DECIPHERING THE REAL THROUGH ARTIFICE: A STUDY OF THE GAZE IN VICTORIAN ART

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how the gaze is utilized to find hidden truth in Charlotte Brontë’s first novel, *The Professor*, the early work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and George Eliot’s novella, “The Lifted Veil.” Brontë’s narrator and protagonist of *The Professor* is an obsessive gazer who decodes the faces of those around him to find inner character; even though his gaze fails at times, he maintains an ideal that the true mind of a person can be seen upon the face. The early painting of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood demonstrates a similar mindset by rendering the mundane hyper-realistically.

Specifically, Millais’ 1849 oil *Isabella* and his 1850 oil *Christ in the House of His Parents* demonstrate that the inner character of person can be designated phrenologically; critics, however, disparaged the hyper-reality of the Brotherhood for being ugly and artless. Differing considerably from her other realist work, George Eliot’s “The Lifted Veil” is a supernatural novella written from the perspective of a man who can read minds and see the future. Even though he is gifted with preternatural sight, he is afflicted by sickness and loneliness. All three works demonstrate that even though searching for the real through eyesight is at times problematic, it should always be treated as a closely tended process.
INTRODUCTION

Is truth revealed through external reality? Can the mind, the inner reality of a person, be seen upon the face? Or, what would happen if one could see the internal truth of the mind as easily as one can look upon a face? This thesis endeavors to answer such questions by exploring both literary and artistic work from nineteenth-century Victorian England that used the face as a place where truth can be discovered. To decipher the inner truth of an individual, Victorians utilized the now-debunked pseudosciences of phrenology and physiognomy to judge the inner character of the person. These pseudosciences grew from the relatively harmless fads of self-help into pernicious systems of domination, racialization and false categorization. Even though phrenology and physiognomy have been discarded in favor of modern psychology, the questions that led to the adoption of the pseudosciences are still relevant. For instance, modern psychology, specifically social psychology, still looks at how people use physical cues to understand each other through continuing research in stereotyping, nonverbal communication, and the processing of facial expressions. Even more provocatively, as of 2013, neuroscientists still have not completely mapped, or understand, how the mind processes stimuli (Abbot). Despite the progress of modern technology, neuroscientists still rely on close, subjective observation of the brain itself to determine how, and why, people are the way they are.

By looking back at Victorian art, one can see a common interest in deciphering internal realities, the “real,” through sight. To engage the topic of finding reality through
the gaze, this thesis approaches two relatively ignored texts from prominent Victorian female writers and the hyper-realism of mid-century visual art. Specifically, the first chapter engages Charlotte Brontë’s first novel, *The Professor*; the second chapter highlights the early work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and the third chapter explores George Eliot’s supernatural novella, “The Lifted Veil.” Although these lookers or creators believed that truth can be found through active, careful looking, the reality they depicted was either critically unsuccessful, as was the case with *The Professor* and the early work done by the PRB, or like “The Lifted Veil,” regarded with skepticism. Through describing the attempts and failures to find reality through the gaze, I hope to demonstrate the difficulties inherent in the task itself.

Critics have written widely and extensively regarding Charlotte Brontë’s other novels; however, criticism on Brontë’s first novel, *The Professor*, is comparatively rare. Criticism generally uses the text as a beginning to conversing with Brontë’s more successful last novel, *Villette*, or to comment on the novelist’s biography. Margaret Shaw briefly highlights the protagonist, William Crimsworth’s, gaze by aligning it to the spying sight of M. Paul and de Hamal in *Villette* (816). Anna Longmuir discusses the construction of British identity through place as it is seen in *Villette* and *The Professor*. Other critics use the novel to discuss the mechanism of the market or power dynamics. Jennifer Ruth explores the marketplace of *The Professor* and its reflection on the burgeoning Victorian middle class while Annette Federico argues that the male narrator allows Brontë to explore power from a male perspective (Federico 324). However, William Cohen describes *The Professor* as an exploration of human interiority while others, such as Catherine Malone, study the reception of the novel.
Even though there is some critical interest in the novel, critics have popularly preferred using the author’s biography or applying literary theory to themes discussed within the novel to gain an understanding of the text. Unlike other critics, my first chapter on *The Professor* privileges the text above theory or biography. In addition to applying close reading and analysis to the text, my work on *The Professor* focuses on the gaze of the narrator, which few, if not any, critics have explored in depth.

Chapter one begins its exploration of Charlotte Brontë’s novel *The Professor* by explaining phrenology and physiognomy, the two tools which Crimsworth uses to dissect and understand those around him by referring to primary texts composed by phrenologists George Combe and Johann Caspar Lavater. Following this, the chapter explores how Crimsworth applies these tools of looking through his examination of other characters, particularly women, in the novel. Through analyzing how Crimsworth gazes upon others, one can see a belief that eyesight can provide a quasi-scientific detachment which provides a possibility of understanding an objective, internal truth about a person. The second section of the chapter, however, engages instances in which Crimsworth’s gaze is impeded through physical blockades to his sight or internal blockades, like poor eyesight or mental illness. This chapter concludes by positing that despite Crimsworth’s belief he can see the truth from facade, his own sight is at times confounded by his own subjectivity, illness, or through physical realities.

Unlike the scarce critical treatment *The Professor* has received, many art historians have studied the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood by looking at the biography of the specific members and by applying an art historical lens to the paintings themselves. One of the primary resources for scholarship is William Holman Hunt’s
biography *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, which provides an account of the Brotherhood’s history from one of its founding members. Additionally, art historians also refer to the works of John Ruskin, who was an initial supporter and apologist for the Brotherhood. Likewise, criticism also utilizes primary resources, such as critical responses published in newspapers, to reflect the prevailing critical climate of the time. Nevertheless, the readings of the paintings themselves provide the most vigorous accounting of the nature of the movement.

Even though there is a library worth of criticism on the Pre-Raphaelites, I am not aware of any criticism juxtaposing the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to either *The Professor* or “The Lifted Veil.” By uniting the artwork composed by the Pre-Raphaelites to the specific literary endeavors of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, I hope to demonstrate an interdisciplinary search for the real and true that permeated Victorian art.

To accomplish this, chapter two continues the theme of truth-finding through the gaze by considering art completed by what art historian Clive Bell calls the “hard-edge,” or first, epoch of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Like Crimsworth, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) believed that the “real” truth of nature or humanity could be depicted if the viewer had perfect, objective eyesight. The group also utilized tools like phrenology and physiognomy so as to better capture the reality of their figures in their artistic compositions. This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section informs the reader on the founding of the PRB and the aesthetic ideas that propelled the early PRB into fame. The second section briefly illuminates the influence of phrenology and physiognomy upon the PRB and offers a close analysis of two particular oils that
show particular interest in the reality of the face: John Everett Millais’ 1849 *Isabella*, and his 1850 work *Christ in the House of His Parents*. The penultimate section provides a review of the criticism of the PRB’s early work; such criticism demonstrates how the public reacted to the intense realism that the PRB strove towards. The final section concludes by uniting my analysis of the paintings with the criticism to demonstrate that Victorian critics needed the artifice of the ideal to find merit in works of art.

My third and final chapter examines George Eliot’s novella “The Lifted Veil.” Like *The Professor*, “The Lifted Veil” has puzzled critics from its first publication. Even now, contemporary criticism of the novella is generally sparse. This could be, as Whitney Helms suggests, because the novella is and remains a failure. It could also be because the novella stands out amongst Eliot’s work as a supernatural rather than realist text. Despite Helms’ argument, Terry Eagleton and Kate Flint have used the novella to discuss social power dynamics. Additionally, criticism has also centered on the novella’s interest in pseudoscience; B.M. Gray uses the novella to talk about George Eliot’s interest in the pseudosciences, while Malcolm Bull argues that Latimer was magnetized by Bertha Grant, his love interest. Others have written on the novella’s construction: Martin Willis writes in “Clairvoyance, Economics, and Authorship in George Eliot’s ‘The Lifted Veil’” that the novella is a “fictional examination of the forms of speculation that were both demanded of George Eliot and which she herself saw as vital in her continuing writing career,” while Jil Galvan scrutinizes Latimer’s construction as a narrator (184). Still yet, other critics have instead pursued the novella as a medical text. For instance, Diane Mason diagnoses Latimer with monomania while Martin Raitiere
sidesteps Latimer’s ability to read minds and attributes his ability to see the future as a form of epilepsy.

Criticism on “The Lifted Veil” is similar to criticism on The Professor. That is, critics favor theory and the author’s biography rather than relying fully upon the text for their argument. To fill this lacuna in criticism, my principle argument is founded upon and is centered on close reading and analysis. In addition to using close reading, this chapter also specifies two different types of vision used within the text and refrains from criticizing the narrator’s experience. To my knowledge, no critic has used the text itself to exemplify different types of vision and neither do many critics approach Latimer, the narrator, as more than a misanthrope.

As a text, “The Lifted Veil” differs from the mundane realism presented in Charlotte Brontë’s The Professor and the hyper-realism depicted in the early work of the PRB. Instead, “The Lifted Veil” applies supernaturalism to the gaze so as to comment on the nature of knowledge gained through preternatural sight. The narrator of the novella, Latimer, is a gifted seer much like Crimsworth and the painters of the PRB are, and he crafts his narrative to show that he too sees past the facade of the face and into the real qualities of the person he is engaging. This chapter is broken up into two sections: the first section tackles the preternatural or passive use of vision, and the second section counters with the narrator’s use of active or pursued sight. The first section aligns Latimer’s ability to read minds as being highly spectatorial, for he composes the thoughts of others much as one composes or frames a painting. Even though he composes these images for the reader, he is not in control of the images as they present themselves to him; therefore, his understanding of others is passive, uncontrolled, and inevitably painful.
The second section focuses on instances in which Latimer’s vision is actively engaged; I refer to this type of gaze as active or pursued sight. There are instances in which Latimer controls his vision, and in turn controls his life. By paring the two types of gaze within the novella, one can see a dramatic reenactment of the argument for perfect knowledge through sight and knowledge gained of others through action.

Following chapter three, I have included a conclusion that synthesizes the theses I have presented in each chapter to demonstrate the continual interest of defining and understanding the real through an understanding of facade in nineteenth-century Victorian English literary and visual art.
By approaching vision as a path towards the understanding of inner character, Charlotte Brontë demonstrates a belief that one can depict the real through art in her first novel, *The Professor*. In the preface to the novel, Brontë describes an interest in crafting a story in which her “hero should work his way through life as [she] had seen real living men work theirs – that he should never get a shilling he had not earned – that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station” (3). By constructing a character that should resemble what Brontë refers to as “Adam’s son,” she aims to create a steady character that would “drain throughout life a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment;” in other words, her goal was to portray what she designated the “real” (Brontë 3). It was perhaps the designated “real” that resulted in the overall failure of the novel to be published in her lifetime. In the preface of the novel, Brontë states: “Men in business are usually thought to prefer the real; on trial the idea will be often found fallacious: a passionate preference for the wild, wonderful, and thrilling—the strange, startling, and harrowing—agitates divers [sic] souls that show a calm and sober surface” (Brontë 3).

Perhaps another reason the novel is regarded as a failure is due to its plot. Despite the novel’s small size, the plot is comparatively slender. The novel follows William Crimsworth, an Eton educated orphan, and opens with a letter to his school friend,
Charles. The letter itself is awkward and has been unanimously decried by critics as ineffectual. The letter describes how, after leaving Eton, Crimsworth is offered yet promptly denies a place as a clergyman on his uncles’ land; instead, he decides to follow in his father’s footsteps and go into trade. He contacts his brother, Edward, and spends a depressing few months working for him. Eventually, with the help of another tradesman, Hunsden, Crimsworth leaves England for Belgium. The letter ends there; its recipient is promptly forgotten and the letter put away. What follows next is Crimsworth’s account of his life as a teacher in Belgium and his search for independence and happiness.

Throughout the novel, Crimsworth is obsessed with looking. To feed this obsession, he uses tools such as phrenology and physiognomy to determine the inner life of those around him. At other times, he uses his obsession with observation as a place for enacting power as is evident in his interactions with his students. Even though Crimsworth is an obsessive looker, his gaze is imperfect; besides periodic blockades to his vision, he suffers from short-sightedness and hypochondria. Both of these internal obstructions prevent him from accurately seeing and diagnosing the inner qualities of others.

Amongst Brontë criticism, The Professor has been comparatively ignored perhaps due to the plot, the attempt at realism, or even for the clumsy opening. Mostly the novel is treated as a re-telling of the author’s biography or as a warm up for Villette. Few critics have discussed how the gaze is used within the novel, and even fewer have applied close readings to the text to tease out the gaze’s implications. The goal of this chapter will be

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1 Carl Plasa highlights some of the criticism: “The epistolary manoeuvre with which Bronte begins The Professor is both artificial and clumsy. It is...the sign of an early gaucherie on the part of a would-be novelist perilously aspiring...to secure a professional status within the male-dominated literary establishment of mid nineteenth-century England” (2).
to fill this lacuna in criticism through a discussion of how sight is used in Charlotte Brontë’s *The Professor*. To begin, the chapter will highlight the tools of phrenology and physiognomy that are used throughout the novel. Following this, the chapter will continue on to demonstrate how these tools are used through close reading and analysis of the text. The second section of the chapter engages issues of different types of blockades to sight, like environmental stoppages such as boarded windows or shielded faces to internal impediments, such as hypochondria and short-sightedness. Through approaching sight in *The Professor*, one can see not only an individual character’s preoccupation with correct seeing, but an overall Victorian interest, demonstrated implicitly with the protagonist’s confidence in the tools of phrenology and physiognomy, in what it means to see and be seen.

I. NAVIGATING SIGHT

Social control resides with the figure who possesses the power to read the inner state of the other whilst maintaining the illegibility of the self (Shuttleworth 125).

To understand how Crimsworth sees, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the tools Crimsworth uses to diagnose those around him. The first tool he uses is physiognomy, which posits that the mind of a person can be deciphered through his or her appearance, particularly on his or her face. John Caspar Lavater’s 1789 text *On Physiognomy* became an important text of the nineteenth century for it generated specific ideas on how a person’s outward appearance, specifically the face, should be read.
According to Lavater, “the moral life of man, particularly, reveals itself in the lines, marks, and transitions of the countenance” (8). To begin, Lavater divides the body into three parts: the “rim of the belly to the organs of generation, which is the central focal point of this region, define the “animal life”; the “middle or moral life would be seated in the breast, and the heart would be its central point,” and finally, “the intellectual life, which of the three is supreme, would reside in the head, and have the eye for its centre” (9). Likewise, the head would mirror the bodily divisions just described: “If we take the countenance as the representative and epitome of the three divisions, then will the forehead, to the eyebrows, be the mirror, or image, of understanding; the nose and cheeks the image of the moral and sensitive life; and the mouth and chin the image of the animal life; while the eye will be to the whole as its summary and centre” (9). Then, through looking at the face, one could see the propensities of understanding, morality, and animal life. In addition to the generalities he makes about the positioning of the qualities of a person found on the composition of his or her face, Lavater precisely delineates what qualities can be found where. Here is a brief excerpt:

The form, height, arching, proportion, obliquity and position of the skull, or bone of the forehead, show the propensity, degree of power, thought, and sensibility of man. – The bones give the internal quality, and their covering the application of power….1. The longer the forehead, the more comprehension…and less activity. …3. The more curved and cornerless the outline, the more tender and flexible the character; the more rectilinear, the more pertinacity and severity. (Lavater 12)
Thus, by looking to and at the face in physiognomic terms, one can decipher the mind of the person. Therefore, the physiognomist must have precise vision; she must “possess a most delicate, swift, certain and most extensive spirit of observation” (Lavater 10).

In addition to physiognomy, Crimsworth uses phrenology, a pseudoscience that suggests that internal mind is visible through measurements of the head, to see other characters within the novel. According to George Combe, “phrenology gives us a view of [the animal, moral and intellectual powers] drawn from observation…One great advantage of phrenology is the light which it throws on the natural constitution of the mind” (Combe 31). This “natural constitution” reflects a belief that the mind can be seen through observation. Phrenology assumes that the mind is made up of organs that are doubled with “each faculty having two lying in corresponding situations of the hemispheres of the brain” (Combe 31). Because “the organs of the mind can be seen and felt, and their size estimated – and the mental manifestations also that accompany them can be observed, in an unlimited number of instances, – so that, assuming the existence of organs, it is clear that a far higher degree of certainty in regard to the natural endowments of the mind may be attained by these means” (Combe 31). In other words, by noting the shape and constitution of a head, one is most accurately able to describe the inborn qualities of a person.

These qualities are divided into two groups: the faculties and the propensities. The faculties remark on the moral and intellectual capabilities of a person, and the propensities describe the animal, which describes the appetite and the physical capabilities of a person. Propensities and faculties should be used in conjunction, and one should not be overly favored; right conduct, then, is a harmony between propensity
and faculty: “right conduct is that which is approved of by the whole moral and intellectual faculties, fully enlightened, and acting in harmonious combination” (Combe 37).

Crimsworth uses these tools of phrenology and physiognomy constantly and consistently when he comes into contact with others. The first glimpse the reader gets of William Crimsworth’s gaze is when he looks at his brother’s wife. Crimsworth’s gaze begins at a distance; he describes the generalities of the object and then begins to focus in on the specifics of the person. Thus, when Mrs. Crimsworth enters the frame of the narrative, we are given a description of her age and physical shape: “she was young, tall and well-shaped” (Brontë 11). Following this, Crimsworth narrows slightly as he notes her dress – “her dress was handsome and fashionable – so much my first glance sufficed to ascertain” (11). After this general description, the reader is given an account of Mrs. Crimsworth voice, which was “lively” and “indicated” what Crimsworth notes as “good animal spirits” (11). He continues to describe her features more minutely, painting her complexion as “good” with features “sufficiently marked but agreeable” (Brontë 11).

Her face becomes increasingly more vivid to the reader: “I soon saw also that there was a more than girlish – a somewhat infantine expression in her, by-no-means small, features; this lisp and expression were, I have no doubt, a charm in Edward’s eyes, and would be so to those of most men – but they were not in mine” (Brontë 11). He continues: “I sought her eye, desirous to read there the intelligence which I could not discern in her face or her conversation; it was merry, rather small; by turns I saw vivacity, vanity – coquetry, look out through its irid, but I watched in vain for a glimpse of soul” (Brontë 11). After seeing her face and applying his methods of reading to it, he finally looks
away: “Having perused the *fair page* of Mrs. Crimsworth’s face, a deep, involuntary sigh announced my disappointment” (Brontë 11, italics mine).

In this first face-reading, Brontë aligns looking at faces to reading pages, and Crimsworth’s ability to read into the soul (or soullessness) of a person is as the reader is able develop opinions based off of text. Here, the face is the text, and the eye divulges the meaning of the text. Throughout the novel, Crimsworth looks mostly at women so as to anticipate their morality and their inner desires; in other words, he divines the inherent meaning of others through reading their faces like one would read a book. This first example not only mimics how one would look upon a book to “read” meaning, but through Crimsworth’s noting of the generalities and then moving onto the particularities of Mrs. Crimsworth, one could also say that he dissect her as one would dissect a painting\(^2\). Here, looking becomes a simultaneous attempt towards action and reading: when one comes to the text or painting, one is first struck by the text’s generalities, like the shape of the letters or figures represented, but as the text or painting comes into focus, one can read the specificity, the meaning, of the text or painting. Moreover, through looking, Crimsworth demonstrates that the body is the material (similar to how the paper holds the text or the canvas displays the paint) in which the mind illustrates its meaning. This example of Crimsworth’s gaze upon his sister-in-law follows Lavater’s conception of physiognomy. Therefore, like Lavater suggests, Crimsworth believes that the key to the body and mind’s coding is in the eye. So, to truly understand a person, one must look into the eye, or the face, to get an accurate account.

