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"NOT A SINGLE SYLLOGISM FROM BEGINNING TO END": ON FRAGMENTARINESS AND THE CRITIQUE OF THE NOVEL IN HENRY MACKENZIE'S *THE MAN OF FEELING**

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ABSTRACT. ***"Not a Single Syllogism from Beginning to End": On Fragmentariness and the Critique of the Novel in Henry Mackenzie's* The Man of Feeling.** Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) is known to be particularly striking for its high level of formal and narrative fragmentariness. Formlessness and fragmentariness have long been discussed as key features of the early British novel (see Hunter 1990; see Starr 1998) and are often understood as defining features of mid and late eighteenth-century sentimental novels, which foreground their own materiality (see Wetmore 2013). Indeed, the unfeeling curate-logician who hands the manuscript over to the editor famously opines that its author cannot be found "in one strain for two chapters together" and that the text does not contain "a single syllogism from beginning to end" (Mackenzie 2001, 4). In this article, I explore the highly eclectic and fragmentary generic make-up of *The Man of Feeling* (cf. Benedict 2016) in order to flesh out the specific critique that the text mounts against the emerging genre of the novel and the poetics of moral sentimentalism. Mackenzie does, in fact, disparage the new genre in his essays for *The Mirror* and *The Lounger* and never claims to be writing a novel – whether in his correspondence or in the narrative introduction to *The Man of Feeling* – but rather a "medley" of sorts. By providing a more nuanced account of Mackenzie's critique that remains sensitive to its inherent tensions, I want to shed light on the manner in which the

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text's fragmentariness stages the unreliability of Harley's perpetually-frustrated acts of sympathy and benevolence, which function as counterexamples to a proposed "art of thinking" (Mackenzie 2001, 32). If properly understood and practiced, such an art would allow a coherent grasp of human nature and potentially provide a suitable moral-affective remedy for the ills of modern commercial society (cf. Harkin 2005c) that Harley witnesses and describes along his journey.

Keywords: *fragmentariness, moral sentimentalism, logic, self-knowledge, art of thinking.*

REZUMAT. ***"Nici urmă de silogism de la început până la sfârşit". Despre fragmentaritate şi critica romanului în „The Man of Feeling" de Henry Mackenzie*****.** Cartea „The Man of Feeling" scrisă de Henry Mackenzie în 1771 este bine cunoscută pentru cât de fragmentară este atât la nivel formal, cât şi narativ. Fragmentaritatea şi lipsa generală de unitate a textului sunt considerate de foarte mult timp trăsături cheie ale romanului britanic timpuriu (vezi Hunter 1990; vezi Starr 1998), dar şi ale romanelor sentimentale de la mijlocul şi finele secolului al XVIII-lea, care se definesc în primul rând prin accentul pus pe propria lor materialitate (vezi Wetmore 2013). De pildă, parohul impasibil şi pasionat de logică care îi înmânează editorului manuscrisul comentează faptul că autorul acestuia nu poate urmări "un singur fir logic mai mult de două capitole la rând" şi nu poate găsi "nici urmă de silogism de la început până la sfârşit" (Mackenzie 2001, 4; traducerea mea). Ceea ce îmi propun în acest articol este să investighez alcătuirea generică deosebit de eclectică şi fragmentară a romanului „The Man of Feeling" (cf. Benedict 2016) cu scopul de a decela critica pe care Mackenzie o aduce romanului ca gen literar nou, dar şi, în sens mai larg, poeticii care sprijină adesea sentimentalismul moral. Într-adevăr, Mackenzie critică noua specie literară în eseurile sale din *The Mirror* şi *The Lounger* şi nu susţine nicăieri că ar scrie un roman, nici în corespondenţa sa, nici în introducerea narativă cu care porneşte „The Man of Feeling". În schimb, acesta îşi descrie opera prin termenul de „amestec" (traducerea mea). Cu ajutorul unei perspective mai nuanţate asupra criticii lui Mackenzie, prin care îmi propun să iau în calcul tensiunile sale inerente, vreau să scot în evidenţă modul în care aspectul fragmentar al textului susţine şi amplifică inconsecvenţa actelor de caritate ale lui Harley, care merg împotriva unei vrednice „arte de a gândi" (Mackenzie 2001, 32; traducerea mea). Cu condiţia să fie corect înţeleasă şi practicată, această artă ar putea permite o înţelegere adecvată a naturii umane şi ar putea oferi un remediu afectiv şi moral potrivit pentru lipsurile unei societăţi moderne comerciale (cf. Harkin 2005c), precum cea la care Harley este martor pe parcursul călătoriei sale.

Cuvinte cheie: *fragmentaritate, sentimentalismul moral, logică, cunoaşterea de sine, arta de a gândi.*

