Received wisdom about the sentimental novel centres on its reliance on typographical detail (dashes and asterisks particularly) and the externalization of subjective states (in descriptions of the physical body) to address the essential ineffability of the novel's implicit world view. Indeed, the critical discourse about the genre is so utterly saturated by assumptions about the inefficacy of language that scant attention has been paid to the actual methods of literary description in the sentimental tableau, or what I would call "frozen pathos." I would like to outline the cultural signifiers of pathos in selected sentimental novels of the eighteenth century; these signifiers, I argue, also serve to undercut the sense of privacy, of immediacy, and so inscribe contradiction as one of the very foundations of the genre.

The novels I examine as typically sentimental are obscure, and rarely read by twentieth-century readers. But these novels—along with the more respectable tearful novel, *The Man of Feeling*—were standard reading for late-century sentimental audiences. At the same time, my suggestion

that such novels as Sadler’s *Wanley Penson* (1792) or Thistlethwaite’s *Man of Experience* (1780) summon conventional, stock emotional postures to elicit predictable, stock emotional responses from their readers is perhaps not very surprising. Popular sentimental novels enthusiastically adopt, even devour, the sentimental novel’s conventional tearful scenes, eccentric punctuation, and other narrational tics. But therein lies their critical interest. The second-rate novel is as concerned with representing feeling to the reader as more skilfully constructed ones: it simply relies more baldly on the conventions at its disposal. William Sadler, Charles Dodd, and Courtney Melmoth embrace the conventions that authors such as Henry Mackenzie also adopt and that readers of both popular and (currently) canonical sentimental novels accepted and perhaps expected. Such writers were widely read and enjoyed in the period and that, I think, makes them critically interesting. And these popular sentimental authors provide a context within which to read Sterne and Mackenzie and to read many of those who read Sterne and Mackenzie at the end of the eighteenth century.

The sentimental practice of referring beyond words for pathetic significance and some particular—and dramatic—instances of the sentimental narrative referring outside itself are found in contemporary magazines and miscellanies. The pairing of illustrative plates and “sentimental anecdotes” (as short narratives were sometimes called) is particularly significant. To suggest that the plate is included with the anecdote is inexact: the anecdote is clearly written around the moment represented in the plate, and the events of the narrative are all in preparation, in anticipation of that moment. Not only do the engravings represent the most important and most pathetic moment in the story, they are referred to and deferred to within the narrative.

“The Fatal Concealment,” printed in the *Sentimental Magazine* of 1773, is a notable example. Monsieur Milot and Mademoiselle Abbeville are in love, against the wishes of her father, the baron. One day, during a romantic though innocent tête-à-tête, the baron arrives home unexpectedly. Milot is rashly hidden in Mademoiselle Abbeville’s bedroom. The baron discovers him, taunts him until he draws his sword, and Milot, in a passionate moment, kills the baron. Mademoiselle Abbeville discovers her father’s body. Not knowing that her lover is responsible, she calls “for justice upon his murderer.” Milot is instantly seized and Mademoiselle is in a quandary:

She sprung up from the bed, where the body of her father was now laid, and embraced her dear Milot with the most extravagant marks of fondness, reproaching
herself bitterly for not contriving his escape. ... Remorse, love, fear, and amaze-
ment were at once visible in his countenance; [see the plate] but I should in vain
attempt a description of what painting would fail to express. The guards them-
selves stood for some moments motionless at the melting scene, forgetting their
barbarous office.²

The phrase “see the plate” and the square brackets that contain it are
included in the text. The reference to the graphic scene within the narra-
tive is significant. The moment is frozen (the guards are so “moved” that
they are motionless) and must be understood in reference to the plate.
Typically, Milot’s emotions are so great that even the illustration it-
self fails fully to comprehend them. Language is second best; it cannot
begin to capture the sentiments of the scene. The anecdote finally sug-
gests that only facial expression and bodily gesture can represent the
fatal moment and only graphic illustration can begin to communicate the
pathos.

