The Art of the Theorist: Rhetorical Structure in The Man of Feeling

Ralph E. Jenkins
Temple University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol9/iss1/2

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in Scottish Literature by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.
Ralph E. Jenkins

The Art of the Theorist: Rhetorical Structure in The Man of Feeling

After The Vicar of Wakefield, The Man of Feeling is probably the most widely read sentimental novel in English, and its relative popularity poses an interesting critical problem: how to explain the appeal of a book which few readers take seriously as a work of art. Most discussions of Mackenzie deal with his importance in the history of sentiment, and even sympathetic critics have little to say in defense of his artistic abilities. Brian Vickers' intelligent introduction to the 1967 Oxford Press edition, for example, criticizes the "triteness of the pattern" on which the novel is built, and admits that modern readers are "disappointed" by Mackenzie's "laborious piling-on of pathos." Vickers offers two defenses of Mackenzie; he says that The Man of Feeling has a structure similar to that of the more respected Vicar of Wakefield, and he concurs with Scott's opinion that Mackenzie succeeded in becoming "the historian of sentiment."1 Kenneth Slagle's introduction to the earlier Norton Library edition also offers a defense based upon historical importance; the novel is valuable because it helped teach people to weep over the distresses of the poor and thus led to social reform.2 Another historical defense is given by Dale Kramer, who argues that the novel is important because it is a "cultural artifact" embodying a summary of theories of sentimental education.3 Such defenses are valuable as far as they go, but they leave the impression that Mackenzie can interest only two kinds of reader: the modern scholar who is concerned primarily with historical questions, or the occasional atavistic reader who likes a good cry—which does Mackenzie's artistic reputation very little good. One could probably offer similar defenses for novels like Brooke's Pool of Quality, which Mackenzie admired, but which, despite its historical importance, is justifiably less often read than The Man of Feeling. The difference between the two is surely that Mackenzie's book is the better work of art. I do not mean that The Man of Feeling is a serious rival to novels like Tom Jones,

1. p. xviii; p. xxiv.
but Mackenzie's artistic talents, such as they are, have been largely ignored by those who write about his historical importance.

Mackenzie himself is partly responsible for this; his comments on his own writing often do not inspire one to take him seriously. In his introduction to *Julia de Roubigné*, speaking of the "letters" that make up the novel, he complains, "I found it a difficult task to reduce them into narrative, because they are made up of sentiment, which narrative would destroy." 4 In his letters to Elizabeth Rose about the composition of *The Man of Feeling*, he says something similar: "You will find inclosed a very whimsical Introduction to a very odd Medley. . . . You must know, then, that I have seldom been in Use to write any Prose, except what consisted of Observations (such as I could make) on Men & Manners. . . . I was somehow led to think of introducing a Man of Sensibility into different scenes where his Feelings might be seen in their Effects, & his Sentiments occasionally delivered without the stiffness of regular Deduction. . . . to indulge that desultory Humour of writing which sometimes possesses me, I began with this Introduction & write now & then a Chapter as I have Leisure or Inclination." 5 And in another letter he anticipates critical objections to "the want of Connection in the Parts." 6 Many modern critics have taken such remarks at face value and think of the book as a collection of episodes "intended merely to display the hero in a variety of emotional experiences." 7

Obviously *The Man of Feeling* does not have a conventional narrative structure, but *The Man of the World* shows that Mackenzie could at least write a conventional melodramatic plot. Thus the unconventional structure of *The Man of Feeling* should be taken as evidence not of Mackenzie's incompetence, but of his unconventional intentions. In the early stages of writing, Mackenzie warned his cousin that he intended *The Man of Feeling* to be "as different from the Entanglement