Introduction

In the exchange between the fictional editor of the found manuscript that Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) pretends to be based on and the rather unfeeling curate in whose possession it had been left, the latter explains that what he is about to give away to the former "is no more a history than it is a sermon" (Mackenzie 2001, 4). He then goes on to describe the exact circumstances in which the manuscript was discovered and relates his own frustration with the text's illegibility and general lack of coherence, at which the soon-to-be editor exclaims that he "should be glad to see this medley" (Mackenzie 2001, 4), embodying rather than making explicit an entirely different – if not downright contrary – readerly attitude (cf. Lilley 2007, 656; cf. Csengei 2008, 955-6). In any case, the curate's attempt at classifying the manuscript in generic terms as well as the editor's brief remark are both repeated with small but significant differences in the correspondence that Mackenzie kept with his cousin, Elisabeth Rose of Kilravock, as he was writing what we now commonly take to be a paradigmatic British sentimental novel of the late eighteenth century. Indeed, Stephen Ahern has referred to it as "the ur-text of the later stages of the sentimental fashion in British fiction" (2007, 120). In his 8 July 1769 letter, Mackenzie qualifies the entire text as "a very odd Medley" (Harkin 2005a, 161), while in 31 July 1769 he writes that it "might as well be called a Sermon as a History" (Harkin 2005a 162). These observations, whether made by the fictional curate, the alleged editor, or the actual author, all point towards the text's underlying generic hybridity or, perhaps, instability (cf. Harkin 1994, 333). Remarking on this sense of indeterminacy, April London writes that

> [t]he effect at present of withholding information is to dramatize the uncertainties of the reader's relation to the text. In denying us the regulatory conditions of genre or literary reputation – this is not a history, a sermon, or a novel whose famous authorship underwrites our attention – the editor enforces an awareness of the contingencies of reading when the conventional directive signposts are withheld" (1997, 51-2).

The found manuscript cannot be described as either a private history detailing with great precision all the trivial – and perhaps even indecent – aspects of the protagonist's life, nor as a grave sermon giving out moral precepts and exhortations in a manner that exceedingly observes the principle of *docere* at the expense of *delectare* (cf. Barton 2020, 138). Yet Mackenzie's observations also tell us that the text may be described as *both* a private history and a sermon at the very same time. In addition to this, the manuscript's indeterminacy also

lies in its unprecedented degree of fragmentariness[2] that has been subject to much debate. It may very well be described as a strange and curious "medley" not only because it emerges, first and foremost, as an assortment of ill-connected sentimental encounters of various kinds, bringing together very different social classes and typologies, but also because it puts together a constantly shifting portrait of its protagonist, Harley – one that lacks any kind of moral-psychological progression (cf. Starr 1998, 29-30, 44) and is often complicated and contradictory.[3]

This paper explores the fragmentariness of *The Man of Feeling* one step further by connecting its formal and narrative features more comprehensively with the observations that Mackenzie himself makes on novels and novel-reading – whether of the sentimental kind or otherwise – in his correspondence and journalism. I want to suggest that it is precisely on account of its formlessness that the text emerges as both a conventional novel of sentiment steeped in the culture of sensibility *and* a critique of this specific genre with its corresponding writing and reading practices. Building on John Mullan's work, Maureen Harkin has argued that *The Man of Feeling* caters to readers who are "free of prejudices against novels as inferior to history, sermons or logic" (Harkin 1994, 333). And yet, perhaps it is more accurate to say that it also caters to readers who are free of prejudices against writings commonly deemed inferior to novels themselves. In any case, the boundaries between the text's simultaneous avowal and disparagement of novelistic sentimentalism are never easy to make out and it often appears that the two serve to mutually reinforce one another. While this reading is consistent with many scholarly discussions on the ambivalence towards sympathy and sentimentalism that most novels of sensibility and moral philosophical debates on these matters reveal, [4] I want to unpack Mackenzie's novelistic poetics more clearly in order to understand at what point the didacticism of novels stops and their dangers begin in his view.

By focusing on the intrinsic incongruities that shape Harley's character, which may be alternatively accounted for in terms of excessive sensitivity or sentimental hypocrisy,[5] I want to argue that his failure to fully embody the good-

[2] For the purposes of this paper, I will use the terms "fragmentariness" and "formlessness" interchangeably throughout.

[3] On the generic hybridity of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, as well as the way in which this correlates with a deeply ambiguous sentimental hero, see London (1997) and Benedict (2016).

[4] See, for instance, Benedict (1994, 118-9), Keymer (2005, 598-9), or Ahern (2007, 120-21). A common and convincing way of approaching this ambivalence is by looking at the continuities between Augustan satire, with its penchant for irony, equivocation, and skepticism, and later eighteenth-century sentimentalism. On this question, see, for instance, Benedict (1995), Starr (1998), and Wetmore (2013).

[5] On the satirical conflation of sentimental naivety with vanity or hypocrisy, see Benedict (1994, 128-29) and Benedict (1995, 324-27). For an analysis of sentimental hypocrisy in *The Man of Feeling* and its connections to theatricality or performativity, see also Uściński (2019).

natured man demonstrating all the public virtues of benevolence ultimately rests on his inability to coherently and consistently gain knowledge of human nature, whether instantiated in himself or others. This may be understood as a logical failure in the context of the discipline's redefinition during the Enlightenment as a practical art of thinking that crucially informs moral conduct. The hint is provided by the curate himself – described as a "strenuous logician" – who gives the found manuscript to the much more sentimental editor and, in return, receives from the latter what is most likely a logical treatise written by "one of the German Illustrissimi" (Mackenzie 2001, 4). In the context of his particular propensities, the curate famously complains that he "could never find the author in one strain for two chapters together," nor was he able to encounter "a single syllogism from beginning to end" (Mackenzie 2001, 4). The same suggestion is echoed much later by the misanthropist that Harley is introduced to, who bemoans the larger cultural and political failure of "that art which is necessary for every business, the art of thinking […]" (Mackenzie 2001, 32). What does this tell us about the nature of Harley's frailty? And how may the well-known tensions and ambiguities that shape the novel's treatment of refined sensibility and moral sentimentalism be further understood in light of this kind of logical error?