In the sentimental novel, where such plates are relatively rare, de-
fall to the pathetic scene is achieved through descriptive passages and
through a reliance on the tableau. The sentimental tableau’s interest is hu-
man figures and their emotional conditions; thus, it shares in many of
the conventions of theatre and contemporary genre painting. The trans-
lation of the conventions of stage and painting to a literary text, from a
visual or graphic manifestation to the description of that manifestation,
is noteworthy, for the tableau, constituted of description rather than nar-
rative, works further to fragment the story’s narrative and to interrupt
the plotline.³ It may seem premature to speak of such a visually deter-
mined thing as the tableau in terms of literary description, and whether
description can in fact be considered in any way visual is another is-
ssue. As Jeffrey Kittay points out, however, description is understood
“in spatial terms, in terms of the senses and in terms of movement.
That these terms in such a discussion are mostly metaphorical is undeni-
able; at the same time, it is no less true that they are necessary, and thus

³ For discussions of the sentimental novel’s characteristically fragmented or non-continuous plot-
line, see Leo Baudry’s “The Form of the Sentimental Novel”; Patricia Meyer Spacks’s chapter
on sentimental novels in her Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English
Novels (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Elizabeth Wanning Harries’
discussion in The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Cen-
tury (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1994); and, for an examination
of the fragmented plot of Mackenzie’s Man of Feeling and the influences of antiquarianism, Ev-
erett Zimmerman’s “Fragments of History and The Man of Feeling: From Richard Bentley to
Walter Scott,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 23 (1990), 283–300.
not merely metaphorical, since spatial models permeate the way we cognize and conceptualize." But, finally, the tableaux in the sentimental novels refer to a visual culture, and suggest, sometimes explicitly, a culture of sentimentalism that is visual or graphic and denies the power of words.

Essentially, a visual tableau is a representation that captures a single—usually highly significant—moment of an action or a state. It is static, as, for example, in the tableau vivant, that painting-like representation of a scene by living figures which was popular in early nineteenth-century England, but already becoming popular in late eighteenth-century France and Germany. The literary tableau is also, albeit figuratively, static. It captures an act in a moment, and "draws a frame around" it: the moment that would pass by in linear narrative is made to stand still and is drawn out in all its detail, as if on a canvas or in a snapshot. The constituents of the moment are represented "in simultaneous relation," in terms of space or place rather than in terms of chronology or time. Thus, the typical novelistic tableau is a highly descriptive passage that, by its construction, seems designed to evoke a "scene," a highly specified, static, but detailed and full scene. The novelistic text usually represents a tableau by way of description or another non-narrative mode.

The method of description common in sentimental tableaux departs, however, from contemporary theories of literary description. In his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (1783), Hugh Blair says that the best description is particular: when describing Nature, "a Writer of the inferior class" is vague and his expressions "feeble and general." But proper description is also selective, for Blair notes that a true Poet makes us imagine that we see [the object described] before our eyes; ... he places it in such a light, that a Painter could copy after him. This happy talent is chiefly owing to a strong imagination, which first receives a lively impression of the object; and then, by employing a proper selection of

6 Kittay, p. 239.
8 Philippe Hamon defines the literary or descriptive tableau as hypotyposis, as a "lively and animated" description of actions, passions, physical or moral events." "Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive," trans. Patricia Baudoin, Yale French Studies 61 (1981), p. 3. My definition begins with his.
circumstances in describing it, transmits that impression in its full force to the imagination of others.  

Especially when the poet intends to make “a sublime, or a pathetic impression,” Blair requires that the “imagination ought ... to be seized at once; and it is far more deeply impressed by one strong and ardent image, than by the anxious minuteness of laboured illustration.” Yet “laboured illustration” is typical of many sentimental tableaux. This may suggest that the genre’s novelists are “of the inferior class”: certainly, the most descriptive tableaux do not succeed in “seizing” the imagination or making their impression in a single blow. At the same time, it also suggests that the highly—even excessively—detailed tableaux have as their end an effect conjured not by literary description, but by graphic representation of a scene.

The striking tableau in Charles Dodd’s *Curse of Sentiment* (1787) is illustrative. It appears in the frame of the novel, where the editor-character describes the provenance of the letters which form the novel’s main narrative. The tableau is constructed upon his departure from an inn, as he leaves his hosts behind:

The landlord, a fine tall handsome man, about sixty, his silver hair was tied in a rosetto, and loose at the sides; his garb was of drab-coloured camblet, neat and simple; his countenance was full of honest good-nature and solicitation; and his fine blue eyes so forcibly entreated me to accept of his benediction in a glass of liquor, that there was no resisting the influence.—His wife stood with the flask and goblet, her hand raised ready to execute what her liberal mind so earnestly solicited—she was Neatness itself—dressed in a short robe-de-chambre of Valencienne grey and purple silk, tied at the neck and wrists with dark brown ribbons; her cap was of the finest lace, drawn close round the outlines of her face, and ornamented with ribbons, of a colour uniform with those of her dress.