7. Slagle, p. viii. Kramer's essay suggests a rationale for the episodes: all are chosen to show some aspect of Harley's education, which culminates in the realization that "natural goodness has no efficacy in the tainted world in which its proponents lived" (p. 199). It seems unlikely that Mackenzie was convinced of the inefficacy of sentiment. While he admits that sentiments can be carried to excess and abused, his later writings show a continued belief in the value of sentiment in education and religion. See particularly *Mirror* Nos. 42-44, 49, 72, 101; and *Lounger* No. 90. See also David G. Spencer, "Henry Mackenzie, A Practical Sentimentalist," *Papers on Language and Literature*, III, 314-26.
of a Novel as can be,” and suggested that it “might as well be called
a Sermon as a History. . . .” 8 Mackenzie wanted to evoke a senti-
mental response from his readers, but, as this last remark implies, he
wanted to evoke it for a didactic purpose; he meant Harley to be an
admirable character with qualities that the reader should want to emu-
late—sympathy, charity, and philanthropy. He could have treated these
topics in a series of moral essays, like the “detach’d Essays” that gave
him the idea, but chose a narrative vehicle, as he says, “from the Notion
of it’s interesting both the Memory & the Affection deeper, than mere
Argument, or moral Reasoning.” 9 In Mirror No. 107 (“Of defini-
tions”), written some years later, he also discusses some advantages
of narrative. He deals with the difficulty of reconciling theoretical
descriptions with real experience and quotes a narrative passage from
an Elizabethan author describing how a lover ought to behave. He says
that the passage, “instead of simplifying the matter, makes it more
difficult than . . . it is actually found.” For contrast he quotes another
“theoretical description,” this one a narrative of a hypothetical battle,
and says that “it renders a very confused and intricate business . . .
perfectly clear and obvious to the meanest capacity. This, however,
is by no means owing to any want in the theoretical situation of that
incident or bustle which occurs in the real; on the contrary, the events
are infinitely more numerous in the first than in the latter, though the
art of the theorist carries the imagination through them all with won-
derful distinctness.” He publishes the account, he claims ironically, “for
the sole use of our British commanders,” so they can learn to conduct
an animated battle. 10 He sees narrative, then, as a way to enliven both
the moral essay and the theoretical description; it clarifies definition
and evokes a deeper emotional response than “mere Argument.”

These remarks may give us a better understanding of Mackenzie’s
intentions in The Man of Feeling; the book should not be considered
primarily as a feeble novel, but as a theoretical description of the man
of feeling, enlivened by narrative but designed primarily to educate
the public in the virtues of sentiment and to hold up Harley as a model
for emulation. Mackenzie must therefore combine the art of the
novelist with that of the rhetorician; he must persuade the reader to
admire Harley, who at first glance seems to be an impractical, weak,
and ridiculous character incapable of dealing with the real world. His
original audience was easily won over, but modern readers, with a prefer-
ence for irony, have not been persuaded. If anyone weeps over the

10. Works, V, 44-54.
book today it is from excessive laughter rather than sympathy. But modern distaste for sentiment should not make us overlook the technical skill which Mackenzie brought to his task of persuasion. This skill is, I believe, the unacknowledged reason why the book is still read today in preference to other sentimental novels; Mackenzie shows considerable artistry in his efforts to disarm criticism and make us admire his improbable hero.

One way of disarming criticism is to anticipate it, which Mackenzie does by pointing out some of the ludicrous aspects of his hero’s behavior. In matters of business Harley is incompetent; from childhood he listens with indifference to suggestions on how to improve his fortunes. He misses a chance to inherit money by refusing to humor a crochety female relative, even daring to fall asleep while she discusses “the composition and virtues of her favorite cholic-water.” 11 He is “a child in the drama of the world,” and when he falls in love with Miss Walton, his “paroxysms of fancy” cause him to make “awkward blunders” at which his friends “laughed very heartily” (p. 10). To emphasize Harley’s naiveté, Mackenzie has him meet a clever beggar on his way to London. The beggar, who knows the world from the bottom up, makes his living by telling fortunes and admits to Harley that he learns the characters of his clients by cunning, by gleaning information from servants and neighbors (pp. 13-14). Harley, the innocent, relies upon his ridiculous “skill” in physiognomy, against which his wise aunt has warned him.12 His trust in outward appearances makes him an easy prey for professional gamblers; having lost his money, he pawns his watch to a sneering waiter to help a prostitute. When he explains to friends that he believed in the honest faces of the gamblers, they laugh, and one of them gives as harsh a judgment of Harley as any critical reader could offer: “here’s a very pretty fellow for you . . . you might have sworn he was a saint, yet now he games with sharpers, and loses his money, and is alluded by a fine story invented by a whore, and pawns his watch; here are sacrificed doings with a witness!” (p. 36). The task Mackenzie sets himself is to convince the reader that despite Harley’s naiveté, gullibility, impracticality, and tender disposition, he is more to be admired than worldly men—that he is in fact a kind of saint.