Novelistic Fragmentariness and the Double Celebration and Critique of Refined Sensibility

To return to the aforementioned correspondence, it is worth pointing out from the very beginning that, when discussing his composition of *The Man of Feeling*, Mackenzie relies substantially on the language of sentiment and sensibility, despite the fact that he never openly says that he is writing a novel. On the contrary, he frequently claims that he has departed significantly from the genre. Even so, he tells his cousin in the same letter of July 1769 that his narrative foregrounds "a Man of Sensibility" who is placed "into different Scenes where his Feelings might be seen in their Effects, & his Sentiments occasionally delivered" (Harkin 2005a, 161). He makes a similar observation in his 1770-71 correspondence with James Elphinston, the prominent Scottish educator, whom he tells that his narrative "consists of some episodical adventures of a Man of Feeling; where his sentiments are occasionally expressed and the features of his mind developed, as the incidents draw them forth" (Harkin 2005a, 166). This is simply to say that the literary piece he is writing features the chief human and social type commonly found in sentimental fiction with a view to gaining insight into his interiority as it develops after each episodic encounter

and impacts the world around him. An element of epistemic-moral progression together with an implicit didactic impulse[6] are suggested here, to which I would like to return later on.

Mackenzie's letters also demonstrate the kind of clear-cut dichotomous thinking that is typical of sentimental literature and the modes of writing and reading that it tends to encourage. This type of discourse often frames sentimentalism as the type of sensibility reserved for the exquisitely refined few (cf. Harkin 1994, 333; cf. Csengei 2008, 955) who emerge as sentimental heroes or heroines that are incongruous with the vulgar and their pursuits and often remain marginalised in the corrupt commercial societies rigidly built around them.[7] A glimpse of this kind of clash may, for instance, be discerned in Mackenzie's June 1771 letter to the same Elphinston. Here, the former sets his legal career, with the dry and tedious style of writing that he is forced to practice in the context of his profession, against the delicacy of feeling that he may only indulge in small increments while penning *The Man of Feeling*: "The self-same pen, which is now giving language to sentiment, has been just turned from drawing an *Information*, or completing a *Record*; and the same head, which is now occupied in tracing the movements of the heart, and unwinding the delicate thread of susceptibility and feeling, has but a moment before laboured, in settling the place of a *Whereas* or an *Aforesaid*" (Harkin 2005a, 168). Apart from the intensity of the language of refined sensibility that is evident in these lines, what is crucial is that the invoked contrast between the sentimental and the vulgar is meant as an apology for the strangeness and fragmentariness of the text since, as Mackenzie explains, this is the only kind of literary writing that his occupation allows. In other words, the pervasive vocabulary and discourse of sentimentalism is used here to frame the fragmentariness of *The Man of Feeling*, according to Mackenzie's own words: "Let it be considered, to what use the bulk of my time is appropriated; amidst what sort of employment, I allowed myself the avocation of writing these fragments […]" (Harkin 2005a, 168). Finally, in a September 1769 letter to his cousin, Mackenzie also briefly demonstrates his own engagement in typically sentimental reading practices: "Lady Julia Mandeville I have wept over formerly […]" (Harkin 2005a, 163).

The notion that formlessness and fragmentariness are typical features of eighteenth-century British novels, especially those of the sentimental variety, is

[6] Regarding Mackenzie's description of his own authorial intent and its generic implications, April London has gestured at the ways in which *The Man of Feeling* engages with traditional history, rewriting it as "interiorized and affective history" (1997, 62) via – among other things – the fragmentariness of his own work.

[7] For the clash between sentimental heroes and commercial society, see McDaniel (2004) and Harkin (2005c). See also Ahern (2007, 122).

in no way new. Most notably, Paul Hunter has opened a still ongoing conversation about this dimension of early novels when compiling his comprehensive list of features that define the genre. He chiefly associates this trait with the "parenthetical tendency" or digressive structure of novels and exemplifies them in Henry Fielding's specific approach to the new genre (Hunter 1990, 24). Building on G. A. Starr's insights, Harkin discusses more broadly the main features of sentimental novels in her Introduction to the Broadview edition of *The Man of Feeling*. Here, she explains that, while fragmentariness does not define the formal features of sentimental writings alone, it is definitely intensified in novels of sensibility and serves to reinforce the claim to authenticity that all early novels struggle to make:

> Linked to this bodily or visual sign as guarantee of authenticity is the resort to a number of formal means, not exclusive to the sentimental novel but characteristic of it, used to assert the truthfulness and artfulness of these texts. Hence the numerous found manuscripts, interruptions to the story, and interpolated fragments which imply the work's status as direct transcripts of the feeling heart. (Harkin 2005c, 11-2)

In her synthesis, Harkin thus lights upon the consensus formed around the fragmentariness of sentimental fiction, according to which it may be explained not only by means of this kind of authenticating impulse, but also by what she calls a "mistrust of language" (Harkin 2005c, 11) and a heightened interest in the bodily dimension of feeling.[8]

This consensus has been expanded upon in recent contributions by Stephen Ahern and Alex Wetmore, who have principally and respectively tackled the last two elements,[9] fleshing them out even further. Ahern sets out to explore the moments of theatricality or performativity that are laced throughout *The Man of Feeling* in order to investigate the ambivalence that, he argues, is implicit in the novel's "mode of rhetorical and emotional excess" and the "aesthetic of ineffability" (Ahern 2007, 121) that constitutes one of its most crucial ingredients. In other words, Ahern suggests that the fragmentariness of Mackenzie's text

[8] For further discussions of fragmentariness in *The Man of Feeling* or other eighteenth-century sentimental novels, see Benedict (1994), Harkin (1994), Benedict (1995), Mullan (1996), Starr (1998), Eker (2014).