\(^2\) This argument that reality can be translated to art, specifically painting, will be explored in depth in Chapter 2.
By following the trajectory of Crimsworth’s gaze, we see the trained eye of the physiognomist; the mouth, as Lavater notes, designates the animal spirits of a person. According to Crimsworth’s reading, Mrs. Crimsworth’s voice, her mouth, indicates “good animal spirits.” Read physiognomically, her expression designates her as characteristically feminine, for “the female thinks not profoundly; profound thought is the power of the man” (Lavater 16). Crimsworth does not find such women attractive, and when he looks in her eye for the truth – the eye is the center of the being to Lavater – he finds vivacity, vanity and coquetry; he does not find the thoughtful soul he desires for companionship.

Here, William Crimsworth demonstrates a gaze that moves from the general to the particularities of Mrs. Crimsworth’s physiognomy, yet it is in the particulars of her expression to which he seeks knowledge; it is in her eye that he foretells her soullessness and vanity, yet through her person, he sees an object sought after and desired. Why is his sister-in-law desirable, as Crimsworth admits, to most viewers besides himself? Because of the shamelessness of his gaze – he only looks away after reaching his diagnosis of her personal qualities – one can rule out that he does not desire his sister-in-law for the sake of his brother. Gilbert and Gubar read “his disgust…with the stereotypical doll-woman” to suggest the androgynous nature of his character (319). Although there is good work in approaching Crimsworth as an androgynous character, since he is a masculine narrator written by a female writer in the guise of a male writer, which makes him uniquely narratologically androgynous, I read his disgust for Mrs. Crimsworth to be more of a hegemonic power demonstration and a portrayal of his own inclinations as a character. Crimsworth’s disgust is, simply, a production of ego. He enjoys the fact that he can use
his tools of phrenology and physiognomy to see beyond what he perceives others to see. His disgust, then, is a reflection of the superiority he feels when he looks at someone he believes he understands fully.

Even though he is disappointed by what he sees in Mrs. Crimsworth’s face, Crimsworth’s gaze becomes the most aggressive when he begins teaching at Mdlle. Reuter’s pensionnat. He composes word “pictures” of some of his students to demonstrate to his reader, if his readers are “idealists,” that his students are anything but “earthly” angels, or “human flowers” (Brontë 81). His descriptions are delineated and precise; in fact, he compares his descriptions to sketches and encourages his reader to look upon them: “just look here while I open my portfolio and show them a sketch or two, pencilled after nature” (81). In his words, Crimsworth’s gaze is meant to illuminate and shatter the idealist view that women are angels or “human flowers,” but his own negative bias to his students prevents any sort of realistic balance³. The girls he describes are devils and too sullied by personality to be considered “human flowers.” He does more than to check the idealist in his reading of women; he uses his position at the lectern to alienate, disassemble, and objectify.

As Shuttleworth aptly describes, Crimsworth “enters his self-imposed task of classifying the Belgian people as a whole, with all the zest of an anthropologist assured of his own evolutionary supremacy” (132). And this reading, although positioned to describe his male students at M. Pelet’s school, is also demonstrated at Mdlle. Reuter’s pensionnat. Here, my reading differs from Shuttleworth’s. She reads Crimsworth’s

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³ As Starzyk points out, “Crimsworth’s Anglophilic and anti-papist sentiments make of his verbal drawings mirrored surfaces reflecting the artist’s person rather than the character of his artistic subjects. And that is precisely one of the significant functions of the appropriation of image – the disclosure of aspects of self as revealed in the self’s delineation of others” (Starzyk 149). In other words, through appropriating these girls for his own art, Crimsworth demonstrates more of his own features than he does with his students.
attention to his female students as “one more step towards emancipating himself from the
hold of his aristocratic mother” while I see his attention to his female students to be a
further demonstration of the power of the gaze to disassemble, much as how he
disassembled Mrs. Crimsworth through his gaze (Shuttleworth 133). Although the
virgin/whore dichotomy is implicit within his readings of his charges, I do not see
Crimsworth’s gaze as being “held” by the ghost of his aristocratic mother. In fact, I read
his gaze to be hegemonic, fully developed, and not in need of emancipating from a
mother figure.

Crimsworth begins his word portraits of his students by visually dissecting a
student named Aurelia Koslow, a “half-breed” German and Russian (Brontë 82). He
divides his description into two parts: he describes her physical attributes and then, from
his knowledge of her features and time in class, describes her mental abilities.

She is eighteen years of age, and has been sent to Brussels to finish her
education; she is of middle size, stiffly made, body long, legs short, bust
much developed but not compactly moulded, waist disproportionately
compressed by an inhumanly braced corset, dress carefully arranged, large
feet tortured into small bottines, head small, hair smoothed, braided, oiled,
and gummed to perfection; very low forehead, very diminutive and
vindictive grey eyes, somewhat Tartar features, rather flat nose, rather
high-cheek bones, yet the ensemble not positively ugly; tolerably good
complexion. So much for person. (Brontë 82)
The language he uses to describe her person is reminiscent of a breed description; much
like one would tout the point of a dog’s ear or the proportion of his legs to the length of
his torso for breeding, Crimsworth diminishes Aurelia’s person to a metric. Gezari supports my sentiment: “Crimsworth asserts that his role as professor in a girls’ school has enabled him to see women as human rather than angelic, but such passages not only represent sexual provocation as an attack but brutalize Crimsworth’s female pupils, making them less human than animal” (45). Even so, my reading goes farther than Gezari’s by exploring how he reduces so that one can see that it is not the role of professor that gives him the power to disassemble his students; instead, his role only gives him the opportunity to enact a power through the gaze that he has always had, as I demonstrated with how he saw Mrs. Crimsworth. When he looks at Aurelia Koslow, much as he looked at Mrs. Crimsworth, he arranges her into parts that designate a whole which completely objectifies the student. Along with reducing her body into parts to be segmented and judged, he reviews the artlessness of her dress. Her attempts to control her body through “small bottines” and restrict her waist with an “inhumanely braced corset” are judged as harshly and with as much empathy as he treats her torso or her legs. I am not condoning the use of too-small shoes or confining corsets, but what I hope to draw attention to is that the use of such fashion has social rather than personal implications. Her choice of clothing indicates an interest in shaping how others view her: a girl with a small waist and small feet, or what was considered attractive at the time. Instead of criticizing her choice to conform to society, Crimsworth could have looked instead at society as the part of the culprit in contorting the girl’s body. Nevertheless, he focuses more on her body’s failure to conform to his standard rather than crediting her attempts to meet the standard.
Through gazing at her person, Crimsworth is able to judge her personal worth; he does this through dividing her body and judging how this body conforms to his standard. Through gazing at her body, he finds her forehead to be “very low,” which signals to the reader in physiognomic terms that she is not intelligent, for if “the form, height, arching, proportion, obliquity and position of the skull, or bone of the forehead show the propensity, degree of power, thought and sensibility of a man,” then a low forehead signals low propensity, power, thought and sensibility (Lavater 12). Crimsworth continues to describe her mind as “deplorably ignorant and ill-informed”: [she was] incapable of writing or speaking correctly even German, her native tongue, a dunce in French, and her attempts at learning English a mere farce, yet she has been at school twelve years; but as she invariably gets her exercises, of every description, done by a fellow pupil, and reads her lessons off a book concealed in her lap, it is not wonderful that her progress has been so snail-like. I do not know what Aurelia's daily habits of life are, because I have not the opportunity of observing her at all times; but from what I see of the state of her desk, books, and papers, I should say she is slovenly and even dirty; her outward dress, as I have said, is well attended to, but in passing behind her bench, I have remarked that her neck is gray for want of washing, and her hair, so glossy with gum and grease, is not such as one feels tempted to pass the hand over, much less to run the fingers through. (Brontë 82-3)

So, after dissecting Aurelia physically, he continues to comment on the quality of her mind and the quality of her morals. Despite the fact that she has been in school twelve
years, she is a “dunce in French,” cannot write or speak German correctly nor can she manage English. Crimsworth, although he admits to not having “the opportunity of observing her at all times,” focuses on what she cannot do, which skews the supposed objectiveness of this word portrait. This leaves the reader with the assumption that this girl cannot do anything, when, if she was more dynamically re-created in Crimsworth’s words, we would see a girl who struggled in languages but perhaps was somewhat talented in another field. Instead, since she has a low forehead, and thus does not have a propensity for intelligence, she is irredeemable.

Moving from a discussion of her mind, Crimsworth touches on the state of Aurelia’s morality through her use of others to get her work done: “she invariably gets her exercises, of every description, done by a fellow pupil.” Furthermore, she “reads her lessons off a book concealed in her lap.” By describing Aurelia this way, Crimsworth creates a girl that is lazy and morally lackadaisical. Likewise, one can revisit the section describing Aurelia’s clothing to see a girl who is complicit in her own deceit. Much as Aurelia relies on deceit to succeed in her classes, she applies deceit to her body. She restricts her waist and feet to deceive the viewer into thinking she has a small waist and small feet much as she tries to deceive her professors through hiding her book on her lap. Both actions aim to shield the truth from the viewer.  

Not only does she not do her own work, and is thus morally reprehensible, she does not even wash properly. Her lack of hygiene, coupled with her fastidious dress, signals to the reader that she cares for appearances but does not care to put real effort into

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4 Gilbert and Gubar explain how in his position, Crimsworth is able to see through the facade of the female role: “He sees her, in other words, as she really is, preparing in devious and idiosyncratic ways for her female role; sees her in the classroom where she is learning not just the set curriculum of the nineteenth-century pensionnat but, more important, the duplicitous stratagems of femininity. Thus, as master of the classroom, he is really master of the mystery of female identity” (322).
her appearance. Instead, she takes short cuts by greasing her perhaps already dirty hair. Nevertheless, the fact that Crimsworth thought about passing his hand over her head or running his fingers through her hair adds a sinister tint of sexuality to the word portrait. Since he has denigrated his student already through dismembering her and commenting on the quality of her mind and body, he leaves the reader with the suggestion that he thought about touching the objectified student he has spent so much time demonstrating mastery over.

Crimsworth treats Adèle Dronsart much as he treats Aurelia Koslow. She, like Aurelia Koslow, is dismembered and pinned to the text so as to be catalogued. He begins by diagnosing her physical form:

Not far from Mdlle. Koslow sits another young lady by name Adèle Dronsart: this is a Belgian, rather low of stature, in form heavy, with broad waist, short neck and limbs, good red and white complexion, features well chiseled and regular, well-cut eyes of a clear brown colour, light brown hair, good teeth, age not much above fifteen, but as full-grown as a stout young Englishwoman of twenty. This portrait gives the idea of a somewhat dumpy but good-looking damsel, does it not? (Brontë 83)

Like Aurelia Koslow, Adèle is described as one would describe a show dog. Even the quality of her teeth are mentioned. Unlike Aurelia, Adèle’s body is not entrapped by too-small shoes or a confining corset but is instead “heavy, with broad waist.” Here, Crimsworth suggests that Adèle is more confident in her body shape than Aurelia since she does not confine her body in restricting clothing. If one accepts my reading that

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5 Carl Plasa notes that “the depravity Crimsworth claims to behold in the collective visage of the school girls…is a reflex of the sexuality he refuses to confront in himself” (17).
Aurelia’s clothing intimates her duplicity, since the clothing suggests a smaller figure than is actually there, then one would think that Adèle would be given a more empathetic reading by Crimsworth. Her confidence and truthfulness, demonstrated in her sartorial decisions, do not entice Crimsworth’s empathy; instead, he describes her as “somewhat dumpy” yet still good-looking.

In addition to her looks, what makes Adèle most striking is her gaze:

Well – when I looked along the row of young heads – my eye generally stopped at this of Adèle’s; her gaze was ever waiting for mine and it frequently succeeded in arresting it. She was an unnatural-looking being, so young, fresh, blooming, yet so Gorgon-like. Suspicion, sullen ill temper were on her forehead vicious propensities in her eye, envy and panther-like deceit about her mouth. In general she sat very still; her massive shape looked as if it could not bend much, nor did her large head—so broad at the base, so narrow towards the top—seem made to turn readily on her short neck. She had but two varieties of expression; the prevalent one a forbidding, dissatisfied scowl, varied sometimes by a most pernicious and perfidious smile. (Brontë 83)

Here, Crimsworth’s re-productions of Aurelia and Adèle come to meet. Crimsworth editorializes Aurelia’s eyes to be “vindictive,” and he describes Adèle’s gaze to be “arresting.” Crimsworth writes as if Aurelia does not see him, as if he is looking at her through a one way mirror, but he ignores his prominent place on the lectern. Similarly, he seems to be surprised that a student such as Adèle would look back at him as his gaze passes over his students. Both girls, I argue, look back at Crimsworth. He assumes that
his “breast-plate of steely indifference” and “visor of impassible austerity” protect him from the gaze of others much as the Aegis, Perseus’ shield, protected him from the gorgon Medusa’s gaze (Brontë 72). Still, from his portraits, we see that Crimsworth’s armor does not prevent others from looking back at him despite his malicious indifference. His “portrait” of Aurelia and Adèle aims to effectively turn the Medusa’s gaze upon the objectified female, yet their returned gazes betray a truth about Crimsworth’s supposed one-way gazer: when one gazes upon another, the other gazes back. If Aurelia saw Crimsworth’s supposed detached gaze come to rest on her person and divide her into pieces, her gaze perhaps would be vindictive; likewise, Adèle’s arresting, suspicious gaze appears to mirror the gaze she is in receipt of.

Crimsworth believes that he is checking the idealist; however, his gaze is inherently idealistic. The objective view, to Crimsworth, is one that can find the true, the real, through looking. It is a counter to the idealist who would view the women as platitudes: flowers, earthy angels. Instead, Crimsworth relies on what he thinks is more real: he figuratively dismembers the women and reduces their bodies to commodity to be looked at. The truth of the matter is that in The Professor, both the idealist and the realist (that is, one of Crimsworth’s supposed audience and Crimsworth himself) look at women the same way: one reduces the women to lovely angels and the other reduces them to so much meat. Even though Crimsworth is circumspect and uses overzealous detailing to describe the girls he instructs at Mdlle. Reuter’s pensionnat, these characters are of little importance when it comes to progressing the plot. In fact, his descriptions of the three girls, Adèle, Aurelia and Juana, are asides, and the girls are not mentioned in the novel after their description.
Characters that are central to the plot, however, are not as painstakingly described.

For instance, when he first describes Frances, his love interest and future wife, he gives her a mere paragraph of description:

She looked young; yet, had I been required to name her exact age, I should have been somewhat nonplussed; the slightness of her figure might have suited seventeen; a certain anxious and pre-occupied expression of face seemed the indication of riper years. She was dressed, like all the rest, in a dark stuff gown and a white collar; her features were dissimilar to any there, not so rounded, more defined, yet scarcely regular. The shape of her head too was different, the superior part more developed, the base considerably less. I felt assured, at first sight, that she was not a Belgian; her complexion, her countenance, her lineaments, her figure, were all distinct from theirs, and, evidently, the type of another race—of a race less gifted with fullness of flesh and plenitude of blood; less jocund, material, unthinking. (Brontë 102)

His description worries over her age and is uncharacteristically indecisive. Like him, she is “young but not youthful” (Brontë 64). Likewise, Crimsworth describes his face as being “thin” and “irregular” with “a large, square forehead”; her features, like his, are also “not so rounded, more defined yet scarcely regular” (Brontë 64). Through comparing his description of Frances’ face to the description of his own face, one is reminded of his response to his mother’s portrait: “no regular beauty pleases egotistical human beings so much as a softened and refined likeness of themselves” (Brontë 21).

Because Frances looks like Crimsworth, and Crimsworth has already demonstrated a
penchant for egotistical looking, one can see how Frances’ looks foreshadow their impending romance.

In addition to the similarities of Frances and Crimsworth’s visages, Frances also, much like Crimsworth, looks decidedly different from her Belgian counterparts. Crimsworth takes notice of this as he considers their similarities. To further separate her from the others that surround her, he compares Frances to the Belgians. His languages echoes that of phrenologist Johann Spurzheim’s comparison of the Protestant reformer Melanchthon\(^6\) and Pope Alexander VI\(^7\), whom Juana Trista, another of Crimsworth’s students, is likened to.

According to Combe, Melanchthon’s head demonstrates a “decided predominance of the moral and intellectual regions over the animal propensities,” which can be seen by looking at the dominant portion of the face, his forehead (Combe 37). Spurzheim, who paralleled Melanchthon and Pope Alexander VI, notes that Melanchthon’s head demonstrates the “brain of an extraordinary man. The organs of the moral and religious feelings predominate greatly, and will disapprove of all violence, irreverence, and injustice. The forehead betokens a vast and comprehensive understanding; and the ensemble a mind the noblest, the most amiable, and the most intellectual that can be conceived” (qtd. in Combe 37). Pope Alexander VI is described to be markedly different:

> [his] cerebral organization…is despicable in the eyes of the phrenologist [because] the animal organs compose by far its greatest portion. Such a brain is no more adequate to the manifestation of Christian virtues, than the brain of an idiot from birth to the exhibition of the intellect of a

\(^6\) Consider Figure 1
\(^7\) Consider Figure 2
Leibnitz or a Bacon. The cervical and whole basilar region of the head are particularly developed; the organs of the perceptive faculties are pretty large; but the sincipital (or coronal) region is exceedingly low, particularly at the organs of Benevolence, Veneration, and Conscientiousness. Such a head is unfit for any employment of a superior kind, and never gives birth to sentiments of humanity. The sphere of its activity does not extend beyond those enjoyments which minister to the animal portion of human nature. (qtd in Combe 38)

Like Melanchthon, the shape of Frances’ head is more developed in the anterior, which aligns her propensities to be more moral and intellectual, and so she is more desirable. The opposite of the Protestant Melanchthon, Pope Alexander VI, finds his analog in the Catholic Belgians that surround Frances. The hauntingly despicable Juana Trista, in fact, is likened to Pope Alexander VI.

I wonder that any one, looking at that [Juana Trista’s] head and countenance, would have received her under their roof. *She had precisely the same shape of skull as Pope Alexander the Sixth*; her organs of benevolence, veneration, conscientiousness, adhesiveness, were singularly small, those of self-esteem, firmness, destructiveness, combativeness, preposterously large; her head sloped up in the penthouse shape, was contracted about the forehead, and prominent behind; she had rather good, though large and marked features; her temperament was fibrous and

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8 For a post-colonial reading of the treatment of the women at the pensionnat and within the novel, see Carl Plasa.
Figure 1: Melanchthon, Albrecht Durer. 1526.

Figure 2: Pope Alexander VI. Spurzheim. 1826.
bilious, her complexion pale and dark, hair and eyes black, form angular and rigid but proportionate, age fifteen. (Brontë 84, italics mine)

Like Pope Alexander VI, the Belgian girls’ heads are described to be the opposite of Frances’ head; their heads are more developed at the base and less so in the superior portion. Likewise, as Shuttleworth points out, “the additional area of deficiency ascribed to Juana for instance is that of ‘adhesiveness,’ defined by Combe as the capacity which underlies friendship and society. It is also the only faculty which he specifically associates with the condition of femininity” (134).

