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ACCOUNTING FOR MYSTERIES: NARRATIVES OF  
INTUITION AND EMPIRICISM IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

by

Brooke Diane Taylor

A dissertation presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
of Washington University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2010

Saint Louis, Missouri

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Brooke Diane Taylor

May 2010

## Acknowledgments

I owe thanks to far more people than I can name—students, colleagues, professors, and the administrative staff of the English department at Washington University—who have assisted me over the course of this project. I would like to extend special thanks to my advisor, Professor Miriam Bailin, who constantly models excellence in teaching and in scholarship, and whose tactful criticism of my dissertation was always spot-on. I'd also like to thank Professor Bill McKelvy for his thoughtful comments on this study, and the other members of my dissertation committee, Professors Wolfram Schmidgen, Dan Shea, Corinna Treitel, and Harriett Stone, for their interest in my project.

I want to thank my closest friends in the English department, especially Keya Kraft and Tarah Demant, who have helped me throughout this process to think hard and to laugh even harder. I'm also indebted to those friends and scholars within and outside the department who read pieces and talked through problems, including Ben Cooper, Courtney Bates, Anna Teekell, Debie Rudder Lohe, Christine Copeland, Melissa Wilkinson, and Janet Reed. I've appreciated the fresh perspectives of my friends outside my field, among them Natalie DeBoer, Monica Ellis Lewis, Jamie Eisenberg, and Beth Wilburn. And I'd like to acknowledge that this project would have never come to fruition if Erick Kelemen hadn't first made me believe that I was up to the challenge.

I am forever grateful to my parents, Thomas and Caroline Taylor, for their love and encouragement, and for raising me in a house filled with books. I owe thanks to my brother, Brandon, for setting the bar high when it comes to sibling rivalry. I would be remiss if I overlooked my constant companions during the writing process, L.M. and C., whose loyalty is unmatched and whose quiet company gave me more comfort than I can tell. Finally, my greatest thanks go to my husband, M. David Duckworth, who patiently endured my frustrations and enthusiastically celebrated my victories. I could not have written this study without his support and I dedicate the best of its pages to him.

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## Introduction: Problems of Life and Mind and Literature

George Henry Lewes spent the final years of his life working on a massive, multi-volume project called *Problems of Life and Mind*.<sup>1</sup> A public intellectual and devoted rationalist, he is still perhaps most recognized as George Eliot's lifelong companion and is often credited with encouraging her to write fiction. Although his own professional pursuits tend to be overshadowed by George Eliot's literary success, Lewes was more than a devoted husband and supportive literary agent. Over the course of his long career, his professional endeavors were well-respected and widely varied. Engaging vigorously in contemporary intellectual debates about science, religion, politics, and the arts, Lewes was a journalist, philosopher, dramatist, novelist, scientist, and literary critic. Works by Rick Rylance and Rosemary Ashton have recently explored the scientific and cultural significance of Lewes's work outside the context of his relationship with Eliot.<sup>2</sup> Rylance notes that Lewes's last work, the five-volume *Problems of Life and Mind*, has received relatively little critical attention, but, as Rylance argues, *Problems* is particularly significant in demonstrating the extent to which Lewes himself helped to shape the relationship between literature and science in the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

Because of its length (over 2,000 pages) and its vast range of subject matter, *Problems of Life and Mind* feels unwieldy and sometimes disjointed. Some of these structural issues are likely related to the fact that three of the five volumes of *Problems* were unfinished at the time of Lewes's death, and were edited and published posthumously by George Eliot. However, the structural difficulties of the text also seem to stem from the central argument itself.

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<sup>1</sup> George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, 5 vols. (London: Trübner & Co., 1875-1879).

<sup>2</sup> See Rick Rylance's final chapter "Lewes: History, Mind, and Language" in *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Rosemary Ashton's *G. H. Lewes: An Unconventional Victorian* (London: Pimlico, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Rylance, 252.

*Problems of Life and Mind* takes a scientific approach to theorizing how we can accurately read the world and verify our understanding of it. As Rylance notes, “*Problems of Life and Mind* is about the historicity of truth.”<sup>4</sup> Hardly an easy task to begin with, Lewes’s project is further complicated by his efforts to reconcile the authority of scientific fact with the historical limitations and cultural influences that influence even the laws of science. Rylance summarizes the work as comprised of Lewes’s “law-bound, law-discovering, scientific enterprise, grounded in Comtean Positivism, [combined with a] strong sense of the determination of intellectual and cultural life by the historical moment.”<sup>5</sup> This comprehensive and balanced strategy seems to be equally informed by Lewes’s engagement with science and literature. His awareness of the historicity of nineteenth-century science distinguishes him from contemporary scientists like Herbert Spencer and Alexander Bain, whose works emphasize the transcendental truth they see in science and omit from consideration their entrenchment in their own historical context.<sup>6</sup> This distinction from his fellow scientists demonstrates a unique and important affiliation between Lewes and nineteenth-century novelists, including those whose works are examined in this dissertation. Although only one of the novels in this study features a scientist as a central character (Ezra Jennings in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*), the plot of each novel is significantly informed by contemporary developments and controversies in Victorian science. Questioning how we can accurately read the world around us and what methods of verification are reliable, these novels are quite self-consciousness about their own fictionality and yet persist, in remarkable

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<sup>4</sup> Rylance, 255.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 256.

and interesting ways, to grapple with issues very much in line with those Lewes struggles to clarify in *Problems of Life and Mind*.

In the early chapters of Volume I of *Problems of Life and Mind*, published in 1874, Lewes explains that his project is in part a revision of the definition of empiricism in regard to science. In fact, a great deal of his project is concerned with finding scientific explanations for metaphysical phenomena: “It is towards the transformation of Metaphysics by reduction to the Method of Science that these pages tend.”<sup>7</sup> Metaphysics, for Lewes, includes any phenomena that seem to be non-empirical and Lewes is dedicated to finding a way to account for empirical and non-empirical phenomena. By the 1870s, Lewes had moved away from the clear demarcations of Positivism, which strongly informed his approach to scientific research early in his career; however, he still abided by its emphasis on rationalism. His acknowledgment of metaphysics as a legitimate avenue of exploration rests on the significant qualification that it can ultimately be reduced to sensory experience, even if the experience is such that it *seems* undetectable. Non-empirical experiences must have some kind of empirical source, according to Lewes, who argues that all human experience is ultimately sensory (otherwise it is not actually experience). Therefore, an investigation that attempts to reach beyond the sensory is essentially pointless: “whatever speculative curiosity may prompt, our real and lasting interest is in ascertaining the order of the things we know.”<sup>8</sup> The known world, according to Lewes, is that which is “Sensible,” or, that which is known to us through empirical experience. But Lewes significantly expands the knowable world by acknowledging a category of understanding that he calls “Extra-sensible,” a category which reaches beyond the typical definition of an empirical sensory experience to include