12. Mackenzie wrote to Elizabeth Rose, “I believe in a former Letter I desired you not to laugh at me for my Pretensions to Skill in Physiognomy. We can bear to laugh at ourselves, for you will find that Science ridiculed in an Adventure, which is the Subject of one of the Chapters I have now inclosed” (Letters, p. 25).
The man of feeling and the man of the world, as the titles of the two novels suggest, are opposite types, and Mackenzie's basic technique of persuasion is to make the contrast between them favorable to Harley. His introduction is not merely a structural joke in imitation of Sterne; it sets up this contrast in such a way that the reader is urged from the beginning to sympathize with the man of feeling. The hunting curate is "a strenuous logician" who began to read Harley's story from curiosity, but "soon grew weary of the task . . . I could never find the author in one strain for two chapters together; and I don't believe there's a single syllogism from beginning to end." The unfeeling world of logic, this implies, will reject a story of sentiment and find it fit only for shotgun wadding. Through the anonymous writer of the introduction, Mackenzie anticipates criticism of his structure: "I found it a bundle of little episodes, put together without art, and of no importance on the whole, with something of nature, and little else in them." He then answers his own objections with understated praise: "I was a good deal affected with some very trifling passages in it; and had the name of Marmonet, or a Richardson, been on the title page—'tis odds that I should have wept; but One is ashamed to be pleased with the works of one knows not whom." This ironic challenge, thrown out by an unknown writer to the public, implies that only insensitive logicians like the curate will fail to be touched by the story; sensitive readers will recognize its merit and weep. Mackenzie's audacious comparison of himself to Marmonet and Richardson further implies that those who fail to appreciate him will be guilty of judging works by the reputation of their authors rather than by their real merit.

Mackenzie continues to contrast his opposing types by distinguishing between two kinds of bashfulness: "this, the awkwardness of a booby, which a few steps into the world will convert into the pertness of a coxcomb, that, a consciousness which the most delicate feelings produce, and the most extensive knowledge cannot always remove" (p. 4). With quiet irony the narrator assures us that Harley was "of the latter species," since he "never attained" the pertness of the coxcomb. Harley's superior sensitivity is innate rather than acquired. His parents did not inculcate it, since he lost them in childhood; nor did his guardian, since they seldom met and could reconcile their differences only over a bottle; nor was his education responsible, since it "had been but indifferently attended to" and he "was suffered to be his own master" in literature after some useless basic instruction (p. 6). He is like Miss Walton, whose "humanity was a feeling, not a principle" (p. 9). This division of mankind into two opposed groups—pert insensitive coxcombs and
aristocrats of sensitivity—leaves the reader little choice but to prefer the natural nobility typified by Harley.

Mackenzie's two conventional settings, the virtuous countryside and the sinful city, reinforce this opposition. In the country Harley lives among sympathetic companions—Miss Walton, Ben Silton ("born to be happy without the world"), Edwards, his aunt, and his servant Peter. London, by contrast, is described by Peter as "a sad place," and his aunt thinks it is "so replete with temptations that it needed the whole armour of her friendly cautions to repel their attacks" (p. 11). Harley's unfortunate London experiences are neatly bracketed by encounters with the gauger, a typical man of the world who succeeds through cunning and duplicity where the honest man of feeling fails. The gauger affects the manners of a gentleman; he is urbane, informed, amusing—and he gets the lease of crown lands by pimping for his sister. After their first encounter Harley is inclined to blame not the gauger but the nobility, "that rank whose opportunities for nobler accomplishments have only served to rear a fabric of folly which the untutored hand of affectation can imitate with success" (p. 19). But when he learns that affectation and vice are the qualities that the city rewards, he agrees with another disappointed competitor for the lease who cries, "a plague on all rogues," and returns immediately to the country, where honesty and virtue are esteemed.

