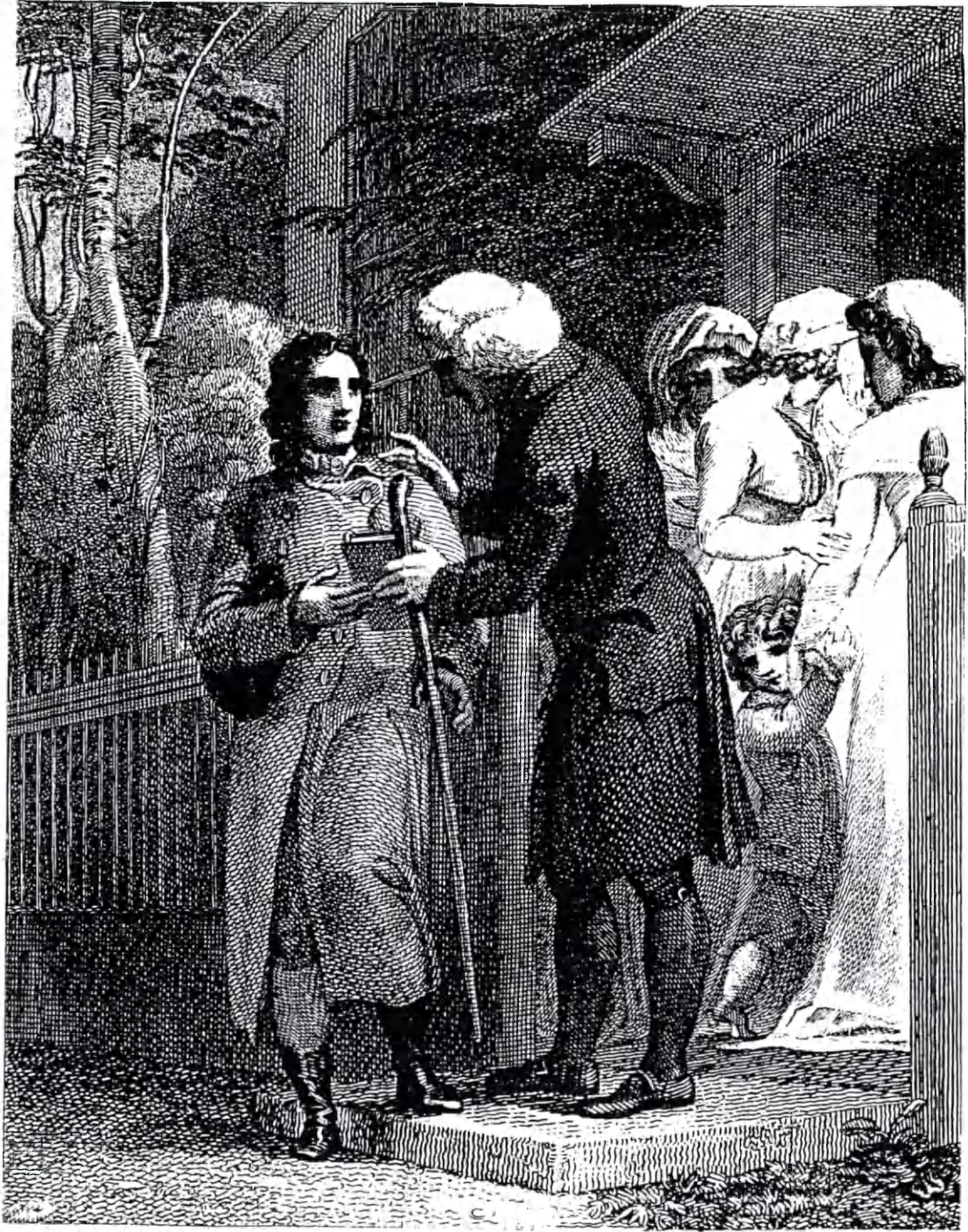


Plate 1

and which, added to five guineas, was all the patrimony I had to bestow. (26)

In his illustration, Stothard has heightened the already emotional content of the event in several ways: Stothard has selected a setting, a moment in the action, a composition of figures and gestures to arouse the emotion of the viewer, or more precisely to "cue" the emotion of the viewer.

The position of the figures relative to each other is not described by Goldsmith, but Stothard's tableau arrangement maximizes its emotional content. A stone threshold and gate are introduced to separate George from the family; and George, one foot on the threshold and the other in the road, stands outside the gate. A tree behind the gate with vine twined round its trunk is added to reflect the dutiful nature of the father-son relationship and the father's role as supporter. As mentioned by Goldsmith, Primrose hands to George a Bible and a staff; George's hands are poised to receive both articles from the Vicar; and in the next moment, the Vicar will touch his son, enclosing him in the circle of his arms for the last time before George steps from the threshold and sets out. Furthermore, Stothard's tableau arouses our sympathy for the distress the Vicar's family feel. The women, who have already taken leave of George, are overcome with emotion and, weeping, have turned away. Just as Stothard has exploited the gestures of the Vicar and George to make the

reader anticipate their final contact before parting, he has used the gestures of the women to convey the idea of the family circle. One daughter holds the other's arm and that daughter holds one of the little boys, who clings to her even though he watches George's departure. The family behind the gate seems to close its circle in an act of communal sympathy.

Between ca. 1750-1775, a cult had been made of sensibility. Its literature is described by John Mullan in Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century as

a type of writing which does not so much recommend correct conduct to its readers as assume virtue in their capacity to understand the sentimental text. Virtue, in this context, has come to consist not in a set of prescribed social or political practices, but in the recognition of a series of 'sentimental' images and conventions. (119-120)

Stothard's task if he wished to present a satisfying work to an audience "reading for the sentiment" (Mullan 136) in order to have "proof of a feeling heart" (Mullan 123) was to give them a series of images and conventions that they could not fail to interpret weepingly.

This literary genre was designed to give its readers a litmus test of their faculty for feeling. The number of tears shed in the reading would give the reader evidence as

to his or her own sensitivity, and also virtue. Todd identifies weeping as a goal of sentimental literature: "It prided itself...on making its readers weep and in teaching them when and how much to weep" (4). This display of emotion, says Todd, "is justified by the belief that a heightened sense of one's virtue through pity for another is morally improving" (8). A cue for the viewer of Stothard's first illustration to the novel is the tearful women. Although Goldsmith's text is linear (George departs from the others before taking leave of his father), an artist can imply the past and future while focusing on the present moment. The effect is to transfer the weeping onto us as we watch the present.

Another cue to read the illustration for its sentiment is Stothard's focus on the family circle. Eighteenth-century literary heroes who were too feeling, too good, and too innocent to fare well in the cruel and corrupt world often took refuge in their families. Mullan explains that "the model offered" in such sentimental stories "is of a simple virtue which has to be removed from the world in order to exist" (117) -- removed to what Henry Mackenzie, author of several classic eighteenth-century sentimental novels, describes as "that cordial friendship, that warm attachment which is only to be found in the smaller circles of private life, which is lost in the bustle and extended connection of larger societies" (Mullan 130; Mackenzie 10). Sentimental

readers of The Vicar of Wakefield would interpret the life of the Vicar as described by himself as that of a virtuous and innocent man keeping his contact with the world to a minimum and finding secure happiness in the heart of his family. In fact, early in the novel, the Vicar describes his family as sharing a similar nature: "In short, a family likeness prevailed through all, and properly speaking, they had but one character, that of being all equally generous, credulous, simple, and inoffensive" (21). That character is one an eighteenth-century reader would immediately recognize as an "archetypal victim," described by Todd as "the sensitive, benevolent man whose feelings are too exquisite for the acquisitiveness, vulgarity and selfishness of his world" (4).

Stothard encourages such an interpretation of the Vicar by making his familial circle the subject of every one of the illustrations of the novel. In all six plates, Stothard presents the Vicar in this circle and depicts the effect of various events upon it. The first illustration of the series shows only the first of many threats to the family. Outside circumstance, society at large, with its crass motivations and self-interest, will buffet this little group; but Stothard's Vicar, though suffering, works bravely and consistently to maintain the domestic links.

Although Stothard presents a depiction of the departure scene that has only one possible interpretation, Goldsmith's

scene is less unequivocal. In the text, George's departure offers what could be a bit of satiric foreshadowing. The Vicar reveals in his last words describing the scene a certain ridiculousness in his advice to his son and his lack of concern about his son's vulnerability in the world. The Vicar recommends this psalm to George: "I have been young, and now am old; yet never saw I the righteous man forsaken, or his seed begging their bread" (26). A nice thought, but a few words to George about how to protect himself from trickery and harm and how to secure his own bread would have been much more useful. Although the reader for sentiment would have seen the advice as in keeping with the Vicar's innocent and trusting character, the Vicar's comment may be Goldsmith's way of undermining the Vicar's presentation of himself to the reader.

Another hint that the Vicar has not served his son well in this scene is his comment that "as he [George] was possest of integrity and honour, I was under no apprehensions from throwing him naked into the amphitheatre of life; for I knew he would act a good part whether vanquished or victorious" (26-27). Again, these remarks may be interpreted as those of a man truly innocent of the nature of the world, but they could quite easily be taken as revealing a nonchalance about his son's well-being that is not becoming. The Vicar cares more for his son's virtue than his survival. These hints may be provided by Goldsmith to

guide the reader to an interpretation of Primrose; but Stothard adopts the viewpoint of Primrose, and his illustrations present the most sympathetic picture of him possible.