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<sup>7</sup> George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, vol. I (London: Trübner and Company, 1874) 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 28



metaphysical experiences. The sort of “Extra-sensible” understanding we might gain, Lewes argues, may not directly result from empirical experience, but can be inferred from such experiences and so ultimately traced back to an empirical source. This process of inference allows for non-empirical forms of knowledge to be studied scientifically and ultimately to be verified by empirical facts.<sup>9</sup>

Although the specificities and particularities of Lewes’s five scientific volumes may seem rather far removed from the typical preoccupations of a Victorian fiction writer, the novels I examine in this study are very much concerned with similar questions about the link between fact and feeling, or empiricism and intuition. Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* weighs the process of analysis against sympathy and compassion. Mary Elizabeth Braddon uses material evidence to overtly mislead the reader, only to finally suggest that there may in fact be visible signs of the protagonist’s guilt in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. In *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins introduces both a detective and a scientist into the English country house in an attempt to make sense of superstitions and physical clues. But the connections between science and literature are, not surprisingly, most clearly articulated by George Eliot herself in her epigraph to the first chapter of *Daniel Deronda*:

Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning. Even Science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars’ unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his.<sup>10</sup>

Her emphasis on the similarity between the disciplines of science and literature highlights the culturally and historically specific aspects of science. This message corresponds with Lewes’s *Problems*—a connection all the more telling since she penned *Daniel Deronda* at the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>10</sup> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 1876 (London: Penguin, 1995) 7.

same time Lewes was writing *Problems of Life and Mind*. Science as a descendent of Poetry in this passage does not suggest a hierarchy but rather an implicit relation of certain qualities and methodologies, a sense of fallible and human construction, one that locates each pursuit in a specific time and place within history without diminishing the meaning or significance of either pursuit.

The significant relationship between Victorian science and literature—a relationship that revealed striking similarities between the preoccupations of the two disciplines—was rather pointedly overlooked by New Criticism in the mid-twentieth century. Recent decades have, however, witnessed increasing critical interest in the relationship between literature and science in the nineteenth century. Due in large part to Gillian Beer’s seminal work in *Darwin’s Plots*, the mutual influence of these two disciplines has been generally accepted by literary critics, with texts by George Levine, Sally Shuttleworth, and William Myers, among others, contributing to a growing collection of scholarly work that productively examines the connection of two seemingly separate disciplines.<sup>11</sup> For example, George Levine asserts that, “[p]articipating equally but differently in the culture’s myths and ideologies, science and literature support, reveal, and test each other.”<sup>12</sup> Peter Allan Dale has argued for a shared culture of science and literature, opposing the “belief that science and literature (or art) are utterly independent, mutually antagonistic modes of thoughts.”<sup>13</sup> Rick Rylance links the

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<sup>11</sup> See Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and William Myers, *The Teaching of George Eliot* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> George Levine, “The Novel as Scientific Discourse: The Example of Conrad,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 21 (1988): 223.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Allan Dale, *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture: Science, Art, and Society in the Victorian Age* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) 8.

disciplines of science and literature through specific sub-sets, explaining, “[w]hat draws psychology and fiction, as well as other parties, together is, in part, a shared interest in language.”<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Smith suggests that the mutual influence of science and literature is not an “unresolved conflict” but an evolution into “complementarity” or “the coming together of two (or more) things to form a unified whole, each supplying what the other lacks.”<sup>15</sup> This shift in critical consideration from two divided fields of study to a complementary relationship between literature and science has highlighted the significant lack of specialization in the mid-nineteenth-century; it has also persuasively established the extent to which novelists and scientists often participated in the same cultural conversations and had corresponding and even cooperative influences on the public imagination. There is, however, a danger in assuming that the “complementarity” of science and literature was altogether congenial. My project takes as its starting point the assumption that Victorian science and literature are in many ways compatible, but it will look closely at the problems and tensions that arise at their moments of intersection in these novels. The works I will study here both employ and interrogate empirical methodology in their representation of science. In doing so, they often throw off the realist conventions that so comfortably yoke literature to the methodologies of empirical science. Instead of relying on science for assured explanation, these novels frequently locate their modes of understanding elsewhere, raising questions about whether a scientific approach to reading the world is completely accurate or fully desirable.

Each of the novels examined in this dissertation is perhaps most famous for the melodramatic, mystical, or otherwise implausible events that occur in its narrative. As a

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<sup>14</sup> Rylance, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Smith, *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994) 10, 236.

result, studies of these novels are often generic and tend to focus on sensation novels as a somewhat diminished form of the Victorian realist novel, a form worth studying because of the important cultural and political issues they raise.<sup>16</sup> There have also been provocative and influential studies that consider these novels within a history of reading and realism, considering the implications of the mass circulation of fiction in an increasingly literate society.<sup>17</sup> Such studies have usefully examined the publishing and readership history of novels in a nineteenth-century commodity culture of advertisements, romance novels, and sensational fiction, all readily available and equally capable of deluding the average consumer. My study focuses not on how these novels were read, but on how their narratives present a methodology of reading and understanding a rapidly changing world. By focusing on empirical and non-empirical modes of cognition, I will trace these alternative methods of understanding as a demonstration of Victorians' simultaneous desire for scientific authority and reluctance to let go of traditional systems of belief.

Nineteenth-century fiction writers generally seem to subscribe to—even if they don't always practice—an epistemology of empiricism similar to that of their scientific contemporaries. It is precisely this attention to detail and the emphasis on particularities of circumstance, everyday experience, and the causal effects of social situations and historical events, that seem to operate within such an epistemology and typically earn a text's

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<sup>16</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Pamela Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels: Reading, Contagion, and Transgression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992) are useful and influential feminist studies of sensation novels.

<sup>17</sup> See Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998); Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998); John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten, eds., *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

placement in the category of realist fiction. But even novels that attend diligently to realistic details often seem to challenge the empiricist notion that all experiences can be reduced to physical sensation. With the introduction of “sensational” or uncanny events in these otherwise realist narratives, the relationship between the surety of empirical facts and the presence of non-empirical forces raises significant questions. Non-empirical modes of cognition—intuition, premonitions, and visionary flashes—offer a sense of moral certainty, a conviction that disregards concrete proof but is nonetheless true. These novels attempt to reconcile what appears to be a division between these two methods of understanding by representing these experiences within an epistemology of empiricism that supports the conventions of realism and considers both empirical and non-empirical modes of cognition to be legitimate methods of understanding.