[9] David Fairer has also offered an analysis that bridges these two dimensions of sentimental fiction by focusing on the question of "sentimental translation," which makes possible the encounter between matter and mind (1999, 161-6). Thus, in contrast to Ahern and others, Fairer's analysis highlights the translatability (and transferability) of somatic sentimental expression and meaning.

rests on the assumed incommensurability of intense affectivity and mutual sympathy, especially that which is seen in moments of transcendent communion between self, other, and the world, explaining the breaks, silences, and other abrupt interruptions that sentimental novels like Mackenzie's abound in (121-4). Indeed, Ahern explains how the sense of ineffability or incommensurability that defines affective excess involves "a point of intensity beyond which words fail" (122), as well as the manner in which Mackenzie's text "emphasizes scenes of emotional excess, scenes that seem pieced together rather haphazardly in a meandering narrative structure" (123). On the basis of such insights, fragmentariness emerges as the formal expression of sentimentalism – silences and tears produce gaps in the text, while affective intensity or enthusiastic sublimity produce convoluted narrative structures in more general terms. What is also significant here is Ahern's insight that this mode of excess disturbs rational or logical structures and frustrates understanding – it "generates a surplus of meaning, an incomprehensibility that stupefies yet somehow bypasses the circuitry of the rational conscious mind" (122). On the other hand, Wetmore has inquired into the many techniques that produce self-reflexivity in eighteenth-century sentimental works featuring various instantiations of the figure of the man of feeling – techniques that include "typographical play, textual fragmentation, anti-linear narrative structures, visual puns, manipulations of digression and intertextuality, and self-conscious intrusions by narrators, authors, readers and editors" (Wetmore 2013, 1). His proposal is that all these textual strategies serve the broader purpose of what he terms "corporeal defamiliarization" (2) by means of which sentimental novels emphasize their own materiality in a manner that parallels the overwhelming interest in embodied feeling and somatic expression that defines the culture of sensibility as a whole (1-4). In this culture, books emerge as "intimate things to be felt, whose literary value should be approached along physiological lines" (Wetmore 2013, 2). Hence, according to Ahern and Wetmore, the self-conscious fragmentariness of sentimental literature may be explained, first and foremost, by the incommensurability of emotional excess and by the enhanced materiality, if not corporeality, of such texts, respectively.

Yet, if we take into account other observations that Mackenzie makes in his correspondence together with some of the intrusive comments inserted by *The Man of Feeling*'s fictional editor, the fragmentariness of this particular manuscript also explains why this is not in fact a novel but a departure from the genre and its deeply sentimental values, if not a rather straightforward critique or more oblique satire directed at these. To go back to the July 1769 letter mentioned earlier, after explaining that his piece may be read as either a sermon

or a history,[10] Mackenzie also describes it as "simple to Excess; for I would have it as different from the Entanglement of a Novel as can be" (Harkin 2005a, 162). Apart from the equivocation captured in this quasi-oxymoronic statement, which is worth pointing out, Mackenzie seems to suggest that what he is writing is not a novel primarily due to the scarcity of its characters and incidents – a form of simplicity that may also be connected to its concise and episodic structure. Interestingly enough, Mackenzie soon clarifies that this remark is not meant as a disparagement of the genre (cf. London 1997, 61), but also uses this opportunity to comment on the small number of well-written novels at the time, particularly in Scotland (Harkin 2005a, 162). This is because the novel stands as a particularly complex species of writing, a fact that is lost on vulgar writers and readers, who are merely content with "a proper Jumble of Incidents" (Harkin 2005a, 162). In his July 1770 letter to Elphinston, he repeats the same description of his work, simply saying that "it is perfectly different from that species of composition" (Harkin 2005a, 166). But, most importantly, in his already-mentioned May 1771 letter to the same Elphinston, Mackenzie also apologizes for the perplexing nature of his text not only by admitting that this is what his profession has allowed him to produce, but that he "was led into it, partly by accident, partly from wanting to shun the common road of novels […]" (Harkin 2005a, 168).

Very similar observations are made in *The Man of Feeling*. Shortly after the intrusive fragment titled "The Pupil" – another example of fragmentariness – an extensive comment belonging to the fictional editor is inserted in the text (Mackenzie 2001, 93-4). Here, the editor bemoans the damaged condition of the manuscript, which has reached its peak at that exact point, making the text utterly unreadable: "There were so very few connected passages of the subsequent chapters remaining, that even the partiality of an editor could not offer them to the public" (Mackenzie 2001, 93). Thus, he suggests a distinction between sentimental readers like himself who are partial to the manuscript as it presents itself, undeterred by the fractured nature of Harley's narrative, and novel readers who are most likely to come across the text by accident and find little pleasure in its simplicity and strangeness. The latter kind of readers will be disappointed by having "expected the intricacies of a novel" and cannot possibly

[10] London has argued that Mackenzie's reliance on historical and pastoral modes within the larger dialogic generic structure of *The Man of Feeling* is designed, in part, to elevate it from its otherwise low and effeminate novelistic mode and endow it with a more convincing didactic element, while also distancing the text in significant ways from these traditional forms (1997, 44-51). To this, I would like to add that the manuscript's comparison with (and simultaneous separation from) history and sermon also stands as a means of asserting its generic humility in relation to the novel.