Shuttleworth’s reading is provocative, yet it does not adequately explore the implications of Brontë’s decision to implicitly un-feminize Juana Trista through Crimsworth’s gaze. I believe Brontë chooses her metaphor carefully to draw attention to the difference between the “Catholic” head type exemplified by Juana Trista and her associates and the “Protestant” head type shown in Crimsworth and Frances’ head types. Shuttleworth also ignores Combe’s comparison of Pope Alexander VI to Melanchthon, and does not question why the Protestant reformer would be superior in Combe’s and Spurzheim’s eyes for reasons other than phrenological purposes. By comparing Melanchthon to Pope Alexander VI, Combe and Spurzheim not only prefer a head type, they prefer the head of a Protestant. This differentiation between religious heads hints at a differentiation of race that Brontë touches on. This Catholic “race” of school girls that the Protestant Crimsworth sees is gifted with “fullness of flesh and plenitude of blood,” and they are “jocund, material, unthinking.” (Brontë 102). Through comparing her head shape to the other girls, Crimsworth reads that Frances would be more phlegmatic, immaterial, and thinking; therefore, she would be more Protestant, and thus more
phrenologically and physiognomically desirable. Similarly, she would have the propensity for being moral and intellectual unlike the Catholic school girls he regards as animalistic either because of their Catholicism or because of the implicit anti-Catholicism of phrenology and physiognomy.

Even though much can be shown with just a few sentences applied to phrenology, Crimsworth is markedly mum on his description of Frances’ person. Instead of dismembering her as he does with his other tutees, he hints at features and propensities rather than handing them to the reader. Why does he do this? It is not because he cannot, but because he chooses not to:

Now reader, though I have spent a page and a half in describing Mdlle. Henri, I know well enough that I have left on your mind’s eye no distinct picture of her; I have not painted her complexion, nor her eyes, nor her hair, nor even drawn the outline of her shape. You cannot tell whether her nose was aquiline or retroussé, whether her chin was long or short, her face square or oval; nor could I the first day, and it is not my intention to communicate to you at once a knowledge I myself gained by little and little. (Brontê 102-3)

This instance of keeping knowledge from the reader is very similar to the first meeting with Hunsden. Instead of describing Hunsden for the reader, Hunsden is left as a silhouette in a darkened room. His voice characterizes his person, allowing the reader to think him large when in fact many of his features are more feminine than Crimsworth’s. Like Hunsden’s voice speaks to his character, Frances’ head denotes a phrenological type; that is, she is spoken of in a generality rather than given any subjective independence.
Unlike Hunsden, whose face is shadowed by Crimsworth’s poor sight, Crimsworth toys with the reader; instead of showing what is known to him through his already demonstrated incisive gaze, he tells the reader such knowledge is meant to be communicated “little by little.” To Crimsworth, then, a character that is important to the story is not known quickly, but piecemeal.

II. SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS AND IMPEDED VISION

Even though Crimsworth demonstrates cutting, precise vision as he looks upon others, his gaze is at times impeded within the novel. Specifically, it is voluntarily stopped at the insistence of the narrator, and at other times, it is denied access through physical impediment. For instance, when the reader first is introduced to Hunsden, Crimsworth denies the reader a circumspect reading of Hunsden’s physiognomy. Unlike his reading of his brother and his brother’s wife, Hunsden is, at first, merely given a silhouette which disguises his true self. This denial of sight cloaks his importance within the novel.\(^9\)

Although Crimsworth was in contact with Hunsden before, the first time he is introduced to the reader is at Edward’s party. Crimsworth, dejected and alone, wanders through his brother’s gallery to look at the portrait of his mother. He picks up a candle in the dark room to better study her features and is surprised by Hunsden’s voice: “Humph! There’s some sense in that face” (Brontë 21). Hunsden is referring to the face of the portrait, a face that Crimsworth regards highly.

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\(^9\) Gilbert and Gubar describe him as “a plot-manipulator, a narrator-in-disguise, seeing to it that the action proceeds as it should, and commenting on events as they occur” (333).
What follows is a close analysis of Crimsworth’s mother’s features and the bearing of aristocratic features. Hunsden’s voice articulates a gaze that is well versed in the language of physiognomy and the power it implies:

[Crimsworth] replied quietly: “compare yourself and Mr. Edward Crimsworth, Mr. Hunsden.”

“Oh Crimsworth is better filled up than I am – I know; besides, he has a straight nose, arched eyebrows and all that – but these advantages – if they are advantages – he did not inherit from his mother, the patrician, but from his father, old Crimsworth – who, my father says, was as veritable a ------ shire blue-dyer as ever put indigo in a vat, yet withal the handsomest man in the three Ridings. It is you, William, who are the aristocrat of your family and you are not as fine a fellow as your plebeian brother by a long chalk. (Brontë 22)

In this passage, Hunsden describes Edward’s facial features to have more power in the marketplace than Crimsworth’s. Because Edward is the “plebeian brother” who in turn resembles his father, the blue-dyer, Edward is more capable of being a tradesman. On the other hand, it is William’s supposed aristocratic bearing that makes him incompatible with the life of a tradesman. Hunsden continues later: “The Lord never made either your face or your head for X------. What good can your bumps of ideality, comparison, self-esteem, conscientiousness do you here?” (Brontë 23). Even though Hunsden doubts if the “straight nose, arched eyebrows and all that” are advantages, he sees Crimsworth’s face as being thoroughly disadvantaged in the trade marketplace. An aristocrat, it seems,
does not belong in X------shire nor does the eye accept such moral values designated to
the aristocratic countenance to be of value in the marketplace.

But what of Hunsden’s countenance? The reader is only given, at this point, a
trifle of a description to carry such a blunt voice. Although Crimsworth has already
shown the reader a penchant for minute description, he withholds any meaningful
description of Hunsden. Instead, the reader is left to decipher the character of Hunsden
through his language, through his body, and not through a reading of his face or his eye.
In this way, his true intention – which Lavater believes to be apparent in the reading of
the eye – is left in the shadows.

Crimsworth, as the narrator, decides to withhold a detailed account of Hunsden’s
features and instead gives the reader a “silhouette”: that is, he describes a “tall man,
young though probably five to six years older than I, in other respects of an appearance
the opposite of common-place” (Brontë 21). Here, Crimsworth begins to describe
Hunsden, yet he decides to withhold the particularities of Hunsden’s features, for he was
“not disposed to paint [Hunsden’s] portrait in detail” (Brontë 21). Instead, Crimsworth
relies on the generalities of figure to begin a conversation in which Hunsden is able to see
the particularities of Crimsworth’s character while Crimsworth denies Hunsden any
figure besides a silhouette. A few questions arise: Why is the narrator refusing the
reader by impeding her gaze? Why is he not showing the reader Hunsden’s true
intentions through particular description, as he does with other characters?

There are a few answers to such questions. First, by not disclosing Hunsden’s
physiognomy, Brontë, in the guise of Crimsworth, denies the reader knowledge of
Hunsden so as to build suspense and create interest in the character. Or, Hunsden’s
abrupt, straightforward language is meant to differentiate the vividly descriptive, yet often silent, Crimsworth to a blunt shadow. The reader is therefore encouraged to approach Hunsden as a foil.  

This instance of contrast compares neatly with another instance of contrast: the moment Crimsworth compares the image of himself to his brother’s image in a mirror.

I looked at him – I measured his robust frame and powerful proportions – I saw my own reflection in the mirror over the mantel-piece; I amused myself with comparing the two pictures. In face I resembled him, though I was not so handsome – my features were less regular – I had a darker eye and a broader brow – in form I was greatly inferior – thinner, slighter, not so tall. As an animal, Edward excelled me far – should he prove as paramount in mind as in person I must be his slave – for I must expect from him no lion-like generosity to one weaker than himself; his cold, avaricious eye, his stern forbidding manner told me he would not spare.  

(Brontë 14)

As Crimsworth looks at his brother, he is aware of his brother’s physical superiority: his frame, proportion and beauty far surpass Crimsworth’s more feminine physique. Even though his brother is much more handsome, Crimsworth sees past Edward’s looks and into his eye, which is marked by being “cold,” “avaricious,” “stern,” and “forbidding.” Here, through the eye, the reader is shown Edward’s true qualities. Nevertheless, the

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10 Terry Eagleton writes: “Crimsworth is downtrodden but would make an efficient oppressor; Hunsden is imperious but speaks up for the poor. William dismisses his radical sarcasm as mere prejudice, but it is not difficult to imagine the Crimsworth we know at the end of the novel stoutly maintaining his hard-won class-rights and cultivating reverence for rank. To the extent that Hunsden is an inverted mirror image of William, he must clearly be combated (38). “The final relationship…is one of antagonistic affection; their conflicts remain active but are gathered in pragmatic unity” (Eagleton 40). Or, the relationship between Hunsden and Crimsworth mirrors that of a representative democracy where competing ideas are joined through a sense of nationalism.
reader is forbidden straightforward access into Crimsworth’s eye. The reader, who is only given the compared form – “less regular” “darker eye” “broader brow” “thinner, slighter, not so tall” – is left wondering what Crimsworth saw in the reflection of his own eye. In other words, the reader does not get a straightforward account of Crimsworth’s hidden feelings through the gaze; instead, the reader must rely on her own sight-reading of the text to literally read into Crimsworth’s character. Nevertheless, I believe that Edward provides a truer foil to Crimsworth than Hunsden in this instance because Edward is shown to be so physically different from Crimsworth. Similarly, Edward is bathed in the light of Crimsworth’s gaze and allowed to be an uncanny image (both like and not like) of Crimsworth. Contrastingly, Hunsden, in the first meeting, is akin to a speaking silhouette and not a full embodiment of a person. Instead of being a whole character, full of contrasting physical perfection with moral imperfection as Edward is, Hunsden is first approached as literally a half-man\(^\text{11}\) which makes him less of a foil and more of a failed description.

This half-man can be read as a foil to Crimsworth’s embodied, incisive gaze, or, more aptly, this instance of characterization could be read as the first concrete example in which Crimsworth’s gaze fails. As the reader finds out a few pages later, Crimsworth was only able to make a general reading of Hunsden’s features because he is very short-sighted (Brontë 29). Because of his short sight, Crimsworth was only able to gather “a vague, general idea of his appearance” (Brontë 29). Knowing this, the hyper-vigilant Crimsworth’s gaze comes under scrutiny. Are any of his “readings” of others valid if he

\(^{11}\) Here, I am referencing the partial nature of the silhouette, but the phrase is apt to describe Hunsden’s duality as both one thing yet another. Gezari likens Hunsden to a female Minotaur: “Caught and fixed in the process of metamorphosis, he is more fabular than real, a man who has sometimes the “mien of a morose bull” and that of “an arch and mischievous girl,” as if the legendary Minotaur were to have been a daughter instead of a son” (41).
does not have perfect vision? The point is valid, but it is not an argument I am making here. Instead, by looking at the instances in which sight fails or is denied Crimsworth, one can see that Crimsworth’s sight is a defensive sight as well as a diagnosing sight. Much like Lawrence Starzyk argues, Crimsworth’s defensiveness throughout the novel is characteristic of his inability to see; his partial sight “explains his frequent lapses in visual discrimination” as is evident in his first meeting with Hunsden (150). Starzyk, however, leaves his observation of Crimsworth’s sight as a psychological footnote to his interest in demonstrating the novel’s theme of slavery and independence; he does not explain what Crimsworth’s flawed sight demonstrates in terms of the narrator’s confidence with understanding the object he is looking upon. When Crimsworth can see, and thus understand what he is looking at, his language is confident; however, in instances in which his gaze is impeded either by his own inability to see, such as when he views Hunsden, or through an external force, one can see his confidence and understanding of what he is looking at deteriorate. By approaching his vision this way, one begins to understand that the relationship is tried between Hunsden and Crimsworth because Crimsworth cannot adequately see Hunsden while Hunsden perfectly sees Crimsworth.

Gilbert and Gubar argue the opposite. They read Hunsden to be completely different from Crimsworth – “Where Crimsworth is passive, reserved, aristocratic, Hunsden is a troublemaker; where Crimsworth is idealistic and sensitive, Hunsden is cynical; where Crimsworth is magisterial, Hunsden is revolutionary. Neither ever expresses any particular affection for the other” (Brontë 332). I believe that the conflict between the two characters is more dependent on Crimsworth’s inability to accurately see
Hunsden. He is unable to place Hunsden as he is able to place others within the text, which makes their relationship more complex than an example of foiling. As I have argued, Edward provides a more powerful foil to Crimsworth’s character than Hunsden does.

Still, even when Crimsworth does get close enough to Hunsden to see, his reading is ambivalent. When he looks at Hunsden, he sees a complicated arrangement of opposites. Hunsden’s voice and general bearing portrayed a “notion of something powerful and massive,” yet his lineaments are “small and even feminine” (Brontë 29). Likewise, his internal propensities (which Crimsworth can gather through a “rapid scrutiny of…physiognomy”) designate a person that would have contentions between “his inward and outward man,” and Crimsworth “suspected [Hunsden’s] soul had more of will and ambition than his body had of fibre and muscle” (Brontë 29). Hunsden, then, is a study of opposites. He is feminine and masculine, powerful and weak: “he would but could not, and the athletic mind scowled scorn on its more fragile companion” (Brontë 29). Hunsden is, in short, a complicated creature, and Crimsworth understands that. However, since his “outward man” does not accurately demonstrate his “inward man,” one wonders if Crimsworth’s tools of physiognomy and phrenology are effective when used to read Hunsden. True, the two pseudosciences give him the ability to see the dichotomy, but they did not give him the ability to understand it. Because his tools of physiognomy and phrenology fail him with Hunsden, Crimsworth does not know how to see Hunsden, so instead, Hunsden’s true character is an enigma to Crimsworth. So, here, his short-sight demonstrates not just the fact that he cannot literally see what is far away
from him, but also metaphorically points to an inability to understand completely what he does see.

His failure to see Hunsden adequately is not the only example of his inability to see clearly. Throughout the novel, Crimsworth obsessively seeks women with his gaze, even in circumstances in which looking upon them is denied. For instance, when he first arrives in Belgium, he finds himself in front of the pensionnat de demoiselles:

“Pensionnat! The word excited an uneasy sensation in my mind – it seemed to speak of restraint. Some of the demoiselles, externats no doubt, were at the moment issuing from the door – I looked for a pretty face amongst them, but their close, little French bonnets hid their features – in a moment they were gone” (Brontë 51). The word “Pensionnat” is a sort of fetish for Crimsworth, for it signifies a facade that encloses women. Much as he reads faces – the architectural facade of the person – he finds the architecture of buildings just as readable. In the word and place of “Pensionnat” he defines “restraint” that signals to feminine restraint, which he longs to understand. Since he desires to understand the feminine, such as we have seen with his reading of Mrs. Crimsworth, Aurelia, and Adèle, one would not be surprised to see that he looks for female faces amongst the crowd of externats that exit the building. However, when he looks “for a pretty face amongst them” he is deterred by their sartorial headgear; in fact, their bonnets restrain Crimsworth’s probing eye.

In addition, after he gets his post at M. Pelet’s school, his gaze to the feminine is also impeded. In his bedroom, one of the windows is boarded up. So:

the first thing I did was to scrutinize closely the nailed boards, hoping to find some chink or crevice which I might enlarge as so get a peep at the
consecrated ground; my researches were in vain – for the boards were well
joined and strongly nailed; it was astonishing how disappointed I felt – I
thought it would have been so pleasant to have looked out upon a garden
planted with flowers and trees, so amusing to have watched the
demoiselles at their play – to have studied the female character in a variety
of phases, myself the while, sheltered from view by a modest muslin
curtain. (Brontë 54-5)

Here, we see a similar longing to understand through sight as when Crimsworth is
walking in front of the pensionnat. Also, like the moment his gaze is confounded by the
externats’ bonnets, his gaze is restricted by nailed boards which prevent him from
studying the women he so longs to gaze upon. He searches for some “chink or crevice”
to physically infiltrate so he might look upon femininity so as to understand it, to study it.
There is, undoubtedly, an undercurrent of repressed sexuality in this section.¹² His search
for a hole in the nailed boards and the presence of a garden “planted with flowers and
trees” hidden behind the wooden boards implies a search for and the presence of feminine
fertility. Cohen notes that “…were the master to espy the female students, it would be

¹² Gilbert and Gubar suggest “in part” that “his feelings mirror Charlotte’s own desire to “get a peep” into
the “consecrated” realm of men” while simultaneously drawing attention to the “characteristically female
desire to comprehend the mysteries of femaleness. Crimsworth, like many women novelists, fantasizes
becoming a voyeur, a scientist of sexual secrets….When he is finally invited to join the staff of the
pensionnat, his ecstatic reaction is not just a parody of male idealizations of women; it is an expression of
Brontë’s own desire to analyze the walled garden of femininity” (321). On the other hand, Annette
Federico argues that “Crimsworth is…virtually obsessed with knowing the mysterious female, but this may
be less because Brontë is also obsessed with femaleness than with the fact that in creating a male figure she
is engaged in the study of oppression from the inside” (336). Federico, unlike Gilbert and Gubar, believes
that Crimsworth’s masculinity is not questionable, and that his relationship with the world is easier because
he is able to fit into the hegemonic patriarchy better than other characters written by Brontë, such as Lucy
Snowe, who has to worry about being followed in the street while Crimsworth does, in fact, follow women
in the street. To Federico, Brontë knows what “it is like to be the object of male scrutiny,” and the instance
in which Crimsworth visually claws at the boarded window is a reenactment on how men look at women
(336).
tantamount to sexually violating them” (474). Thus, the boards are put in place to protect the feminine much as the bonnets protected the externs from the gaze of men.

Nevertheless, the boards, although protecting the women, draw more attention to their presence beyond them than actually protecting them. In fact, Crimsworth mentions that “in moments of weariness and low spirits did I look with dissatisfied eyes on the most tantalizing board, longing to tear it away and get a glimpse of the green region which I imagined to lie beyond” (Brontë 55).

Besides being troubled by short sightedness and blockades to his sight, Crimsworth also suffers from Hypochondria which at times controls the direction of his gaze. After he asks Frances to marry him, and realizes that he loves her physically as well as mentally, Crimsworth becomes ill. Hypochondria, a manifestation of this illness, is introduced as a disembodied voice that says: "In the midst of life we are in death” (Brontë 191). Crimsworth’s response to this voice enables the reader to understand what initiated this recurrence of Hypochondria: “That sound, and the sensation of chill anguish accompanying it, many would have regarded as supernatural; but I recognized it at once as the effect of reaction” (Brontë 191). His Hypochondria is an “effect of reaction” and not a reasonless, supernatural visitation. Because Crimsworth came to the realization that the physical aspects of life are as valid to him as the moral – for he fell in love with Frances’ physical being as well as for her morality – his soul “had overstrained the body’s comparative weakness” (Brontë 191). In other words, because of the division between soul and body, “darkness fell upon” Crimsworth. Hypochondria, now embodied in the feminine, enters the room, so Crimsworth reminisces over his time with her.
She had been my acquaintance, nay, my guest, once before in boyhood; I had entertained her at bed and board for a year; for that space of time I had her to myself in secret; she lay with me, she ate with me, she walked out with me, showing me nooks in woods, hollows in hills, where we could sit together, and where she could drop her drear veil over me, and so hide sky and sun, grass and green tree; taking me entirely to her death-cold bosom, and holding me with arms of bone. What tales she would tell me at such hours! What songs she would recite in my ears! How she would discourse to me of her own country—the grave—and again and again promise to conduct me there ere long; and, drawing me to the very brink of a black, sullen river, show me, on the other side, shores unequal with mound, monument, and tablet, standing up in a glimmer more hoary than moonlight. "Necropolis!" she would whisper, pointing to the pale piles, and add, "It contains a mansion prepared for you." (Brontë 191, italics mine)

As the passage indicates, before he met Frances, Crimsworth’s mistress was Hypochondria. She lay with him, ate with him, and walked with him. She hid vision by dropping “her drear veil” over him, thus hiding the sky and sun, “grass and green tree.” His ears are filled, and so is his mind, with her tales of the grave. She showed him the world and reframed it as a place of death. When she leads him to the side of the river, she tells him what to see: “Necropolis!” she would whisper, pointing to the pale piles, and add, “It contains a mansion prepared for you.” Crimsworth’s vision thus becomes obstructed by the cold hand of mental illness, of Hypochondria. His vision, when
directed by his Hypochondria, is changed and not his own; in fact, his own vision becomes the object of Hypochondria’s gaze, so he loses his own subjectivity and ability to tell the difference between a mansion and a necropolis. Instead, Hypochondria directs and controls not only what he sees, but the intrinsic meaning of that object. He may in fact see a necropolis, or a romanticized cemetery, but he confuses it with a mansion or a place to live because Hypochondria controls his subjectivity and his gaze.