Lewes describes this connection with an analogy that suggests empirical and non-empirical are not opposites but are somewhat related methodologies like those of empirical science and metaphysics: “Metaphysics holds a position with respect to Science somewhat analogous to the position held by Algebra with respect to Arithmetic. The objects of Arithmetic are quantities; the objects of Algebra are not quantities but the relations of quantities.”<sup>18</sup> Based on this relational understanding, it follows that realist fiction can call upon both empiricism and metaphysics (or non-empirical phenomena) in its depiction of human experience. In that way, these texts are realistic not because they present factual (or actual) events but because there is a sense of truth in the relations they represent, in truths that can be inferred from the fictional narrative. Part of their project is to find a compromise, a way to reconcile the inexplicable within the rubric of the empirical. However, neatly fitting literature under the umbrella of science admittedly fails to take into

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<sup>18</sup> Lewes, *Problems* Vol. I, 68.

account for the significantly distinct pursuits and purposes of the two fields. George Eliot says as much in one of her essays:

Suppose, then, that the effort which has been again and again made to construct a universal language on a rational basis has at last succeeded, and that you have a language which has no uncertainty, no whims of idiom, no cumbrous forms, no fitful shimmer of many-hued significance, no hoary archaisms ‘familiar with forgotten years’—a patent deodorised and non-resonant language, which effects the purpose of communication as perfectly and rapidly as algebraic signs. Your language may be a perfect medium of expression to science, but will never express *life*, which is a great deal more than science.<sup>19</sup>

Obviously, this distinction between life and science in regard to language is especially notable for a novelist intent on exploring the implications of scientific methodology. In this dissertation, the novels that I examine are preoccupied with a depiction of life that tends to move well beyond the boundaries of strictly empirical science. Even as they ground their narratives in time and place and concrete descriptions, the novelists question allegedly reliable modes of reading the world and methods of verification. Their narratives privilege intuitive flashes of understanding, give weight to mysterious visions, and allow for the prescient power of dreams. In doing so, they offer modes of reading the world that are alternatively modeled as resistant to and compatible with empirical science. Often the narratives set up what Lewes would see as a false dichotomy between empirical and non-empirical modes of cognition, only to collapse or at least confuse that binary.

The central project of this dissertation is to examine these tensions and intersections between nineteenth-century science and literature by looking closely at empiricism and non-empirical modes of cognition as they are represented in four Victorian novels. In this study, I will explore the way these texts attend to an empirical approach to reading the world in a way that combines the conventions of realist literature with the sensory-based experiences of

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<sup>19</sup> George Eliot, “Natural History of German Life: Riehl,” *Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood and Sons, 1884) 268.

empirical science. Rather than focusing on literal representations of reading texts within the text of each novel, I am expanding the definition of reading to accommodate an empirical epistemology that expected the world to be knowable but realized that the shift from seeing to understanding required some form of intellectual interpretation. As their plots unfold, each of these novels depicts a desire to methodically account for physical evidence, material facts, and external appearances. While they make painstaking efforts to emphasize the significance of concrete detail and the necessity for material proof, this narrative of empiricism is repeatedly challenged by inexplicable moments—intuition, premonitions, dreams, and in some cases even ghostly spirits that disrupt the narrative and disturb or contradict an empirical reading. By representing these non-empirical forces as accurate modes of moral understanding, the novelists acknowledge the limitations of empiricism and insist that there must be other, equally relevant modes of cognition. I will trace the way each novel addresses the intrusion of these non-empirical forces in the narrative's effort to reconcile them within an epistemology of empiricism—strategies of reconciliation that are, to varying degrees, compatible with Lewes's own perspective.

I argue, however, that such assimilation is not always easy. Even as the narratives often claim that uncanny or metaphysical events can be absorbed into a realist narrative and empirical epistemology, there are uneasy moments and sometimes unresolved conclusions that suggest that this integration often remains problematic. The extent to which imaginative experiences inform an otherwise realist plot was a concern for Lewes as a literary critic who delighted in the fictional exploration of what he termed "real experience" but was dismayed when novelists moved beyond what he felt were the boundaries of rationality. His review of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was favorable, and he professed to be enthusiastic about the novel. But in a letter to the author (now lost) he seems to have didactically

asserted his own theory of novel-writing—a method that aligned itself quite neatly with his convictions about scientific empiricism. Brontë thanked him for his “cheering commendation and valuable advice” but she responded with a rather different theory:

You warn me to beware of Melodrama, and you exhort me to adhere to the real. ...

You advise me too, not to stray far from the ground of experience as I become weak when I enter the region of fiction; and you say ‘real experience is perennially interesting and to all men’.

I feel this also is true, but, dear sir, is not the real experience of each individual very limited? ... Then, too, Imagination is quite a strong, restless faculty which claims to be heard and exercised, are we to be quite deaf to her cry and insensate to her struggles? When she shows us bright pictures are we never to look at them and try to reproduce them? And when she is eloquent and speaks rapidly and urgently in our ear are we not to write to her dictation?<sup>20</sup>

Rosemary Ashton observes that Brontë’s response identifies the opposition between realism and romance, but she argues that “Lewes’s view was less narrow than this.”<sup>21</sup> I suggest that Brontë’s distinction is not as much about genre as it is a delineation between two different forms of experience that she attempts to represent in her novel—one that is easily located in an empirical world and the other that is vividly perceived but not readily assimilated into an epistemology that relies on sensory-based knowledge. *Jane Eyre*, like many Victorian novels, is notable for a narrative that seems both true to experience and larger than life. The ordinary details of a governess’s situation are juxtaposed with thrilling mystery, remarkable coincidence, and romantic attachments that challenge social expectations and, as when Jane seems to hear Rochester’s voice calling to her, defy rational explanation. Whether or not these elements are probable, the narrative assigns a truth value to them. Empirical science cannot account for Rochester’s disembodied voice floating across the moor, but Jane’s

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<sup>20</sup> Charlotte Brontë to George Henry Lewes, 6 Nov. 1847. qtd. in Rosemary Ashton’s *G. H. Lewes: An Unconventional Victorian*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> Ashton, *G. H. Lewes*, 67.



intuitive sense that he needs her is confirmed when she returns to Thornfield Hall and reunites with Rochester, now blinded and injured by the fire. However Lewes felt about melodramatic episodes, he ultimately wrote favorably of Charlotte Brontë: “Almost all that we require in a novelist she has: perception of character, and power of delineating it; picturesqueness; passion; and knowledge of life.”<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, where Lewes felt Brontë must be drawing on actual experience, she admitted in a letter to another friend her actual “knowledge” was minimal. On the contrary, Brontë declared that she was writing from “intuition” rather than experience.<sup>23</sup>

This correlation of intuition and experience accords with Lewes’s argument that metaphysical truths can be inferred from empirical experiences, but it makes that process of inference particularly hazy. *Jane Eyre* succeeds because it demonstrates that intuitive perceptions can be as powerful and convincing as a record of actual events. This distinction between fact and intuitive feeling is exactly what Brontë anxiously points out in her confessional letter, admitting the limitations of her own experience and tacitly declaring the strength of her imagination to take a feeling and make it nearly indistinguishable from “fact”—in this case, personal experience as represented in a work of fiction. The work of the novel writer is to capture both fact and feeling with her pen, and to make each feel equally believable for readers who are aware of (and perhaps wary of) the fictionality of the text. Because of this unique relationship between writer and reader and between fact and feeling, I find it particularly interesting that it is precisely a perceived equivalence between empirical fact and intuitive feeling that gets reimagined and reworked as part of the mystery and plot of each of the novels I examine in this study.

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<sup>22</sup> Lewes, “Recent Novels: French and English,” *Fraser’s Magazine*, 36 (Dec. 1847) 690-1. Qtd. in Ashton, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Charlotte Brontë, “To William Smith Williams,” 11 Dec. 1847. Qtd. in Ashton, 67-8.