This kind of situation inclines naturally toward satire; Harley could easily have been shown as a country simpleton made ridiculous by sophisticated Londoners. Instead his London experiences are made to emphasize the value of his natural sensitivity and innocence. If the visit to Bedlam, for example, had been intended merely to show Harley reacting emotionally to pathetic scenes, Mackenzie could have dwelt upon the clanking chains and wild cries of the more spectacular inmates. He shows us instead a set of inmates who make Harley's lack of formal education and aversion to business seem desirable qualities. One is a mathematician who "fell a sacrifice . . . to the theory of comets"; another is a schoolmaster who "came hither to be resolved of some doubts he entertained concerning the genuine pronunciation of the Greek vowels." A third is a once-wealthy businessman who foolishly passed up a chance to retire to the country and was reduced to poverty and madness by "an unlucky fluctuation of stock" (pp. 20-21). The point is clear: Harley's ignorance of scholarship and business is preferable to knowledge which leads only to madness. Ignorance of the ways of the world is sanity, if not bliss. The guide's conclusion makes the
point explicit: "the world, in the eye of a philosopher, may be said to be a large madhouse." The guide, who understands the world so well, is appropriately mad himself; he suffers from political delusions.

This undermining of the value of worldly knowledge might lead the reader to think that Mackenzie is implicitly praising irrational passion. Harley agrees with his guide, however, that "the passions of men are temporary madness," and Mackenzie describes another inmate to dramatize the point: a young lady who loved excessively and was driven to madness by the death of her lover. Mackenzie concludes her pathetic tale with subtle praise of his own narrative abilities: "Though this story was told in very plain language, it had particularly attracted Harley's notice; he had given it the tribute of some tears" (p. 22). So, presumably, has the sensitive reader, who has been shown that "feeling" is neither rational knowledge nor uncontrolled passion, but an inner impulse to charity and sympathy. Harley's reaction anticipates his charity to Miss Atkins and Edwards; he consoles the lady with thoughts of heaven and leaves money for her care.

After the Bedlam visit come the scenes displaying Harley's gullibility, which pose an interesting artistic problem. Mackenzie must show that his hero is trusting and unworldly while avoiding satire—while in fact making Harley admirable for precisely those qualities that make him vulnerable to satire. His solution is to preface these scenes with the chapter concerning the unpleasant misanthropist, ironically described as "one of the wise." The admirable younger brother of the misanthropist resembles Harley; he is unworldly, uncomplaining, and unambitious, and upon inheriting a small estate he wisely moves to the country and marries "a young lady of similar temper to his own, with whom the sagacious world pitied him for finding happiness" (p. 24). The misanthropist is Harley's opposite; he was "remarkable at school for quickness of parts and genius"; he was "naturally impetuous, decisive, and overbearing," and ambitious as well—a potential man of the world. When jilted by his fiancée, however, he became embittered, sold his lands, and moved to London where he "has ever since applied his talents to the villifying of his species" (p. 25). The misanthropist rails constantly at the follies of mankind, from whom he pointedly dissociates himself by referring to "you" rather than "we." His cynical "wisdom" is finally so disagreeable that one again prefers Harley's kind

13. In Mirror No. 42 Mackenzie describes a philosopher in whose mind "the finer and more delicate sensibilities are seldom known to have place; or, if originally implanted there, are in great measure extinguished by the exertions of intense study and profound investigation. Hence the idea of philosophy and unfeelingness being united, has become proverbial. . ." (Works, VI, 177-78).
of ignorance. Thus when Harley is deceived by gamblers, the sting of satire is removed. He loses his money not because he is greedy and stupid, but because he is always ready to believe in the honesty of others. Gullibility and trust are merely two different words for the same thing; the same quality that made Harley lose his money leads to his charitable treatment of Miss Atkins, whom he saves from prostitution and starvation. The waiter to whom Harley pawns his watch pronounces the judgment of the world: he "whispered to a girl . . . something, in which the word CULLY was honoured with a particular emphasis" (p. 35). But Mackenzie shows that the alternative to Harley's naive trust is the misanthropist's total cynicism, which is not merely disagreeable but makes charity impossible.