Confused by this resurgence of Hypochondria, Crimsworth notes his unhappy childhood: “my boyhood was lonely, parentless; uncheered by brother or sister,” so he did not feel it strange that Hypochondria arose to guide him by lifting up her “illusive lamp to me in the distance and lure me to her vaulted home of horrors” (Brontë 191). The light that Hypochondria shed with her “illusive lamp” may be a light that was trustworthy to Crimsworth at one point, but now he hesitates to trust it. Since falling in love with Frances, he has begun to trust his own vision, to understand his own motives, and does not trust the Hypochondria that overtakes him later in life. However, this instance remains strange to him:

No wonder her spells THEN had power; but NOW, when my course was widening, my prospect brightening; when my affections had found a rest; when my desires, folding wings, weary with long flight, had just alighted on the very lap of fruition, and nestled there warm, content, under the caress of a soft hand—why did hypochondria accost me now? (Brontë 192).

Why does Hypochondria arise at this point in the novel? Plasa argues that Hypochondria is a disguise for masturbation; his reading suggests that the “death in life” presents a
double entendre, much as the French la petit mort euphemism suggests. This instance, according to Plasa, demonstrates Crimsworth’s sexual self-repression. Likewise Maynard posits that hypochondria is brought on by “a great deal of sexual stimulation without any release, so that the energies prey inwardly (88). Shuttleworth argues that Hypochondria appears because Crimsworth relaxes his control due to his “sense of achievement” of winning Frances which results in a resurgence of “unacknowledged fears surrounding his social and sexual identity” (141). Nevertheless, I believe that hypochondria arose because of the powerful change of starting a new phase of life; that is, Crimsworth began a new phase of life when he asked Frances to marry him, which meant that Hypochondria, his past mistress, no longer had a place in his life when that place was taken over by Frances. After he asks why hypochondria should “accost” him now, he describes Hypochondria as a “ghastly concubine coming to embitter a husband’s heart toward his young bride” (192).

Critics also have failed to see the doubling present in the metaphor of the feminine concubine. His last feminizing metaphor for Hypochondria, the concubine, is used to underline Frances’ own purifying qualities though doubling. Unlike Hypochondria, which guided, veiled, and stole his subjectivity, Frances, the bride, is more passive. Frances does not control how Crimsworth sees like Hypochondria does; in fact, Frances’ gaze is a place in which “affection tempered penetration” (Brontë 146). Likewise, one can see the parallels between the two houses Hypochondria and Frances metaphorically point to: Hypochondria points towards a mansion in a necropolis located beyond a river, and Frances points to a house in England located across the channel.
Through doubling, one gets the sense of Frances’ goodness, but one is also reminded of how Hypochondria, as an illness, prevented sight.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Hunsden, in response to the Crimsworth’s chidings about his bachelorhood, pulls out a cameo of a woman named Lucia and declares: “You call her ideal; but see, here is her shadow; and there cannot be a shadow without a substance” (Brontë 219). This declaration may as well sum up what Crimsworth comes to realize throughout his time obsessively gazing. As he looks upon women and men, he believes he sees the shadow of their minds hiding upon their countenances. Through the use of his toolkit of phrenology and physiognomy, he is able to decipher the shadows and denote the substance, the mind, the shadow intimates. At times, he is depressed with what he finds, such as when he looks at his sister-in-law. At other times, he is disgusted and repelled, as when he looks upon Adèle Dronsart, Aurelia Koslow and Juana Trista. Even though he is characteristically rough and unfair with his assessment of these women, his language aims to show a scientific detachment; this detachment evidences a possibility of understanding the psyche that does not require empathy, which implies that there is an objective truth that can be perceived through objective depiction. This idea of objectivity requires the artist or writer to be completely in tune with the real and be obliged to show that in favor of the ideal. Crimsworth strives towards this ideal by trying to be as
objective as possible, even if he fails due to his own subjectivity or through physical blockages, such as a boarded window, his own short-sightedness, or because of mental illness.

Because of his failures to see others objectively, one could argue that Brontë is demonstrating that the belief of seeing internal truth through external representation is inherently flawed within her first novel. However, it is not the search for truth through eyesight that should be questioned but the viewer’s reliance upon his own subjectivity to decipher meaning. Through creating a narrator that is proud of his ability to see truth, but undercutting that ability by describing him as short-sighted, Brontë is instead commenting against the pride and privilege that those who practiced phrenology and physiognomy held over those they looked upon. Therefore, one who uses his gaze to decipher hidden meaning must be aware of his own subjectivity in order to make an accurate reading.
CHAPTER TWO
PHRENOLOGY, EARLY PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD PAINTING, AND
THE REAL

William Crimsworth’s gaze, although complicated and at times untrustworthy, embodies an ideal that the true and real can be seen through facade. He gazes at others to determine their true intentions, as is seen with how he applies his gaze to his sister-in-law and to the women and girls at the pensionnat. To do this, he appropriates the language of portraiture (“just look here while I open my portfolio and show them a sketch or two, pencilled after nature”) and dissects their figures to determine their worth (Brontë 81). These women become models for Crimsworth to contemplate the romance of the feminine ideal and the real.

Crimsworth’s gaze is a diagnosing gaze; it is one that uses the power of science and art to designate the mind, the inner being, of others through facade and appearance. Brontë, through her character Crimsworth, demonstrates a very Victorian interest of portraying the real through appearance. To Victorians phrenologists such as George Combe and physiognomists such as John Caspar Lavater, the real is an interplay between the physical and the metaphysical mind. Likewise, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) demonstrates an interest in portraying the real through close attention to the physical.

The PRB’s interest in portraying the real was not a new one. In Western art, there has been a tradition of artistry that has strived to depict humanity and the world as realistically as possible. One of the ways artists have tried to re-create the human
experience is through a depiction of movement and musculature. *Kritios Boy*¹³ (c. 480 B.C.E.) is a prime example of such a development for its use of contrapposto, or counterposing. The statue depicts a young man with most of his weight on one leg with a slight angle to his shoulder. By creating his figure to be simultaneously in repose, as is demonstrated by its relaxed frame, yet still giving the impression that movement is possible, the unknown artist created a statue that exhibits the human potential to move or to stay still. Therefore, the statue is simultaneously kinetic and stationary. What makes this statue and other statues that utilize contrapposto and its sister-style, the S-curve, so interesting to the eye is its resemblance to the human body’s potential for movement, which the artist shows in his sculpture through his close attention to how the body interacts with the environment.

Moving forward into the early Renaissance, artists such as Giotto broke from the Byzantine tradition of idealizing the divine by re-creating Christ and his followers to be on earth rather than floating in heavenly gold. His decision to paint the sky blue, rather than gold, in his frescos at the Arena chapel¹⁴ (c.1305 C.E) points to a philosophical shift from medievalism into the humanism that the Italian Renaissance is best known, for Giotto’s view of Christ in his frescos depicts essentially a human man upon Earth. His attention to the human, earthly existence inspired other artists to do the same. This same interest in portraying the real echoes in the work of Perugino’s fresco at the Sistine Chapel titled *The Delivery of the Keys*¹⁵ (c.1481 C.E). In addition to painting the sky blue as Giotto did, Perugino’s fresco is painted using linear one-point perspective, which gives the fresco the appearance of depth. The figures of Christ and the kneeling Peter

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¹³ See Figure 3
¹⁴ See Figure 4 for *The Lamentation*, an example of one of these frescos.
¹⁵ See Figure 5
Figure 3: *Kritios Boy*. Unknown (c. 480 B.C.E). Marble. Acropolis Museum, Athens.
Figure 4: *The Lamentation*. Giotto (c. 1305 C.E.). Fresco. Arena Chapel, Padua.
surrounded by their admirers in the foreground are larger than the figures in the background\textsuperscript{16}.

Not only does the size of the figures create depth, but Perugino’s attention to the angled lines of the square in which the figures stand upon, and how the lines meet at the vanishing point, which is an open door of Solomon’s temple in the background, give the fresco the appearance of infinite space and depth. Here, Perugino describes figures that seem to exist within a space of potential, which provides the viewer with a sense of similarity to looking upon a vista: the particulars close to the viewer are clear and easily analyzed, while the characteristics of the space farther from the viewer are less firm. Through using linear one-point perspective, Perugino encourages his viewer to see the picture plane to be like an earthly horizon.

Artists have continued and still continue to use mathematics, as is demonstrated by Perugino’s use of perspective, and optics to give their art the appearance of reality. As time passed, artists began to use mirrors, and even optical devices such as the camera obscura, to help make their pieces capture light, shadow, depth, and color realistically. For instance, one of the most famous theories of the use of the camera obscura to create seemingly photorealistic texture and depth is through the work of the seventeenth-century Dutch painter, Johannes Vermeer\textsuperscript{17}. Through this device, and perhaps with the help of other optical lenses, he was able to minutely paint crisp details and use color to lavishly describe the refractory nature of light as it plays upon color.

A brief survey of Western art demonstrates a progressive interest in capturing and

\textsuperscript{16} The figures in the background of the fresco are enacting two other scenes from Christ’s life; specifically, they represent the scene demonstrating Christ’s response to giving tribute money and the scene of Christ’s stoning respectively.

\textsuperscript{17} For an example of such a work, see Figure 6.
Figure 5: The Delivery of the Keys. Perugino (c 1481 C.E.). Fresco. Sistine Chapel.
representing humanity, and in turn the world, as realistically possible. This is a purposely broad statement, but generally true of Western art. There are, of course, interesting movements in art prior to the nineteenth-century that playfully rebuked the realism of the Renaissance, such as Mannerism and, at times, the French Rococo (in which style was preferred) and Neoclassicism. It is easy to put a framing device around history, especially art history, as always a movement to some eventual conclusion, but art in my mind is generally without a conclusion. As rules are created, so are they broken. Broken rules are then sometimes repaired and so forth. By drawing a progressive line with choice figures, I hope to demonstrate a single prevailing interest, amongst other interests, that artists have historically gravitated towards: the portrayal of the real. With this progression in mind, one wonders why the artists of the PRB felt the need to reestablish themselves as artists whose goal is to re-create the real. Were they able to scorn the ideal, much like Crimsworth did, and re-create through their art what they considered “real” humanity? Were they effective? How did these artists motion towards the real in their art?

The PRB had a long and strange history; each artist developed individually within the group, and some critics argue that the later paintings by the founders would not be considered Pre-Raphaelitic at all. Additionally, the Brotherhood’s initial membership of seven broke apart and then expanded to eventually include more than forty associated painters, writers, poets, sculptors, models, critics and artists. Because of the influx of artists, the art that was created under the umbrella of the PRB became

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18 A few examples: Millais eventually ran off with Ruskin’s wife, Effie, after Effie successfully annulled her marriage to Ruskin; Millais also eventually led the Academy, while Rossetti spent his later years as a recluse and dependent on an assortment of drugs. Lastly, Holman Hunt had, went to the Holy Land as a Christian convert after his initial stint in the first epoch (Bell 18).

19 Bell believes that founding member Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “whole inclination was towards a romantic form of art,” as is demonstrated with his later paintings of Siddal (18). Rossetti himself also believed towards the end of his life that “properly speaking, [he] could not be considered a Pre-Raphaelite” (Bell 21).
Figure 6: *The Music Lesson* Johann Vermeer (c. 1662 C.E.). Oil. Royal Collection, London.
increasingly diverse.

Some critics have taken to dividing the Pre-Raphaelite movement into pieces, or epochs, so as to better understand it as a whole. For instance, Quentin Bell divides the Pre-Raphaelite movement into two epochs, and Christopher Wood separates the movement into three epochs. Bell and Wood both designate the first epoch to be the founding 1848-60 movement, which Bell designates the “hard edge” movement that most of the artists, besides Hunt, eventually gave up (Bell 17). Wood’s second movement highlights the landscape movement, and the third follows the latter more Romantic, medievalist movement that Rossetti led. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make an overall argument regarding the entirety of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, for, as Bell states:

As a result of its increasingly heterogeneous nature Pre-Raphaelitism becomes less and less susceptible to any kind of overall criticism. The further it travelled and the more we know about the movement the less we are able to make any kind of valid generalization. For this reason the criticism of the Pre-Raphaelites is more interesting and more rewarding when it deals with the hard edge painters. (Bell 19)

I agree with Bell’s assessment and have limited my chapter to discussing the first movement of the Pre-Raphaelite movement and Bell’s “hard edge” painters. Additionally, this chapter focuses primarily on Bell and Wood’s designated first epoch of the Pre-Raphaelite movement not to dismiss the later work of the PRB, but to present the initial movement that inspired others in the nineteenth-century to continue to create under the name of the Brotherhood.
This chapter is divided into four sections: the first provides the background of the PRB and discusses the artistic belief structure that informs the early PRB’s aesthetic concerns. The second section discloses phrenological and physiognomical background to the PRB’s work and provides close readings of two oils in particular: John Everett Millais 1849 oil *Isabella* and his 1850 oil *Christ in the House of His Parents*. It must be stressed that the PRB was a long-lived enterprise that went through many phases, and that all of the artists matured and developed individually as their careers progressed. This chapter mainly focuses on the early work of the Brotherhood, and Millais two oils were chosen due to their striking use of detail and use of perspective, which the early PRB was known for. The third section discusses the criticism that the PRB faced for their style and attention to realism. The fourth and last section presents conclusions based off of the readings of the images and critical responses with a look into next chapter.

I. BACKGROUND

Founded in 1849, the PRB began as a response to the predominant teachings of the English Royal Academy. William Michael Rossetti explains their position:

> Of the subjects recommended to our school as a body...the best we think, are clearly those of our own day. But there is a distinction here. Mere domestic art, as mostly understood and practised, is a very meagre affair...boys playing games, girls listening to organ-grinders, cottagers smoking quiet pipes, or preparing homely dinners. Or we have a touch of the most poverty-stricken religious feeling – a grace before meal, or a girl at a tombstone...Such Art as this is strictly analogous to the juvenile tale
or religious tract; and it would be just as sensible to exhort our men of letters to disport themselves in those mildest fields of literature as to inspirit our painted to corresponding relaxations in art. Modern art, to be worthy of the name, must deal with very different matter; with passion, multiform character, *real business and action*, incident, historic fact.

(Rossetti 587)

Here, Rossetti demands that art be passionate, and, most importantly, demonstrate “real business and action.” The opposite of his modern art is “juvenile” and bloodlessly “meagre.” Instead of representing true form, a-modern nineteenth-century art is represented by stock characters: “boys playing games, girls listening to organ-grinders, cottagers smoking quiet pipes,” etc. It can be argued that these images that Rossetti points to are “real” images in that they depict an action that could be easily seen from a window or through everyday experience. Nevertheless, it is the sentimentality and easiness of the Victorian stock image that Rossetti and the PRB disagreed with. Instead, they believed that realistic art should excite rather than dull and simplify the senses as a “juvenile tale or religious tract” might. It should express the world as it is but in hyper-focus. These images of sentimentality did not stimulate the interests of the PRB; instead, they aimed to create a more realistic, lifelike, and hyper-focused transcription through art.

In addition to Rossetti’s disgust over the use of stock images in art, the PRB was founded not only to counter pedestrian art, but to comment on the state of the Royal Academy where all of the members were enrolled. In an apology printed in 1851 titled *Pre-Raphaelitism*, John Ruskin describes how the Royal Academy taught their pupils:
We begin, in all probability, by telling the youth of fifteen or sixteen, that Nature is full of faults, and that he is to improve her; but that Raphael is perfection, and that the more he copies Raphael the better; that after much copying of Raphael, he is to try what he can do himself in a Raphaelesque, but yet original, manner: that is to say, he is to try to do something very clever, all out of his own head, but yet this clever something is to be properly subjected to Raphaelesque rules, is to have a principal light occupying one-seventh of its space, and a principal shadow occupying one-third of the same; that no two people's head in the picture are to be turned the same way, and that all the personages represented are to possess ideal beauty of the highest order, which ideal beauty consists partly in a Greek outline of nose, partly in proportions expressible in decimal fractions between the lips and chin; but partly also in that degree of improvement which the youth of sixteen is to bestow upon God's work in general. This I say is the kind of teaching which through various channels, Royal Academy lecturings, press criticisms, public enthusiasm, and not least by solid weight of gold, we give to our young men. And we wonder we have no painters! (Pre-Raphaelitism19-20)

As Ruskin points out, the Royal Academy encouraged and taught their students to create art that resembled Raphael’s precedent. The founding of the PRB, as nuanced by their choice of name, was a conscious deviation from the Raphaelitism that the Brotherhood felt restricted their art in the Royal Academy. The term “Pre-Raphaelite” not only encouraged a sense of art that existed before Raphael, but of an art that existed outside of
the influence of the Raphael school of art that the Royal Academy appreciated. Consequently, their art deviated from what Ruskin refers to as the “Raphaelesque rules.”

In their beginning few years, the PRB began as a young group of artists with a slim set of principles that encouraged them to move beyond their training at the Royal Academy:

1. To have genuine ideas to express;
2. To study Nature attentively, so as to know how to express them;
3. To sympathise with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote;
4. And most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.

These rules, according to William Michael Rossetti, made up the credo of the PRB. Nevertheless, this credo is vague and explains little, especially the first tenet. One might argue that having “genuine ideas to express” is counter to the goals of pure realism which would only require a faithful reproduction of what one sees. In other words, realism does not need to express an idea but only form. However, it must be stated that the convention of the time, the “idea” that was painted continually, was the depiction of the ideal, or an imaginative re-arrangement of nature. Therefore, Realism and Naturalism is, essentially, an idea that countered the convention of the ideal that the Pre-Raphaelites felt flooded the Raphaelesque nineteenth-century art world. They felt that the Raphaelesque ideal was not a “genuine” idea; in fact, it was the exact opposite in the eyes of the Realist or Naturalist painter. So, the first tenet merely stresses the desire to express the “genuine ideas” that the PRB discovered naturally and not through rote. Along with the four tenets of the PRB, one might consider Ford Madox Brown’s quote regarding his 1855 oil The
Last of England as a clarification of the four tenets of Pre-Raphaelitism: “Absolutely without regard to the art of any period or country, I have tried to render this scene as it would appear” (Ford 101). As Christopher Wood states, “this remark might stand as a credo for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood” for it demonstrates an interest, above all else, of depicting everything, even the medieval or literary themes they drew inspiration from, as they would appear in real life (Wood 12).