The implications of such equivalence are striking: if fact and feeling are similar but not always the same, how do we know for sure which one to trust? Fact and feeling are not interchangeable, but they can be equally powerful and equally fallible. Faced with this dilemma, these novels present empirical evidence as the only reliable method of determining truth, only to demonstrate that empirical facts are often misleading or incomplete. The solution to the problem of empiricism's insufficiency is a reliance on emotional and intuitive methods of reading the world, subsequently verified by empirical evidence in order to be taken seriously. As Charlotte Brontë asserted to Lewes, "Imagination is quite a strong, restless faculty."<sup>24</sup> It demands recognition, but it also requires the confirmation of empirical evidence before it can be accepted as a resolution to the mysteries in these texts.

The pseudo-equivalence of intuition and empiricism, then, does seem to move toward a certain kind of mutual reliance. Rather than being diametrically opposed, these methods of reading the world often work in cooperation, running in tandem and crossing over one another as an imaginative leap of faith allows for certainty of a character's guilt or innocence long before evidence can sufficiently allow for similar claims—or in spite of what the evidence suggests. Although a combination of these approaches seems to allow for a comprehensive understanding, the constant use of one method to challenge or confirm the other often fails to instill confidence in our ability to read the world at all. The mutual reliance and equal fallibility of empiricism and intuition evoke doubts about both modes of understanding: facts rarely tell the whole story; intuitive knowledge can hardly be sufficient evidence on its own. Their interrelation does not just link science and literature in a comfortable complementary relationship, but also raises provocative questions about how to

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<sup>24</sup> Ashton, *G. H. Lewes*, 67.

find an appropriate balance of these methods in order to accurately read (and write) the world.

In this study, I am more concerned with fictional depictions of science and empiricism than I am with the historic realities of these methods. Victorian novels generally profess a tacit enthusiasm for empirical science in their dependence on material evidence as an indicator of truth. The society depicted in these novels is typically one in which these standards are widely accepted. But just as Lewes tempered his Positivist science with a more complicated consideration of how to discover and account for scientific facts, these novelists are not naïve about their alliance with an empirical epistemology. In fact, the objective truth that empiricism seems to promise is constantly challenged and debated in these narratives. For all their emphasis on detail, description, and fundamental connections, Victorian novels exploit anxieties about empirical evidence that fails to tell the truth: circumstantial evidence that convicts the wrong man, eye-witnesses who make devastating mistakes, individual perceptions that are blind to moral truths. In their efforts to “express *life*, which is a great deal more than science”<sup>25</sup> these novels demonstrate the limitations of empiricism and imagine ways to expand our reading of the world. Challenging the very systems of evidence on which they depend, the simultaneous commendation of and skepticism about empiricism in these novels is, I suggest, representative of a Victorian culture that sought scientific surety, but not at the expense of traditionally shared values.

In the mysteries so carefully plotted in Victorian novels, the attempt to reconcile empirical and non-empirical modes of understanding invites not only scientific inquiry and experiment, but also a reconsideration of social relationships and personal associations. On the one hand, it seems like a rather obvious rhetorical trope that people are not always what

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<sup>25</sup> George Eliot, “Natural History of German Life: Riehl,” 268.

they seem. On the other hand, the assumption that one's moral fiber was somehow physically inscribed on one's countenance still circulated in the Victorian imagination thanks to outdated methodologies of phrenology and physiognomy. Even the most modern of scientific thought in the nineteenth century was informed by cultural assumptions and untested data. We can see such notions influencing perceptions of gender and race in these novels, with ethnocentric perceptions of beauty and Englishness as a reflection of moral character. Even though science in the second half of the nineteenth-century had left phrenology and physiognomy far behind, their influence still carried a certain cultural currency. Such theories lingered because they spoke to a desire for clear and easy answers, a compelling wish to equate seeing with knowing. Indeed, much of the promise of Victorian science was the positivist belief that, as Peter Allan Dale explains, "a rational and accurate knowledge of the world, as in itself it really is, is possible."<sup>26</sup> Victorian expectations for a legible world date back to late-eighteenth-century political discourse regarding legitimacy and transparency in government. Jeremy Bentham's and Thomas Paine's arguments against the British constitution and its defenders (particularly Edmund Burke) privilege individual merit over ancestral power and are, in large part, premised on the idea that truth must be visible in order to be true, that seeing is in fact the most reliable form of knowing.<sup>27</sup> The problem was, of course, that Victorians were all too aware that seeing and knowing were hardly equivalent—a fact that increased their skepticism without decreasing their fascination with the idea of scientific "proof." This eagerness to make truth an empirical issue can be seen in legal cases of the time, which increasingly relied on circumstantial evidence rather than eye-

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<sup>26</sup> Dale, *Fact and Feeling*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Wolfram Schmidgen, in his reading of *Waverly* in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), argues that Paine "enforc[es] a congruence between reality and visibility" when writing against the British constitution, insisting that "[o]nly when to see and to know are epistemologically identical operations can legitimacy be shown to have a basis in reality" (205).

witness reports when determining guilt or innocence.<sup>28</sup> Legal questions also revolved around the extent to which an understanding of motive could be inferred by judges or juries in a criminal trial.<sup>29</sup> In a significant shift from previous decades, by the mid-nineteenth century an individual witness was no longer considered an unfailing source of empirical facts. As Kate Flint argues, “Victorians were fascinated with the act of seeing, with the question of reliability – or otherwise – of the human eye, and with the problems of interpreting what they saw.”<sup>30</sup> The act of interpretation shifts truth from objective fact to subjective experience and this shift could be either refreshingly unbiased or dangerously unfeeling. An earnest and optimistic desire to discover moral truth seems to compel this endeavor; as Suzy Anger suggests, Victorian writers held quite clearly “the recognition of the subjective nature of interpretation, combined with a resolve to nevertheless get it right.”<sup>31</sup>

The question of how to appropriately and accurately interpret information plays a significant role in each of the narratives I examine in this dissertation. No matter how resolutely a detective figure insists the facts must speak for themselves, the real mystery is inevitably solved by accurately interpreting both empirical facts and intuitive feelings. Likewise, appearances may be both informative and misleading. As George Eliot’s narrator in *Adam Bede* remarks dryly, “One begins to suspect at length that there is no direct

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<sup>28</sup> See Alexander Welsh’s *Strong Representations: Narrative and Circumstantial Evidence in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Lisa Rodensky’s argument in *The Crime in Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), considers the shifting perspectives about empirical evidence and inferred knowledge in nineteenth-century criminal trials. She notes, “Criminal law was itself asking whether knowledge and intentions could be presumed from the natural consequences of acts or whether evidence of *actual* knowledge and intention needed to be introduced” (89).

<sup>30</sup> Kate Flint, *Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 1.