The second illustration in Stothard's series is "The Rescue of Sophia from Drowning" (Stothard, Plate 2), a scene that, as described in the text, potentially places the Vicar in a negative light. The Vicar relates his reaction as he looks up from conversation with Burchell to see Sophia as she attempts to cross a flooded stream:

I perceived my youngest daughter in the midst of a rapid stream, thrown from her horse, and struggling with the torrent. She had sunk twice, nor was it in my power to disengage myself in time to bring her relief. My sensations were even too violent to permit my attempting her rescue: she most certainly would have perished had not my companion, perceiving her danger, instantly plunged in to her relief, and, with some difficulty, brought her in safety to the opposite shore. By taking the current a little farther up, the rest of the family got safely over. (30-31)

Here, the Vicar describes himself as so overcome by sensation he cannot move, which an eighteenth-century reader for feeling would recognize as a consequence of an exquisite sensibility to his daughter's distress, but which a reader

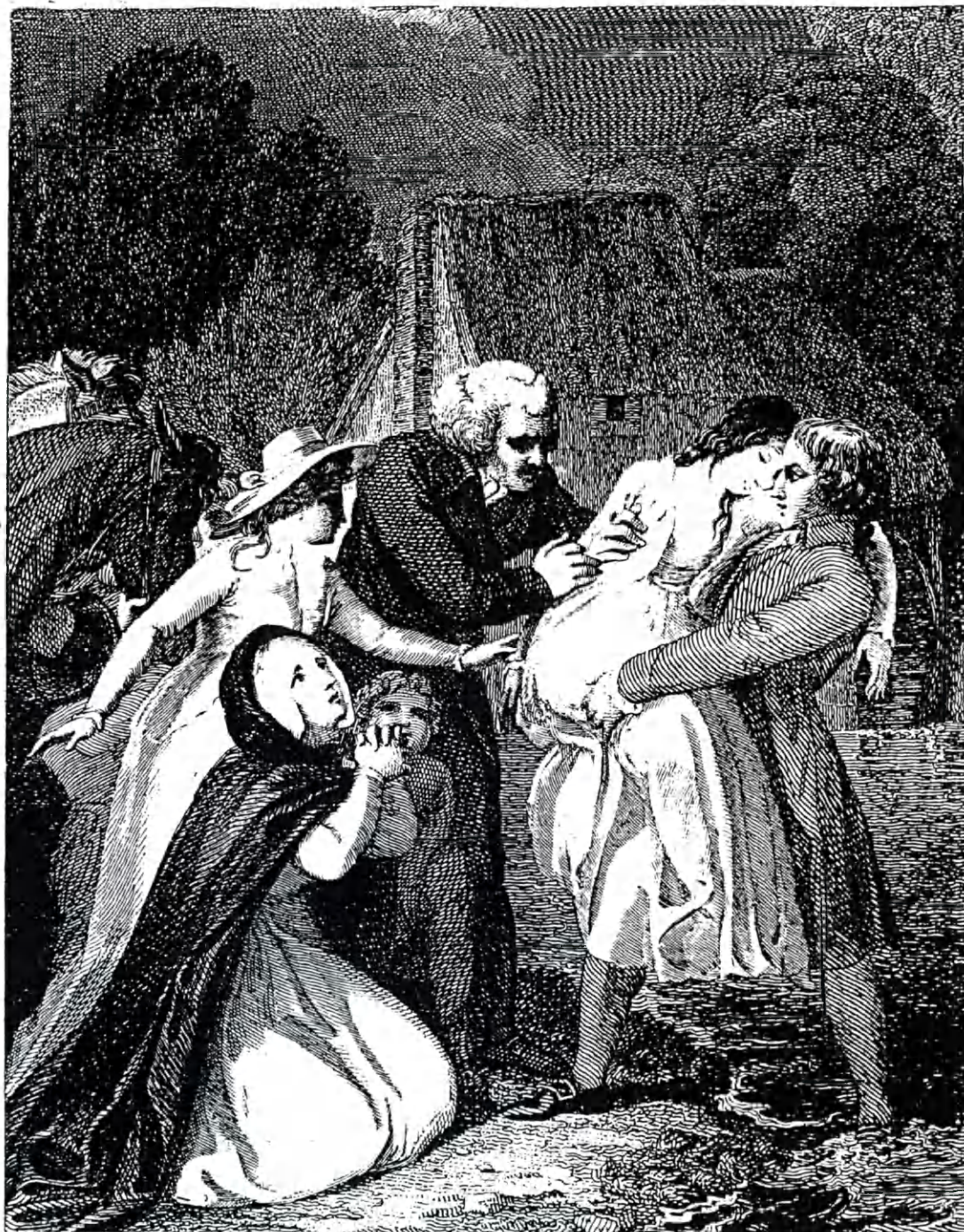


Plate 2

may also decide carries with it a severe criticism of such extreme sensitivity inasmuch as Sophia could have died because of her father's paralysis.

Instead of a protoplasmic blob of emotion, Stothard gives us the strong father ready and waiting to receive his daughter into the family circle. The Vicar, although not Sophia's rescuer and, in fact, not a major actor in the scene, has center stage in the illustration. Stothard has also tampered with Goldsmith's chain of events. In Goldsmith, Burchell carries Sophia to the far shore and the rest of the family follow, whereas in Stothard, the family wait on the shore to which Burchell delivers Sophia. Either Burchell is returning her to the near shore, which makes little sense as she would then have to cross the flood again, or the family have managed to cross more quickly than Burchell and are receiving Sophia on the far shore, which makes little sense as the Vicar was too stunned to act quickly enough to get to Sophia. Either Stothard did not read the text carefully, or more likely he felt it necessary to eliminate from his illustration the possible reading of the tragic potential of the Vicar's hyper-sensitivity and consequent paralysis. In order to present a consistent and sympathetic portrayal of the Vicar as the caring and competent parent, he must be pictured in the act of receiving Sophia.

Whereas Stothard has beefed up the Vicar's action in

the scene, he has made Deborah Primrose the weak vessel of overflowing emotion. In Stothard's rendition, she has dropped to her knees with clasped hands and eyes cast toward the heavens, presumably offering her thanks to God for the deliverance of her daughter from certain death. Nowhere in the Vicar's account does he mention anyone dropping to the knees or thanking heaven for Sophia's restoration to the family. The only one thanked is Burchell, Sophia's rescuer, and Deborah's remarks to him do not show her to be overcome with emotion: "My wife also hoped one day to have the pleasure of returning his kindness at her own house" (31).

Shelley Bennett has noted that "Stothard often relied on the female figure as his chief expressive device to convey both grace and sentiment" (29). She gives as an example Stothard's illustration of a scene from Fenelon's Telemachus, in which the figure of Venus is sentimentalized. "In this case," explains Bennett, "the qualities of grace and sentiment were not in keeping with the spirit of the text. The meaning of the passage is completely obscured in Stothard's illustration" (29). The transference of feeling not found in the text to a female figure in an illustration was a common practice for Stothard. According to the cult of sensibility, such an overflow of emotion was not inappropriate in a woman, in fact, was to be expected, as it indicated her goodness and worth (Todd 19-20). As in Stothard's first plate, where the women turn weeping from

the scene of George's departure, the grateful Deborah can here serve as a useful cue for the reader's own display of emotion. In his depiction of Sophia's rescue, Stothard simply moves the susceptibility to distress from the Vicar, where it might have had dire consequences for Sophia, to the mother, where it is a mark of her virtue.

Stothard also gives Sophia an extra dose of sensibility. The Vicar hints in his account of the event that Sophia pretended to be more indisposed than she actually was to gain a few more moments of Burchell's attention: "Her gratitude may be more readily imagined than described: she thanked her deliverer more with looks than words, and continued to lean upon his arm, as if still willing to receive assistance" (31). Stothard's plate gives no indication that Sophia is milking the situation and gaining some extra attention from Burchell. Stothard depicts her as completely overcome, perhaps even unconscious. Completely limp and with eyes closed, she appears, indeed, nearly to have drowned. This depiction is yet another departure from Goldsmith's text. Primrose tells the reader that the only break the incident necessitated was some refreshing at the next inn -- certainly not enough rest to revive someone who had nearly drowned. Stothard quite possibly may have thought Sophia's wiles on Burchell compromising to the sympathy the reader would want to feel for her and so ignored them. Of course, Sophia's state makes

Burchell appear more heroic in the illustration.

Stothard's placement of figures also underscores Burchell's heroism and emphasizes the already heavy foreshadowing Goldsmith has provided of Burchell's role as future rescuer of the Primrose family. Sophia is about to be placed on terra firma by Burchell, who stands with one foot on the bank and the other still in the stream. Burchell is not only returning Sophia to the domestic circle, his position in the illustration makes him an essential link in the composition of the family ring, as formed by the gesturing arms. His future place in the family is made quite explicit.⁶

Bennett selects Stothard's illustration of Sophia's rescue as the "most characteristic" (33) example of Stothard's arousing the compassion of his audience. "The delicate sensibility of the reader," explains Bennett, "would be deeply moved by such a scene of beauty in distress and deeply thrilled by the sentimental rescue, which provided an incentive for Sophia and Burchell to fall in love" (34). Bennett proclaims the illustration "a hallmark of the cult of sensibility" and points to "its repeated depiction by following illustrators" as proof of "its ability to reach a wide audience" (34). She mentions Rowlandson, William Mulready, and John Masey Wright as illustrators who follow Stothard's pattern in presenting this scene (34), but we shall see later how Rowlandson

transforms it.

The next illustration in Stothard's series, "The Honeysuckle Arbour" (Stothard, Plate 3) is less successful than the rescue as a design for the cult of feeling, perhaps because the text is difficult to present in a way that would elicit sympathy for the Primroses. As Goldsmith describes the intrusion of the Squire on a family picnic, the family forgive his rudeness when they learn his identity and wealth. The Vicar recounts that Squire Thornhill approached the family with a superior air:

He seemed to want no introduction, but was going to salute [kiss] my daughters as one certain of a kind reception; but they had early learnt the lesson of looking presumption out of countenance. Upon which he let us know that his name was Thornhill, and that he was owner of the estate that lay for some extent round us. He again, therefore, offered to salute the female part of the family, and such was the power of fortune and fine cloaths, that he found no second repulse.

(36)

The girls' acceptance of an inappropriate salute because the giver is wealthy only makes them look foolish, not sympathetic. In the text, the Vicar winks at the girls when they are about to sing the Squire a song, as he "did not approve of such disproportioned acquaintances" (36). This is



Plate 3

not very strong action for a clergyman who does not approve of his daughters' behavior. All in all, Goldsmith's scene seems to present the family at a very vulnerable moment.

Stothard does his best with the Primroses' folly by turning it into abused innocence. The Primroses remain passive as the Squire salutes Olivia: not one reacts positively or negatively to his presumption; and even the Vicar remains in his chair, calmly regarding the act. A sentimental audience may see the Vicar of this illustration and his family as simply unsuspecting -- why else would they be so calm? Stothard does give the reader clues for the danger that has just come into the Primroses' lives. The text does not single out Olivia as the sole receiver of a salute, so Stothard has taken some liberty with the text in order to give the viewer clues to the future subject of the Squire's attentions.

As in the illustration of Sophia's rescue, Stothard's composition foreshadows the Squire's role in the story. Again, Stothard gives us the tight family circle, formed by gesturing arms; but here the Squire, rather than completing the circle, as Burchell does in "The Rescue of Sophia," breaks the chain. He has wrenched Sophia around so that she is no longer in the circle; the chain is missing a link. The Squire's back is to the viewer, and his stance is aggressive as he holds Olivia. Despite the almost violent action, Olivia's face shows no resistance, surprise, or displeasure.