The story of Miss Atkins shows the man of feeling's readiness to aid the unfortunate; it also shows that his mildness of temper is not to be mistaken for cowardice. Harley faces her father's sword with restrained courage just as he later faces down the bully in the stagecoach. Moreover, the details of her history are carefully chosen to contrast with Harley's, and her downfall is another example of the pernicious effect of worldly education. Unlike Harley, she has a father, but instead of inculcating morality in her, he talks of "the honour of a soldier" and holds moral sentiments in such low esteem that she "was soon weaned from opinions which she began to consider as the dreams of superstition . . ." (p. 38). Her reading is wider than Harley's but is "confined to plays, novels, and those poetical descriptions of the beauty of virtue and honour, which the circulating libraries easily afforded" (p. 38). She has the advantage of beauty and the "quickness of parts" which he lacks, but they serve only to make her "giddy, open to adulation, and vain of those talents which acquired it." She avoids the "awkward blunders" that mark Harley's social behavior and becomes "an example of politeness," but her acceptance of worldly standards makes her entertain the advances of Winbrooke, a forerunner of Sindall. Misled by her upbringing and by false values, she is seduced and learns too late the credo of men of the world: "Honour . . . is the

14. Lounger No. 66 enlarges upon the unpleasant character of the misanthropist: "He saunter's about in places of public resort, like the Evil Genius of the time, sickening at every prosperous, and enjoying every untoward event . . . misanthrophy, comfortless as it is, is yet more an indulgence than a virtue . . . and . . . neither the yieldings of complacency, nor the sportfulness of good humour, are inconsistent with the dignity of wisdom" (Works, VI, 414-18).

15. In Lounger No. 90 Mackenzie again condemns "that common herd of nove's (the wretched offspring of circulating libraries) which are despised for their insignificance, or proscribed for their immorality . . ." (Works, V, 186).
word of fools, or of those wise men who cheat them" (p. 42). Her
history is further proof of the superiority of feeling over cleverness
and polish; those qualities which the world admires bring disaster rather
than happiness. Harley's consolation to Atkins emphasizes the lesson:
"The world is ever tyrannical. . . . Let us not be slaves to the names it
affixes to motive or to action. . . . Its fantastic ideas vanish as they
rise; they teach us to look beyond it" (p. 51).

These pointed contrasts are Mackenzie's chief persuasive device,
but he appeals to the reader's sympathies in other ways as well. When
Harley and Atkins are reconciled, he writes, "We would attempt to
describe the joy which Harley felt on this occasion, did it not occur
to us that one half of the world could not understand it though we did,
and the other half will, by this time, have understood it without any
description at all" (p. 47). This is a clear appeal to the reader to think
of himself as one of that superior class who intuitively understand
Harley's sentiments—to think of himself as a man of feeling. In the
scene at the inn, Mackenzie identifies the man of feeling with another
admired class of men, the poets. Poetry is "an incentive to philan-
thropy," and "there is a certain poetic ground, on which a man cannot
tread without feelings that enlarge the heart; the causes of human
depair vanish before the romantic enthusiasm he professes" (p. 56).
The poet, like the man of feeling, risks "the danger of unfitness for
the world," and to illustrate the point, Ben Sifton sketches the charac-
ters of Jack the merchant and Tom the poet in terms that identify Tom
with the man of feeling. Tom is above material concerns—"he pawned
his great-coat for an edition of Shakespeare"—and his love for poetry
is, like feeling, an innate perception of better things: "Tom would have
been as he is, though Virgil and Horace had never been born . . ."
(p. 56). Tom will never succeed in this world, but will finally go to
heaven. So, by analogy, will the man of feeling—which hints at the
eventual sanctification of Harley.

The scenes that follow this are probably the most overwrought and
laughable parts of the book for the modern reader, but they have a
definite place in Mackenzie's rhetorical plan. He has shown the inac-
curcy of the world's judgment of his hero and has shown that the
unfeeling world, rather than Harley, is the proper object of criticism
and contempt. The scenes depicting Edwards and the orphaned children