<sup>31</sup> Suzy Anger, *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) 86.

correlation between eyelashes and morals.”<sup>32</sup> The presumption of such a correlation would obviously be silly. And yet, presumptions, biases, and seemingly mistaken certainties pervade the narratives. Of course some of this is the art of crafting a mystery and prolonging its resolution. But in looking closely at how the narratives craft their mysteries, we can see what I suggest is a genuine struggle to come to terms with a particular anxiety about reading the world—how to properly and responsibly account for empirical facts that cannot be denied and intuitive feelings that defy factual analysis. The problem of finding, trusting, and interpreting evidence is a central preoccupation of each of the novels in this study. From Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s beautiful sensation heroine in *Lady Audley’s Secret* to George Eliot’s social project in *Daniel Deronda*, texts that seem quite different are actually asking many of the same questions and rehearsing several versions of their answers.

Reading these novels alongside one another offers us an insight into Victorian science as it functioned in the popular imagination, which is to say that none of these texts imagines science in quite the same way. *Bleak House* suggests that the analytical approach of empiricism is detrimental to human relationships. *Lady Audley’s Secret* asks whether the scientific process of empiricism is ultimately subject to the same bourgeois systems of control as any other method of understanding. *The Moonstone* uses science as a rather convenient bridge between intuition and empiricism, but even as it functions as a means of clearing an innocent man, it fails to reveal the mystery in its entirety. *Daniel Deronda* perhaps takes the debate between intuition and empiricism most seriously as it embarks on an intellectual project to account for empirical and metaphysical forces that shape our histories. Taken together, these works offer what I believe to be a fairly representative picture of the tensions and complications that rippled under the no-nonsense surface of empiricism. Not

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<sup>32</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 1859, (New York: Signet, 1961) 154.

only do these texts acknowledge a strong sense of scientific authority and progress, specifically figured as an empirical and positivist understanding of the world, but they also challenge the capacity of science to authentically account for human relationships and moral truths. Even when the facts are correctly identified, these texts suggest that science may not be fully able to resolve the crises and complications of the narrative without acknowledging the influence and resistance of its counterparts: intuition and imagination, and even ghostly visions and premonitions.

In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot defines a poet as one who has “a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge.”<sup>33</sup> This definition highlights the mutual reliance between intuition and empiricism. But its ideal scenario of thought tempered by feeling becomes increasingly elusive in the rapidly professionalizing and specializing society of the nineteenth century. We see the angst of analysis that leaves no room for subtler forms of feeling in Dickens’s *Bleak House* in the corrupt character of the lawyer Mr. Tulkinghorn. But it is the figures of the detective in Dickens’s Inspector Bucket and Wilkie Collins’s Sergeant Cuff who more precariously balance empirical investigation with intuitive feeling. The act of detection in these novels is one that attempts to analyze and ultimately to understand a particular event for which there were no witnesses, or about which witness reports are necessarily silent, mistaken, or misleading. The process of detection is a systematic, empirical process in which concrete evidence is carefully examined. As such, it offers a sense of stability and control in what feels like an increasingly uncertain world. But there is no space for intuitive feeling in this process, except as an educated inference based on evidence and previous experience. As

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<sup>33</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 1872 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 209.

a result, these detectives are often wrong before they are right and the very process of investigation threatens to disrupt the status quo and upset traditional expectations.

Presenting itself as a narrative equally scientific and imaginative, the three-volume novel that dominated publishing in the mid-nineteenth century ultimately claims for itself the authority of moral truth within a newly uncertain scientific culture. Seemingly inexplicable events and moments that seem nothing less than sensational appear in each of these novels. They defy an empirical reading, and yet they serve as evidence themselves—proof of experiences that occur outside the realm of material fact and yet have their own pervasive and measurable influence on people and on history. To rely solely on empirical evidence carries the corresponding anxiety of a method of reading the world that is amoral and utterly removed from sympathy or human feeling. At the same time, even when intuitive feelings or inexplicable premonitions are later revealed to be accurate, their reliability is suspect and they inevitably require confirmation by an external (empirical) authority. This final compromise suggests that the novels almost always return, however reluctantly, to an empirical epistemology as the most reliable means for reading the world. But this empiricism is—always—significantly qualified. The epistemology of empiricism we see perpetuated in these texts is quite removed from a naïve empiricism that purports simply to record an authentic truth as experienced. What we see in these novels instead is a clear awareness that empirical evidence is often remarkably compelling by virtue of its solid material presence and apparent lack of bias, but that in spite of these qualities it remains insufficient to a certain degree. With no room for emotional understanding, no connection to a moral compass, and no space for intuitive faith, an empirical reading consistently fails to account for truths that cannot be easily reduced to the empirical but are nonetheless a measurable and valuable part of human experience.



In the first chapter, I provide a reading of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853). I trace the way his novel challenges expectations about empirical evidence by insisting that emotional or intuitive readings are, in fact, more direct and accurate modes of understanding. Circumstantial evidence becomes a threatening force in the novel, a source of blackmail and also a menacing force that could convict the wrong man for murder. In my reading of Dickens's novel, I argue that we see how an empirical approach can be dangerously limited and limiting. The narrative echoes a widespread concern that empirical perceptions could be blind to moral truths. But it also represents a Victorian anxiety that goes beyond the fear that circumstantial evidence could mislead. It suggests that a purely empirical method of reading the world can actually have devastating social implications as well, so that one's devotion to empirical analysis ultimately reduces one's capacity for sympathy and fellow-feeling.

The second chapter is a study of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's popular sensation novel, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861-2). The central conflict in Braddon's novel lies in a discrepancy between appearances and actuality. While it quickly becomes clear that things are not what they seem, the narrative seems to vacillate between methods of reading the world that alternately adhere to and defy an epistemology of empiricism. The amateur detective collects material evidence but is guided by visions and dreams in a mission to uncover and to conceal the truth. I assert that the conclusion of the novel does not necessarily question the authority of empirical evidence, but suggests that it relies heavily on imaginative interpretation and that non-empirical methods of knowing are at least equally reliable.

The subject of the third chapter is Wilkie Collins's mystery novel, *The Moonstone* (1868). In this chapter, I argue that Collins, like Dickens, is preoccupied with the division between fact and feeling, or empiricism and intuition, but Collins's novel presents science as

a convenient strategy for bridging that divide. Here, the detective is not the one who unearths the truth. A scientific experiment is the climactic moment of the novel, but its failure to actually solve the mystery demonstrates that there is no simple solution after all. On the contrary, *The Moonstone* makes clear that the combination of intuitive and empirical perspectives is an uneasy one. Challenging the very systems of evidence on which it depends, the simultaneous commendation and skepticism of empiricism in this narrative suggests that the scientific process of the mid-to-late nineteenth century was as unsettling as it was promising.

My final chapter is a study of George Eliot's final novel, *Daniel Deronda*. I argue that this text demonstrates a striking intellectual commitment to and simultaneous challenge of empirical science as the singular viable method for reading and understanding the world. *Daniel Deronda* accounts for empirical facts and metaphysical forces as equally powerful influences in its narrative. It explicitly considers both empiricism and intuition as scientific modes of understanding. Intuitive truths defy an empirical reading and yet they serve as a form of evidence themselves—proof of experiences that occur outside the realm of material fact and yet have their own pervasive and measurable influence on people and on history.