be entertained by a story that is, once again, "simple to excess" and only sketches "a few incidents in a life undistinguished, except by some features of the heart" (Mackenzie 2001, 93). As I explore elsewhere, this emerges as a performance of authentic and exquisite sensibility on the part of the editor by means of which he aligns himself with the values embodied by Harley and enhances the manuscript's status as a marginalized relic that only a small sentimental elite can truly enjoy (Bacalu 2022, 355-56). The editor's own noticeable discomfort with a manuscript that is difficult to salvage does make some room for critical distance, but his mournful tone and the fact that his own metatextual interventions inevitably cause the text's further erosion highlight the implacable fate of simple yet genuine feeling in a corrupt commercial world. The editor is reluctantly required to adjust or censure the text to the extent that he provides his own narrative summary of the events taking place in the parts he withholds from the public (Mackenzie 2001, 93-4) so as to make it at least somewhat palatable to the more common sort of reader. In any case, the manuscript's repetitiveness, the incoherence of its disjoined chapters, and the banality of the events recounted are pitted against the greater complexity and cohesion that defines novels. Yet, unable to convincingly advocate for its intrinsic worth, we can ironically make out the editor's ambivalence towards the text despite his marked sentimentality: "Some instruction, and some example, I make no doubt they contained" (Mackenzie 2001, 93).

Considering all this, what I would like to propose is a more refined treatment of self-reflexivity in eighteenth-century sentimental novels, which can foster a fuller understanding of specific forms of fragmentariness and distinguish more clearly between those that work in such a way as to support excessive sensibility and those that seek to subvert its values. This is not to say that some of these formal techniques and narrative strategies are not inherently ambivalent, as Ahern rightfully remarks with respect to the aesthetics of excess and ineffability (Ahern 2007, 120), but it is worth examining with a more discriminating eye what separates all the various elements of self-reflexivity and fragmentariness, as well as how they interact and mutually inform one another.[11] Significantly, Wetmore explains that the tendency of sentimental fiction towards "corporeal defamiliarization" has been enabled by two significant intellectual-cultural shifts in the eighteenth century: the reframing of the body as a site of virtue rather than vice and the reworking of the satirical tools

[11] An example of an account of fragmentariness in *The Man of Feeling* that dedicates attention to various interactions among its constitutive elements may be found in Starr's discussion of how "Mackenzie seeks to present himself as a genuine man of feeling but also as something of a man of the world: framing devices permit him this necessary combination of oneness with the hero and distance from him" (Starr 1998, 39).

developed by Augustan writers in such a way that they are made to serve the same conflation between heightened corporeal sensibility and proper moral conduct (Wetmore 2013, 2-3). Wetmore's claim is that such literary techniques are not, however, built on the naïve assumption of the corresponding transparency of texts and bodies. In fact, he argues that they foreground the opacity of both, revealing "an underlying strain of *somatic scepticism*" (Wetmore 2013, 3; original emphasis). His point is reminiscent of Jon Mee's similar account of the rehabilitation of enthusiasm throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, according to which the Romantic elevation of this equally religious-medical and social-political passion never sheds accompanying anxieties of its potential for mental distemper and civil unrest (Mee 2003, 3-5), thus inviting a more lucid understanding of the twists and turns suffered by such persistent unease throughout its history. In any case, Wetmore's remarks take us – at least partly – back to the longstanding consensus built around the intrinsic ambiguity of most, if not all sentimental writing, with the qualification that his careful approach to the question recognizes more clearly the distinction between fragmentariness as distance and fragmentariness as corporeality, as well as the tension between transparency and opacity that emerges from the latter.

Quite recently, Bahadir Eker has made the very powerful point that *The Man of Feeling* may be easily read as an undisguised parody of sentimental novels and, thus, a harsh critique of their underlying ideology. He explores the "ironic distance" that is created in the text with the help of its highly fragmentary and convoluted narrative structure, operating on several levels and centering around an intrusive and sardonic narrator (Eker 2014, 100-11; cf. Starr 1998, 39-40). While I agree with Eker's analysis, which does not shy away from directly addressing the text's unmistakable irony, I believe that there is need for a more detailed discussion of the manner in which such elements of ironic fragmentariness converse with those forms of fragmentariness that are meant to enhance empathy and physicality in specific texts, which would allow us to disentangle with greater dexterity the particulars of the points that they make about the vagaries of moral sentimentalism. As I suggest elsewhere (Bacalu 2022, 354-57), Eker's exploration of the ghostly narrator's criticism of Harley, which we must not forget is suspended at times, must be counterbalanced with an account of the editor's own presence in the text, who often performs sensibility and marginality alongside the protagonist. In this regard, I would like to build on Wetmore's simultaneous recognition of and departure from Barbara Benedict's conception of sentimental literature (see Benedict 1994, 121-26) as constantly providing a "check valve on sensibility" (Wetmore 2013, 10) by setting up a dialectical relationship between emotional excess and various distancing and controlling devices (Wetmore 2013, 10-11). As it appears, Wetmore admits this

account all while tipping the scales in favour of a greater emphasis on corporeality and proximity. This could be a starting point for a keener understanding of how *The Man of Feeling*'s anti-novelistic formlessness actually works.