In fact, her hand is on his shoulder. Her submissive expression is oddly reflected in the rendering of the Squire's horse -- perhaps a foreshadowing of his future mastery of Olivia, but not terribly successful as such.

Stothard appears to exaggerate both the trusting nature of the Primroses and the threat posed by the Squire for emotional effect on the viewer. Although the Primroses are not aware of the threat the Squire poses, Stothard has given clear clues that danger is at hand. Todd identifies "the chaste suffering woman" as the other archetypal victim of sentimental literature (4); and in this illustration, Stothard foreshadows Olivia's fate in that role. And rather than weeping for her, the reader trembles; and trembling, Todd notes, was, like weeping, a physical manifestation of the deep sympathy between reader and character (8).

Stothard does not make the trembling viewer of this illustration wait long for an opportunity to weep copiously. In his fourth illustration, "The Vicar and Olivia" (Stothard, Plate 4), Stothard depicts the Vicar's discovery of Olivia after she has been ruined by the Squire. Reunited with Olivia, the Vicar is again in the role of protector of the family. In this picture, we see Stothard's standard device of transferring all the emotive content of the scene to the female figure. Olivia is on her knees, in a state of near collapse. The Vicar, standing tall with feet firmly planted, supports her, by -- how else? -- encircling her in



Plate 4

his arms.

Goldsmith includes some of this emotional content; but, as elsewhere in the novel, some actions could be interpreted as undercutting the sentiment. The Vicar recoils from Olivia when she reveals that she has lost her virtue; and he embraces her once again when he hears she has married the Squire, even though it was by what Olivia believed to be a sham priest. Robert Hopkins has interpreted the Vicar's reactions to Olivia's story as revealing his concern for her worth as a daughter he can still marry to a wealthy man -- not a flattering picture of a vicar who is supposed to be forgiving his daughter unconditionally (True Genius 209-210). Stothard, however, chooses not to contaminate the viewer's experience of this powerfully pathetic scene with doubts about the Vicar's motives.

Stothard wants the emotion of this tableau to be so concentrated for the viewer, that he has almost eliminated the setting: the room is bare, save for the overturned chair. Nothing distracts the viewer from the two central figures, who fill up most of the frame. This is true, to a large extent, for all his illustrations in this series. Though they have distinct locations, like the doorway of the house in Wakefield, the stream of the rescue episode, the honeysuckle seat, and this room in a tavern, all the settings remain a backdrop, a flat curtain behind the players, rather than a real world that the characters live

in and move through. The minimizing of the physical surroundings of the scenes depicted allows the focus to fall entirely on the emotional drama of the characters. They fill the plates with their looks and gestures.

Interpretations of the novel as sentimental regard the Vicar's last sermon in prison as its climax. The Vicar starts his sermon to prepare his son for execution and himself for death by despair, but he expands it to include the entire prison congregation:

"Let us not be niggardly in our exhortation, but let all our fellow prisoners have a share: good gaoler let them be permitted to stand here, while I attempt to improve them." Thus saying, I made an effort to rise from my straw, but wanted strength, and was able only to recline against the wall. The prisoners assembled according to my direction, for they loved to hear my council, my son and his mother supported me on either side, I looked and saw that none were wanting, and then addressed them with the following exhortation. (159-160)

Goldsmith then includes the Vicar's sermon in full, with no narrative or descriptive interruption.

The delivery of the sermon has been viewed by critics who interpret the novel as sentimental fiction or as a straight didactic moral tale as the turning point for the Vicar. Martin Battestin compares the Vicar's trials and

tribulations to those endured by Job, and calls his sermon to the prisoners "the true climax and peripeteia of Goldsmith's tale" (211). According to Battestin, it is only when the Vicar understands that "in this life there is more to suffer than to enjoy," that "the balance will be redressed, but only hereafter," and proclaims his knowledge in the face of skepticism that he possesses true faith and earns the praise of God (211). James H. Lehmann revises the Job comparison somewhat, arguing that the Vicar is converted from "concern for appearances and social status . . . by the natural and passionate love of his family and fellow man" (82). Stothard's sermon scene (Stothard, Plate 5) differs from both these interpretations in that Stothard's prisoners appear very receptive and nothing in his entire series of illustrations has indicated a vicar who has ever been concerned with social status; but these differences do not alter the basic point, which is the Vicar's transcending of circumstance. Stothard creates a scene wherein virtue, which has shone steadfastly throughout the novel, shines brightest in its darkest hour.

In the text, the Vicar delivers this sermon from the straw mat in his cell as he is too weak to stand and, even lying on the mat, must be supported by his son and wife on either side. Though his arm has been scorched in the fire that occurred earlier in the plot, that ailment alone would seem insufficient to keep the Vicar from standing; and as in



Plate 5

the near drowning of Sophia, here the Vicar might be accused of suffering from over-sensitivity, at the expense of his children. He is preparing himself for death, though nothing threatens him but feeling, whereas George is awaiting certain execution.

Stothard's solution to presenting a possibly compromised Vicar is similar to his fix on Sophia's rescue. Stothard bolsters the Vicar's image, picturing him standing unsupported to deliver his last sermon. From a position of strength, he consoles his diminished family circle, on one side his wife -- to whom the emotion of the scene has been again transferred -- and George on the other. (We assume it is George since he wears a uniform and shackles.) Facing the Vicar on the left side of the plate are the prisoners, nine figures in all, but only three whose faces are lighted enough to see their expressions. These three seem serious and thoughtful. All the prisoners assume respectful postures, their hands clasped together or arms folded. One prisoner sits in the foreground, his shackled foot prominently put forward, his head turned up toward the Vicar. The Vicar's expanded domestic circle includes these unfortunates.

The motif of gesturing hands that Stothard has used throughout the series is here used to greatest effect. At the very center of the composition is the Vicar's open hand, extended toward the prisoners. The hand also seems to hover

above the head of little Dick. The arm that earlier drew to himself only his family now reaches toward the prisoners, whom he finds suffer the same despair as he himself does, and who can only expect their reward in the afterlife.

Though Stothard's illustration again offers only one view of the Vicar, the ambiguous text allows for the possibility that the Vicar has an overinflated sense of his own importance, as he thinks that the prisoners "love to listen" to his council and that it would be "niggardly" not to share his wisdom with them. His belief that these criminals are improved by listening to him may also be in error, especially given the scene Goldsmith's describes earlier, in which the prisoners make great sport of interrupting his sermons with their antics.

The final illustration in Stothard's series (Stothard, Plate 6) brings us to the main reversal in the plot, which many consider the ultimate evidence of a sentimental work. When we find the Vicar in Stothard's last plate, his little family boat is safe in the harbor; but its crew has increased. The Vicar has been rewarded for his virtue with a safe, happy, and enlarged family circle. Of course, Stothard would not depict the return of material fortune to the Vicar, as this would always have been unimportant to a virtuous man, the safety of his family coming foremost.

The illustration depicts the closing scene of the novel: "As soon as dinner was over, according to my old



Plate 6

custom, I requested that the table might be taken away, to have the pleasure of seeing all my family assembled once more by a chearful fire-side. My two little ones sate upon each knee, the rest of the company by their partners" (184). In Stothard's composition, the seated figures make a ring around the fireside with the Vicar at the head. But there is a subcircle, composed of the Vicar and the little boys, about whom he has closed his arms and legs. Olivia, who is standing behind the Vicar, is the only figure not seated and in shadow. She seems a ghost of the evil the unfeeling world can wreak on a poor innocent soul, and, as she hovers over the Vicar with a hand placed on his chair, serves as a reminder that his role of protector is not over while he still has little ones to guide to safety.

Whereas Stothard's first plate gives us the first blow to the family circle, Stothard's last gives us the circle enlarged and strengthened thanks to the Vicar's goodness and constancy. Stothard's series confirms the Vicar's comment made when calamities were raining heavy in the second half of the novel: "If we are to be taken from this abode, only let us hold to the right, and wherever we are thrown, we can still retire to a charming apartment, when we can look round our own hearts with intrepidity and with pleasure!" (139). And in having felt with the Vicar all the threats to that pleasure, the viewer of these illustrations can close the book, knowing that like the Vicar, he or she is, in Mullan's

words, "an exception -- a simple soul in an unsentimental world" (146).

CHAPTER III
ROWLANDSON'S VICAR

Born in London in 1756, just one year after Stothard, Rowlandson was the son of a wool and silk merchant. When Rowlandson's father, who often speculated in his business, went bankrupt in 1759, Rowlandson and his sister were taken in by their aunt and uncle, who was a prosperous Spitalfields silk weaver (Falk 30, 36-38). Rowlandson had in common with Stothard not only his experience of the Spitalfields silk weaving and design industry but also his training as a student at the Royal Academy, which Rowlandson entered in 1772 at age sixteen (Hayes 17). The similarity of the two artists' backgrounds might suggest that Rowlandson and Stothard developed similar styles, but nothing could be further from the case.

Early in his career, Rowlandson was attracted to the work of draughtsman John Hamilton Mortimer (1740-1779); and as seen in what pieces survive from Rowlandson's years at the academy, he copied Mortimer's "taut, wirey line" and in some cases even the subject of some of Mortimer's work (Hayes 28-30). After completing his studies, Rowlandson exhibited small portraits at the academy. He may have been

making some money as a portraitist during this period (Hayes 17; Stephen and Lee 17: 357-359).

Sometime in the early 1780s, Rowlandson's work underwent a shift in subject matter to comic prints, called "drolls." Drolls were not only popular with patrons of London print shops but also lined the windows of country booksellers and stationers. They were the rage, and Rowlandson probably saw he could make a consistent living producing them. The subject also suited him, as Rowlandson had a comic bent (Hayes 47-48).

Although he appreciated the satire found in the work of the Italian caricaturists (Hayes 31) and in Hogarth's narrative prints (Hayes 53-54) and did many political caricatures for magazines (Hayes 18), the majority of Rowlandson's art was to be more comic than stinging and focused on common incidents from middle-class English life. His collection of sketches A Tour in a Post Chaise (published 1784) demonstrates his facility for depicting such scenes. From purchasing trousers in preparation for the trip to having breakfast at an inn along the journey, the collection chronicles every small scene of the tour in the country: "No detail of the incidents attending the journey was too trivial for him to record, and he recorded it with the mobility and candour of the snapshot. . . . he caught to perfection the 'feel' of an incident" (Hayes 34).

By 1784, Rowlandson's style had also undergone a

transformation. He adopted the tinted drawing and dropped the style of Mortimer, who extensively crosshatched to indicate contour and shading. Rowlandson began to rely only on the outline of figures and objects, which he later colored with light washes (Hayes 32, 29-30). Rowlandson's line freed from the mesh of crosshatching became "highly expressive," "flexible," and "vigorous" (Hayes 34). This exceptional ability to capture the essence of a figure with a single pen line earned him a place among England's greatest draughtsmen (Wark 26).