“These are mysteries we can’t account for!”: Analysis and Intuition in  
Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*

In a letter written in 1817, John Keats posited the idea that creativity best emerges from uncertainty rather than rational understanding. Genius is not inspired by facts, he suggests, but by perpetual mystery:

it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

Real achievement is not, then, a mastery of memorization but a process of imagination. The state of “*Negative Capability*” allows for and indeed encourages imaginative productivity. According to Keats, Shakespeare’s literary achievements can be attributed, at least in part, to his ability to exist within this state of uncertainty and (unlike Coleridge) not bother with “any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” What is most interesting about Keats’s comment is not just the tension that he suggests exists between reason and imagination, but the implication that the former exists at the expense of the latter. The productivity associated with uncertainty is not just redirected, he suggests, but is actually depleted by factual analysis. What’s particularly interesting is that Keats was not alone in considering this possibility. The serious implications of such an inverse relationship between reason and imagination was not simply Keats’s unique fancy, but actually became an increasing concern for writers and thinkers of the nineteenth century. Some of the most highly-trained analytical minds would later reflect and worry that their capacity for reading the world analytically or empirically had actually diminished their ability to perceive things emotionally and imaginatively.

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<sup>34</sup> John Keats, “To George and Thomas Keats,” 21, 27 (?) Dec. 1817, letter 45 of *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*, vol. I, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 193.

Charles Darwin's *The Origins of the Species* was published in 1859 and is generally credited with changing the perceptions and possibilities of nineteenth-century science. The development of evolutionary biology was an extraordinary shift in the conception of science: it introduced the application of scientific theory and procedures to human behavior, expanding science and "forcefully extending its authority in the realm of knowledge, and even beyond, into religion and morals."<sup>35</sup> Groundbreaking in many ways, it also worked to authorize a movement that had already been stirring for some time – a shift away from the traditional authorities of religion and social hierarchy and toward dependence on the more precise authority of empirical facts and personal experience. Traditional explanations no longer seemed to suffice and traditional authorities searched for appropriate responses to scientific theories and discoveries.

Rather than rejecting scientific developments, serious intellectual efforts were made to integrate them into conventional beliefs. Although religion and science still tend to get framed as oppositions, reactions from the Church were much more complicated and diverse than the simple formula of science vs. religion. In fact, assimilation was as common as opposition: many clergy actually argued that evolution was compatible with orthodox religion.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, secular writers and thinkers were perfectly willing to accept scientific discoveries without submitting to a doctrine of empirical fact. Science might be a promising field, but, as Matthew Arnold argued, that didn't mean that scientific investigation and methodology merited an emphasis in liberal education.<sup>37</sup> Fictional representation was quite

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<sup>35</sup> George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) 3. See also Robin Gilmour's chapter "Science: Re-Imagining the Universe" in his book, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1830-1890* (New York: Longman, 1993), 111-141.

<sup>36</sup> Levine, 9.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Alan Donovan, "Mill, Arnold, and Scientific Humanism," *Victorian Science and Victorian Values: Literary Perspectives*, eds. James Paradis and Thomas Postlewait (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1981), 191.

different. In many novels, science becomes synonymous with empiricism, a system of data-collection, an objective and unimaginative observation process, a taxing and limited methodology that might occasionally result in great discovery but never offers the comprehensive and nuanced perspectives of intuition and imagination.

Matthew Arnold never claimed more than a glancing, amateur interest in science that scarcely moved beyond the facts it discovered. Science was certainly not central to Arnold's vision of cultural progress, which required that we "combine the pieces of our knowledge together, to bring them under general rules, to relate them to principles."<sup>38</sup> This process, although it seems inductive, did not have to abide by the sort of methodology rooted in an empirical or Positivist science. In his article on scientific humanism, Robert Alan Donovan observes that Arnold seems "curiously insensitive to the claims of science as a mode of intellectual culture and thus as an important element in a liberal curriculum."<sup>39</sup> This division between science and the liberal arts might have been an artificial one, but writers and thinkers who associated science with merely the facts it discovered rather than the process of discovery helped to perpetuate the notion that Victorian science was, as Donald R. Benson describes it, "a discipline built upon passive and objective observation of physical phenomena, precise recording of these observations as facts, and manipulation of facts by induction ... to yield general truths about nature."<sup>40</sup> Benson argues that the view of

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<sup>38</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Literature and Science," *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, vol. X, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 62.

<sup>39</sup> Donovan, 189.

<sup>40</sup> Donald R. Benson, "Facts and Constructs: Victorian Humanists and Scientific Theorists on Scientific Knowledge" *Victorian Science and Victorian Values: Literary Perspectives*, eds. James Paradis and Thomas Postlewait (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1981), 301. Benson argues that while humanists like Arnold and Mill and some scientists, including Huxley and Spencer, perpetuated this fact-based perspective, other influential and significant scientists, John Tyndall and William Carpenter among them, were experimentalists and were invested in methodology and education, arguing that creativity was as important to science as its fact-based results.

scientists themselves, particularly experimentalists like John Tyndall and William Carpenter, was considerably different. But prevailing notions generally subscribed to Arnold's point of view: "Things as they truly are,—facts,—are the object-matter of science."<sup>41</sup> The implication of a fact-based discipline is that it has no space for any information that cannot be quantified—imagination, creativity, emotion, these elements of human life and culture seem to have no place in science. The promise and possibilities of science were thus tempered by an equally pressing concern that a scientific method of reading and knowing the world would replace feeling with fact and would thereby eliminate a tremendous aspect of the human experience.

Regardless of the accuracy of such assumption, the sense of opposition between feeling and fact was a general perception of the nineteenth-century, with facts meaning anything that could be quantified or proven through empirical science. Feeling, however, was a more ambiguous term that encompasses any method of interpretation that is not based on the collection of data—including but not limited to intuition, imagination, emotion, friendship, faith, creativity, and fine arts. These elements contribute to a quality of life and in fact shape the way we read and interpret the world, but they cannot be scientifically quantified. The discrepancy understood to exist between fact and feeling was a troubling concern for many writers and thinkers, who fretted over what seemed to be an unbridgeable distance between the two. Keats wondered at the creative power of "*Negative Capability*" while other thinkers worried about their own fact-based educations that seemed to have shaped a capacity for empirical analysis at the expense of more subtle forms of understanding.

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<sup>41</sup> Matthew Arnold, "St. Paul and Protestantism," *The Complete Works of Matthew Arnold*, vol. VI, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), 30.