Logical Fracture and Human Nature

Given that *The Man of Feeling* is never really dubbed a fully-fledged novel in either Mackenzie's correspondence or in the text itself, the former's criticism of sentimental novels in *The Lounger* no. 20 of 18 June 1785 should not be understood as a radical departure from a genre of writing that he originally celebrated without any reservations, as other scholars have suggested (cf. Harkin 1994, 336-37; see Spencer 1967). Rather, there is little reason to believe that the exact same suspicions that Mackenzie expresses towards novel-writing in his journalism are not also captured – at least to some extent – in his literary works. This means that the comments on novels made in his essays may be scoured even further for keys to understanding *The Man of Feeling*, especially in terms of its generic complexity and instability. Indeed, it is becoming rather clear that this piece of writing does not fall easily into the category of "novels" for a number of reasons, thus articulating Mackenzie's own critique of the genre all while escaping it – even if only partly. This seems to be the case even considering the fact that sentimental novels are traditionally said to resist early novels written in the realist tradition.[12] Thus, in line with Benedict's and Eker's analyses (see Benedict 1994; see Eker 2014), the text's overwhelming formal and narrative fragmentariness – which we know Mackenzie invokes in his correspondence as a key sign that he is not actually writing a novel – produces concentric layers of distance between the protagonist and the reader and introduces a system of checks and balances on the exaggerated emotionality on display. Once again, this makes room for satire and ridicule, as Mackenzie himself explicitly admits at times, such as with respect to the famous episode in which Harley dabbles in physiognomy (see Harkin 2005a, 164). Hence, although we are dealing with a literary work that is steeped in the sentimental tradition and emerges from the ongoing culture of sensibility, its fragmentariness is designed to invite thorough critical reflection on some of their more problematic assumptions.

[12] On the points of divergence between the realist and sentimental traditions (as well as their shared ground), see Starr (1998). For a similar and highly insightful analysis of the way in which the sentimental trope of physiognomy both derives and departs from the bourgeois ethos of early realist novels, while returning to approaches seen in romance and satire, see Benedict (1995, 311-14, 320).

At the same time, we have also seen that Mackenzie understands his rejection of the novel in terms of a specific strand of fragmentariness that is instantiated in the simplicity and banality of *The Man of Feeling*. We recall that the manuscript is presented as a piece of writing that does away with the overwrought complexities of the fashionable sentimental novels of its own time, which mainly appealed to the vulgar. I want to propose that this is because novelistic complexity emerges in Mackenzie's journalism as the corollary of excessively and ridiculously refined feeling that succumbs to vice by staging what Mackenzie calls a "rivalship of virtues and of duties" (Harkin 2005b, 197), which can only lead to the dangerous "separation of conscience from feeling" (198). As Mackenzie explains in his famous *Lounger* essay, novels are not intrinsically depraved, but the nature of this species of writing is such that hack writers may produce successful works just by being endowed with "a heated imagination, or an excursive fancy" (Harkin 2005b, 196). This kind of imaginative and emotional excess produces an absurd yet irresistibly seductive refinement and intensity of feeling that misapplies virtue and overbalances not just logic and rationality but, most importantly, what Mackenzie refers to as practical duty (Harkin 2005b, 197-98). Otherwise put, Mackenzie appears to advocate for none other than moderation and prudence. In his view, the problem with novels, especially of the sentimental kind, is that they heighten and overcomplicate the conflicts around virtuous feeling to the extent that the pursuit of proper moral conduct and good works in the public sphere is irremediably frustrated. It follows that a well-written novel that can offer proper moral guidance and example is one that succeeds in harmoniously coupling fine feeling with practical duty (cf. Benedict 1994, 130-32 and Barton 2020, 140-46). Indeed, Roman Alexander Barton has also remarked that "the true dialectic relation in Mackenzie's novel is that between the *man of feeling* and the *man of philosophy*. […] Only together, Mackenzie seems to suggest with Shaftesbury, natural affection and reasoning bring about virtuous character, i.e. moral sensibility, the expression of which is the practice of friendship" (Barton 2020, 144). This also calls to mind Burling's similar suggestion that there is a need to distinguish between "the usable, important elements of sentimentalism, as well as the display of excessive affectations" (Burling 1988, 141). I agree with these readings, all while emphasizing the fact that usable sentimentalism is, in Mackenzie's view, prudent and self-reflexive. In the text, Harley is indeed guilty of this kind of mismatch between feeling and virtue, but the complicated structures of ironic fragmentariness keep his behaviour under constant scrutiny and control and his conduct is never fully vicious – perhaps misguided and impotent, at most. Such fragmentariness goes hand in hand with the constant sense of frustration, failing, and ruin that governs Harley's actions and almost all of the sympathetic encounters that take

place, which Harkin in particular has pointed out (see Harkin 1994; see Harkin 2019). This also contributes to the distancing or displacing effect that various mechanisms of ironic fragmentariness produce.