From 1798 onward, most of Rowlandson's work was for the publisher Rudolph Ackermann, who ran a fashionable print-selling firm. Ackermann published Rowlandson's most famous collections of comic prints, The Microcosm of London, The Three Tours of Dr. Syntax, and The English Dance of Death (Hayes 23-26) and also commissioned Rowlandson to illustrate several novels, including those by Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and Goldsmith (Stephen and Lee 17: 357-359). Rowlandson produced prodigiously to keep Ackermann supplied and (supposedly) to keep pace with his gambling debts (Hayes 19). Although a precise count of his drawings has never been made, Robert Wark ventures that his drawings in public collections plus what is known to be in private collections make an estimate of 10,000 perfectly reasonable (1). In one sense, Rowlandson produced, as Stothard did, to sell, and he often repeated comic themes that were successful. While

noting Rowlandson's volume of production, Hayes cautions that it would be wrong to consider Rowlandson "merely a craftsman, merely an illustrator, merely interested in output. The extraordinarily individual quality of his pen work and the teeming richness of his invention raise him far above this level" (45).⁷

At first glance, the most obvious difference between Rowlandson's series of illustrations of The Vicar and Stothard's is the number of designs. With twenty-four watercolors, Rowlandson produced four times as many illustrations as Stothard. In deciding how many illustrations to provide for The Vicar, Stothard and Rowlandson might have been looking ahead toward the production of their illustrations as prints to be sold separately from the book. It was commonplace for illustrations of eighteenth-century literature to be issued as single prints for hanging. Sentimental scenes depicting a work's most affecting moments were fashionable (Alexander 5), but series of prints representing a narrative progression, such as Hogarth's famous series, were also popular. Any one of Stothard's illustrations for The Vicar could stand alone and inspire in the viewer the requisite emotions. Rowlandson's illustrations, in contrast, depend on narrative progression for their comedy; and he quite reasonably could have imagined twenty-four engravings reproduced from his watercolours being hung around a room in

sequence, as Hogarth's progresses had been in the mid eighteenth century.

The series' formats are also strikingly different. Unlike Stothard, whose designs for The Vicar are in the standard vertical book-illustration format of the day, Rowlandson chose to render all but one of the watercolors in the horizontal format of Hogarth's narrative series. His choice of format indicates the success Rowlandson had experienced as an inventor of original scenes, and Ackermann must not have been put off by the idea that a reader would have to turn the book to view Rowlandson's illustrations. Knowing the draw a Rowlandson print had for his customers, Ackermann probably had confidence that whatever the format, Rowlandson's illustrations would be popular.

The departure from the standard format in book illustration enabled Rowlandson to pull back his lens, so to speak, and take a wide-angle view of the scenes in the novel. In Stothard's narrow designs, the figures of the Primroses fill the entire frame. In Rowlandson's watercolors, the figures are smaller, and that reduction combined with the added width of the horizontal format allow Rowlandson to include peripheral details of scenes. These details serve to place the Primroses in a broader context than the family circle, thus creating a more complex view of the Vicar than provided by Stothard.

With the wider view in mind, Rowlandson's frontispiece

for The Vicar (Rowlandson, Plate 7) is a problematic place to begin. It is the only illustration of the twenty-four that is vertical and in which the figures fill the full frame. Although atypical of the watercolors that follow, this illustration is typical of what Robert Essick calls "the epitome frontispiece," which "functions less as an illustration to a specific passage than as a visual introduction and epitome for the whole" (171). Rowlandson's frontispiece, indeed, does not illustrate any specific scene in the novel, but rather reveals the Vicar's general character.

Goldsmith establishes this character in the first few chapters, wherein the Vicar describes his life and position in Wakefield. For example,

We had an elegant house, situated in a fine country, and a good neighbourhood. The year was spent in moral or rural amusements; in visiting our rich neighbours, and relieving such as were poor. We had no revolutions to fear, nor fatigues to undergo; all our adventures were by the fire-side, and all our migrations from the blue bed to the brown. (18)

The text reveals that the Vicar has not had much experience of life except comfortableness. Going hand-in-hand with this lack of knowledge of the world is the Vicar's description of relieving the poor as a "moral amusement," which seems to



THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD.

*A Character eminently calculated to inculcate benevolence,
humanity, patience in sufferings, & reliance on Providence.*

indicate a lack of sympathy with those less fortunate. Goldsmith also indicates that although the Vicar was generous with the poor, it was not at much expense to himself, and he felt very self-satisfied about his contributions:

The profits of my living, which amounted to but thirty-five pounds a year, I made over to the orphans and widows of the clergy of our diocese; for having sufficient fortune of my own, I was careless of temporalities, and felt a secret pleasure in doing my duty without reward. (21-22)

In the discussion of Stothard's illustrations, I have noted similar comments the Vicar lets fall that might be interpreted as undermining a sentimental reading of the text. Critic Richard Jaarsma argues that such comments are a novelistic technique used by Goldsmith to make "Dr. Primrose's view of reality immediately suspect" (335), and, more specifically, to make Primrose's view of himself suspect. Jaarsma maintains that Primrose, in his narration, "continually reveals, quite unconsciously, sides of his character that destroy his character as he imagines it" (335).

In the frontispiece portrait of the Vicar, Rowlandson seems to have picked up on Goldsmith's hints that the Vicar does his moral duty at little spiritual cost and with great self-satisfaction. Rowlandson gives us the Vicar with a

daughter on either arm stopping for a moment to give a poor child, a woman, and crippled man a few coins. It is actually one of the daughters, not the Vicar, who drops the coins in the man's extended hat while the Vicar looks ahead with a superior air. The pose the Vicar strikes underscores his smugness. With one hand in his partially unbuttoned waistcoat, the Vicar is imitating the most popular portrait pose of the day. This "in-hand" gesture, as art historian Arline Meyers explains, "acquired its greatest cachet in the late 1740s and early 1750s" in London's fashionable studios, and "subsequently filtered down and became a staple of second-string painters of the squirearchy and middle classes" (49). The pose seems to act as Rowlandson's tip off that this is a portrait of the Vicar as the Vicar would draw himself, believing the scene and stance would communicate an image of a benevolent and genteel man teaching his daughters a moral lesson. Ironically, the portrait "destroys his character as he imagines it" by revealing a clergyman who does not know true charity or humility. Rowlandson has used the frontispiece as a warning to the readers to suspect the self-portrait they are about to read -- a tale told by the Vicar himself. The frontispiece works as a clever reference to the vulnerability of a first-person narration.

Robert Hopkins argues that interpretation of The Vicar as satire depends on the reader's detachment from the Vicar:

The central problem involved in this first-person point of view narrative is whether Dr. Primrose is to be viewed as a hero to be admired . . . or as a narrator from whom the reader remains detached. If the reader is to remain detached from the Vicar, then the text should provide specific examples that will explain this detachment and indicate another more objective point of view. (True Genius 9)

In the twenty-three scenes in the narrative sequence, Rowlandson's format detaches us from the Vicar's telling of the story and offers a more objective viewpoint on the events of the novel. The wider canvas allows Rowlandson to include the indicators that Hopkins and Jaarsma maintain have been given in the text by Goldsmith for an ironic reading of the Vicar. If many of Goldsmith's contemporaries failed to read Goldsmith's irony, says Hopkins, "it was not because he [Goldsmith] had failed to plant the signposts" (True Genius 173).

Rowlandson's "The Departure from Wakefield" (Rowlandson, Plate 8) is an excellent example of how he uses those "signposts" to influence the reading of the scene. Rather than a closeup view of the family's private reaction to departure, as Stothard provides in his illustration of "The Vicar Taking Leave of George," Rowlandson shows the Primrose family making their departure from Wakefield among



Plate 8

a crowd and in a wide landscape. That landscape includes the Primrose residence. The family is shown just having passed through the high walls that surround the house. Within the walls can be seen a deep archway that must house a substantial door and a large shade tree. The details of the Primrose home -- the high walls, the heavy door, the tree -- give the sense that the family has left a well-fortified and secure home, where they were protected, shaded, from harsher realities because of their financial situation. Now, outside the walls and beyond the shade, they are exposed and vulnerable. Goldsmith hints at this vulnerability in the text:

The leaving a neighbourhood in which we had enjoyed so many hours of tranquility, was not without a tear, which scarce fortitude itself could suppress. Besides, a journey of seventy miles to a family that had hitherto never been above ten from home, filled us with apprehension, and the cries of the poor, who followed us for some miles, contributed to encrease it. (27)

With these lines, Goldsmith establishes the family's inexperience with the world and also introduces the crowd of poor people who see off the Vicar.

Rowlandson makes the most of this crowd. In the background of the illustration is a church, which indicates that the crowd is made up of the Vicar's parishioners. They

press the Primroses, take their hands, weep and exclaim in despair at losing them. And the Primroses, especially Deborah, who is riding behind the Vicar, seem to respond with warmth. Rowlandson depicts a family who is held in sincere affection. This view is substantiated by the text. Goldsmith, although he mentions the Vicar's self-satisfied manner in giving money to his parish, also mentions that the Vicar did know his people well: "I also set a resolution of keeping no curate, and of being acquainted with every man in the parish" (22). But Rowlandson's rendering of the parishioners, although establishing their regard for the Vicar and his family, calls into question the worth of their high esteem. An exceedingly uncouth and blank-minded man in the left foreground of the illustration scratches his head as he surveys the scene and suggests that the estimate of the Vicar's character by such a simple group may not be the truest. Rowlandson pokes fun at the heartfelt emotions of the poor and indicates that we are not to trust their overreactions. The Vicar would not have to do much to be loved by this lot. As the family leave Wakefield, they may be subject to the judgment of the more discerning. With his detailed depiction of the crowd, which is only briefly referred to in Goldsmith, Rowlandson indicates that the moral character of the family will soon be exposed when it keeps different company.