John Stuart Mill wrote of his strict education in his autobiography, claiming that the deeply engrained habit of keen analysis had become detrimental to his enjoyment of life: “For now I saw, or thought I saw, what I had always before received with incredulity – that the habit of analysis has a tendency to wear away the feelings.”<sup>42</sup> His education, he felt, “had failed to create these feelings in sufficient strength to risk the dissolving influence of analysis.”<sup>43</sup> Mill overtly posits feeling and factual analysis against one another; they exist only in inverse proportions. The result, Mill claims, was a paralyzing ennui: “I was thus, as I said to myself, left stranded at the commencement of my voyage, with a well-equipped ship and a rudder, but no sail; without any real desire for the ends which I had been so carefully fitted out to work for: no delight in virtue, or the general good, but also just as little in anything else.”<sup>44</sup> Literature proved the antidote for Mill, who found his despair lightened by reading Wordsworth: “What made Wordsworth’s poems a medicine for my state of mind was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty.”<sup>45</sup> Mill’s experience illustrates the idea that scientific, empirical, fact-based analysis is ultimately deficient. The concept of “thought coloured by feeling” is perhaps a version of ideal reconciliation, but the increasing distinction between fact and feeling is a problematic divide, with facts not only mind-numbing but soul-sucking. Without emotional perception, scientific analysis is experienced as inhuman, rote and mechanical, diminishing both the capacity for pleasure and for goodwill.

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<sup>42</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London: Longman, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1873), 137.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

It may be tempting to dismiss Arnold and Mill as humanists who are misinformed about the scientific process and who generalize their own anxieties into an artificial gap between scientific fact and emotional feeling. Similar preoccupations figure in some of the most significant literary works of the nineteenth-century – from George Eliot’s novels to Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*. But what is perhaps more surprising is that the perception of a troubling distance between feeling and fact was experienced by nineteenth-century scientists as well as writers – notably, by none other than Charles Darwin. Darwin, who believed himself a true Baconian-scientist and insisted in his autobiography that he had built his career on the careful observation of empirical data, was troubled by the belief that factual analysis had crowded more tender feeling from his mind. He writes, “Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds, such as the work of Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, gave me great pleasure,” but in his later years, he finds himself unable to enjoy poetry: “My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive.”<sup>46</sup> Even as he locates his “higher tastes” as a specific neurological process, Darwin remains concerned about its larger implications: “The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably, to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.”<sup>47</sup> Darwin surmises that feeling and intellect are distinct but inter-reliant. It is particularly significant that the gap he experiences is not only “injurious” and “enfeebling” in terms of personal happiness but also in regard to moral understanding.

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Darwin, “Autobiography,” *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, vol. I, ed. Francis Darwin. (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 81.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.



Dickens's *Bleak House* preceded the publication of *The Origin of the Species* by six years, but his novel is similarly preoccupied with the intersections – and gaps – between fact and imagination. Dickens illustrates the danger of the fact without feeling, and the way a machine for grinding out general laws can erode morality and intellectual progress. Dickens's novel speaks to the Victorian anxiety that deductive reasoning and analysis might actually diminish one's ability to feel. In this chapter, I will argue that Dickens seeks to close the perceived gap between fact and feeling. The necessity of employing both head and heart is central to *Bleak House*, which attempts to negotiate the symbiosis of heart and mind while answering to the objective clarity of facts that science demands in its explanations. In *Bleak House*, Dickens finds himself in the untenable but inescapable position of advocating for feeling while insisting that the significant elements of his story are based entirely in scientific fact. His novel resists the limitations of empirical science in its desire to uphold feelings—in the form of intuition—as an authentic mode of understanding. But at the same time it compromises that power by attempting to adhere to empirical facts.

In December of 1852, George H. Lewes published a letter in the *Leader* responding to the most recent monthly installment of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*. As a philosopher, Lewes was known for his belief in Comtean rationalism and empiricism – a professional conviction that evidently carried over into his literary pleasures as well. In this letter, Lewes objects to the use of spontaneous combustion as the cause of death for the gin-drinking rag-and-bones shopkeeper, Mr. Krook. Lewes's response to Krook's death emphasizes the influence of fiction on the public imagination and, moreover, advocates a certain kind of scientific realism in fiction:

...it is a fault in Art, and a fault in Literature, overstepping the limits of Fiction, and giving currency to a vulgar error. ... Spontaneous Combustion is not only a scientific error which we doubt if [Dickens] can find one organic chemist of any authority to countenance now, but is absolutely *impossible*

according to all known laws of combustion, and to the constitution of the human body.<sup>48</sup>

By declaring “the limits of Fiction” as those imposed by scientific fact and insisting that Dickens had significantly overstepped them, Lewes articulates that tension between fact and feeling in regard to a fictional reference. The method of science that Lewes advocates is based on empirical knowledge, or sensory perception and experience. The fantastical events and exaggerated characters of *Bleak House* indicate that the preoccupations of the novel lie elsewhere than the scientific method; the exchange of letters between Dickens and Lewes suggests otherwise.

In spite of the implausibility of many of the novel’s events, Dickens seems to be seriously invested in a narrative that stands up to the rigors of scientific investigation. In his preface to the 1853 publication of *Bleak House*,<sup>49</sup> Dickens responds directly to Lewes’s criticism and emphasizes the factuality of his fiction. He insists that “everything set forth in these pages concerning the Court of Chancery is substantially true, and within the truth.”<sup>50</sup> He goes on to defend the possibility of spontaneous combustion by citing documented cases – “about thirty cases on record” (6). He remarks upon the scientific validity of a particular case’s circumstances, noting that the case was “minutely investigated and described” before concluding, “The appearances beyond all rational doubts observed in that case, are the appearances observed in Mr. Krook’s case” (6).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> George Henry Lewes, “Literature,” *The Leader*, 11 Dec. 1852, 1189.

<sup>49</sup> *Bleak House* was initially published by Bradbury & Evans in nineteen monthly installments, or “numbers,” from March of 1852 to September of 1853. It was published as a three-volume novel with preface in September 1853.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, 1853 (London: Penguin, 2003), 5. All subsequent references to this novel are to this edition and are made parenthetically.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Denman establishes in “Krook’s Death and Dickens’s Authorities,” *The Dickensian*, 82:3 (1986), 131, that Dickens found most of his cases he cites in Robert Macnish’s, *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* (1828). See also

This insistence on factuality seems odd for a fiction writer – couldn't he have simply defended his use of poetic license? If Krook is intended to illustrate the devastating gap between all fact (his collection of documents and artifacts) and no feeling (his utter lack of empathy), then why does Dickens attempt to bridge the gap between fact and fiction by presenting scientific evidence for Krook's symbolic demise? Why does he feel compelled to find outside authentication for a fictional event? Why try to justify spontaneous combustion, of all the improbable elements of *Bleak House*? Why bother to respond to a complaint grounded in Positivist science? There is clearly something more at stake here than the opinion of one critic. Failing to meet the standards of scientific empiricism is clearly a concern for Dickens, as though admitting the impossibility of Krook's death would somehow diminish the efficacy of the novel as a whole.