As in other tableaux, the scene is motionless and non-chronological. The hostess stands with the flask and goblet ready to pour, demonstrating the intention to pour, but without moving towards the moment of pouring. The detail is exact, even extreme: the enumeration of costume detail is odd, for there seems to be no significant end to describing each ribbon, except perhaps to fill out the emblematic picture of “Neatness” that the hostess presents. In addition, the organization of the scene is spatial: the couple is precisely positioned “on each side [of] the door of the voiture”;

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10 Blair, 3:156.
at "the opening between them, and a little receded from their line," is the servant, Jennet:

she was dressed in the country habit of servants—a short jacket and coat, striped grey and white, gave all the graces of a form which corresponded with my ideas of perfect elegance and just symmetry—her rosy cheeks contrasted the finest black eyes in the world—a smile of thanks and modesty sat upon her countenance, and a tear stole side-long from her eye, which she endeavoured to conceal by inverting her head, and directed a look of forced cheerfulness at Robairé, who was mounted on the leading horse, cloathed in his professional garb of Port Royal Guide.12

The use of detail in the passage is noteworthy. If, as Philippe Hamon has said, the detail "is that which over-determines meaning and significance ... what stops, blocks and suspends the momentum of reading,"13 then detail as Dodd uses it effectively halts the narrative, and imposes a sort of two-dimensionality, a description made wholly of surface. But what is puzzling is that while the detail in Dodd’s tableau is highly particular, the effect is not particularly individualizing. In part, the use of detail simply slows down reading and emphasizes the stasis of the scene. Following the description of Jennet, the narrator indicates that Robairé’s whip has been suspended mid-air throughout the delineation of the scene: this detail emphasizes the absence of "time" and insists on the scene’s stillness. Stasis is suggested again when the narrator notes that as he drives away and leaves the scene behind, it remains: he looks back at the scene “fixed in silence.”14 Finally, the tableau works to signal itself: to point to its own stillness, its fixity, with its extreme graphic detail, and thus, paradoxically, to deny the power of language to capture subjective feeling.

As I have suggested, the eighteenth-century practice of gestural acting is central to the visual culture of emotion. In contemporary works on acting, wordless gesture was touted as the best way to express passion. Aaron Hill, in his Essay on the Art of Acting (first published posthumously in 1753), catalogues the ten dramatic passions and their proper representation in terms of bulging eyes and extended facial muscles, “nature’s own marks and impressions on the body.”15 In his chapters on acting

12 Dodd, p. vii.
13 Hamon, p. 11.
14 Dodd, p. viii.
15 Aaron Hill, An Essay on the Art of Acting; in which, the Dramatic Passions are Properly Defined and Described ... Now First Revised and Separately Published, revised ed. (London, 1779). p
in The Elements of Dramatic Criticism (1775), William Cooke recommends that the actor study Classical statues for their “expressions” and “attitudes,” and that he become proficient in dancing, to improve upon his grace but also to gain physical expressiveness. According to Cooke, dancing is that graceful deportment of the body, in conjunction with the eyes, and muscles of the face, by which a man may express his thoughts independent of the articulation of syllables, and words; this gives a grace to every thing an actor says or does upon the stage, and twas this carried, perhaps, to its utmost perfection, which gave rise to an observation lately made on a celebrated French dancer, “That all her steps were sentiments.”

Each step, each gesture on stage, expresses ideas and meaning when words are not available—or able. John Hill in The Actor (1755) notes:

Gestures have their determinate signification as well as words; and they can no more be misunderstood: the life and spirit of a representation depend greatly upon these; and what is more than both, its truth. We may express to an audience every passion of the heart by these, without words: Often the player is not allowed words, and when he is, these give them double force and energy. There are peculiar gestures for every passion, nay, for every stage of passion; but these are not arbitrary, or what the player pleases; they are dictated by nature; they are common to all mankind, and therefore all men understand them.

James Burgh, in The Art of Speaking (1761), writes that “Every part of the human frame contributes to express the passions and emotions of the mind, and to shew, in general, its present state,” noting that the hands, for instance, “serve us instead of many sorts of words, and where the language of the tongue is unknown, that of the hands is understood, being universal, and common to all nations.” Physicalized emotion partakes in a universal language, “a vocabulary of basic gestures, each with an individual meaning known to all in advance, and all performed in accordance with given techniques and precepts of style.”