Rowlandson chooses to depict two scenes from the

Primroses' life in their new home that illustrate the vulnerability of their character. In his new parish, Primrose rents a farm to supplement his income as vicar there. His neighbors are also farmers and so, unlike Primrose's parishioners in Wakefield, are his equal in financial standing. As a vicar, Primrose is supposed to be their better in moral standing; but this superiority is not easy to achieve, as Goldsmith describes the country folk as having a natural and unselfconscious uprightness:

The place of our retreat was in a little neighbourhood, consisting of farmers, who tilled their own grounds, and were equal strangers to opulence and poverty. As they had almost all the conveniencies of life within themselves, they seldom visited town or cities in search of superfluity. Remote from the polite, they still retained the primaeval simplicity of manners, and frugal by habit, they scarce knew that temperance was a virtue. They wrought with chearfulness on days of labour; but observed festivals as intervals of idleness and pleasure. (31-32)

Although the Vicar gives this true description of his good neighbors, when invited to Michaelmas eve "to burn nuts and play tricks" (60) at his neighbor Flamborough's, the Vicar says that had it not been for a recent humiliation "it is probable we might have rejected such an invitation with

contempt: however, we suffered ourselves to be happy" (60). In Goldsmith, despite the family's reservations, the Vicar is soon enjoying himself immensely as he watches the games at the Flamboroughs. The family is terribly embarrassed, however, when caught in the midst of Hunt the Slipper by two London "ladies," friends of the Squire, whom the Primroses mistake for their betters, when they are, in fact, prostitutes.

Rowlandson depicts the moment when the London ladies burst upon the game of Hunt the Slipper (Rowlandson, Plate 9): Olivia has just received a thump of the slipper "on that side least capable of making a defence" (61). Rowlandson's portrayal of Olivia closely matches Goldsmith's description of her as being "hemmed in, and thumped about, all blowzed, in spirits, and bawling for fair play, fair play, with a voice that might deafen a ballad singer, when confusion on confusion, who should enter the room but our two great acquaintances from town" (61). The humor of the illustration comes both from the fun of the country game itself and from the Primroses' misreading of the two town women. In Rowlandson's depiction, only Deborah has noticed the entrance of Lady Blarney and Carolina Wilelmina Amelia Skeggs. Her mouth and arms are wide with surprise as she looks at the position her daughter has been caught in. She is embarrassed by their innocent games in front of those who should be embarrassed by their corrupt ones.



Plate 9

The Primroses' position in Rowlandson's scene corresponds well with Ronald Paulson's description of the predicament of characters in the novel of manners, which he describes in Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England:

The basic situation simply involves the juxtaposition of two sets of values or manners... and a protagonist who touches both. The protagonist is between the two areas; not completely committed to either, he is insecure, an unknown quantity seeking to discover his true position in relation to them, or else he is solidly on the lower level but trying to pass himself off as the higher, or perhaps even become the higher. (7-8)

Upon leaving Wakefield and becoming farmers, the Primroses have become insecure about their position. Although it is clear they are not presently in better standing than the Flamboroughs, their past standing in Wakefield and their current association with the Squire have given them the idea that they are above the Flamboroughs or are soon to be above them and has exposed them to such serious misjudgments as taking two bawds for ladies. If Burchell had not intervened later in the story, the consequences of the Primroses' mistake could have been catastrophic for Olivia and Sophia, who wished to join the "ladies" in London.

Goldsmith uses the Flamboroughs again as the standard of appropriate behavior for the Primroses in the episode of the family portrait. The Flamboroughs commission a traveling limner to draw their portraits. The family of seven are drawn with a bowl of seven oranges -- a very simple motif. When the Primroses hear of the Flamborough portraits, they want to have their own done, as the two families "had long a sort of rivalry in point of taste" (82). To outdo the Flamboroughs, the Primroses unanimously decide to have their portraits done "in one large historical family piece" (82). The Primroses think this would be both cheaper, because it would require only one frame, and more genteel, because historical portraits were fashionable with the gentry. The family cannot decide on one historical scene, so they are each "drawn as independent historical figures" (82). The inappropriateness of their selections and the ludicrousness of the combinations of characters that result are surpassed only by the portrait being too large to be moved out of the kitchen -- their-self image becoming literally too large for their situation.⁸ The family also accommodate the Squire's request to be included in the portrait, again ignoring their true position in the hopes of bettering it.

Rowlandson merely has to render the portrait as described by Goldsmith to have a wonderfully comic illustration (Rowlandson, Plate 10). Rowlandson gives us the giant canvas, with Deborah as Venus, Dick and Bill as



Plate 10

cupids, the Vicar in his clerical clothes presenting Deborah/Venus with his work on monogamy, Sophia as shepherdess with "as many sheep as the painter could put in for nothing" (83), Moses also with shepherd staff but in fancy clothes, Olivia as an Amazon but dressed in a green joseph, and the Squire as Alexander the Great kneeling at Olivia's feet.

With his wide-angle lens, Rowlandson can show not only the portrait, but the delighted reaction of the Primroses as they watch the painter add the final touches and the reactions of some neighbors, who are in the doorway pointing and smiling. Goldsmith describes the reactions of the neighbors to the portrait in the text: The picture was "the jest of all our neighbours. One compared it to Robinson Crusoe's long-boat, too large to be removed; another thought it more resembled a reel in a bottle; some wondered how it could be got out, but still more were amazed how it ever got in" (83). In this illustration, Rowlandson has closely modeled the complex viewpoint achieved in the novel. Rowlandson gives us not just the ridiculous portrait but the Vicar regarding the portrait and the neighbors regarding the Vicar regarding the portrait. Thus, as the viewer regards the whole, he or she has the distance necessary for a comic or ironic reading.

As in "Hunting the Slipper" Rowlandson has given us the Vicar's family uncertain of its position and vulnerable to

mistaking itself for what it is not -- here with obvious comic consequence, but also foreshadowing a more serious one. The Primroses' false belief that the Squire will be part of their family will make Olivia's virtue vulnerable. Goldsmith foreshadows this consequence in the neighbors' "scandalous whispers" (84), which are the result of the Squire's inclusion in the family portrait. W. F. Gallaway, one of the first twentieth-century critics to suggest an ironic reading of the novel, concludes that "even after the loss of their fortune the Primroses were for a while content, but, alas, for human nature! no sooner did they see some possibility of climbing the social ladder by alliance with the Thornhills than they -- the Vicar excepted -- 'suffered' themselves to be happy with the Flamboroughs" (1174). Gallaway adds that the Primroses' disregard for the habits of the Flamboroughs reflects a general tenet of Goldsmith's on human nature: "Goldsmith realizes that man is content with simplicity only so long as he sees no opportunity to change his fate" (1175).

What saves both "Hunting the Slipper" and "The Family Picture" from severe satire of the Primroses' pretensions is the playful liveliness and domestic detail of the two scenes. The roaring fire and ring of laughing children, playing pups, a pile of hats on the floor, the Vicar and Burchell laughing, and Mr. Flamborough smoking his pipe make the viewer of "Hunting the Slipper" feel he or she is

witnessing a real, not caricatured, country scene; and likewise "The Family Picture," in which humble baskets support the oversized portrait, the dog barks at the picture's life-sized sheep, the kittens lie on the floor, the neighbors peek in the doorway, and crockery lines the shelf.

Although in his study of eighteenth-century sentimental novels, Virtue in Distress, R. F. Brissenden pronounces the structure of The Vicar of Wakefield "profoundly sentimental" (247), he goes on to say that for the modern reader the sentimentality is for the most part "not disturbing" (247). He offers Goldsmith's portrayal of country life as one reason the novel "remains a genuinely charming and delightful book" (247). He elaborates, "Goldsmith's picture of life in the country is at once realistic and idyllic: the framework may be artificial, but the domestic rural world of the Primroses which it encompasses is rendered with remarkable fidelity, liveliness and good humour" (247). Brissenden's words could apply equally well to Rowlandson's picture of domestic rural life in these two illustrations. The settings are in striking contrast to the flat backdrops of the Stothard illustrations, which are not realistic, faithful, or lively and give us no sense of the broader country life the Primroses are a part of, only the drama of the family's emotions as it faces various outside threats.

Both "Hunting the Slipper" and "The Family Portrait"

depict scenes from the first half of the novel, which most critics concede is comic in tone. Rowlandson's interpretation of Goldsmith becomes more interesting in depictions of scenes of the second half of the novel, which could be interpreted as highly dramatic and emotional. Critics who advocate an ironic reading of the text throughout the whole novel point to subtle clues they believe Goldsmith has given in the text for such a reading of the second half. Hopkins claims "it is no exaggeration to assert that every seemingly sentimental situation in The Vicar is ironically undermined by one device or another" (True Genius 205). Rowlandson is extremely sensitive to such devices in the text and uses them to the fullest in his illustrations of potentially sentimental scenes; and where the tone of the language is what lends the comedy, Rowlandson finds a means to give an equivalent effect in the illustration.

The moment at which the Vicar and Arabella Wilmot, along with her uncle and aunt, discover George acting in a production put on by strolling players fits Todd's description of scenes in sentimental eighteenth-century literature that depend on extremes of emotion following quickly upon each other. Goldsmith describes the shock and dismay of Arabella and the Vicar, and the overwhelming embarrassment experienced by George:

He [George] was going to begin, when, turning his

eyes upon the audience, he perceived Miss Wilmot and me, and stood at once speechless and immoveable. The actors behind the scene, who ascribed this pause to his natural timidity, attempted to encourage him; but instead of going on, he burst into a flood of tears, and retired off the stage. (105)

Rowlandson capitalizes on this description, showing us a frozen George on stage with actors in either wing, who are totally unaware of Arabella's shock in the front row and are trying to feed George his lines (Rowlandson, Plate 11). Rowlandson renders Arabella's reaction, which mirrors George's, with an exaggerated gesture. Rowlandson's horizontal format has allowed not only the depiction of the stage and the front row of the audience, where the Vicar and Arabella are seated, but almost the entire theater. This wider view of the scene has a distancing effect on the viewer, who sees that none of the many people drawn in the back rows and the balcony have noticed the little drama between George and his loved ones, which makes it seem not so serious. Indeed, many audience members are engrossed in little dramas of their own. Only the French horn player in the orchestra pit has noticed Arabella's near swoon and is regarding her with interest. Goldsmith does not describe the crowd in the theater or mention a horn player. Rowlandson's introduction of these elements works to make the viewer



Plate 11

consider and evaluate the characters' reactions as a bit silly rather than to sympathize with them.

The scene of Deborah's reconciliation with the fallen Olivia is another incident in the second half of the novel that could be interpreted as a moment to make readers weep. Goldsmith, however, plants several undermining signposts. On the morning after their house has burned, the Primroses gather to breakfast in the honeysuckle arbor, where they first met the Squire. The place inspires in Deborah "a pleasing distress" (136), which causes her to weep and ask her daughter to sing a particular song:

When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can sooth her melancholy,
What art can wash her guilt away?