One of the PRB’s staunchest and avid supporters was the art critic John Ruskin. Through Ruskin’s work, the artists, particularly Holman Hunt\(^\text{20}\), were inspired to create art that was reliant on knowledge of the real and not through a slavish adherence to an ideal. In Ruskin’s second volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin rebukes art – landscapes in particular – that demonstrate artifice rather than the real: “…the violation of specific form, the utter abandonment of all organic and individual character of object […] is constantly held up by the unthinking critic as the foundation of the grand or historical style, and the first step to the attainment of a pure ideal” (*Modern Painters* 25). In other words, when the artist paints his ideal, rather than describing the world as it is, he is partaking in a grand tradition of not looking properly. His rendering is incomplete and shows nothing. According to Ruskin in *Modern Painters*, there is but one grand style, in the treatment of all subjects whatsoever, and that style is based on the *perfect* knowledge, and consists in the simple, unencumbered rendering, of the specific characters of the given object, be

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\(^{20}\) In his autobiography titled *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, Hunt gushes over Ruskin’s work: “He feels the power and responsibility of art more than any author I have ever read” (90). He continues to laud Ruskin’s ability to capture the image in text and explain the condition of modern art: “Students…would be wise had they realized their doleful condition, and taken an independent course. I venture to conclude that we are now in a similar plight, and the book I speak of [that is, *Modern Painters*] helps one to see the difference between dead and living art at a critical juncture” (Hunt 91).
it man, beast or flower. Every change, caricature, or abandonment of such
specific character, is as destructive of grandeur as it is for truth, beauty as
of propriety. Every alteration of the features of nature has its origin either
in powerless indolence or blind audacity\(^2\) ... (25)

Thus, Ruskin requires good artists to be perfect lookers. They are to establish their art by
regarding and rendering the real as carefully and minutely as possible

Like Crimsworth, who attempts to study the world around him critically so as to
find the real, the PRB studied nature attentively so as to have the ability to express it
effectively, much as Ruskin encouraged in Modern Painters. Likewise, one is reminded
of Crimsworth’s self-proclaimed duty to demonstrate the real:

DAILY, as I continued my attendance at the seminary of Mdlle. Reuter,
did I find fresh occasions to compare the ideal with the real. What had I
known of female character previously to my arrival at Brussels? Precious
little. And what was my notion of it? Something vague, slight, gauzy,
glittering; now when I came in contact with it I found it to be a palpable
substance enough; very hard too sometimes, and often heavy; there was
metal in it, both lead and iron. Let the idealists, the dreamers about
earthly angel and human flowers, just look here while I open my portfolio
and show them a sketch or two, pencilled after nature. (Brontë 81, italics
mine)

\(^2\) Christina Rossetti’s 1856 poem “In the Artist’s Studio,” written supposedly about her brother, Dante
Gabriel Rossetti (also a founding member of the PRB), and his infatuation with Elizabeth Siddal, who
modeled for him in his later work, provides another view on how her brother viewed his figures: “Fair as
the moon and joyful as the light;/ Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;/ Not as she is, but was when
hope shone bright;/Not as she is, but how she fills his dream” (601, italics mine). Here, Christina Rossetti
suggests that the later work by her brother did not suggest the real character of his painted female but
instead provided what Ruskin would call “blind audacity” in capturing the artist’s idealization rather than
the thing itself.
Crimsworth’s detailed “sketch or two,” as previously discussed in chapter one, shows an interest in exploring the ideal woman and the real woman through looking. To Crimsworth and the PRB, the ideal was merely “vague [and] slight,” showing nothing of the “palpable substance” of the real. Despite the fact that his gaze is largely ineffectual and demonstrates more about himself than the object he depicts, one can see the same idealism in Crimsworth’s gaze as in the PRB’s principles.

II. USE OF PHRENOLOGY AND REALISM

My argument that the PRB aimed to demonstrate the real through paint is supported gracefully by Lucy Hartley. She writes:

A conviction that the proper subject of art ought to be found in the observation of the ordinary dominated the PRB aesthetic, for it was in ordinariness, they believed, that real beauty is found. Central to such an understanding was a belief that observation was the means of seeing through the individual to the common essences shared by individuals, gathering together the intuition of particulars into representation of the substances which make us human. (Hartley 83)

The PRB sought to demonstrate real beauty through the depiction of ordinary people so as to expose what the group believed to be the true character of humanity. To do this, they used both phrenology and physiognomy to highlight the real.

According to Stephanie Grilli, the PRB was “guided by the principles of self-help and self-knowledge,” and were “attracted to the promises of phrenology” (49). Grilli continues:
Much space in the PRB Journal is devoted to the character analyses by a “head-reader, as he would have been called, named Donovan. A true showman, “Donovan” is Charles Donovan who ran the London School of Phrenology, where he gave free lectures every Monday evening and provided courses in the art of “examining the head.” (Grilli 49-50)

Additionally, the Pre-Raphaelites were denied access into the Academy’s Life Class, so they learned “from phrenology a method of portraying human nature through physiognomical peculiarities. As a result, their portraiture moved away from the synthetic and the ideal to the analytic and natural” (Grilli 50).

It can be argued by modern readers and viewers that the use of the now-disregarded pseudosciences undermines the reality of the depictions of the PRB’s art. Instead of attacking phrenology and physiognomy as an inaccurate and potentially dangerous set of principles, one must instead see what the two pseudosciences taught: it taught the viewer to look and to look carefully at the individual. What phrenology and physiognomy taught the PRB was not a facile understanding and an idealization of the human form like the Academy taught; instead, it encouraged the group to look analytically and to give attention to the precise details of the individual it wished to render. What resulted from the PRB’s use of phrenology and physiognomy was an art that aimed for precision in showing a person as she was.

One can see such a demonstration in much of the work by the PRB, but most specifically in Millais 1849 oil, Isabella. Isabella demonstrates an early scene from Boccaccio that was retold by Keats in his poem “Isabella: or, The Pot of Basil.” Included with the oil was the following excerpt from the poem:
Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!

Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love’s eye!

They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
Without some stir of heart, some malady;
They could not sit at meals but feel how well
It soothed each to be the other by….

These brethren having found by many signs
What love Lorenzo for their sister had,
And how she loved him too, each unconfines
His bitter thoughts to other, well nigh mad
That he, the servant of their trade designs,
Should in their sister’s love be blithe and glad
When ‘twas their plan to coax her by degrees
To some high noble and his olive-trees.

The poem illuminates the story depicted in the oil. Isabella is in love with Lorenzo who works for her family. When her brothers find out that Lorenzo and Isabella are in love, they are enraged; they kill Lorenzo and bury him in the forest. In a Romantic twist, the ghost of Lorenzo visits Isabella and tells her where his body is. Isabella visits the body and decapitates the corpse and replants Lorenzo’s head in a pot of basil. She fawns over the basil plant, which, coincidentally, draws her brother’s attention to the plant. The
brothers find the head buried beneath the basil, steal it, and flee. Isabella then dies of a broken heart. The painting describes not the death scene or Isabella’s sadness, but instead a family meal in which Isabella’s three brothers glare knowingly at the lovers. The lovers, Isabella and Lorenzo, are seated to the right of the table, and Isabella’s three brothers sit across from her\textsuperscript{22}. The oil is remarkable for its tight, claustrophobic treatment of space and its precise detail. The action of the painting is clustered around a small table in which twelve people sit. The table is draped by a patterned white and grey cloth, which provides the first perspectival sight line for the painting. The eye follows the width of the table and then moves up its length, noting the detailed hands and interchanging color pallet of the clothing worn by the diners. The eye is stopped directly at the end of the table by a silver dish and a triangular patterned blue and gold wallpaper, reminiscent of Victorian wallpaper. After being stopped by the detailed pattern of the wallpaper, the gaze is gently persuaded by the tipped glass of the last man at the table to travel to the right. Following this guidance, the eye begins to travel across the faces of the men sitting to the left, beginning with the inclined, disembodied head of the man to the far back and to the man raising his glass of red wine. Following this, the gaze is halted by the red cap of a grimacing man at the front of the table. His right hand is occupied cracking nuts and catching them in his left hand while his right leg is outstretched, kicking at what appears to be an Italian greyhound cowering in Isabella’s lap. The eye is constantly drawn to the white stocking leg and follows its point to the greyhound, to Isabella’s lap and up towards the intense gaze of Lorenzo. The viewer’s eye is then convinced to stop at each face as it continues its circuit back up the table: it notes the covered head of an elderly woman, the patrician pate of a man in yellow

\textsuperscript{22} See Figure 7.
Figure 7: Isabella, Sir John Everett Millais (1849 C.E.). Oil. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool
wiping his mouth, the brown head of a small youth, the downcast gaze of a rosy cheeked blonde, the inclined head of an olive-complexioned drinker.

Each face is notable, different, and phrenologically interesting. Grilli points out that the very faces in Millais’ painting allow the viewer a way into reading to mind of the painted: “By portraying the variety of physiognomical features of models appropriate for their role, the artist allows the viewer to read the character’s mind and his motivation” (55). Thus a viewer well-read in the language of phrenology or physiognomy would read in the large, open forehead of Lorenzo a sensitive and intelligent nature, while the grimacing brother’s short forehead and thick neck would describe a strong animal propensity. By looking at each of these characters individually, one gets a sense of a universal type: the intelligent lover, the brutish brother, the elegant lady. However, these types are downplayed by the use of living models instead of the sculptural, ideal, or at times imaginary models frequently used by the Academy. Instead of using ideal types, Millais used people he knew to model for this painting. Although there are different accounts of who is whom, the most likely (according to Parris) is that F.G. Stephens sat for the brother holding up the glass, Walter Deverell sat to his left, and Jack Harris is the brother kicking the dog; Dante Gabriel Rossetti is the olive complexioned man at the end of the table drinking, Hugh Fenn is the man peeling the apple, the artist’s father for the man wiping his mouth, William Michael Rossetti and partly Charles Compton for Lorenzo and Mary Hodgkinson for Isabella (Parris 69).

But what of the reality of gesture? There are two types of gestures within the painting: the gestures hidden by the table and the controlled expressions taking place above-table. Below table, the gestures are obviously presented to the viewer. True, the
family sitting at the table is unaware of this leg, but the viewer is not. In fact, the
viewer’s eye is constantly drawn back to the point of the toe towards the dog’s lolled eye.
The dog, commonly a symbol of fidelity, is terrorized by the violence of the brother’s
outstretched leg, as can be seen by his rolling eye. If the dog is read as a symbol of
fidelity, then due to its position at Isabella’s lap, one can read the violence of the
outstretched leg to foreshadow her doomed romance. Still, none of the people sitting at
the table in the painting are aware of the potential violence because the threat is literally
made under the table. What happens above table in the facial features of the sitters is
another story. Barlow reads the paintings as a study in secrets: “Each action – raising
glasses, holding napkins and other seemingly trivial gestures – can be read as ‘innocently’
polite or as concealing hidden threats. The brother at the left who looks to his wine glass,
genteelly extending his little finger, seems to gaze past his glass to the lovers, his other
hand held up to his mouth, fingers pressing his lips, as if to conceal his expression” (136).
Even the grimacing face of the brother with the outstretched leg could be read as either a
menacing gesture or the grimace of a man as he tries to crack the hard shell of a nut.

But is the painting really ambiguous? I do not think so. Instead, the painting
presents an argument of the ambiguous becoming clarified by reality. Because the
viewer is given two perspectives, that of the table above and the table below, the gestures
of the everyday become recast. The viewer can literally see beyond the facade of gesture
and into the true reality of intention. In other words, the viewer is both a figure that sees
the above-table polite gestures and the hidden threat these gestures conceal. Thus, the
viewer is implicitly given a power to see through the facade of the everyday into the true
reality of the depiction.
Millais’ 1850 oil *Christ in the House of His Parents* also demonstrates a similar interest in portraying the real through attention to phrenology and minute detail. As with *Isabella*, Millais truncates space by pushing the figures of the boy Christ, Mary his mother, Joseph his father, his cousin John the Baptist and two other figures into the foreground. By limiting the space of the picture plane, Millais encourages the viewer to regard the reality and detail of the figures. The action is centered on a well-used carpenter’s table. The child Christ stands in the immediate foreground in front of the table showing his mother, and the viewer, a wounded hand. Joseph contorts his body over the table so as to touch Christ’s bleeding hand, and young John the Baptist, wearing his camel-skin, approaches his cousin with a bowl of water. The figure to the left in the foreground leans over the table towards Christ whilst grasping a hammer, which foreshadows Christ’s crucifixion. The remaining figure, an elderly female, likewise leans over the table, her face partly in shadow as she looks upon Christ kissing his mother’s cheek. Beyond this elderly female is a wall on which hangs the tools of Joseph’s craft; among these tools is a ladder, and on this ladder rests a dove, which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. This wall also pushes the human figures into the foreground, which also presses the action of the piece into the viewer’s space. Because of this, the eye is pressured continually to follow the circular pattern of movement around the Christ.

Unlike *Isabella*, which appears to take place upon a closed stage so as to highlight the realistically rendered images of the faces, *Christ in the House of His Parents* has two open spaces that give the oil the semblance of perspective. To the left of Christ is an

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23 Consider Figure 8
24 This wound, coupled with the drops of red blood on Christ’s foot, also signal to the Crucifixion.
Figure 8: Christ in the House of His Parents, Sir John Everett Millais (1850 C.E.), Tate Gallery, London.
open door that leads to a pasture in which sheep crowd behind a fence, staring into the viewer’s space. Likewise, to the right of Christ and behind Joseph’s bent figure is the remaining portion of the carpenter’s studio where wooden boards lean against a wall to the utmost right of the picture plane. This wall meets with another wall in the background that gives the illusion of space through an open lunette window.

The details of the oil are striking. The immediate foreground is littered with sawdust and wood shavings. This attention to detail gives the painting a sense of the realism of a carpenter’s shop, but also in places problematizes the perspective. At the feet of the figure holding a hammer is a crumpled spiraling wood shaving that flattens the picture plane. Because of this detail, perspective is dismissed and the illusion of space is forgotten, much as it is in Isabella. Despite this possible flaw – which is arguable, since most of the early PRB paintings dismiss perspective in favor of detail – one is struck by the realism of the carpenter’s bench. The bench is precisely painted so as to show use; the wood is chipped and scarred, and in places, the surface is burnished from what I imagine is the ghost of finishing polish and accumulated dirt. In addition to the carpenter’s bench, one is struck by the precise detail of the wooden wall behind Joseph. The jambs of the doorway flake their leftover bark, and the wood swirls fingerprint-like behind the old woman’s head. Likewise, Millais painted the wood to be imperfect; in places, the wood cracks and shows signs of rot.

Millais was careful to paint his images to resemble the real. In fact, according to Hunt, he “went to an actual carpenter’s shop in Oxford street where they had some planks of real cedar” (202). In this shop, Millais “worked for days” so as to paint his image of Joseph’s carpenter’s shop as close to the real as possible (Hunt 202). In addition to his
attention to rendering the objects of the shop realistically, he also spent a great deal of energy making his models appear as lifelike in paint as they appeared standing in front of him: “When painting the body of the little St. John, as I finished it and turned my eyes from the boy who stood in front of me, back to my painting, so thoroughly in relief did it appear that on looking again to the model I could not tell which was which” (Hunt 202). Likewise, he was very particular in choosing his model for Joseph: “I would not have a lazy model who had never done any work in his life. I was determined to choose a real carpenter, whose frame and muscles had been formed by the very exercise that had been the toil of the Virgin’s husband” (Hunt 202). Moreover, Millais did not rely on his imagination to render the faces of the figures in Christ in the House of His Parents. The model for the Virgin Mary is Mary Hodgkinson, who was also in Isabella; Nöel Humphreys modeled Christ; Edwin Everett sat for John the Baptist; H. St. Ledger is the assistant to the left of the picture plane, and Joseph’s head is the likeness of artist’s father (Parris 78).

Millais was very careful in his choice of models. The choice to dissect a model’s body – that is, having one model for the hands, another for the face, etc. – had been a standard for painting for many years before the PRB were formed. Nevertheless, although Millais carefully and systematically made his painting to resemble the real, he still chose not to use a “real” carpenter’s head as Joseph’s head. This would appear to be contrary to the trend of realism within the early PRB paintings. Why would Millais choose to use his father’s head rather than the carpenter’s head? Instead of pointing

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25 This tradition has roots in antiquity. Consider the story of Zeuxis, a fifth century painter. He held a contest to find the most beautiful woman to be his model for Helen; however, he could not find a woman who had all of the particulars of beauty. Instead, he crafted his ideal Helen by using various models to create a composite image of Helen. This story has been depicted multiple times in art. See Victor Mottez 1858 oil and François-André Vincent’s 1789 oil.
towards an ideal, as a composite image of a person in a painting generally did. Millais chose to use his father’s head to show the phrenological truth of Joseph’s character.

Stephanie Grilli writes:

> The sheer size of the cap of the head, the height to which it rises perpendicularly to the brow, and the regularity and the subtlety of the curve of the crown exceed normal expectations of human anatomy. But all of these features stress the most desirable cranial features – the shine [on Joseph’s pate] no longer comes from a halo but from a smooth, tightly pulled temple (57).

So, to get at a phrenological truth of a character, Millais inserted the head of his father upon the body of a carpenter. Grilli hints that this choice points to a humanistic trend towards realism to describe the holy to be simultaneously human.

Instead of creating an idealization of figure, which one could argue that Millais subscribed to by placing his father’s head upon the carpenter’s body, I would argue that Millais depicted the character of Joseph as realistically as possible by making his body that of a carpenter, and by distinguishing his mind, as shown through his father’s phrenological typography. Millais choice to transcribe his father’s head does not go against the slim rules that PRB was founded on, nor does this choice contradict Ruskin’s ideal art. For, as Ruskin states, “if there be any truth or beauty in the original conception of the spiritual being so introduced, there must be a true and real connection between that abstract idea and the features of nature as she was and is” (*Modern Painters* 25-6).

Therefore, Millais found a connection between the “abstract idea” of Joseph’s character in the “features of nature” as found in the phrenological topography of his father’s head.
Likewise, he found the “abstract idea” of carpenter-ness in the body of the carpenter he rendered.

III. CRITICAL RESPONSE

Millais’ Isabella was well received. An 1849 article in The Literary Gazette called it “a very clever copy of the ancient style,” and noted that “the absence of perspective and aerial distance is of a piece with the original school which it imitated, and the very formality of the impasting and distribution of the forms carries us back to the period of aspiring but imperfect art” (“Royal Academy” 433). What The Literary Gazette so enjoyed about the painting was a general misinterpretation; the painting was not meant to be “clever copy of the ancient style,” as the usual academy paintings were. Instead, it aimed to depict the freshness of the art before Raphael and not draw attention to pre-Raphaelesque “imperfection.” What the public saw when they looked upon Isabella was a painting that was “like” rather than a painting that stood on its own. The public’s taste was, as William Morris puts it, “under the influence of the academical tradition” and was not prepared to view the work as a deviation from the norm of copy, which is why I think critics liked this painting (630). The critics and the public, however, changed their mind when the PRB presented their other works.