The system of stage gesture I only begin to describe here is part of a more general attempt to articulate a generally accessible language of gesture, a language which “all men understand” (or at least, all men

17 Cooke, pp. 191–92.
of a certain culture and with a certain level of aesthetic education and taste). In the context of this question of language and transparency, the acting and oratory guide presented itself as a sort of lexicon of body language. Many were familiar with Le Brun’s cataloguing of the passions and their accompanying expressions, but the widespread reliance on gestural conventions also ensured that “all men would understand.” As Alan McKenzie notes, “Garrick’s audience and [Benjamin] West’s viewers knew exactly how anguish and rapture looked because they had seen so many clear episodes of them—on walls and stages, as well as on the faces of those with whom they lived and dealt.”

And conventions of externalized passions were also interdisciplinary. Paul Hiffernan in Dramatic Genius (1770) notes that “From Sculpture performers are to learn pleasing attitudes, and how to stand still with firmness and grace: from History-Painting the diversified energy of the passions in the human countenance, with the body’s suitable action to each.”

John Hill declares that the actor must use the eyes forcibly and “mark things” strongly and boldly, for “People who mark things weakly, are not fit for the stage. The paintings shewn there are seen from a distance, and they are to be proportioned for that view.” Visual, “external” representation of “internal,” unspoken emotion was a cultural norm, as were the external signs of particular emotions.

The episode of Le Fever, found in volume 6 of Tristram Shandy (published in 1762), is a tableau that relies on gesture and external expression for its emotional import. The story was read as particularly sentimental in the later eighteenth century. The Sentimental Magazine of 1774 raves that “the story of Le Fevre is one of the most highly finished, and masterly examples of true pathos to be found in any language”; the Critical Review of 1762 calls it “beautifully pathetic” and says that the episode “exhibits the character of Toby and his corporal in such a point of view, as must endear them to every reader of sensibility.” In her versified Story of Le Fevre (1787), Jane Timbury refers to “Mr. Sterne’s affecting story of LE FEVER” which “has been so much admired by the sentimental part of the literary world.”

23 Hill, p. 231.
Tristram Shandy Sterne “parodies the conventions of what B[rewster] Rogerson has called ‘the pathetic style,’ ‘an elaborate theory of the representation of the passions by their outward visible or audible signs,’” the episodes of sentiment, at least, were not taken ironically by readers, and the story of Le Fever was consumed by sentimentalists as a proper sentimental scene.

The episode itself is fairly short. Uncle Toby and Trim discover that a dying soldier, Le Fever, and his son are in a nearby inn and send the sick man aid. The next morning, Toby visits him, offers his services generously, but Le Fever soon dies. In such a summary (one based on narrative events), the episode seems flat: it is in fact quite moving as a descriptive one, and it was the descriptive, tableau-like scene of Le Fever’s death that was most striking to eighteenth-century readers, or at least to the sentimentalists. The narrator notes that Toby had presented himself to Le Fever with openness and kindness, “so that before my uncle Toby had half finished the kind offers he was making to the father, had the son insensibly pressed up close to his knees, and had taken hold of the breast of his coat, and was pulling it towards him.” Le Fever responds to Toby’s speech as well:

The blood and spirits of Le Fever, which were waxing cold and slow within him, and were retreating to their last citadel, the heart,—rallied back,—the film forsook his eyes for a moment,—he looked up wishfully in my uncle Toby’s face,—then cast a look upon his boy,—and that ligament, fine as it was,—was never broken.—

Nature instantly ebb’d again,—the film returned to its place,—the pulse fluttered—stopp’d—went on—throb’d—stopp’d again—moved—stopp’d—shall I go on?—No.26

The scene is essentially descriptive though it is (properly) narrative.27 There is some indication of chronology in the scene, though the action of young Le Fever occurs as Toby is speaking, in the midst of a speech which has already been enacted and completed in the text. And the gesture of Le Fever is negligible as “action” (for example, the look cast from Toby to the boy is full of import but is slight). Action in the scene

27 See Seymour Chatman’s discussion of description and “Narrative at the service of Description,” that is, narrative which fills description’s role and works to the same end, in Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 32.
is imperceptible (the film falling from the eyes) or physically internal (the fluttering pulse, throb- bing, starting up and stopping). The characters are wordless. Language cannot represent the sentiments they express, Le Fever’s love for his son and the comfort he feels in entrusting him to Toby. Finally, the scene is frozen. It constitutes a single moment through a ser- ies of simultaneous gestures, with the actors organized spatially around the bed and pictured in various positions: Toby seated by the bed, young Le Fever clinging to him, and Le Fever lying motionless with all the meaning he represents in his glance.