The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom -- is to die. (136)

The lyrics give a sentimental cast to Olivia's situation. Her only salvation, according to the song, is to die, which would win the heart back of her lover. This is not Olivia's true situation. The Squire did not have any regard for her, as evidenced by his attempt to "give" her to a friend of his; and he could not be brought to repentance by any

action, as the novel bears out later, when he thinks Olivia dead and cares not a bit. The Primroses seem to be indulging in a false view of their situation: they find it more affecting -- and thus more "pleasing" -- to think of their situation as a little play of virtue-in-distress rather than to evaluate their own culpability and devise a plan for future action. Gallaway notes the Vicar's trait of avoiding unpleasant self-evaluation and asserts that Goldsmith "is aware that the sentimentalist is an idealist viewing life through the false glasses of romance, and not seldom an unconscious hypocrite seeking an escape from a realism he found unpleasant and a morality he found severe" (1180).

Rowlandson renders the setting of the reconciliation scene, a country landscape, in a vibrant style influenced by Thomas Gainsborough (Rowlandson, Plate 12). The family is seated at the table in the honeysuckle seat listening to Olivia sing. But for a few details, the scene could elicit a feeling response from the viewer. The first is Olivia's gesture while singing, which like Arabella's in the theater, is exaggerated and implies that she might be enjoying performing her tragedy and perhaps is finding proof of her own sensibility in her situation.⁹ Rowlandson uses the caption for the illustration to further the idea that Olivia is playing a part. The illustration is titled "The Fair Penitent," the name of the play in which George was discovered acting.

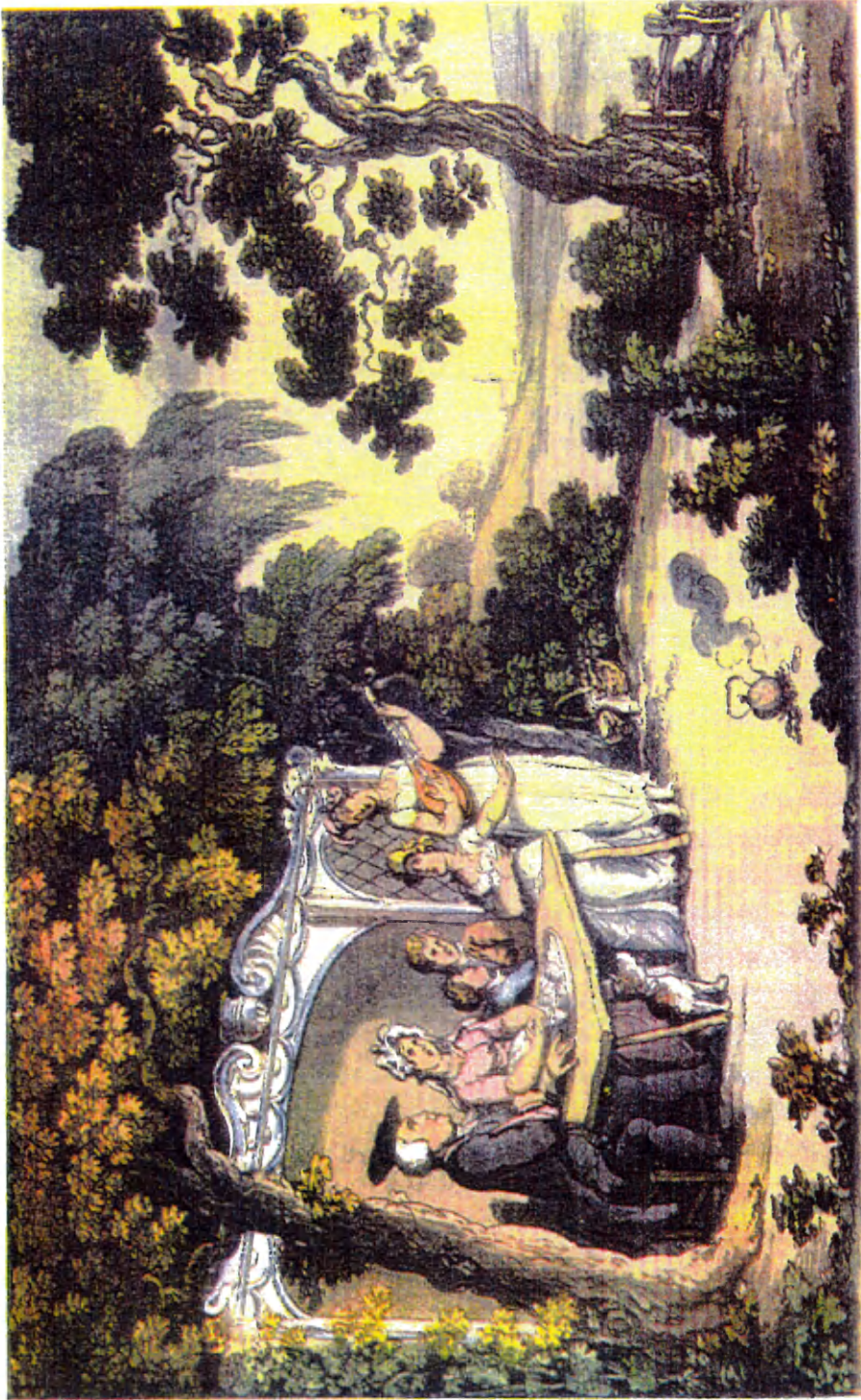


Plate 12

Rowlandson's depiction of the Vicar's arm in a pink sling reminds the viewer of the fire and the family's dire circumstances, raising the question of whether it is an appropriate time for them to indulge in sentimentality about their situation. The view of the Vicar's church in the background of the scene also calls into question Primrose's position as moral head of the family. Shouldn't the Vicar be leading his family in spiritual repentance and healing rather than encouraging them all in regarding Olivia as the heroine of a romance novel? Although the clues to an ironic reading were in the song lyrics and description of Deborah's distress as "pleasing", Rowlandson finds graphic details to communicate an ironic tone, and the result is an interpretation of Primrose's nature that matches Gallaway's.

In the final illustration of the series (Rowlandson, Plate 13), Rowlandson continues his antisentimental reading of the novel, and, rather than the safety of a circle of like hearts that Stothard ends on, Rowlandson gives us the financial security of marriage. Rowlandson draws for the final scene the procession to the church that the Vicar describes as an occasion for much merry making:

I found the whole company as merry as affluence and innocence could make them. However, as they were now preparing for a very solemn ceremony, their laughter entirely displeased me. I told them of the grave, becoming and sublime deportment they



Plate 13

should assume upon this mystical occasion, and read them two homilies and a thesis of my own composing in order to prepare them. Yet, they still seemed perfectly refractory and ungovernable. Even as we were going along to church, to which I led the way, all gravity had quite forsaken them, and I was often tempted to turn back in indignation. (182)

Rowlandson shows the procession just as it is coming to the church and has picked up on the Vicar's comment that they were "as happy as innocence and affluence can make them." With the composition of the illustration, Rowlandson shows us the economic links that the marriages will bring. To the right of the scene, Arabella holds her father's arm on one side and George's on the other; and to the left of the scene, Sophia holds Burchell's arm and her mother's. The women will serve as the conduits through which affluence will come flowing back to the Primroses.

To emphasize the new state of security the Primrose's are about to enter, Rowlandson has included the church and has drawn its portico as fortress-like with a crenelated roofline implying that once the Primroses enter and George and Sophia are married, the family's position will be unassailable. But Rowlandson casts an ironic tone on the new found security, as it is financial rather than spiritual. At the Vicar's feet is a tomb stone, perhaps placed there to

remind us that although the Vicar, while in prison, thought himself at death's door, on the other side of which he had expected to receive his only reward -- God's grace -- he now is about to enter the church to receive the very earthly reward of the marriages of his son and daughter -- all the money that those unions will bring with them. Rowlandson has again given us the wider context needed to apprehend more than the Vicar sees himself. The Vicar has turned from a heavenly reward to an earthly one in a matter of a few hours. Goldsmith's clue to this reading is in the Vicar's comment: "I had nothing now on this side of the grave to wish for, all my cares were over, my pleasure was unspeakable" (184). The lesson the Vicar purported to have learned in prison he has forgotten -- true security to be found only in the afterlife. Jaarsma and Hopkins both maintain that this ending reveals a Primrose who has not learned from his experiences (Jaarsma 338 and Hopkins, True Genius 223-224). Primrose does not change.

Rowlandson gives the viewer the sense of coming full circle by echoing in the final frame his earlier illustration of the "Departure from Wakefield." As in that scene, the Primrose family is processing, and crowds of poor and country folk press in on them and crane to see. This time, however, the family is not leaving the high walls of economic security and social position; they are reentering the secure world of wealth and standing and will leave the

mass of not so fortunate ones outside. Indeed, if we were to put the two plates side by side, with the departure scene on the right, and read them right to left, we would see that the family passes from one threshold to another and that the whole story has been a long procession from the apparently secure doors of Wakefield through the outside world, where the family was vulnerable and exposed on all sides, to the secure portals of marriage.

CHAPTER IV
VICAR TO VICAR

In his illustrations of The Vicar, Rowlandson responds to the subtlety of Goldsmith's text, and at the same time, makes a reply to Stothard's illustrations of the novel. Just as literary scholars not only give a reading of a text but also address previous interpretations by other scholars -- especially those that contradict the argument they are presenting -- Rowlandson, in his own illustrations of The Vicar, addresses Stothard's 1792 interpretation of the novel. Rowlandson debunks Stothard's sentimental interpretation and ensures that this point is not missed by choosing to depict three scenes that Stothard had illustrated, and in rendering them to take on Stothard's readings point by point. These scenes are Sophia's rescue, the Squire's first meeting with the Primroses, and the Vicar preaching to the prisoners.

Bennett declares Stothard's illustration of Sophia's rescue "a hallmark of the cult of sensibility" because it is perfectly designed to make the viewer melt with emotion. Rowlandson answers this hallmark by drawing the same scene in such a way as to provoke laughter (Rowlandson, Plate 14).



Plate 14

He creates this effect with three actions: Burchell wades through the flooded stream carrying Sophia to the far shore; Sophia's horse flounders in the water; and the Vicar on foot, with Deborah and Olivia on horseback, crosses further up the stream where the water is only hoof deep. The actions in the scene closely follow Goldsmith's account. Whereas Stothard, in an attempt to mask the paralysis of the Vicar, places the Vicar on the far shore ready to receive Sophia, Rowlandson has made Primrose's delay in acting quite clear and quite comic: the Vicar comes stumbling along with outstretched arms after the rescue has occurred, having been completely useless. Rowlandson would have agreed with John Dussinger's interpretation of this scene as a satire of sentiment. Dussinger argues that "Primrose's 'sickly sensibility' weakens both mind and body, diminishing him at moments" and "results in delusions, which precipitate his losses" (151). The Vicar was incapable of rescuing Sophia because he was incapacitated by emotion, and the loss of Sophia could have been the result.