Unlike Isabella, Christ in the House of His Parents was disparaged by critics for its realism. Its characters were too ugly, too human, and too detailed. Famously (or infamously) Charles Dickens wrote:
“In the foreground of that carpenter’s shop is a hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-headed boy, in a bed gown; who appears to have received a poke in the hand, from the stick of another boy whom he has been playing in an adjacent gutter, and to be holding it up for the contemplation of a kneeling woman, so horrible in her ugliness, that (supposing it were possible for any human creature to exist for a moment with that dislocated throat) she would stand from the rest of the company as a Monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin-shop of England” (Dickens 265-66).

Disregarding Dickens’ questionable assertion that Mary has a dislocated neck, it is at first strange that Dickens, who wrote of realistic concerns of the poor, would dislike this oil for its depiction of figures that appear to be taken from life. When he looks at the Christ child, he sees a little boy that looks like other little boys. However, it is this realism that struck Dickens and other critics as blasphemous. Dickens continues: “This, in the nineteenth century, and in the eighty-second year of the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Art, is what Pre-Raphael Art can do to render reverence and homage to the faith in which we all live and die!” (Dickens 266). One could imagine this same argument against Giotto’s decision to paint his sky blue in the Arena Chapel. But is it irreverent to paint Christ as a human being? I do not think this is what Dickens is getting at. What he dislikes so much about the painting is that the figures are not idealized versions of humanity. Mary’s brow wrinkles, and Christ looks like a little boy with bare feet that looks like many other little boys who hurt themselves and go to their mothers. It was not that Dickens was disgusted by the idea of reality, but that ideal beauty, which
was popularly painted, was not depicted here. As William Morris puts it, the PRB images “are not like pictures” that the public was used to seeing in their picture books or albums or hanging from Academy walls (630).

Nevertheless, Dickens was not alone in his critique of the ugliness of PRB art. One critic, David Masson, took contention over the phrenological ugliness of the people portrayed generally in PRB work:

There was universally noted in the earlier works of the Pre-Raphaelites, a kind of contempt for all pre-established ideas of beauty. It even seemed as if, in their resolution to copy literally the forms of Nature, they took pleasure in seeking out such forms as would be called ugly or mean. Thus, instead of giving us figures with those fine conventional heads and regular oval faces and gracefully-formed hands and feet which we like to see in albums, they appeared to take delight in figures with heads phrenologically clumsy, faces strongly marked and irregular, and very pronounced ankles and knuckles. (Masson 203)

Although this criticism seems general, the article goes on to point to Millais as being particularly culpable in painting ugly figures: “the colouring of the faces, hands, and feet of the personages painted – and these the most sacred personages that an artist could paint – was altogether so peculiar that critics among his brother-artists declared that he must have had scrofulous subjects for his models” (Masson 203).

Thus, it was the realism that the early PRB sought that many contemporary critics despised as is demonstrated by the negative response to Millais 1850 submission of
Christ in the House of His Parents. The other members in the PRB did not fare well either in that year. The companion piece to Christ in the House of His Parents, William Holman Hunt’s A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Priest from the Persecution of the Druids, did not attract the same loud derision as Millais work, but was still disliked for its ugliness. One critic specifically disparaged Hunt’s realism; Hunt’s characters, like Millais figures, were “undoubtedly painted from nature, but the striking points of the study are precisely those which are rejected in that kind of Art which is properly called “fine” (“The Royal Academy” 176). Like Christ in the House of His Parents, A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Priest from the Persecution of the Druids has a tight picture plane, and the figures are pushed into the foreground; likewise, each figure demonstrates various expressions and the brushwork is extremely tight. Hunt, like Millais, painted with delicacy and crisp detail, a prominent feature of early PRB work. Still, Millais and Hunt were not the only artists of the PRB to be attacked by critics. Ecce Ancilla Domini, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s 1850 submission to the Portland Gallery “was bitterly attacked by critics,” which led to his decision never to exhibit again in London (Wood 16).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Even though Crimsworth’s obsession may appear to be limited to the confines of The Professor, one can clearly see that other Victorian artists, such as the Pre-Raphaelite

26 In a popular critique titled “The Fleshly School of Poetry,” written in 1871, well after Rossetti decided to not show his art in London, Robert Buchanan writes: “Judged by the photographs [of Rossetti’s artwork], he is an artist who conceives unpleasantly, and draws ill” (889). Buchanan continues to conflate Rossetti’s poetry, which was highly regarded at the time, to be like his art: “There is the same thinness and transparence of design, the same combination of the simple and the grotesque, the same morbid deviation from healthy forms of life, the same sense of weary, wasting, yet exquisite sensuality; nothing virile, nothing tender, nothing completely sane; a superfluity of extreme sensibility, of delight in beautiful forms, hues and tints, and a deep-seated indifference to all agitating forces and agencies, all tumultuous griefs and sorrows, all the thunderous stress of life, and all the straining storm of speculation” (890).
Brotherhood, were interested in depicting the world as it was and not as an ideal. Through looking at the work of the Brotherhood, specifically of that of Millais, one can see that there was less of an emphasis on portraying the ideal and more on demonstrating the particular. The PRB, much like Crimsworth, used tools such as physiognomy and phrenology to decipher and decode their images; they used what was most common to demonstrate what they felt was most alive. Hartley, echoing Wordsworth’s Preface to Lyrical Ballads, puts the goal of the PRB succinctly: “Art should be able to copy life, ordinary life or life as it is lived, by translating these experiences into specific emotional expressions” (89). Through looking at both Crimsworth’s gaze in Brontë’s The Professor and comparing that gaze to the art of the early PRB, one can see that factions of both the literary arts and the visual arts were interested in finding the mind, the unseen real, through understanding of the physical.

Even though the PRB demonstrated this interest, was it necessarily effective? Did people want their paintings to be hyper-realistic? An analysis of contemporary critical response to early PRB art would prove that it was not. Generally, critics were taken aback by the reality, by the ugly reality, that Millais and his brethren depicted. It was not interesting to the contemporary nineteenth-century viewer if the artist portrayed the real if the real was ugly. And if the artist portrayed the Holy as real, then the artist was in danger of appearing sacrilegious. In addition to this ugly reality, the artists gave the viewer literally no space away from their painted figures. The tight picture plane and intentional haphazard attention to perspective forces the figures into the primary space of the eye, and the eye has no choice but to regard the phrenological reality of humanity. Everywhere one looks in Christ in the House of His Parents is precise, analytical detail;
even the child Christ’s toenails are chipped. Similarly, Isabella is a study of how the mind portrays itself on the face, and when that mind is ugly – as it is demonstrated by the three brothers at the left of the table – the face is necessarily ugly.

In short, the PRB were initially treated with contempt because they attempted to show through art what they viewed humanity to be. They attempted to show the shadow of the substance of humanity through their precise handling of detail, figure, and form. I would argue that Millais specifically was effective in demonstrating a specific view of the particulars of humanity and uses his eyesight and artistic talent to demonstrate what Ruskin refers to as the “perfect knowledge” of the simple and unadorned properties of humanity. The reactions of the public and the critics were merely a response to that perfect knowledge. Without the artifice of the ideal, the viewer of art and the reader of literature are left in a predicament: how does one respond when the ideal is replaced with unadorned reality? In Crimsworth’s case, he delighted in unveiling the real through his tools of phrenology and sight, and tried (and arguably failed at times) to demonstrate Ruskin’s perfect knowledge through his gaze. Nevertheless, one must not forget that The Professor was a critical failure much as the work of the early PRB was. The audience, it seems, does not react well when humanity is stripped of its artifice. Neither does Latimer, the narrator of George Eliot’s novella “The Lifted Veil.” Much like the critical audience of the PRB and Charlotte Brontë’s “men in business,” Latimer is repelled by the abject realism he is subjected to when around other people. Chapter three continues to explore how the narrator and his body react to the experience of having perfect knowledge of others.
CHAPTER THREE

“THE MYSTERY THAT LIES UNDER THE PROCESSES” SIGHT IN “THE LIFTED VEIL”

As previously argued, much nineteenth-century thought was dedicated to understanding the inner workings of the mind through eyesight. Charlotte Brontë, in her first novel, created a narrator that obsessively sought the real though interpreting the faces of those around him. Likewise, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood crafted their art to show humanity as realistically as possible through perfect attention to vision. Both the novel and the art explored have insisted that with tools such as physiognomy and phrenology, a viewer could essentially read the mind of another through the topography of his or her head or facial features. “The Lifted Veil” takes such sciences a step further. Rather than applying a science to a face to understand the workings of a mind, Latimer, the narrator, can see the thoughts of others that surround him without effort. Not only is he able to “read” minds through no will of his own, he is able to read the future. His ability to lift the veil of a person’s inner thoughts and subject him or her to bare scrutiny prevents Latimer from having meaningful relationships and a happy life. The text maintains that such an ability to see the mind of others is a curse rather than the blessing that physiognomy, phrenology or even mesmerism believed it would be.

27 The title is a reference to Eliot’s 5 December 1859 correspondence to Barbara Bodichon in response to reading Darwin’s Origin of Species. The complete quote is: “But to me the Development Theory and all other explanations of processes by which things came to be, produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes” (George Eliot Letters 227).
“The Lifted Veil” stands alone in George Eliot’s oeuvre of realist fiction as a fantastical work. However, like most works of fantasy or science fiction, the text asks pointed questions that echo into the mundane. Specifically, what would happen if the facade of the face was lifted to reveal the true intentions of the mind? Would the person viewing perceive his fellow man with joy or contempt? Does knowing the inner truth about others foster sympathy? Eliot tackles these questions by creating a narrator, Latimer, who writes to hopefully gain the sympathy of his readers: “It is only the story of my life that will perhaps win a little more sympathy from strangers when I am dead, than I ever believed it would obtain from my friends while I was living” (LV$^{28}$ 4). Why should Latimer seek sympathy from an unknown reader? Latimer, the narrator, has spent his life shrinking away from society because he is forced through extrasensory knowledge to see the inner workings of humanity. This extrasensory knowledge causes Latimer to recoil in disgust and avoid others. In response to this avoidance, those around him treat him with disdain or utter contempt. His narrative is essentially an explanation, an apology, for his life. Because he was not able to gain the sympathy of those around him, he writes into the future to an unknown reader that will perhaps pity his experience.

There is some contention amongst critics over Latimer’s extrasensory abilities: Can Latimer really read minds and see the future? In response to the strange revivification scene at the close of the novella, Terry Eagleton writes: “We can’t believe it; and yet of course we must, for this is a ‘realist’ tale, and within those conventions what Latimer as observer says goes. It must have happened – Bertha must therefore be guilty – and yet, somehow, it didn’t” (58). Eagleton continues on to suggest that Latimer’s unreliability is a function of narrative in general, but his point has been heard. In a later

$^{28}$ All in-text citations marked LV refer to the primary text, “The Lifted Veil”
essay, Jill Galvan believes that disproving Latimer’s extrasensory abilities “returns “The Lifted Veil” to a realist mode, thus answering repeated scholarly comments about the novella’s seeming eccentricity within George Eliot’s canon” (Galvan 241). Galvan’s incredulousness of Latimer’s ability requires a very specific reading of the responses of secondary characters; for instance, after Latimer (supposedly) predicts his brother’s Alfred’s speech correctly before Alfred opens his mouth, Galvan reads Alfred’s look of astonishment and annoyance to “probably simply register his shot at Latimer’s impoliteness” (Galvan 243, italics mine). Galvan’s uncertainty over Alfred’s reaction is evident in her use of “probably,” and later, she admits that it is “harder to dismiss Latimer’s previsions” (Galvan 243, italics mine). Other writers, such as Diane Mason, have provocatively used Victorian pathology – specifically, she diagnoses Latimer as suffering from masturbatory insanity – to explain away Latimer’s extrasensory abilities (399). Like Diane Mason, Martin Raitiere argues that the text preemptively points to Hughlings-Jackson’s discovery of epilepsy rather than showing instances of clairvoyance or extrasensory powers (148).

Unlike Galvan, I do not think it necessary to force “The Lifted Veil” into realism so as to make it fit neatly into George Eliot’s literary canon. Eagleton’s response to Latimer’s conception of reality is interesting for it provides a metacommentary on fiction, but beyond that, I feel that questioning Latimer’s abilities to read minds or tell the future is not sufficiently supported within the text. Instead of questioning the realism of his

29 George Henry Lewes, on the other hand, “declared [it]…a poignant story of a “philosophical kind,” perfectly self-consistent and compatible with the rest of George Eliot’s fiction” (Knoepflmacher 151).
experience, this chapter accepts Latimer’s subjectivity as valid experience. Simply, it does not matter if or if not Latimer can actually read minds or tell the future; what matters is that he believes that he can. His belief is so powerful that it directs the course of his life completely and dictates how he reacts and comes to terms with the world. Because his response is so visceral, it may as well be true that he tells the future and reads minds, for he believes it so full-heartedly. What I am interested in is how he utilizes his insight to interact with the world and not if or if not his method is truly supernatual.

Through close analysis, this chapter will approach two different types of vision utilized in George Eliot’s 1859 novella “The Lifted Veil.” The scholarship of this chapter varies from existing scholarship on the novella which generally prefers to use the text as secondary to theme or concept. Instead, this chapter uses the text as the primary method for discussing themes of sight and vision. The first section considers how preternatural, or passive, vision is used within the text. It specifically highlights Latimer’s instances of previsio and his ability to read minds; also, the first section aligns this type of vision to the artistic spectatorial gaze. The second section describes the second type of vision which I call active or pursued sight. The second section analyzes the instances in which Latimer takes control of his eyesight and thus the direction of his mind. By querying the two different types of sight within the novella, one can see that knowledge of the other should be gained actively through an interplay of logic and sign reading.

30 Rae Greiner agrees that disproving Latimer’s ability to read minds is also counterproductive, but for different reasons: “Critics who seek to disprove Latimer’s clairvoyant powers in order to argue that the novel is realist thus miss the point, for it is realist exactly to the degree that Latimer literally brings omniscience to life. The technique supposed by many of the realists to effectively prompt sympathetic identification and imagining has here been considerably depleted of that very potential” (305).
I. PRETERNATURAL, OR PASSIVE, SIGHT

The novella is bookended by a death. It begins by Latimer reciting his foreseen death. It may seem at first strange that the narrative forecloses its ending; however, as Willis aptly explains, by beginning with the ending, the narrative “shifts the emphasis of the reading experience from revelation to understanding, from knowing what happens to knowing how and why it happens” (“Clairvoyance” 186). By beginning with the ending, Eliot, through Latimer, goads the reader into following Latimer’s reason for writing: to “win a little more sympathy from strangers when I am dead” (LV 4). Thus, “Eliot places the reader in the same position as the clairvoyant Latimer; aware of a future event but unable to stabilize that knowledge within the multiple future possibilities that drive towards that point” (“Clairvoyance” 186).

The initial scene sets up Latimer to be reclining in his chair, alone in his room, and “weary of incessant insight and foresight, without delusions and without hope” (LV 3). As he lounges, Eliot mirrors Latimer’s extinguishing life through noting the slow suffocation of his candle – his “lamp goes out with a horrible stench” as he begins his death throes (LV 3). As Latimer begins to die, the reader is given an account of the action surrounding him, all given through his supposed insight and foresight. The scene is spectatorial in nature as is evidenced by the removal of the narrator from any sympathetic response to his description coupled by a syntactic sense of inevitability.

To begin, consider the following description of the action surrounding Latimer’s dying moments:

No one will answer my bell. I know why. My two servants are lovers, and will have quarrelled. My housekeeper will have rushed out of the
house in a fury, two hours before, hoping that Perry will believe she has
gone to drown herself. Perry is alarmed at last, and is gone out after
her. The little scullery-maid is asleep on a bench: she never answers the
bell; it does not wake her. The sense of suffocation increases: my lamp
goes out with a horrible stench: I make a great effort, and snatch at the bell
again. I long for life, and there is no help. I thirsted for the unknown: the
thirst is gone. (LV 3)

This passage reads as if it is being recited. Likewise, the terse breaks of the sentences,
either through period or colon usage, give the reader a sense of inevitability. This section
is highly self-aware and glib, almost as if it were memorized. Even the short simple
sentences coupled with the punctuation of the longer sentences mimic the rise and fall of
a chest or the inhale and exhale of breath. Although the reader is given a melodramatic
story line of an unhappy couple and a drowsy maid, their stories are not given the interest
of the narrator since the narrator draws himself as removed from the action both through
the lack of worry on his part for their lives and through his physical removal from their
action. This removal is accomplished spatially, through the narrator’s placement in his
room, and at the sentence level. The quick, staccato sentences push the reader’s eyes
forward and goad the reader into approaching the text so as to reach the result and not
give attention to the details. There is little contemplation in Latimer’s death scene, only
inevitability. In other words, even though he knows what is happening, he does not
seem to care31. He relays the action of what he sees without any obvious self-reflection;

31 This sensibility echoes throughout the novella’s plot. Terry Eagleton writes: “His determination to
plough on even though the upshot will be unpleasant is thus a little like Beckett’s glum comment on the
simultaneous absurdity and necessity of narrative: “You must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on” (10).
the action, therefore, is emotionally meaningless to him as are the people that he describes.

With this short section in mind, one can see that Latimer is unsympathetic to those around him. He approaches his death as if it is a spectacle to dissect, and his gaze mechanically follows the lives of his servants without any emotional care. There is no correspondence of feelings between him and others. Instead, there is only preternatural insight.

Along with this instance of foresight comes another spectatorial foretelling of the future. When Latimer is sick in bed in Geneva, the word “Prague” elicits a “strange sense that a new and wondrous scene was breaking” upon him (LV 9). He passively lies there as an image burns itself into his mind:

> a city under the broad sunshine, that seemed to me as if it were the summer sunshine of a long-past century arrested in its course—unrefreshed for ages by dews of night, or the rushing rain-cloud; scorching the dusty, weary, time-eaten grandeur of a people doomed to live on in the stale repetition of memories, like deposed and superannuated kings in their regal gold-inwoven tatters. The city looked so thirsty that the broad river seemed to me a sheet of metal; and the blackened statues, as I passed under their blank gaze, along the unending bridge, with their ancient garments and their saintly crowns, seemed to me the real inhabitants and owners of this place, while the busy, trivial men and women, hurrying to and fro, were a swarm of ephemeral visitants infesting it for a day. It is such grim, stony beings as these, I thought, who are the fathers of ancient
faded children, in those tanned time-fretted dwellings that crowd the steep before me; who pay their court in the worn and crumbling pomp of the palace which stretches its monotonous length on the height; who worship wearily in the stifling air of the churches, urged by no fear or hope, but compelled by their doom to be ever old and undying, to live on in the rigidity of habit, as they live on in perpetual midday, without the repose of night or the new birth of morning. (LV 9)

Latimer approaches his vision as one would approach a painting. True, he appears to walk through his vision of Prague, but his experience is decidedly limited to eyesight. He does not tell the reader the smells or sounds of Prague, but instead gives an expression of feeling elicited by his gaze. Latimer’s gaze begins by presenting to the reader a framing device; he starts by generalizing the image he will present: “a city under the broad sunshine.” He continues by describing the type of sunshine that bathes the city. It is not a warm, tropical light or a cold, clear, winter brightness, but instead the incessant beating sunlight of a wasteland. The sunlight arrests the city as Latimer’s eyesight frames it for the reader. Similarly, this sunlight is not unlike Latimer’s gaze. It appears to stop the momentum of time to allow the reader, and Latimer, the ability to see. Likewise, the negative language (“scorched”) describing the sunlight further supports this point since Latimer continually describes his preternatural insight in the negative, describing it as “diseased” or “morbid” (LV 13, 14). His gaze moves onwards from the sunlight to describe a city arrested in time.