As I have noted, the episode was read as a “sentimental scene,” and body position and expressiveness of glance were understood as the indicators of meaning. With these indicators, the moment in the novel was graphically illustrated over and over again as a scene. For example, George Romney’s painting of the “Death of Le Fevre” [sic] is described in a letter by Adam Walker:

The figures were about eighteen inches long, and wonderfully expressive. The dying lieutenant was looking at Uncle Toby (who sat mute at the foot of the bed) and by the motion of his hand was recommending his son to his care: The boy was kneeling by the bedside, and with eyes that expressed his anguish of heart, was, as it were, turning from a dying to a living father, begging protection, a most pathetic figure. Trim was standing at a distance in his usual attitude, and with a face full of inward grief.28

In the description of the painting, Uncle Toby is “mute” (he does not gesture); Le Fever looks to Toby, indicating with his hand that Toby take care of his son; the boy’s eyes are expressive and his glance speaks his anguish; Trim displays “a face full of inward grief.” All faces are full of feeling and sentiment is indicated through each body. Similar representations were provided in the various collections of the Beauties of Sterne. While they are not point-by-point identical with the description in the novel itself (Le Fever’s hand gesture in Romney’s painting, for instance, is not in Sterne’s description), they point to the sentimentalism of the interpretation and its emphasis on gestures of feeling.

The composed scene of pathos, relying on theatrical gesture and postures, was repeated throughout the genre. In Frances Sheridan’s Memoirs

of Miss Sidney Bidulph (1761), Mr Main’s narrative of Sidney’s grief at the death of her husband provides an opportunity for Sidney to be described in the conventional postures of piety and grief. Because the local clergyman is otherwise occupied, Mr Main reports, Sidney must read the service for the dying at her husband’s bedside:

Surely nothing ever appeared so graceful; her fine hands and her fine eyes lifted up to heaven, while the book lay open before her on the table. Such a reverential, such an ardent, yet such a mournful supplication in those fine eyes! She looked like something more than human! After having in this posture offered up a short petition in silence, she began the service.  

This scene is among those engravings by Edward Francis Burney which accompany the five-volume Sidney Bidulph (the original 1761 novel and the 1767 continuation) printed in the Novelist’s Magazine of 1787. In the engraving, Sidney kneels by Arnold’s bedside, looking to heaven, her hands folded in prayer and the book open before her. She occupies the centre of the scene: Patty, her maid, stands in the background with her back turned and Mr Main kneels, half-hidden behind Sidney, with his hand covering his eyes. Her white dress stands out, separating her from the scenery behind her and linking her to Arnold, swathed in white bedclothes and a white turban, looking to heaven with fervour equal to Sidney’s. The scene is contained both with the ornate border and with the parted curtains of Arnold’s bed, which fill half the picture and which work to frame the two central figures.

The sense of a composed and posed scene is also evident in James Thistlethwaite’s Man of Experience (1780). In an embedded narrative, Mr Freeland tells of his childhood miseries, his family’s destitution, and his mother’s death after giving birth in a cold field:

Gracious Heaven! in what manner can I best convey a description of the scene that presented itself to my sight; a scene rendered infinitely more horrible by the silence and the gloom that invaded us!

My father sitting upon a bank, with his streaming eyes lifted towards Heaven, and his hands folded together!

At his feet lay the dead body of my mother, whose countenance, though pale, still shewed the same piety and resignation which visibly accompanied her actions through the whole course of a long and painful existence; and near her, carelessly extended upon the cold sward, a new-born infant, struggling against the rude attacks of the evening breeze.  

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Again, surrounded by horror, the central character is the type of piety, looking to heaven with hands folded. The scene is markedly non-narrative: any action is caught mid-stream, in the present progressive (the father is "sitting," his eyes are "streaming"). Rather, the scene constitutes an instance of the tableau, a sort of sentimental *ekphrasis*. The sentimental tableau infuses that single moment with emotional significance by using the signifiers of contemporary culture.

In Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771), there are also episodes of this sort, episodes of pathos which are represented dramatically through stage gesture. But the scene which unites Harley and Old Edwards the wanderer (after his stint in the army and after the death of his son) is interesting for its use of the scene not so much in terms of theatre as in terms of graphic art and aesthetic convention. There are many references to the graphic arts in the tableau passages. Narrators summon the skills of Reynolds in capturing an expression, as when the traveller in S.J. Pratt's *Travels for the Heart* (1777) writes of the "picture of the heart" revealed in his own countenance when he is faced with a particularly troubling decision: "What a pity it is, Reynolds was not at my elbow to copy it!" He then goes on to paint the picture himself. Figures are often likened to particular or to typical artworks: Euphemia (in *The Man of Experience*) is "the statue of Despair" on the death of her father; Sidney Bidulph resembles a painting of despair at the news of her husband's imminent death, though Patty Main suggests that "if she had then sat to a painter, he could have made a stronger and more heart-breaking look even than that picture has." As in the theatrically coloured scenes, the tableaux rely on a conventional language understood by the audience to represent pathos. In *The Man of Feeling* and other novels, however, the scenes are tableau-like not simply in that they freeze a moment of a specific action, but also, in that they *stop* action, stop narrative to present the meaning of the scene.