16. Mackenzie wrote to Elizabeth Rose on this subject: "Shenstone had
those very Feelings you mention him to have described; and, tho I confess
I have met with some Dissapointments in the real Characters of Poets, yet
I still imagine they have rather a better Chance for them than other People:
but I will not anticipate the Sentiments of Harley & another Person on this
Subject . . ." (Letters, p. 31).
were Mackenzie’s favorites; they were also intended, as he wrote to his cousin, to “raise Harley in your esteem,” presumably by showing the practical results of his sentiment—his charity and philanthropy. Having left the hypocrisy and madness of London, Harley encounters Edwards, the old soldier, in a Salvator Rosa landscape and finds the “romantic enthusiasm” which leads to philanthropy “rising within him” (p. 60). Edwards’ tale is a recapitulation of the case against the world; he is a lower-class replica of Harley, a man of natural sensitivity and little business sense brought low by unfeeling malice. The game of blind-man’s buff that results in his being pressed into the army is an emblem of the blindness of men of feeling to the cunning of men of the world, and his tale makes Harley clutch convulsively at his sword as evidence of the power of romantic enthusiasm. What follows is unabashedly sentimental; we learn that Edwards’ son and daughter-in-law have died of broken hearts, leaving two children behind. Everyone weeps, and Harley’s enthusiasm is translated into genuine philanthropy. He gives Edwards a small farm, helps him stock and tend it, and becomes a sort of godfather to the children. His experiences thus prove Silton’s thesis that “the most extensive knowledge” of the world cannot destroy the sentiments of genuine men of feeling, and the narrator comments ironically that Harley returns home from London as happy “as if he had arrived from the tour of Europe with a Swiss valet . . . and half a dozen snuff-boxes, with invisible hinges, in his pocket” (p. 70).

Two of the final sections, “The Man of Feeling Jealous” and “The Pupil. A Fragment,” are again exercises in contrast. So that his hero may not seem to be a spiritless do-gooder (and to tie up the loose ends of the story), Mackenzie returns to Harley’s love for Miss Walton and shows that he is capable, like other men, of feeling love and jealousy. But the contrast again shows the basic difference between the man of feeling and the man of the world. Harley’s love for Miss Walton is chaste, unlike the lechery of worldly men. Sedley, the pupil, serves as a stand-in for Harley; on his Italian tour he falls in with gentlemen of deceptive appearance (like the gauger) who pretend to be men of feeling: “subjects, too, of sentiment occurred, and their speeches, particularly those of our friend the son of Count Respino, glowed with the

17. Letters, p. 36. Mackenzie wrote to Elizabeth Rose, “I now send you the first Part of my favorite Passage, The Story of Old Edwards. There are some Strokes in it which I am prouder of than any thing I ever wrote . . . “ And again, “I am happy that Edwards has pleas’d so much, because he is a particular Friend of mine. . . . I have found him in a simple Farm-house; yet, I flatter myself, he is not the less a Hero. The world thinks other-wise . . .” (Letters, pp. 35-36; p. 37).
warmth of honour and softened into the tenderness of feeling" (p. 85). 18 When Sedley discovers that Respino is despicable and has reduced another man to poverty and illness because of a "criminal passion" for his wife, he, too, becomes a philanthropist, saves the man from poverty, and like Harley, leaves the city inhabited by such villains. This indictment of the emotion called love by men of the world makes Harley's pure and passive love for Miss Walton seem admirable rather than feeble and shows that his jealousy is not to be confused with lust.

Harley's death upon finding that this chaste love is returned by Miss Walton has often been a subject for critical jokes, but it has also been misunderstood by serious critics; Kramer, for example, thinks that Harley's death follows the destruction of his belief in the power of sentiment and is the logical conclusion of the sentimentalist's rejection of the physical world. 19 Mackenzie's own comments on the ending are curious; he did not send the final chapters for his cousin's approval and put her off with a description that does not match the actual ending: "You remember a Miss Walton; you have nothing to do but to imagine (Harley) somehow or other wedded to her & made happy;—so must all stories conclude you know; the Hero is as surely married as he was born; because marriage is a good Thing & made in Heaven." 20 What these almost sarcastic comments describe is the ending of a conventional novel, and he was perhaps reluctant to disappoint his cousin's anticipations. The ending that he actually wrote, however, is more suited to his didactic intentions. From a cautiously ironic beginning in which he admitted the ludicrous appearance his hero makes in the world, Mackenzie has refuted the world's criticism and made Harley openly sentimental, the man of feeling in apotheosis. The ending carries this process on to its logical but audacious conclusion. Harley's consoling speech to Atkins, adjuring him not to be a slave to this world but to "look beyond it," and Ben Silton's character of the poet both hinted at the eventual sanctification of the man of feeling. Harley's death is the final step in his elevation to a kind of sanctity. He predicts his own entry into heaven: "we shall meet again, my friend, never to be separated. There are some feelings which perhaps are too tender to be suffered by the world. . . . I cannot think but in those regions which I contemplate, if there is anything of mortality left about us, that these

