

# INDECISION AND THE VALUES OF CHOICE IN 19TH-CENTURY FICTION

## Amanpal Garcha

Today, when we discuss freedom, we mean in part a condition in which individuals have expansive opportunities to choose – whom they marry, what work they pursue, and what they buy and consume. Drawing on insights from economic history, sociology, psychology, and literary criticism, Garcha argues that today's political emphasis on individual choice has its roots in the 19th century. Novels from this period show that the ideal of expansive choice that we take for granted as an obvious good is tied to industrial capitalism's particular cultural effects. These texts suggest that conceiving of freedom purely in terms of choice can produce surprising, countervailing effects on individual perceptions of happiness and action in the world.



Amanpal Garcha teaches in the Department of English at The Ohio State University, specializing in 19th-century British literature, the theory and history of the novel, and literary theory. He is the author of *From Sketch to Novel: The Development of Victorian Fiction*.

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