Harley is travelling on foot, and comes upon a striking landscape, described in the conventional language of the picturesque and in some detail:

The sun was now in his decline, and the evening remarkably serene, when he entered a hollow part of the road, which winded between the surrounding banks, and seamed the sward in different lines, as the choice of travellers had directed them to tread it. It seemed to be little frequented now, for some of those had

partly recovered their former verdure. The scene was such as induced Harley to stand and enjoy it; when, turning round, his notice was attracted by an object, which the fixture of his eye on the spot he walked had before prevented him from observing.

The object is an old man, specifically an old soldier, actually Old Edwards, but so changed by his experience that Harley does not recognize him. The person of the old soldier is interpreted and defined by his situation in the picturesque landscape:

He was one of those figures which Salvator would have drawn; nor was the surrounding scenery unlike the wildness of that painter’s backgrounds. The banks on each side were covered with fantastic shrub-wood, and at a little distance, on the top of one of them, stood a finger-post, to mark the directions of two roads which diverged from the point where it was placed. A rock, with some dangling wild flowers, jutted out above where the soldier lay; on which grew the stump of a large tree, white with age, and a single twisted branch shaded his face as he slept.

The jutting rock, twisted tree, aged stump, and the name of Salvator Rosa all suggest the aesthetic of the picturesque. The sleeping soldier himself is then described in such terms: “His face had the marks of manly comeliness impaired by time; his forehead was not altogether bald, but its hairs might have been numbered; while a few white locks behind crossed the brown of his neck with a contrast the most venerable to a mind like Harley’s.”

Age, grey hair, a marked face are the qualities of the human picturesque, often represented, according to Sir Uvedale Price, by the “rough tattered figures ... [who] bear a close analogy ... to old hovels and mills, to the wild forest horse, and other objects of the same kind.” Harley reflects on the sleeping soldier: “Thou art old ... but age has not brought thee rest for its infirmities; I fear those silver hairs have not found shelter from thy country, though that neck has been bronzed in its service.” The old soldier awakes and Harley walks on. Old Edwards, however, has recognized Harley and follows, bending under his knapsack and with an arm in a sling. The narrative of The Man of Feeling then proceeds, with their reunion and with Old Edwards’ story of his conscription and army service.

34 Mackenzie, p. 85.
36 Mackenzie, p. 85.
This descriptive scene is interesting in several ways. It is contained and comprehended within the aesthetics of the picturesque, defined by the terms of the aesthetic and the comparison with Salvator Rosa. The old soldier scene is essentially a static and "painterly" representation; the reference to the picturesque determines, to a certain extent, its meaning. The figure in the scene is conventionalized and universalized: though the sleeping soldier is really Old Edwards, not a particularly "round" character, but at least a specific character, for the purposes of the scene, he is only a picturesque and sentimental convention. The scene is moralized according to the picturesque formula: Old Edwards is found at a crossroads, one that has been worn by time and is deserted; the land is scarred with paths and, like Old Edwards himself, is only now beginning to heal. To drive the point home, Harley observes the tableau before him and comments upon it, underlining the "correct" interpretation of the scene. Meaning, the correct interpretation, is both inscribed into the scene by the use of the language of the picturesque and explicitly provided in Harley's reflection.

This aspect of Mackenzie's description—the demand for a specific interpretation—is, I would suggest, an inherent characteristic of tableau. The descriptive tableau requires that meaning be accorded to the scene, for, as one critic notes, description's "primary purpose is not to offer a representation, but to dictate an interpretation."37 In his "Descriptive Limits" (1981), Jeffrey Kittay writes of perceiving a tableau:

it is perceiving a single event as meaningful in itself, as carrying with it that which it marks. ... To perceive it is to be invited to cognize it, to make an interpretation. ... Indeed, the power of the message is such that it can be given only in terms of a scene. ... Here, a single act is consecrated, memorialized and monumentalized, endowed with power. It is offered up with the varnish of surface, in order to show that it is to be read.