Rowlandson undermines the sentiment of Stothard's scene by making the horse and dog the center of the composition and the focus of attention. The frightened horse has displaced Burchell's heroic rescue and the Primrose family's concern. The animal's distress, as evidenced by its wide eyes, open mouth, and thrashing legs, is as great as Sophia's in Stothard's. And the horse's rescuer, the

Primroses' dog, who appears to be herding the horse to safety, must be seen as every bit as heroic as Burchell. In his close analysis of the comic quality of Rowlandson's work, Wark notes that among several factors that combine to create humor in Rowlandson's drawings, a subsidiary incident is often most effective: "The notion of presenting us with rather carefully worked out complementary situations . . . is another device that tends to heighten the comedy without, of course, being funny in itself" (8). With the struggling horse and champion dog, Rowlandson has created a subsidiary incident that by mimicking the main event -- the rescue of a fair damsel in distress -- lends comedy to the illustration.¹⁰

The romance and heroism of the scene are even further deflated by Sophia's most awkward position in Burchell's arms. Legs and arms splayed, Sophia looks anything but the picture of femininity -- not to mention her bulk. It seems that Rowlandson has interpreted the "difficulty" the Vicar describes Burchell as having in conveying her to the safe shore as a struggle with her size, not with the torrent. This is certainly not the picture of flowering romantic love that Stothard gives. With this illustration, Rowlandson has put the "hallmark of the cult of sensibility" on its ear, or, as it looks like Sophia is about to be placed, on its back side.

Rowlandson's illustration of the first meeting of the

Primroses and the Squire (Rowlandson, Plate 15) also directly contradicts Stothard's reading. As we have seen, Stothard's illustration is less successful than his rendition of Sophia's rescue, as the attitude of the Primroses' is problematic. Stothard probably intends the viewer to feel fear for the innocent and unsuspecting Primroses, but their passive reactions to the Squire make the illustration rather flat and uninteresting.

Rowlandson's wide-angle view of the scene includes more than just the Primroses' reactions to the Squire's intrusion, which I shall look at shortly; it shows the Squire's intrusion upon the Vicar's enclosures, of which Primrose says he is very proud: "My farm consisted of about twenty acres of excellent land, having given an hundred pound for my predecessor's good-will. Nothing could exceed the neatness of my little enclosures: the elms and hedge rows appearing with inexpressible beauty" (32). Rowlandson has carried the theme of neat enclosures into this illustration, as the honeysuckle arbor is drawn not just as a "seat," but as a small area, bounded by a few rows of low hedges, amongst which there is a gate. Although the family is within this enclosure with the gate shut, it was still completely vulnerable to the advances of the Squire. The Vicar's "enclosures" at his new home, no matter how neat they may be, are terribly insubstantial. The Squire could hardly have taken the wall at Wakefield with a skip and a



Plate 15

jump, but the Primroses no longer enjoy such security of wealth. Instead, they are vulnerable to the appetites of those who own their land and, as Rowlandson explored in "Hunting the Slipper" and "The Family Portrait," to their own desire to reach above their true position.

The reactions of the Primroses, as portrayed by Rowlandson, are driven by this economic vulnerability and by their desire to attain a higher social standing. Rowlandson uses Stothard's device of showing the Squire saluting Olivia as a means of foreshadowing the Squire's interest in her, but he does not depict Olivia as participating in the salute as Stothard does. Rowlandson's Olivia is actually leaning away from the Squire and seems a bit surprised, which emphasizes the boldness of the Squire's action. Rowlandson depicts Sophia and Deborah clasping hands and smiling in approval and excitement as the Squire kisses Olivia, which matches Goldsmith's text when the Vicar reports that "the whole family seemed in earnest to please him" (36) and Deborah "was of opinion, that it was a most fortunate hit" (37). Rowlandson's Vicar seems to frown at the liberty the Squire has taken, again matching Goldsmith. The Vicar recounts, "I did not approve of such disproportioned acquaintances" (36); but his posture in the illustration with one hand in his unbuttoned waistcoat and one in his pocket is the same as the pose he strikes in the frontispiece. Rowlandson probably pictures him in the pose

here to show that he is interested in appearing as a gentleman to the Squire. All these reactions to the Squire reinforce the Primroses' moral vulnerability. The only member of the family who appears to recognize the Squire for what he is, a scoundrel, is the dog, who is barking at him. The dog has center stage in the illustration, perhaps Rowlandson's way of saying that the dog has more sense than Primrose.

Despite these critical comments on the Primrose's financial and moral vulnerability, Rowlandson creates a comic rather than a satiric effect. To accomplish this, Rowlandson again makes use of the subsidiary incident, but in this case, he does not have to invent the complementary action, as he did in the "Rescue of Sophia," because it is already supplied by Goldsmith. Before the Squire's approach, Goldsmith describes a hunt that passes by the family as it picnics:

I had drawn out my family to our usual place of amusement, and our young musicians began their usual concert. As we were thus engaged, we saw a stag bound nimbly by, within about twenty paces of where we were sitting, and by its panting, it seemed prest by the hunters. We had not much time to reflect upon the poor animal's distress, when we perceived the dogs and horsemen come sweeping along at some distance behind, and making the very

path it had taken. (35-36)

The Squire leaves this chase to come salute the Primrose daughters, foregoing one hunt for another.

Rowlandson uses this subsidiary action, as Goldsmith does, to comment ironically. In the background of the plate, rather faintly, Rowlandson has drawn a stag pursued by a line of horsemen. Echoing that same line of pursuit in the foreground is the Squire's dismounted horse, the gate to the honeysuckle seat, and the Squire himself kissing Olivia. The humor the juxtaposition of the two scenes creates is what Robert Quintana has termed "an irony of apprehension" ("Oliver Goldsmith, Ironist to the Georgians" 299), which results when the reader observes more than the characters. The viewer of this illustration, and the reader of the text, apprehend what the Vicar does not; the Squire is a predator after his prey. In Stothard's illustration, the viewer also apprehends more than the Primroses, namely the threat the Squire poses; but that knowledge is intended to increase the viewer's sympathy with the characters rather than diminish it as it does in Rowlandson's illustration.

Rowlandson counters Stothard's portrayal of the Vicar preaching to the prisoners by choosing to depict not the final sermon the Vicar delivers in prison but the first (Rowlandson, Plate 16). The choice indicates that Rowlandson regards the first sermon as the key to interpreting the Vicar's role as religious leader to the incarcerated.



Plate 16

Goldsmith describes the prisoners as playing tricks on the Vicar when he makes his first attempt to reform them:

I found the prisoners very merry, expecting my arrival; and each prepared with some gaol trick to play upon the doctor. Thus, as I was going to begin, one turned my wig awry, as if by accident, and then asked my pardon. A second, who stood at some distance, had a knack of spitting through his teeth, which fell in showers upon my book. A third would cry amen in such an affected tone as gave the rest great delight. A fourth had slyly picked my pocket of my spectacles. But there was one whose trick gave more universal pleasure than all the rest; for observing the manner in which I had disposed my books on the table before me, he very dextrously displaced one of them, and put an obscene jest-book of his own in the place. (148)

Rowlandson's illustration makes the most of these prisoners' antics. Instead of the few contrite prisoners of Stothard, Rowlandson's Vicar addresses two dozen of the most vulgar. Rowlandson gives his enormous power of caricature free rein here. Each inmate has a face more grotesque than the last, till we end in the right-hand corner with a man whose head resembles a pig's. The grotesques sprawl about the prison room, scratching their heads. They scowl and laugh, and the three behind the Vicar wink and snicker at

some joke they are playing. The women are beefy and one smokes a pipe. One couldn't find a more anti-sentimental lot.

Rowlandson's Vicar seems not to take in the attitude of his audience. As he delivers his sermon, he holds his Bible in one hand and reaches out with the other to the prisoners. The gesture is not unlike that used to such sentimental success by Stothard; yet here, instead of reaching out to the serious, contrite, and respectful prisoners, it reaches out to a motley crew. The Vicar of this illustration looks ridiculously naive or, worse yet, ridiculously prideful. Goldsmith's Vicar recounts that "it was now that I applauded my perseverance and address, at thus giving sensibility to wretches divested of every moral feeling" (148-149). Looking at the crowd Rowlandson presents, the viewer could not believe the Vicar capable of investing one of that lot with sensibility. Hopkins points to the Vicar's claims that the prisoners are quickly converted as a sign of his unreliability as narrator: "The rapidity with which Dr. Primrose claims to have reformed his fellow prisoners is too improbable -- he is telling tales, and the reader may legitimately suspect that the narrator is a man who deludes himself" (True Genius 215). Rowlandson, in this illustration, is equally skeptical of the Vicar's account.

Rowlandson also casts some doubt on the Vicar's motives for remaining in prison. Rowlandson shows the prisoners in

shackles, and the prison room is a fortress with thick towers and a crenelated wall above a door crisscrossed with many bands of iron. The seriousness of his position is made apparent, as well as the difficulty that most of the prisoners would have in escaping such a place. If any in that crowd had the power to open the door with a single apology to a squire, it is doubtful he or she would hesitate. Rowlandson shows us the naivete and foolishness of a man who remains incarcerated, though having the power to leave, and who tries to invest prisoners with his own sensibilities, when they would only mock him. Hopkins claims the Vicar's choice to remain and tend to the prisoners "is dictated as much by pride and resentment as by moral principle" (True Genius 215); but Rowlandson's Vicar looks sincere in his efforts to convert, if foolish. Rowlandson gives us not a Job finally achieving true understanding, nor a virtuous man transcending dire circumstance, nor a vicar who is a hypocrite, but a man who once again misreads his situation and himself with dire consequence for his family.

In these three illustrations, Rowlandson shows the viewer that his Vicar is not like Stothard's hero, who is unfairly attacked by the cruel world. Rowlandson places responsibility for the events that threaten the Primrose family squarely on the Vicar, who, since his loss of fortune, has become vulnerable to his own desire to improve his position. Although Rowlandson's and Stothard's readings

of the Vicar's character are in direct opposition, close comparison of their illustrations to Goldsmith reveals that the text does, to some degree, support both interpretations; however, both artists amend the text.

Stothard relies primarily on the novel's sentimental plot for his interpretation. He identifies and depicts the emotional reversals of the novel, making each of his illustrations a tableau of feeling. But to enhance the effect of such a depiction, he tampers with Goldsmith's presentation of the Vicar as sometimes weakened by emotion. Stothard strengthens the Vicar's role as moral leader and protector of his family by placing the Vicar center stage in his compositions and making him often the physical support for other members of the family. Stothard then transfers the emotional weakness onto the female characters, where it does not signify weakness but rather virtue and serves to cue the emotional response (weeping or trembling) of the reader for feeling.