The city is unlike a place, but more like a person in Latimer’s eyes. It is “like deposed and superannuated kings in their regal gold-inwoven tatters,” and it is “thirsty.”
Rather than dwelling on the minute details of the architecture of Prague, Latimer’s gaze pressures him to see what lies beyond the facade. Also, he does not find it necessary to prove to the reader that he saw Prague by noting in detail specific landmarks; instead, he signals to the reader that he knows Prague spiritually. In other words, he sees past the physical buildings and sees a city of people “doomed to live on in the stale repetition of memories.” Thus, Prague becomes hyper-realistic: it is both a physical place of facades and architecture but also a place of human embodiment. Prague, thus, is not unlike how Millais crafted Joseph in *Christ in the House of His Parents*: the body of Joseph is the body of a carpenter, much as the architecture signals to Prague as a place; however, the head of Joseph depicts the quintessential qualities, the inner qualities, of Joseph’s character much as the people that inhabit Prague demonstrate the inner qualities of “stale repetition” that signal to the city’s true nature. These people literally inhabit the body of the Prague much as Joseph’s character inhabits the body of the carpenter.

Still, one wonders why the people are doomed to repeat their habits continually in Latimer’s vision of Prague. Is it the nature of the city to make its inhabitants follow the same habits of living? Or, is it the perpetual light that allows no change? The text states that the inhabitants “live on in perpetual midday,” which would align the unchanging nature of the seasons to be to blame. A simple question comes to mind: Why do the seasons not change? I believe the seasons are unchanging because Latimer’s vision frames Prague much in the same way that artists compose their paintings or sculptors position their work. Prague is unchanging because Latimer’s vision paints Prague in the summer, so as time in a painting is interminable, so is his vision.

32 Knoepflmacher helpfully likens Latimer’s vision of Prague to be similar to the “static realm portrayed by Tennyson in “The Lotos Eaters [which] becomes an emblem for the death-in-life which Latimer will find in his own present and future” (145)
After Latimer experiences his prevision of Prague, he does not believe he actually saw Prague, for he “remembered distinctly the gradual breaking-in of the vision … like the new images in a dissolving view, or the growing distinctness of the landscape as the sun lifts up the veil of the morning mist” (LV 10). Here, he further frames his vision of Prague as a vivid scene to be looked at. He does not think it to be a dream sequence, but more of a poetic experience of sight: “Surely it was in this way that Homer saw the plain of Troy, that Dante saw the abodes of the departed, that Milton saw the earthward flight of the Tempter” (LV 10, italics mine). Latimer assumes that to create art, one must see, and not invent, the object being created. According to Latimer then, Milton, Dante and Homer, all great artists, were passive seers who organized premade visions rather than created their art actively. Much as the PRB sought to see with Ruskin’s perfect vision, these literary artists saw their creations; the difference is that the PRB had to learn and strive for perfect vision. According to Latimer, Milton, Dante and Homer’s visions were not painstaking constructions like the paintings done by the PRB or carefully revised manuscripts but instead passively received transmissions, much like Latimer’s vision of Prague.

Willis suggests that Latimer is “caught within an ideological opposition between work and leisure that was being negotiated by writers of the mid-nineteenth century” (“Clairvoyance” 197-198). Was the act of writing an act of inspiration done by the leisure class, or was it something that required a work ethic more than unbridled genius? In a later work, Willis writes: “Latimer’s focus for clairvoyance is as work rather than an extension of his artistic leisure pursuits” (“George Eliot”153). I disagree. I believe that the novella dramatizes Willis’ opposition through Latimer’s refusal to act and create from
his visions and the sidelining of his own active participation in his life. However, because Latimer does not create from his visions, his visions remain merely that and not art; in other words, there is no “work” consequently done or inspired from his visions. One might argue that the novella itself is “work” done by Latimer, but this work was only inspired from a sense of desperation and loneliness and not through “unbridled genius.”

Because Latimer does not create from his visions, I believe Latimer is not “caught” between ideologies, but an answer to Willis’ “opposition.” Simply, Latimer does not work from his visions, so he does not create art. His vision is thoroughly passive when he sees into the future or reads others thoughts, so art is unable to be created.

The next time Latimer is subject to a vision of the future is when he sees Bertha for the first time. While waiting for his father to come pick him up from his lodgings, Latimer is surprised to find three figures appear in his room: his neighbor Mrs. Filmore, his father, and a young lady “not more than twenty” (LV11). Much like Crimsworth’s pattern of seeing, Latimer describes Bertha from the generalities of her figure and moves into the specifics of her facial features. She is “a tall, slim, willowy figure, with luxuriant blond hair, arranged in cunning braids and folds that looked almost too massive for the slight figure” (LV 11). After her figure, he describes her face as being “small-featured” and “thin-lipped” (LV 11). She is a beautiful girl, but her expression tells much about her personality: “the face had not a girlish expression: the features were sharp, the pale grey eyes at once acute, restless, and sarcastic” (LV11). Like in all of his visions, he gives his vision a border, a frame. Surrounding Bertha’s head are “green weeds” that “made [him] think of a Water-Nixie;” the border of green weeds makes the sarcastic Bertha into a “daughter of an aged river” (LV 12). Bertha’s framing, imposed upon by Latimer, makes
her less human and more faerie. This vision frightens Latimer much more than his vision of Prague does. In fact, he loses his balance and begins to question his sanity. It is here that his vision becomes further aligned to disease rather than poetic inspiration:

I was cold and trembling; I could only totter forward and throw myself on the sofa. This strange new power had manifested itself again . . . But was it a power? Might it not rather be a disease—a sort of intermittent delirium, concentrating my energy of brain into moments of unhealthy activity, and leaving my saner hours all the more barren? I felt a dizzy sense of unreality in what my eye rested on . . . (LV12)

Because Latimer cannot tell the difference between real, active vision and his framed, passive preternatural insight, he begins to feel “a dizzy sense of unreality in what [his] eye rested on” rather than the “rapt passivity” he felt during his vision into Prague.

Following his prevision of his meeting with Bertha Grant and Mrs. Filmore, Latimer becomes aware of an additional ability: to read minds. He refers to it as an obtrusion on my mind of the mental process going forward in first one person, and then another, with whom I happened to be in contact: the vagrant, frivolous ideas and emotions of some uninteresting acquaintance—Mrs. Filmore, for example—would force themselves on my consciousness like an importunate, ill-played musical instrument, or the loud activity of an imprisoned insect. (LV13)

Malcom Bull believes that Latimer’s ability to read minds relays back to mesmerism. Specifically, Bull assumes that Latimer’s ability to see the thoughts of others is based “on the assumption that Bertha magnetized Latimer. To this may be attributed his ability to experience the thoughts and feelings of others, his acquisition of ‘double consciousness,’ and even his enduring fascination with Bertha herself” (246). His reading sidelines the instance of prevision which initially disoriented Latimer and introduces Bertha, which I feel is paramount to understanding why Latimer fainted. I am more inclined to agree with Martin Willis judgment of Bull’s reading that the text is “ambivalent about [the] possibility” that Bertha mesmerized Latimer (“Clairvoyance” 188).
His description of other’s minds to be insect-like references his prevision of Prague. The insect-like people that embody the city show the true nature of the city, much as the thoughts of others, also bug-like, reveal the true reality of those Latimer encounters. Not only are these thoughts essentially annoying to Latimer, but they also afflict Latimer and cause him pain:

This superadded consciousness…became an intense pain and grief when it seemed to be opening to me the souls of those who were in a close relation to me—when the rational talk, the graceful attentions, the wittily-turned phrases, and the kindly deeds, which used to make the web of their characters, were seen as if thrust asunder by a microscopic vision, that showed all the intermediate frivolities, all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling chaos of puerilities, meanness, vague capricious memories, and indolent make-shift thoughts, from which human words and deeds emerge like leaflets covering a fermenting heap. (LV13)

Thus, Latimer’s ability to read minds does not happily lift the veil of the face and show the real qualities of people to be beautiful and easily appreciated. Instead, his abilities unveil reality to be much different from expectations. The reality of his incisive vision is not a beautiful image which echoes back to the critics’ distaste for the “ugly” realism of the PRB. A perfect gaze, a perfect insight into others, then does not result in sympathy, but only disgust and aversion. Because Latimer is subjected to the meanness and vanities of inner thought, he is unable to be truly sympathetic to those around him.

After Latimer uncovers his ability to read minds, he experiences another instance of prevision when he visits an art gallery. This instance further cements Latimer’s vision
with the spectatorial. The vision goes through two phases. It begins when he first views “Giorgione’s picture of the cruel-eyed woman” and continues on when he views the scene of Bertha in the future (LV19). Although Latimer’s vision is highly artistic, since he frames his preternatural vision as an image to be considered, he cannot stand to look at “many pictures in succession; for pictures, when they are powerful, affect me so strongly that one or two exhaust all my capability of contemplation” (LV 19). This is unsurprising given Latimer’s physical repulsion for the images he is preternaturally submitted to. Nevertheless, he still stands in front of the painting: “This morning I had been looking at Giorgione’s picture of the cruel-eyed woman, said to be a likeness of Lucrezia Borgia. I had stood long alone before it, fascinated by the terrible reality of that cunning, relentless face, till I felt a strange poisoned sensation, as if I had long been inhaling a fatal odour, and was just beginning to be conscious of its effects” (LV19).

Even though he is actively engaging the portrait he stands in front of, the “likeness of Lucrezia Borgia” seems to stare back at him, paralyzing his own gaze. Her face is “cunning” and “relentless,” overpowering his own “fascinated” gaze. He gives the painting a “terrible reality,” which reflects back on his first prevision of Prague. Here, when he looks at Giorgione’s image of Lucrezia Borgia, he sees reality and not a painting. In other words, his own sense of reality becomes conflated with artifice. When looking at the image of Lucrezia Borgia, he reacts viscerally, as if he had been poisoned; this poisoning directs his next prevision of Bertha’s hatred and signals to her eventual betrayal.

…I seemed to be suddenly in darkness, out of which there gradually broke a dim firelight, and I felt myself sitting in my father’s leather chair in the
Like in his reading of the painting of Lucrezia Borgia, Latimer’s prevision of Bertha Grant is notable for her “cruel eyes.” Additionally, his gaze in the prevision is also marked by its passivity. Much as he is arrested by the gaze of the Giorgione painting, he is prone in the future Bertha’s presence. In his prevision, Bertha’s thoughts are poisonous; her “pitiless soul” is toxic to Latimer, and he responds to it as if it contaminates the air he breathes much as the gaze of the Giorgione painting taints Latimer’s psyche and thus instigates this vision. Even though it is a prevision, he
responds to it much as he responds to the art he gazed upon. His gaze is fascinated, yet passive; it is disengaged from the action and a receptacle for the mind of the other.

Besides the passivity of the gaze, the poisoning present in Latimer’s response to Giorgione’s painting makes another appearance in the “marble medallion of the dying Cleopatra.” Critics align Cleopatra to Latimer for good reason, for the only other character that could be aligned with Cleopatra is Bertha. Gilbert and Gubar problematically associate Bertha with “Eve, Cleopatra and Lucrezia Borgia” (460). Although I see the connection between Lucrezia Borgia and Eve, I wonder over her connection to Cleopatra. Bertha wears the “great emerald brooch… [of] a studded serpent with diamond eyes,” which, in this instance, gives her the place of Cleopatra’s asp34. Likewise, her hair, which is constantly alluded to in the text, is described to be like “great rich coils,” much like a snake’s body would be described (LV 32). It is also of note that these coils surround her head, alluding to a snake-like mind. Finally, at the end of the novella, she becomes less woman and more devil: “I asked myself how that face of hers could ever have seemed to me the face of a woman born of woman, with memories of childhood, capable of pain, needing to be fondled? The features at that moment seemed so preternaturally sharp, the eyes were so hard and eager—she looked like a cruel immortal, finding her spiritual feast in the agonies of a dying race” (LV 41). Here, Bertha is no longer a woman; she is unsexed and cruel. Read physiognomically, her face reveals her inborn nature that Latimer so easily disregarded in favor of his mind reading. As Lavater states in his influential 1855 reprinting of his 1789 tract On Physiognomy, “the eye will be the whole of [the body’s] summary and centre” (9). Here, we see a face

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34 In an essay exploring the use of poison within the novella, Cheryl Blake Price also aligns Bertha with Cleopatra: “The medallion specifically links Bertha with poison through Cleopatra’s well-known suicide by snake bite” (210).
that is dominated by points and through her eyes, which demonstrate the core of her being: “hard and eager” and “cruel.”

Even though Cleopatra’s asp has much in common with Bertha, Cleopatra herself has very little in common with Latimer. Cleopatra was a powerful historical figure; Latimer’s power to tell the future is passive and painful. He is not in control of his life or his death the way Cleopatra was. Even though Latimer is described as having a “half-womanish, half-ghostly beauty,” he is still a man and has a role within the patriarchy as a landed inheritor to his father’s estate (LV14). Questioning this statement issues a better argument than questioning Latimer’s and Cleopatra’s masculinity and femininity: Is Latimer really in control of his life and death? Latimer thinks that his life is a study of inevitability: “Towards my own destiny I had become entirely passive; for my one ardent desire had spent itself, and impulse no longer predominated over knowledge” (LV 33). He is passive and accepting of the life he leads and does not aim to change it. Instead, he feels “too completely swayed by the sense that [he] was in the grasp of unknown forces, to believe in [his] power of self-release” (LV 33). Suicide is seen here as not a desperate attempt, but as an act of control that Latimer is unable, or unwilling, to enact.

Nevertheless, there is a powerful argument against his perceived lack of control over his life when one considers his likeness to Cleopatra. Firstly, the text explicitly gives control to Latimer because he is the one generating it. Likewise, by aligning Latimer with Cleopatra and creating a serpentine femme fatale, the text implicitly reveals that Latimer is as much in control of his life as Cleopatra was in control of her suicide. Even though he knew Bertha would prove to be poisonous to his life, he still chose to be with her much as Cleopatra chose the venom of the asp. Which reading is the “correct”
reading, then? I feel that both are. Latimer is subjected to his visions of others and the future, so his feelings of entrapment are valid. However, there are points within the story in which he is able to control his vision and thus his life.

II. ACTIVE OR PURSUED SIGHT AND CONTROL

Even though the novella is decidedly centered on Latimer’s preternatural abilities, there are many instances in which Latimer tries to undermine the passivity of his life through active control and through directing his natural sight.

The first example in which Latimer tries to take control is after he receives a visit from a phrenologist, Mr. Letherall. Letherall is rough with Latimer; he “[pulls his] head about as if he wanted to buy and cheapen it” (LV 6). After he roves over Latimer’s “small head” with his “large hands” and presses “in an exploratory, auspicious manner,” Letherall judges Latimer through “glittering spectacles” (LV 6). From his analysis of Latimer’s head, he finds deficiencies at the upper sides of his head and motions towards these mysterious excesses and parts of his cranium that “must be laid to sleep” (LV6). After his head is read by Letherall, Latimer receives an education meant to re-shape his mind to fit the mold his father wanted.

This use of phrenology to prescribe an education was not unheard of; in fact, George Combe, in “An Address delivered at the Anniversary of the Birth of Spurzheim,” states that “Phrenology enables the child to understand the nature, objects, uses and relative authority of each. It introduces light and order where darkness and chaos formerly reigned” (42). He believes that a child is not born without propensities or feelings, but is capable of strong feeling. Combe uses himself as an example of a
passionate child in need of direction, and he believes that phrenology presents such a
direction to children: “a knowledge of the faculties may be rendered of the highest utility
to children themselves” (“An Address…” 42). But how is such knowledge imparted to
children? In “The Lifted Veil,” Latimer is forced into an education that he does not want
because of his father’s desire for a scientific second son and Mr. Letherall’s reading. Mr.
Letherall’s reading is meant to fix and re-direct, and Combe again believes that through
attention to the phrenological make up of a brain, an educator can narrow a child’s
negative traits and stimulate his positive attributes: “all faculties may be directed to
proper objects, and when so directed, their action will become good” (“A system..” 559).
Combe is referring to propensities for illegal or immoral behaviors and not educational
directives which phrenology is used for in “The Lifted Veil.” However, one can take the
position that Latimer’s innate interests and desires are treated with the same skepticism
and dismissal as if he had the propensity for thievery. In this case, there is no difference
between a mechanical education meant to diminish interest in humanity and an education
meant to mitigate the desire to commit harm.

Nevertheless, Combe and many other phrenologists did not believe that an
education could eradicate negative propensities (such as Latimer’s desire for an
understanding of human nature); instead, they believed than an educator and the correct
environment could manage propensities but not necessarily change them. A later work
done in 1869 by James Browne states that “education is the drawing out of faculties that
are already in existence. It develops and strengthens the faculties but cannot originate
any” (xix). Browne continues to state that an education is an interplay between student
and educator, and that an educator should be aware of “the dominant moral and
intellectual attributes of his pupils. Supported by this knowledge, he will be able to point out the field in which their talents may be used profitably, and without irksomeness to themselves. How often, in the absence of such information, have talents been fatally misdirected (xix).

Latimer, then, is a victim of faulty phrenology. His education is not given with a bent towards his own propensities but goes against his strengths. Unsurprisingly, Latimer reacts poorly to his education. He does not want to have the “scientific education” that his father feels is “the really useful training for a younger son” (LV 6). Instead of learning what he wanted, his father gives him private tutors who teach him “natural history, science and the modern languages” (LV 6). Instead of being taught to his strengths, he is given an education meant to remedy his “defects of organization” (LV 6). So since Latimer is “very stupid about machines,” he was “to be greatly occupied with them;” since he “had no memory for classification,” he was to study “systematic zoology and botany;” since he was “hungry for human deeds and human motions,” he was to be “plentifully crammed with the mechanical powers, the elementary bodies, and the phenomena of electricity and magnetism” (LV 6).

Although Latimer is subject to learning what he does not want to learn, as most of us are at one point or another in our lives, Latimer’s language suggests that such an education provided harm rather than enrichment. He was “hungry for human deeds and human motions” and was left to starve on the “mechanical powers” of scientific thought. Thus, the education prescribed to his person, based off of his phrenological reading and his position as second son, failed for it did not, as Flint states, have “no conspicuous change in his innate disposition (461). Why? This could be commentary on the failure
of an education meant to specifically direct a young person into a particular career without regards to his own will if read sympathetically in Latimer's favor. Even though Latimer is subjected to an education that leaves him hungry, he tries to quench his own desires for the human through reading “Plutarch, and Shakespeare, and Don Quixote by the sly” (LV 6).

Latimer is contrary to his tutors because he is not interested in understanding why something happens; instead, he is just interested in the thing itself. His tutors tell him that “an improved man, as distinguished from an ignorant one, was a man who knew the reason why water ran downhill,” but Latimer “had no desire to be this improved man” for he was “glad of the running water; I could watch it and listen to it gurgling among the pebbles, and bathing the bright green water-plants, by the hour together. I did not want to know why it ran; I had perfect confidence that there were good reasons for what was so very beautiful” (LV 7).