The tableau is, according to Kittay, description taking a moment of an action, "and put[ting], one might say nail[ing, it] in its place," asking, "that meaning be ascribed to it."38 Time, or the narrative, stops, and as in a freeze-frame, the moment becomes significant because of the interruption. The tableau, in freezing the moment, demands to be interpreted or understood in itself. Within the tableau is its meaning, for what is in the tableau in that moment is all that there is. Thus, while the descriptive tableau attempts to represent sentiments that words cannot describe,

38 Kittay, p. 239.
it also nails down the sentiments to a single representation and, to stretch
the metaphor of description and space, a two-dimensional one. The senti-
mental moment is limited and controlled. The reader becomes a viewer, a
perceiver, outside of the moment. The sense of the reader/viewer's being
external to the action is considered (by Michael Fried, in his Absorp-
tion and Theatricality [1980], for instance) as essential to the perceiver's
“enthralment” in a work of art. But the sense of externality in a de-
scriptive passage “en-thralls” the reader, tying him or her to a single
representation of the scene. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that
stage gesture and aesthetic categories are not “suggestive” of ideas be-
yond their conventional significance, or that words cannot evoke the idea
of the thing described. Rather, the explicitness with which the conven-
tions are evoked and the exact detail in outlining the visual scene work
to contain the “meanings” of the tableaux and to limit interpretation.

Thus, there are two main characteristics of the sentimental tableau: its
theatricality, that is, its use of theatrical and other conventions, and its
ekphrastic use of detail in its attempt to represent the graphic scene. Both
are means to create meaning. The “universal languages” work to suggest
the audience’s response to the scene; at the same time, inherent in the
tableau form is the insistence that such significance be allowed to the
scene; a demand created through the tableau’s disruption of the narrative
and further, with the tableau’s “staginess.” The staginess of the scene—
its status as “witnessed”—is very often further inscribed in the text. In
Robert Sadler’s Wanley Penson (1791, new ed. 1792), Betty Barnes (one
of the novel’s many narrators) witnesses the blossoming love between
young William Wanley Penson and Melinda Bountly. Penson visits the
house, but remains silent, although his countenance, of course, tells all.
When he finally does decide to declare himself, Betty places herself at a
perfect vantage point. Penson rushes into the room where Melinda sits,
and Betty reports,

it directly jumping in my head, from ... the distress visible in his countenance,
that something of the tender kind would transpire now, if ever it would—and
being curious to observe its cast—I instantly went (that the parties might be
under no restraints on account of my being near) and shut myself into a closet
that was opposite the parlour door, and consequently opposite [the] looking-
glass. ...

The door of this closet was half glass, with a curtain inside, which favoured
my design to a nicety.39

39 Robert Sadler, Wanley Penson; or, The Melancholy Man. A Miscellaneous History, 3 vols (Lon-
don, 1792), 1:93.
From her box-seat, Betty is able to observe the couple through the reflection in the looking-glass, and she reports on the wordless scene: "He now started eagerly on his feet; and dropping instantly on one knee before [Melinda], clasped her hands in his, and fixing his eyes most expressively on hers, remained some moments quite silent; whilst Miss Bountly's changing countenance plainly indicated the workings of her sensibility." The scene is far less descriptive than others in the novel and in the genre, but in its construction—Betty is observing and words fail both the expressive Penson and the blushing Melinda—it is marked as a tableau.

The same sort of voyeurism operates in Keate's novel, *Sketches from Nature; Taken, and Coloured, in a Journey to Margate* (1779), where he employs the gestures and attitudes of the stage and emphasizes the final tableau's theatricality with the explicit construction of its audience. The final chapter, entitled "The Family Picture," contains the most conventionalized and most "tableau-like" tableau in the novel: the sentimental traveller of the novel returns to London at the end of his journey, and goes immediately to his tobacconist in Convent Garden to fill his snuff-box. His tobacconist is more than usually cheerful, and his face glows with good nature; from the back stairs, the traveller hears a woman singing with a guitar and fears that he has interrupted a social evening. The tobacconist responds: "You by no means suspend my pleasure, ...—nay, you increase it, by allowing me to tell you what hath occasioned it.—It is in truth, a scene that might interest your feelings." It is indeed, for the story is typically sentimental. Two young men who have lived above the tobacconist's shop have just brought their worthy old father from prison (imprisoned, of course, on unjust grounds). They have supported the family in his absence and, now that he is broken and old, they will support him. He is finally secure. The traveller exclaims: "I would almost give one eye, to peep through a key-hole with the other, and obtain a glimpse of these happy people, without intruding on their delicious moments." The tobacconist agrees to a viewing, for, as he says, "there can be no breach either of hospitality, or honour, in exhibiting the merits of one's friends, when their actions may not only bear the view, but claim the applause of the world.”