Stothard further enhances the interpretation of the Vicar as preserver of his family by placing the family members in a circular composition as if they are drawing together to protect themselves from the cold blasts of the outside world. Stothard also eliminates Goldsmith's lively depiction of rural country life, providing only the most minimal of background flats to indicate location. The focus is thus placed entirely on the figures of the family as they

experience emotional crises.

Stothard's choice of scenes to illustrate and his decisions about how to present the Vicar and his family are rote for illustrations of the day, which for the most part completely conform to the prescriptions of the cult of sensibility. A quick browsing of David Alexander's catalogue of an exhibition of prints of English literature made in the age of romantic sensibility, which Alexander defines as 1775-1800, will confirm that Stothard's illustrations of The Vicar are completely typical in their sentimentalism. In fact, they are formulaic. As Bennett points out, it is a formula that was requested by the booksellers, and "Stothard's pliable and submissive attitude to the demands of his publishers . . . was probably an important factor in influencing the booksellers in their frequent employment of his talents" (28).

Although Rowlandson was as prolific as Stothard and like Stothard had to sell his work to eat, he was not a hack illustrator who simply gave publishers what they wanted. He was an established artist who made a living reading scenes from real life and presenting those observations in his watercolors. Rowlandson would have felt no obligation to follow a formula in presenting Goldsmith's novel. He reads Goldsmith with the same acuteness with which he observed scenes of middle-class England, identifying all the verbal signs that demand a complex reading.

Rowlandson manipulates the text, but instead of changing or eliminating elements to narrow the reading of the novel to fit a popular formula, Rowlandson elaborates on the text to expand the interpretation of the novel. Rowlandson pulls back from the family grouping that Stothard gives us to show more details, more context, for interpreting the behavior of the Primroses. Rowlandson provides the viewer with landscapes, buildings, interiors, animals, and people -- crowds of people -- where Goldsmith has only indicated them in the most general way or not at all. And yet the details do not contradict Goldsmith. In fact, they often are the graphic equivalent of devices Goldsmith uses to cast some doubt over the actions of the Vicar, such as remarks the Vicar makes that undermine his motivation or the reactions of others to the Primroses' behavior. Rowlandson's additions to Goldsmith's text work to recreate Goldsmith's ambiguous tone, which allows the reader to choose to see the Vicar in a larger context, from a point of view outside the Vicar's narration.

Both sets of illustrations are valuable pieces of criticism. Stothard's interpretation of The Vicar, although routine, provides a full and detailed account of how elements of the novel could lead readers to a sentimental response. As such, Stothard's commentary far exceeds that of contemporary critics and readers. For instance, Fanny Burney reports that the novel made her cry, but doesn't say what

elements specifically conspire to elicit that response. Stothard's illustrations provide that analysis. Rowlandson's illustrations go beyond Stothard's rote reading to reveal the ironic possibilities of the text. Although Goethe comments on Goldsmith's "benevolent irony," Rowlandson's analysis of the elements that contribute to creating Goldsmith's complex tone is unmatched in the verbal criticism of the novel until the twentieth century, when sophisticated analyses of the novel as irony first appear.

Perhaps the twenty-six years between the novel's publication and Stothard's illustrations and the twenty-five years between Stothard's illustrations and Rowlandson's saw the development of a method for critical analysis of novels; but it seems more likely that the artists were simply more prepared to grapple with the new genre than were literary critics of the times. Their task as illustrators forced them to interpret the novel more fully than reviewers tended to. Although neither Stothard nor Rowlandson solves "the problem of emotive unity" in the novel, which Cohen suggests illustrations sometimes can, they do support Cohen's assertion that illustrations may be as revealing, or even more revealing, than verbal interpretations and are worthy of inclusion in a work's critical history.

NOTES

¹ For a survey of contemporary comment about the novel, see G. S. Rousseau's Goldsmith: A Critical Heritage. This compilation includes reviews of The Vicar that appeared in the Monthly Review and Critical Review soon after the novel's publication, and the excerpts from Fanny Burney's diary and Goethe's letter.

² Two authorities on eighteenth-century sentimental literature, Janet Todd and John Mullan, both regard The Vicar as having all the elements of a sentimental novel. Barbara Benedict, though acknowledging that the novel has passages of high irony, includes the novel in her study of sentiment in English prose fiction as an example of a sentimental fable.

Martin Battestin and James Lehmann argue that the Vicar's story is a reworking of the story of Job and so is not satire but a sincere, moral, didactic tale. Battestin maintains that the novel presents a sacral retelling of Job, and Lehmann, that it presents a secularized retelling. Thomas Preston also favors a didactic reading, with the lesson being not to store up treasure on Earth -- the Vicar's treasure, in Preston's opinion, are his children.

Satiric readings of the novel begin with W. F. Gallaway, who concludes that Goldsmith's novel is satirizing sentimentalism, a false sensibility. This opinion is strengthened by Robert H. Hopkins, who argues in True Genius that the entire novel is a parody of sentiment and that the Vicar never learns anything from his experiences. Richard Jaarsma, even more vehemently than Hopkins, argues that the novel is a triple satire on rural innocence, the sentimental novel, and the idea of innate human goodness. John A. Dussinger also lines up with these critics, saying that the novel is a satire of sensibility, and a lesson to the underclass to submit to the aristocracy. Less certain of his conclusions, Richard Quintana acknowledges that the novel is ironic and comic throughout even in its second half but is wary of interpreting it as satire, because its tone is so gentle.

Oliver Ferguson and Michael Adelstein argue that the novel has a split plot, the first half being comic and the second being a lesson in Christian submission and fortitude. David Durant also argues for the split plot, the first half satirizing sentimentality and the second half promoting

lessons learned from experience. Ronald Paulson sees the first half as satire, but doesn't even discuss the novel's second half, in which he believes the tone utterly fails. Marshall Brown also divides the novel in two, calling the first half an idyll and the second, a romance.

³ Wolf summarizes the views of Dobson and Saintsbury and briefly describes each of Rowlandson's plates, noting his favorites, which are the most comic, and those he finds weak, which are the illustrations that lean toward the sentimental (97-99).

⁴ Stothard's daughter-in-law, Anna Elizabeth Bray, wrote the first biography of Stothard, published in 1851, seventeen years after his death. Bray draws a sentimental picture of an ever-patient, ever-pious, ever-gentle man and unsurpassed artist. Her exaggerations preclude any real sense of the man. Indeed, A. C. Coxhead, Stothard's next biographer, writes in 1909 that "stripped of its pious eulogies, Mrs. Bray's book...shrinks to very slender proportions" (1). Having said this, Coxhead describes a Stothard that is little different from Bray's. Coxhead does, however, provide a catalogue of Stothard's book illustrations with some commentary, including descriptions of all the illustrations Stothard did of The Vicar of Wakefield -- not just the six done for E. Harding and J. Good. Shelley M. Bennett gives the most objective summary of Stothard's life, which is based on extensive research. Bennett gives excellent descriptions of Stothard's development as an artist, the influence of his friends Flaxman and Blake, his techniques, and the art market of the time. The brief entries under "Stothard" in Stephen's and Lee's Dictionary of National Biography and in Hammelmann's Book Illustration in Eighteenth-Century England are also useful, although they reveal, respectively, the Victorian predilection for sentiment and the modern prejudice against it.

⁵ Of the Goldsmith critics mentioned in Note 2, only those who see The Vicar as a moral tale deny the stock sentimentality of the plot. Even Jaarsma and Hopkins, who argue for a sustained satiric reading of the novel, concede the point, arguing that the events of the novel, particularly of the second half, are exaggerated to a burlesque of the standard plots of sentimental romance novels of the day.

⁶ A not so successful element of Stothard's composition is the placement on the left side of the frame of two horses, which are held by the reins by either Dick or Bill. It seems odd that Stothard would add them, as they distract from the main action of the illustration. Is the reader

supposed to interpret the horses' nearness to the family as a reflection of their concern for Sophia (similar to Maria's dog's concern for her in Sterne's two novels)? Whatever their intended purpose, the horses only crowd the illustration, making it a bit claustrophobic. Stothard has made a similarly odd introduction of a horse's head in the next illustration, "The Honeysuckle Arbour."

⁷ Joseph Grego, one of the first of the Victorians to take notice of Rowlandson's work, produced Rowlandson the Caricaturist, which catalogues many of his comic prints. A. P. Oppe's Rowlandson: His Drawings and Water-Colours (1923), analyzes Rowlandson's skill as a draughtsman. Bernard Falk's Thomas Rowlandson: His Life and Art, the first well-documented biography of Rowlandson, remains the only full-length work on Rowlandson's life. Robert Wark, who is the premiere modern scholar of Rowlandson's work, has written extensive critiques of his style, particularly noting how Rowlandson creates comedy. John Hayes provides very useful account of Rowlandson's life and the development of his art in Rowlandson: Watercolours and Drawings; and although he prefaces his essay by saying it includes little original research, it is a very concise compilation of facts and observations about Rowlandson and his work from various sources.

⁸ Christopher Flint gives an interesting overview of portraiture in the eighteenth century and assesses the comment Goldsmith was making on it by including this episode in the novel. Wolf declares Rowlandson's "Family Picture" "the best of the entire series" (107) and interprets the illustration as Rowlandson's "withering satire on the 'heroic' art of some of his famous contemporaries" (109).

⁹ Wolf notes the gentle comedy thrown over this illustration by Rowlandson: "Something in Olivia's gesture as she sings, with her hand feelingly on her hearth [sic], and the quizzical expression of the dog, gives a touch of genuine humour to the plate, and saves it from a too pastoral, patriotic atmosphere" (114).

¹⁰ In addition to the subsidiary incident, Rowlandson's style works to keep his scenes light in tone rather than foreboding. Applicable here are Robert Wark's comments regarding Rowlandson's comic droll The Registry Office, a "highly important component in Rowlandson's comic art is the pen and watercolor medium itself. The cursive, elegant pen work and the charming pastel colors do as much as anything else to dispel any sinister atmosphere" (10). Rowlandson's pen work does the same for "The Squire's Intrusion" and his other illustrations for the novel, working with the subsidiary incident and other elements to achieve a comic

atmosphere. Stothard's style achieves the opposite effect. Stothard relies on a stark contrast of light and dark in his designs, the figures of women usually being rendered in white to draw attention to them as the emotional cues in the pictures. The drama of the light and dark designs underscore the emotional seriousness of the moments depicted.

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