18. In Lounger No. 90, Mackenzie warns that, "In morals, as in religion, there are not wanting instances of refined sentimentalists, who are contented with talking of virtues which they never practice, who pay in words what they owe in actions . . . This separation of conscience from feeling is a depravity of the most pernicious sort . . . ." (Works, V, 183).


feelings will subsist;—they are called,—perhaps they are—weaknesses here;—but there may be some better modifications of them in heaven, which may deserve the name of virtues” (p. 91).

Mackenzie has shown, in effect, that the “weaknesses” of the man of feeling are quite the opposite; Harley is sure of a place in heaven because he has those qualities which the world holds in contempt. Consciously or not, Mackenzie has followed the pattern of the saint’s legend. Harley’s innocence and contempt for the world are virtues, and his death is not a defeat but a victory, a final reward; he becomes, too, a model for those left behind to follow. His death has a powerful effect on the narrator, who looks upon his body with “reverence, not fear.” To this point the narrator has been merely a detached and quietly ironic voice commenting on Harley’s history; now he becomes a participant, a convert to the cult of sentiment: “The sight drew a prayer from my heart: it was the voice of frailty and of man! the confusion of my mind began to subside into thought; I had time to weep!” (p. 93).\(^{21}\) Harley’s grave becomes a shrine to which the narrator retires often; there he becomes fully sentimental, like Harley himself: “every noble feeling arises within me! every beat of my heart awakens a virtue!—but it will make you hate the world—No: there is such an air of gentleness around, that I can hate nothing; but, as to the world—I pity the men of it” (p. 94).\(^{22}\) The sensitive reader will now presumably see himself, like the narrator, as a true man of feeling, ready to hold worldly values in contempt and follow Harley’s example of trust, sympathy, and philanthropy.

The kind of rhetorical structure I have described is uncommon in the eighteenth-century novel; as Mackenzie admitted, his book might as well be called a sermon as a history. To criticize him for not creating fully realized characters, engrossing action, or tightly unified narrative structure is therefore beside the point. The kind of structure he did create, however, should be more familiar to the modern reader than to his contemporary audience; it relies upon what is now a basic technique of modern cinema. A television commercial which cuts from a shot of a herd of lowing cattle to a crowd of milling people, then

\(^{21}\) In Mirror No. 101 Mackenzie again suggests the comparison of sentiment to religion and describes a woman who abuses sentiment, saying, “I found that sentiment, like religion, had its superstition, and its martyrs. Every hardship she suffered she accounted a trial, every censure she endured she considered as a testimony of her virtue” (Works, V, 17). She has tried in the wrong way to achieve Harley’s sanctified state.

\(^{22}\) Mirror No. 72 describes another death scene from which the narrator draws similar moral lessons: “I went away sorrowful, but my sorrow was neither ungentle nor unmanly; cast on this world a glance rather of pity than enmity; on the next, a look of humbleness and hope!” (Works, IV, 270).
from a single cow straying away from the herd to the discerning individual who buys the right brand of cigarette is easy enough to interpret. Mackenzie's structural technique is basically the same. He juxtaposes separate incidents without providing narrative transitions, and the reader is expected to see the contrasts or parallels and draw the right conclusion. Judged by the standards of *Tom Jones*, *The Man of Feeling* is loosely constructed; yet its rhetorical structure, properly interpreted, serves Mackenzie's didactic intentions perhaps better than more conventional narrative. We may finally reject the book because it stresses emotion too openly for modern taste, but we should not let our concern for literary history and our preference for irony obscure our appreciation of the ingenuity and technical skill with which Mackenzie undermines criticism and excites admiration for his secular saint.

*Temple University*