40 Sadler, 1:95.
42 Keate, 2:214.
The exhibition of the merits of the family turns into a sort of sentimental peep-show: the tobacconist is able to arrange the viewing, for "The little room where they are, has a glass folding-door, with a curtain drawn only across the lower half of it,—if you will give yourself the trouble to step up with me, on the second stairs, you may, unperceived, look over it, and indulge your curiosity." The traveller does, and says that the sight "shewed me so lovely a FAMILY-PICTURE, as bid defiance to all the efforts of art;—even the pencil of a RAPHAEL,—a TITIAN,—or a GUIDO, would have failed in the attempt." Again, the sentimental narrator emphasizes the indescribable nature of the scene, and then proceeds to describe it. The description begins: "Imagine the whole family grouped round the table on which they had supped,—in full view before me conceive the portrait of the father." The daughter is the singer heard earlier, but in the construction of the scene, she is transformed into a silent figure with a guitar: "they were soothing plaintive notes;—but my mind was too occupied to attend to sounds—it was watching the characters which composed this singular picture." And typically, language in describing the scene is rejected in place of an attempt to create a graphic and visual representation. The sons and father are in conventional attitudes and are mute: "in their features, were pictured all those delicate emotions of the heart, which NATURE has alone entrusted to the human countenance to express, and which the efforts of language are far too feeble to convey." The description is long and laboured, but finally, the traveller simply peers at the still and silent family: there is no interaction and no action.

The voyeurism involved in Keate's tableau points, I think, to the perceiver in the act of perceiving the pathetic scene before him or her: the traveller in Sketches from Nature looks on and interprets the family just as Harley stood before the scene of the old soldier framed by the

43 Keate, 2:215.
44 Keate, 2:216, 217.
45 Keate, 2:218–19, emphasis added.
46 I use the term "voyeur" somewhat incautiously here. The sentimental voyeur may be compared with the sexual voyeur since both take a sort of pleasure in observing unobserved—or apparently unobserved. Both take pleasure from another’s seemingly private, pleasurable moment. A qualification here would be that the fiction of the sentimental voyeur as being unobserved is thin: the voyeur’s subject is barely "absorbed" in his/her own business, but is posed and positioned particularly as a spectacle. I would be less comfortable in typing Keate’s voyeur as the Foucauldian sort, subjugating the family under his “inspecting gaze,” though the obsession in sentimental literature with the transparent heart and private feelings made public suggests the social discipline through exposure that Foucault discusses in “The Eye of Power,” Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al (New York: Random House, 1980), pp. 146–65.
picturesque landscape. Harley moves on once the old soldier is conscious, but in Keate’s novel, the action of the beholder is paramount (justified by the traveller’s sentimental curiosity in the scene) and is emphasized. He wishes he could peek through a keyhole, he peeks over the curtain, he is enthralled by the picture presented before him. And again, the tableau seems to point to itself as an “artificial” scene, with the family group sitting silently and frozen in attitudes of gratitude, happiness, filial duty.

From the 1930s to 1950s, the early years of the American film industry, photographs—“stills”—were used on lobby cards to promote and advertise new Hollywood films. The stills were essentially tableaux which represented a climactic or significant scene in the film and were meant to capture a moment in, and so the essence of, the movie. The stills, however, were posed photographs, not extracted from the film or taken during the film’s shooting, but carefully set up and particularly separate from the film narratives. Marvin Heiferman, in Still Life (1983), remarks:

Life never looked exactly like a movie and the movies never looked like these pictures. When images are projected and then vanish, a wealth of visual detail disappears with them, before the eye or the mind can take inventory. ...

In these photographs, a spell has been broken. Here are actors primed, coiffed and practiced at enacting a life, frozen in enigmatic postures.

The stills seem artificial: as Heiferman notes, “Each one broadcasts an overstated, excessive sense of order. There’s an almost painful clarity of description. ... It’s all affectation and simulation, delivered in a culturally-loaded shorthand.” Sentimental narrative tableaux are also highly “artificial” representations of emotion, relying on “a culturally-loaded shorthand” to suggest emotion to their readers. Sentimental literary tableaux rely on overdetermined and highly detailed description to imbue the scene with significance, to make the reader stop and take notice. But the tableau within a narrative also underlines in these ways its own artificiality, and as with the photographic stills, “a spell has been broken.”

University of Toronto