Indeed, the need for this specific type of balance might be allegorized in the sentimental editor's encounter with the logical curate and captured in the manuscript's oscillation from sermon to history and from neither to both. Neither the curate nor the editor embodies the right attitude to pitiful individuals or forgotten manuscripts. The insurmountable distance between the two and the significant difference in the ways in which they care for the found manuscript seems to suggest that their inability to reach any kind of middle ground is exactly where the problem lies. In many ways, Mackenzie's critique of novelistic sentimentalism may simply be summed up in the injunction not to fall into either the extreme of cold rationality or that of overly heated passion. In any case, Mackenzie describes the counterpart of ridiculously refined feeling by appealing to a vocabulary of plainness and ordinariness. For instance, what "refined and subtile feeling" does, according to Mackenzie, is that it "inspires a certain childish pride of our own superior delicacy, and an unfortunate contempt of the plain worth, the ordinary but useful occupations and ideas of those around us" (Harkin 2005b, 198). This is the same vocabulary that both Mackenzie and the fictional editor of *The Man of Feeling* use to apologize for the modest incidents and unremarkable sentiments depicted in the brief and torn manuscript, which is exactly what makes it unpalatable to the common consumer of novels – a detail that now becomes all the more significant. This means that Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* emerges as both a satirical treatment against novels of sensibility and a recipe for containing sentimental excess, the recognition of which rests on distinguishing between different kinds of fragmentariness that either complicate or simplify the text.

But there are further forms of fragmentariness that shape *The Man of Feeling*, the examination of which can help us flesh out its main argument with even greater precision. In his article, Eker (2014, 100) differentiates between the diegetic, metadiegetic, and meta-metadiegetic levels that organize the text's narrative structure, arguing that the first corresponds to the editor's comments on the found manuscript, the second to Charles' narration, and the third with the events themselves and the stories recounted by the many unfortunate men and women that Harley encounters throughout. Building on this three-fold distinction, I want to distinguish more broadly between the inner psychological fractures that define Harley's affective responses and benevolent actions, as narrated by Charles or the Ghost, and the metatextual or paratextual elements of fragmentariness that we know have occurred after the manuscript was found, misused by the curate, and then published by the editor. For the sake of

concision, we may simply refer to the two types as narrative and textual fragmentariness, respectively. It is also worth noting that the latter helps constitute the found manuscript primarily in its capacity as an object. At the level of the first, Harley is seen jumping from one sentimental *tableau* to another and then another, with little connection between all the various encounters. This kind of episodic structure does not only go against the typical structure of a *Bildungsroman* (see Starr 1998, 29-30), but also underlines how little progress Harley makes in between encounters in terms of his ability to read character (cf. Benedict 1995) and produce real effects in the world around him (cf. Starr 1998, 44; cf. Harkin 1994, 319). Indeed, such formal and narrative fragmentation goes hand in hand with the more important and often striking differences seen in the protagonist's subjectivity and moral character throughout, according to which Harley sometimes embodies the voice of common sense and reasonable sensibility and other times behaves like a ridiculously naïve fool who gets duped by virtually all those around him (cf. Bacalu 2022, 355).

A very good example of the array of logical fractures that Harley demonstrates is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the famous Bedlam episode. As we know, the protagonist and a group of friends are invited by an acquaintance to visit the asylum among "several other shows" (Mackenzie 2001, 23). Harley is eventually persuaded to join the curious party of friends, although he initially protests in a clear anti-sentimentalist indictment against this kind of entertainment:

> I think it an inhuman practice to expose the greatest misery with which our nature is afflicted, to every idle visitant who can afford a trifling perquisite to the keeper; especially as it is a distress which the humane must see with the painful reflection, that it is not in their power to alleviate it. (Mackenzie 2001, 23)

Harley firmly positions himself against the transformation of human suffering into both spectacle and commodity, while also deploring the absurdity of allowing oneself to witness pain that one is profoundly unable to relieve. In a nutshell, his rebuke contains some of the most typical charges against excessive sensibility: that it amounts to cheap sensationalism, egotistic interest, and irredeemable impotence.[13] However, Harley quickly exemplifies the exact type of conduct that he berates. With great susceptibility to spectacle, he is immediately taken with the most striking of the female inmates who possesses the most tragic and lachrymose story of personal misfortune and is watched closely by

[13] These points of criticism are also partly captured in the misanthropist's harangue against fellow feeling, whom Harley and his acquaintance meet in Chapter XXI (Mackenzie 2001, 32-33).

all of the other visitors (Mackenzie 2001, 25-26). Enthralled but incapable of offering genuine help, he listens to the woman's history while shedding increasing amounts of tears before placing a few coins in the keeper's hands and leaving: " 'Be kind to that unfortunate' – He burst into tears, and left them" (Mackenzie 2001, 27). He also flees, however politely, from the delusional but disinterested guide while rewarding the hardened and exploitative keeper whom the inmates dislike, despite the fact that his initial criticism is also directed at the latter social type.

What is more, Harley also participates in the woman's display of intense distress by playing the part of her deceased lover in the larger "performance." They stare at each other fixedly, hold hands, and the distraught woman likens Harley to her long lost lover: "I love you for resembling my Billy; but I shall never love any man like him" (Mackenzie 2001, 27). As such, apart from revealing the exact same faults that he criticizes, whether on account of hypocrisy, naivety, or a mixture of both, Harley also demonstrates lack of rational self-reflexivity by confounding spectator and spectacle (cf. Benedict 1994, 122-24, cf. Bacalu 2022, 357). Throughout the book, Harley listens to the tragic tales of the unfortunate without ever assuming a suitably safe distance, often placing himself on the same footing with them or becoming a chief actor in the spectacles that they create until he himself becomes the ultimate object of pity by dying from unfulfilled love (Mackenzie 2001, 96-8). This problem of the self-involved protagonist and/or narrator who fails to act consistently as the text's moral centre is one of the main charges that anti-modern authors like Pope, Swift, or Fielding,[14] who align themselves with the Augustan satirical tradition, mount against the new genre of the novel. This piece of criticism may be found as early as the 1710s in Lord Shaftesbury's *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*.[15] In the version of the essay included in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), Shaftesbury writes that "unless the party has been used to play the critic thoroughly upon himself, he will hardly be found proof against the criticisms of others. His thoughts can never appear very correct unless they have been used to sound correction by themselves, and been well formed and disciplined before they are brought into the field" (Shaftesbury 2000, 76). In other words, the subjects of modern fiction, who are often author-characters (Shaftesbury 2000, 75), must split themselves into two selves, the author and the critic, for the sake of self-discipline, as well

[14] Despite being a prolific author of novels, Fielding is well known for the hybridity of his works and his ambivalent engagement with the new genre, which can be explained by his reverence for the classical style, not to mention his alignment with Scriblerian satire. See, for instance, Rawson 2007, 153-72.