His education is an education of why and how, and not an education of appreciation. Latimer desired to understand facade for its inherent meaning rather than understanding its formation or the physics behind it. This forced education, then, is not unlike the extrasensory information that Latimer is subjected to after his illness in Geneva. His ability to read minds incapacitates him, for it provides only the physics, the work, put into action or speech and not the appreciation of the production’s surface value. An understanding of why something works is debilitating to Latimer for he approaches such an understanding as a negation of beauty. It is ironic then that his desire to understand the surface qualities of people or objects is so thoroughly unavailable throughout the short story; he is denied it in his education as well as in his adult years.
Still, unlike the extrasensory information that he passively receives, Latimer is able to ignore or re-direct his thoughts from the mechanical education his father, through his tutors, gives him. He is able to avert his attention to the information that pleases him, and despite the insistence of his tutors in making him an “improved man,” Latimer imposes his will and appreciates beauty rather than mechanics. Likewise, he directs his sight away from the material that he is being shown and focuses on the material that interests him. Still, it must be noted that this instance of re-direction does not result in any sort of work or creation but merely demonstrates that Latimer was not completely prone to the wants or desires of others, or his “diseased consciousness” within the text.

Besides his direction of and underhanded approach to his education, Latimer also enacts his will after his first and second instances of prevision. He initially responds with joy to his newfound ability after he views Prague in his mind: “I did not for a moment believe it was really a representation of that city; I believed—I hoped it was a picture that my newly liberated genius had painted in fiery haste, with the colours snatched from lazy memory” (LV 10). As mentioned previously, he believes that his vision was an act of artistic rapture, and he likens his vision of Prague to be like the “spontaneous creation” he believes Homer, Dante and Milton to have had when creating their works (LV 10). After he dwells on the “blissful idea” that he could be a poet, Latimer decides to test his ability “by an exertion of [his] will” (LV 10). He tries to direct his inward vision to re-create another city, Venice; nevertheless, his active control of his vision creates a much more muted painting:

I concentrated my thoughts on Venice; I stimulated my imagination with poetic memories, and strove to feel myself present in Venice, as I had felt
myself present in Prague. But in vain. I was only colouring the Canaletto engravings that hung in my old bedroom at home; the picture was a shifting one, my mind wandering uncertainly in search of more vivid images; I could see no accident of form or shadow without conscious labour after the necessary conditions. It was all *prosaic effort, not rapt passivity*, such as I had experienced half an hour before. (LV10-11, italics mine)

Through the language of “rapt passivity” and “prosaic effort,” one can see how Latimer views artistic vision; artistic vision is a romantic act of passivity to a greater inspiration and not an act of labor. Returning back to his imperfect education, one can see that Latimer would not know that the creation of any type of art is through process. Instead of learning the arts, he had an education that explained mechanics and physics. Since his education staunchly denied teaching the arts, he would not know that the artistry is also an act of process much as science is. If his education was more balanced, his response to his vision would possibly be less naive, and he would have been aware of the strangeness of his vision of Prague. Nevertheless, he tries—albeit unsuccessfully—to exert his own vision so as to create art after his first vision of Prague.

What Latimer does not reveal to the reader, yet emphatically hints to, at this point is that the vision of Prague was strikingly true to his later experience. With that in mind, his vision of Prague vacillates between being a simultaneous supposed artistic or poetic creation and also a vision of truth. Therefore, not only is art created through “rapt passivity,” but so is truth. In other words, truth, to Latimer, is not something to be searched and worked through “prosaic effort” as it would be for everyone else in the
short story. When approaching his vision of Prague and his frustrated vision of Venice, one sees two different versions of truth (that is, truth that is self-evident and truth that is sought) much as one sees two different versions of sight within the short story.

In his second prevision, in which he sees his father, Mrs. Filmore, and Bertha in his room, Latimer immediately responds to his vision by enacting his will. Much like the first instance of prevision, Latimer is initially overwhelmed. By no will of his own, and not through directing his own sight, Latimer is forced to see the ghosts of the future in his bedroom. It scares him. To alleviate his fright, he enacts his will to calm himself:

Pierre left the room at once, with a soothing “Bien, Monsieur”; and I felt the better for this scene of simple, waking prose. Seeking to calm myself still further, I went into my bedroom, adjoining the salon, and opened a case of eau-de-Cologne; took out a bottle; went through the process of taking out the cork very neatly, and then rubbed the reviving spirit over my hands and forehead, and under my nostrils, drawing a new delight from the scent because I had procured it by slow details of labour, and by no strange sudden madness. Already I had begun to taste something of the horror that belongs to the lot of a human being whose nature is not adjusted to simple human conditions. (LV12)

In this response, Latimer delights in the process of care; he feels “better for this scene of simple, waking prose” of talking to his servant, going into his bedroom and applying cologne to his person. Unlike his first experience with prevision, enacting his will is not perceived as a failure. Instead of calling his application of cologne a “prosaic effort” as he called his application of his mind to Venice, the application is described as the “slow
details of labour;” it is familiarized rather than belittled. Likewise, his “rapt passivity” of
creation morphs into a “strange sudden madness.” It continues to remain a negative
feature throughout the rest of the novella.

Even though he is subjected to the thoughts of others in addition to his bouts of
prevision, he does not have access to Bertha Grant’s mind. It is this blind-spot that
initially attracts him to her: “About Bertha I was always in a state of uncertainty: I could
watch the expression of her face, and speculate on its meaning; I could ask for her
opinion with the real interest of ignorance; I could listen for her words and watch for her
smile with hope and fear: she had for me the fascination of an unravelled destiny” (LV
15). Latimer is unable to read Bertha’s mind, so he has to work to understand her nature.
It is through this work that he develops feelings for her. Nevertheless, even though he is
not able to read her mind, he is not completely blinded from understanding her character:

She was keen, sarcastic, unimaginative, prematurely cynical, remaining
critical and unmoved in the most impressive scenes, inclined to dissect all
my favourite poems, and especially contemptuous towards the German
lyrics which were my pet literature at that time. To this moment I am
unable to define my feeling towards her: it was not ordinary boyish
admiration, for she was the very opposite, even to the colour of her hair, of
the ideal woman who still remained to me the type of loveliness; and she
was without that enthusiasm for the great and good, which, even at the
moment of her strongest dominion over me, I should have declared to be
the highest element of character. (LV 15)
Although Bertha’s mind is shielded from Latimer’s penetration, Latimer still is able to find faults with her character. He does not romanticize her; in fact, he sees her as she presents herself. It is the possibility that she could be thinking differently than what she demonstrates that draws his attention and admiration. Unlike the other people in his life who have had their inner lives conflated with their outer due to the advent of Latimer’s “diseased sensibility,” Bertha’s inner and outer lives are initially quite separate (LV 20). Latimer believes that his attraction to Bertha’s inner silence is not singular:

“The most independent people feel the effect of a man’s silence in heightening their value for his opinion—feel an additional triumph in conquering the reverence of a critic habitually captious and satirical: no wonder, then, that an enthusiastic self-distrusting youth should watch and wait before the closed secret of a sarcastic woman’s face, as if it were the shrine of the doubtfully benignant deity who ruled his destiny” (LV 15, italics mine).

Although Latimer understands that it is the silence itself that is universally enticing, since it allows reality to be a mystery, Latimer demonstrates that such a belief is especially powerful in an “enthusiastic self-distrusting youth.” Therefore, his decision to disregard his reading of Bertha’s character through her outward mannerisms was not an act of confidence but an act of uncertainty with his own ability to read the outward manifestations of her personality. He doubted the girl he saw because he doubted his ability to reach a conclusion through work rather than through passively receiving information. His reading of Bertha, although done under his own power and direction of his gaze, is stunted because of his lack of confidence with labor. Brontë’s Crimsworth, on the other hand, was confident in his abilities to read those around him; he relied on his
tools of phrenology and physiognomy so as to decipher their inner characteristics and trusted in the validity of his own vision. Likewise, the PRB, as is demonstrated through Millais’ insistence of visiting a carpenter’s shop so as to gain the real inspiration to render a realistic carpenter in *Christ in the House of His Parents*, were willing to work to depict the real and trusted in their respective vision.

II. CONCLUSIONS

Unlike the bulk of George Eliot’s writings, “The Lifted Veil” is decidedly not realism. It engages ideas of the paranormal rather than discussing the mundane. The novella, however, engages serious questions regarding how information should be attained. For instance, is it better to seek information actively or passively? If a person could read the minds of others and tell the future, would his or her life be better or worse? Would he or she be more sympathetic to the world, or would he or she shut down? Or, the inverse: Would others find him or her more sympathetic?

By looking at how knowledge is gained throughout the novella one could see that the narrator and the text itself agree that knowledge is best gained actively rather than passively. I came to this conclusion by noting the narrator’s use of positive and negative language. He habitually calls his passive, preternatural vision and abilities as “cursed,” a “disease,” a “pitiable peculiarity,” an “abnormal sensibility,” a “diseased activity of the imagination,” an “unhappy gift,” or “wretched” etc. (*LV* 3, 12, 13, 13, 13, 14, 16). Likewise, his body treats such vision as duress, for after his first case of prevision, his “heart…[palpitates] violently” (9). In his second case of prevision, he feels “a painful sensation as if a sharp wind were cutting [him];” he becomes “cold” and proceeds to
faint (LV 11-12). Similarly, he feels “intense pain and grief” when he hears the inner thoughts of those around him (LV 14). Finally, when he collapses after his third vision, he becomes “ill for several days” (LV 20).

In contrast to his passive sight into the future and into others’ minds, his body recovers itself, and he gathers delight when he directs his sight. In the first example of his education, Latimer enjoys controlling his education and his sight by reading “Plutarch, and Shakespeare and Don Quixote by the sly,” for it gives him a glimpse of “human deeds and human emotions” (LV 6). In his first prevision, he immediately tests his ability through an act of will; even though this act does not yield the result he thought it would, his body does not grow ill or react as if it was harmed. Instead, he feels merely “discouraged” but hopeful for inspiration (LV11). After his second instance of prevision, Latimer calms himself by applying cologne; he “draws a new delight from the scent because [he] had procured it by slow details of labour, and by no strange sudden madness,” and he “felt better for this scene of simple, waking prose” (LV 12). Lastly, he feels “delicious torment” in Bertha’s presence because he has to work to understand her nature; since he does not understand her nature passively as he understands everyone else’s, her “touch was bliss” (LV 17, 21).

Unlike B.M. Gray, who believes that “The Lifted Veil” “points an unclouded and characteristic moral, that the pursuit of gratification at the expense of others is death to the soul,” I believe that the novella demonstrates that the death of the soul is through being subjected to forced knowledge (421). I believe that it is Latimer’s passivity of sight and his forced perception into the “real” nature of others, not his desire for gratification, which leads him to an unhappy life, as is demonstrated through his body’s reactions to
passive knowledge and pursued knowledge. Similarly, Thomas Albrecht believes that the novella approaches telepathy in its “relation to the moral value Eliot calls sympathy;” specifically, he states that “Latimer’s experiences…contradict Eliot’s theory that art can and should enlarge our sympathy simply by granting us access to the thoughts and feelings of those around us” (439). Albrecht continues to assert that Latimer is saved from being one of Eliot’s villains due to his ability to feel sympathy for his dying father; however, what initially prevents Latimer from feeling sympathy is his sad ability to read minds (Albrecht 446). Therefore, not only does knowledge of others gained passively result in health problems, but it also prevents the seer from garnering sympathy.

According to the text, people should not be known completely through passive sight because of the repercussions on the self. With Latimer as an example, passive knowledge, such as preternatural knowledge, results in sickness and mental health problems along with eventual alienation. Additionally, the viewer becomes essentially unempowered because of the microscopic frame of his vision.

Likewise, passive knowledge of the real encourages the viewer to approach his life indifferently and not take responsibility for his actions. For instance, Latimer refuses to believe that his life is under his own guidance because he believes he sees the future. He does not try to change the results of his visions nor does he try to win the good graces of his friends and family through his ability. Instead, he accepts what happens and

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35 Gilbert and Gubar helpfully add: “Clairvoyance brings him consciousness of nothing except isolation, distance, impotence, the egoism of his family, the pettiness of his friends, the repetition he is destined to endure” (470).
36 Greiner agrees: “Knowing what others think and feel turns out to be…the worst impediment to sympathy imaginable” (205).
37 Knoepflmacher comes to a similar conclusion: “Latimer finds that the light of certainty incapacitates him from living a life which must be based on trust” (159).
despises others. Therefore, knowing the thoughts of others through sight, or direct contact, rather than through active searching is antithetical to sympathy.
CONCLUSION

In George Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, in the much-anthologized chapter “In Which the Story Pauses a Little,” the narrator states:

*My strongest effort is to avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective, the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath.* (181)

All of the lookers, writers, and artists explored in this thesis have tried to do as the narrator of *Adam Bede* endeavors to do: transcribe the real into artifice. The novel, artwork, and novella explored in chapters one through three present the ability to see inner character as a quasi-scientific practice of perfect looking. But is it truly possible to look perfectly? The narrator of *Adam Bede* seems to think the gaze is bound to be defective, but it is the gesture of relating reality to be as close to as it was experienced that artists should aspire to.

William Crimsworth, the narrator of Charlotte Brontë’s *The Professor*, believes that he can see the true qualities of others through their external manifestations. To do this, he uses the tools of phrenology and physiognomy to find the ontological truth of the mind. Beginning with his spectatorial disassembling of Mrs. Crimsworth, his brother’s wife, the reader sees the narrator’s first implementation of the gaze to define inner
character. Through Mrs. Crimsworth’s gestures, voice and even the structure of her face, Crimsworth is able to designate her as “vain” and “soulless” (Brontë 11). He similarly utilizes his gaze to see through the beauty of the girls at the pensionnat in Belgium to relate the girls’ deplorable laziness, meanness or stupidity to the reader. Even though Crimsworth believes that he is checking the idealist’s desires to put femininity upon a pedestal by seeing past the girls’ beauty and into their “true” characters, his gaze is at times unnecessarily harsh and biased. Instead of providing a generally balanced perspective of flaws and comeliness, he sees the young women as gorgons and vicious liars.

Although he believes that his gaze is incisive and true, Brontë writes Crimsworth to have inherently flawed vision; specifically, he is short sighted. Additionally, his sight is confounded by externals, such as boarded windows, hats, or even his own mental illness. Brontë therefore juxtaposes a belief that one can aim to see the real but also presents instances in which the viewer’s subjectivity threatens the possibility of objective truth. Hence, the novel offers a dramatization of the search for truth through the gaze while also undercutting that truth by presenting reality through an inherently myopic narrator who believes he sees others clearly. My reading of the novel concludes by expressing that the search for truth through the gaze is complicated by the ideal and the self. Brontë’s later novel, Villette, follows a similar plot and continues the conversation of finding the real through sight. A longer version of this thesis would include a chapter on the continuation of the author’s exploration of the topic of the searching gaze within Villette.
The pursuit of true, objective depiction is continued in the early works of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The founding artists of the Brotherhood believed that through careful, minute observation, they could transcribe the real to art. Their founding goal was to develop as artists beyond the Raphaelite ideals of form and composition taught by the teachers of the mid-nineteenth century Royal Academy. Instead, they wished to present to the public a modern art that captured reality as it is rather than what it should be. To do this, the founding artists turned to the manuals of self-help of phrenology and physiognomy. Through these manuals and the guidance of the likes of Charles Donovan, a phrenologist, the Brotherhood applied the searching gaze of the pseudosciences to their work. Rather than using phrenology and physiognomy to diagnose and judge the characters they created in their work, I argue that the artists used the precision required of phrenological looking to enhance their depictions of humanity. By using the analytical gaze of phrenology, the artists created a hyper-realistic depiction that encourages the viewer to take notice of the particular nuances of the real, human form.

Both Isabella and Christ in the House of His Parents by John Everett Millais demonstrate the interest of the early Pre-Raphaelites to depict the objective real. Isabella particularly dramatizes the presence of truth hidden by expression. My reading of the painting dissects the picture plane into two realities: the reality above the table and the reality below it. The reality of the faces of the people as they politely eat is a study of difference and phrenological reality. Each head is crafted to be the likeness of real individuals and friends of the artist, and Millais’ precision is remarkable for its craft. The picture plane above table appears to be a straightforward depiction of a family at dinner; however, the gestures concealed beneath the surface of the table reveal the true intentions
of the sitters. Therefore, this painting specifically persuades the viewer to look twice upon expression and to consider hidden intentions. Millais’ next submission to the Royal Academy, *Christ in the House of His Parents*, presents the Holy Family also using minute realism. Unlike the *Isabella*, which was generally well received, critics responded with venom to the quiet reality depicted. Millais was criticized for crafting the Holy Family to be ugly and dirty representations of figures that *should* be idealized versions of humanity. In fact, rather than differentiating his Christ, Mary, and Joseph as was the usual for religious art, his versions described the figures to be like the mundane people that populated the streets in nineteenth-century London. By crafting the perceived ideal to be interchangeable with the mundane, Millais not only supported an art that substituted idealist representations with realism but also commented upon the need to replace the conception of the ideal with an understanding of physical realities. Through the Pre-Raphaelites’ initial desire to demonstrate the real through external facade and the public’s negative reaction to such a demonstration, one can see that art that proposed that naked reality should replace ideal was not well received.

Chapter three continues to explore a potential outcome of when internal truth is completely revealed to a viewer in George Eliot’s novella “The Lifted Veil.” Although considered a minor work and approached as a deviation from her usual realist fiction, “The Lifted Veil” comments on what would happen if the veil of the face was lifted and a person could see the thoughts of others. Latimer, like Brontë’s Crimsworth, re-writes his life to an undisclosed readership. Unlike Crimsworth, Latimer is subjected to a “diseased consciousness” that enables him to see the thoughts of others and to glimpse the future. Even though Latimer is generally considered a misanthropic narrator, my reading argues
that he becomes this way because he reads the thoughts of others. Generally, the novella argues that when the facade of the face is replaced with the unpolished, unmitigated reality of the mind, one would begin to distrust others and be easily hurt. Because Latimer is forced to see the thoughts of others through no will of his own, his perception of reality is drastically limited to seeing only the internal mechanisms and not the interplay of this mechanism and the face. If, for instance, reality is divided into two parts of surface level and subsurface meaning, as it is in Millais’ *Isabella*, then Latimer’s forced insight would present an ontology that is simply unbalanced, for he is only able to focus on one part of the dialectic rather than querying both sides.

The novella dramatizes the argument of forcibly seeing reality and pursuing truth by providing two instances of the gaze, which I designate “Preternatural or Passive Sight” and “Active, or Pursued Sight” respectively. By designating, defining and explaining these two types of vision and how they are enacted within the novella, my goal was to demonstrate that the novella presents two types of sight that are diametrically opposed. Passive sight is seen as a negative embodiment of sight and causes the narrator sickness and unhappiness; active sight, on the other hand, enables Latimer to take care of himself and find joy in others. My reading of the novella concludes that truth through vision should be pursued, rather than preternaturally or passively received.

Even though science has progressed past the use of the pseudosciences, the goal of finding the real through meticulous eyesight still remains salient to modern lookers. We still look at each other and attempt to understand the personality or the mind of the other through our eyesight. Through approaching Charlotte Brontë’s 1857 publication, *The Professor*, the early work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and George Eliot’s
1859 novella “The Lifted Veil,” this thesis has endeavored to describe how vision was approached as a medium for truth finding. Explorations of each art form shown here demonstrate that truth is complicated and difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to find from facade. At times, conceptions of the ideal and personal subjectivity cloud one’s ability to perceive internal reality. At other times, replication of the truth will be disparaged for appearing to dismiss beauty for unadorned reality. Nevertheless, the search for internal truth should always be a process of work rather than a passive reception of information.


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