[15] On Shaftesbury's significance for moral sentimentalism and novelistic sensibility, see Moore (1916), Tuveson (1953), Greene (1977), Chapin (1983).

as proper moral judgement and conduct. Harley does the reverse, often blurring the boundaries between subjects and objects of sentimental reflection. According to Shaftesbury, this is exactly what impedes moral growth by hindering self-knowledge and a true understanding of human nature: "Wisdom as well as charity may be honestly said 'to begin at home'. There is no way of estimating manners or apprising the different humours, fancies, passions and apprehensions of others without first taking an inventory of the same kind of goods within ourselves and surveying our domestic fund" (Shaftesbury 2000, 85). Finally, the fact that such inner inconsistency on Harley's part occurs in the context of the two harsh condemnations of sentimentalism, voiced not only by Harley but by the misanthropist whom the protagonist meets after visiting Bedlam, is a first sign that we may also read Mackenzie's text as an ironic treatment of the futility of anti-sentimentalist criticism itself.

At the level of the second type of fragmentariness, it is very difficult to ignore the many blanks and gaps found throughout the text, which we know are owing to the curate's negligence, not to mention the editor's many intrusions in the shape of comments and notes on the text that accumulate beyond his introduction. While Eker's analysis successfully reveals the extent to which the narrator's voice satirizes the ideal of the man of feeling, I believe there is more to be said regarding the interaction between this kind of narrative formlessness with the second type of textual fragmentariness, quite apart from the fact that their clash works in such a way as to enhance the text's insurmountable ambivalence (cf. Bacalu 2022, 355-57). If we recognize the fact that the two types of fragmentariness originate from different sources – the first from Harley's own inner lack of coherence and the second from the way in which ordinary men and women respond to this strand of sensibility – we may find that their interaction is key. To return to the editor's most extensive intrusion, he shows that the very reason why he reluctantly chooses to withhold some of the more mutilated passages from a disinterested reading public is because of the curate's own readerly neglect. In other words, the curate's misuse of the manuscript makes the already strange story of Harley completely unreadable (Mackenzie 2001, 93). Thus, at the point where the two forms of fragmentariness conflate, *The Man of Feeling* reveals the fact that, for all of Harley's failings, the common vulgar contempt towards sensibility is what mutilates Harley's character and his journey even further. It is true that the text was already illegible and fractured when it was first handed to the curate, but his own disregard coupled with the editor's constant apologies create further ruptures and inconsistencies. Considering Mackenzie's essayistic observations on novels, this encounter between the two different kinds of fragmentariness shapes *The Man of Feeling* into a critique of *none other* than the dominant critique of sentimentalism.

Neither the curate's criticism, nor the indifference of the editor's imagined reading public do anything to add guidance to misguided benevolence and render it cohesive, whether in moral-psychological, narrative, or textual terms. According to Mackenzie, what is needed is the careful modulation of intense feeling in such a way that it becomes aligned with practical duty and oriented towards good works. Excessive sensibility does indeed frustrate action (Burling 1988, 144), but so does its misguided critique. As other scholars have suggested (see Burling 1988, 143; see Platzner 1976), this would mean that there is no unitary reading of Harley's moral character, but that some of his features are commended while others are censured, or both at the same time.

Conclusion

Offering renewed attention to the striking degree of fragmentariness that shapes Henry Mackenzie's most famous work, *The Man of Feeling*, I have proposed a more nuanced treatment of the different underlying mechanisms behind this formal and narrative feature and the various ways in which they interact. I have insisted that, although fragmentariness is indeed a defining feature of sentimental literature as a whole, Mackenzie's text also reveals elements of formlessness that allow it to depart significantly from the ethos of sentimental novels not just as a means of mounting a critique against these but also by way of proposing a model for containing sentimental excess and giving it an appropriate form. My interest has been in re-reading the critique of novels that Mackenzie articulates in his journalism with the aim of highlighting the generic instability of Mackenzie's text and showing that it cannot, in fact, be easily or fully understood as a novel. In particular, I have emphasized the inner logical fractures that shape Harley's subjectivity and render his values and conduct inconsistent throughout the course of the manuscript. However incoherent Harley's behaviour might be at the level of The Ghost's narrative, the further erosion that the manuscript suffers at the hands of both the curate and the editor emerges as an ironic treatment of the usual criticism and indifference shown towards sentimentalism, which – as Mackenzie seems to suggest – can only be rehabilitated if carefully coupled with self-reflexivity and a true consciousness of duty. As such, Mackenzie's text represents not just a typical instance of sentimental ambivalence but a means of resisting sentimental excess *as well as* its often misguided contemporary critique at the level of both style and formal technique.

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