The empirical epistemology of the Victorian age was not a naïve belief that all things were as they seem. It was a belief that immutable truths could be both discovered through experience and empirically proven. In a century made famous for fiction's dedication to realism, Dickens was not alone in his concern about what standards of verifiability should be employed, and to what end. His friend, colleague, and fellow-writer Wilkie Collins was also eager to represent a certain kind of authenticity in fiction, especially in regard to science – a subject that seems uniquely susceptible to bridging – or clearly dividing – the line between fact and fiction. Echoing Dickens's authorial technique (and his defensiveness), Collins uses his preface to *The Moonstone* to declare that the action of the narrative is “what would most probably have been in real life” – including the “physiological experiment which occupies a prominent place in the closing scenes.”<sup>52</sup> Collins continues,

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Gordon S. Haight's article, “Dickens and Lewes on Spontaneous Combustion,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 10:1 (1955), 53-63, for discussion of Lewes's and Dickens's public and published debate.

<sup>52</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, 1868 (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 3.

Having first ascertained, not only from books, but from living authorities as well, what the result of that experiment would really have been, I have declined to avail myself of the novelist's privilege of supposing something which might have happened, and have so shaped the story as to make it grow out of what actually would have happened – which, I beg to inform my readers, is also what actually does happen, in these pages.<sup>53</sup>

Collins, too, insists on the veracity of his work in a preface that somewhat ironically highlights the very fictionality of his novel. Representing truth is an explicit goal stated in these prefaces, and they locate the sources of their knowledge in empirical evidence published in books and recorded in professional observations. But, paradoxically, each of these narratives undermines its self-professed reliance on material evidence, ultimately using empiricism to provide explanations had been intuited by particular characters all along. Instead of the only reliable avenue of discovery, science becomes a way to explain or to justify a more complex and emotional understanding of a situation. As Jonathan Arac argues, “Dickens’s insistence on ‘truth’ in his preface to *Bleak House* ... leads him to draw wherever possible on scientific theories, for he was convinced that there was no conflict between science, rightly understood, and the imagination.”<sup>54</sup> Dickens, in spite of his digs at Lewes, is not especially interested in science except as a worldview that is large enough to contain human feeling – including the poetic justice of Krook’s self-contained incineration. Collins works a bit more carefully to carve out the possibilities of scientific discovery, but, as my next chapter will demonstrate, his novel is even more interested in science’s uncomfortable proximity to magic, mesmerism, and clairvoyance.

If Dickens’s own interest in scientific discovery is actually rather marginal, his desire to persuade Lewes to agree with him seems to be on a different level. Before writing the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Arac, “Narrative Form and Social Sense in *Bleak House* and The French Revolution” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 32:1 (1977), 66.

Preface to *Bleak House*, Dickens consulted with Dr. John Elliotson, physician and mesmerist, who was also Dickens's family doctor. Dickens wrote to Elliotson, "I am very truly obliged to you for the loan of your remarkable and learned lecture on Spontaneous Combustion; and I am not a little pleased to find myself fortified by such high authority."<sup>55</sup> The majority of scientists, even in the mid-nineteenth century would have agreed with Lewes's estimation that spontaneous combustion is impossible without some other independent source of heat; Dickens had evidently located a minority opinion. He would use Elliotson's lecture to fortify his remarks in the Preface to *Bleak House*, as well as a personal letter to Lewes dated 25 February 1853:

In the beginning you rather hastily (and not quite, I think in all good humour, with that consideration which your knowledge of me might have justified) assumed that I knew nothing at all about the question—had no kind of sense of my responsibility—and had taken no trouble to discriminate between truth and falsehood. Now the object of my note is simply to assure you that when I thought of the incident—which came into my mind, as having that analogy in it which is suggested at the end of the chapter—I looked into a number of books with great care, expressly to learn what the truth was. I examined the subject as a Judge might have done. And without laying down any law upon the case, I placed the evidence impartially before myself, the Jury, as I will place it before you.<sup>56</sup>

This response is puzzling in a number of ways, not the least of which is the follow-up note that Dickens wrote to Lewes two days later:

I cannot help laughing,—though I am really vexed—at a preposterous mistake which my own hand-writing must have occasioned. [...] Look back to my note and I think you will certainly find that there is no such word as 'not,' before 'in all good humor.' There most positively and unquestionably was no such word in my mind, and I cannot believe it has got in the note without my observation.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Charles Dickens, "To Dr. John Elliotson," 7 Feb. 1853, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 7, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, and Angus Easson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 22. The lecture that Dickens mentions in this letter is not among Elliotson's published work.

<sup>56</sup> Dickens, "To G. H. Lewes" 25 Feb. 1853, *Letters*, vol. 7, 28-29.

<sup>57</sup> Dickens, "To G. H. Lewes" 27 Feb. 1853, *Letters*, vol. 7, 32.

Dickens goes on to explain, “The meaning is that *I* (the undersigned) *in all good humor* make that observation. I am as thoroughly persuaded of your good humor in the matter as I am of my own, and I am at once amazed and concerned to find how easily a meaning becomes changed.”<sup>58</sup> This addendum softens the petulant tone of the February 25<sup>th</sup> letter, but it also obscures the meaning. In upholding his own scientific authority, Dickens argues that Lewes should have taken his personal knowledge of Dickens into consideration, letting their friendship and mutual respect (as well as his “good humour”) inform his assessment of the novel. In other words, Dickens expects Lewes to use non-empirical standards even when discussing a scientific matter. Dickens acknowledges his responsibility to represent the truth, and he never backs down from his argument that spontaneous combustion is scientifically possible. But in his eagerness to smooth things over with his friend, he sacrifices the agency of the author when he suggests that a written text may be subject to the clandestine entry of unintended words which might carry an emotional truth and thereby dramatically change the meaning.

In claiming to have read “a number of books with great care, expressly to learn what the truth was,” Dickens acknowledges that his responsibility as a novelist requires a clear distinction between “truth and falsehood.” What doesn’t get addressed in the preface or in his letters is why he feels compelled to emphatically claim scientific authenticity and judicial authority for an episode in a work of fiction, particularly a work that pushes the boundaries of realism in other ways (for example, the exaggerated and even absurd characters of Grandfather Smallweed, Harold Skimpole, and poor Phil of the shooting gallery). Lewes’s complaint is not that *Bleak House* is unrealistic, but that it “gives currency to a vulgar error” by misinforming the reading public about scientific facts. Rather than suggesting that the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

reading public could surely tell fact from fiction, Dickens instead insists that scientific facts actually support spontaneous combustion. He argues as though his work is *supposed* to employ the scientific method as means of verification. But the real issue here is the problem of correspondence between empirical fact and the emotional resonance of Krook's death—a correspondence that Dickens wants to uphold in his novel, and that Lewes's complaint threatens to undo. Dickens insists he has the facts on his side because at the heart of his fictional effort is a desire that fact and feeling will be one and the same. But in his efforts to stand by the emotional *and* scientific truth of Krook's death, he tacitly agrees that “feeling” needs scientific proof to validate it.

As we see in his reply to Lewes, Dickens claims that when he wrote about Krook's death, he limited himself to presenting “evidence.” At the same time, he explains that he first imagined the event because it corresponded with Krook's metaphorical embodiment of the legal system – a collector of “rags and bones.” Krook is the owner of a “rag and bottle” shop in which “Everything seemed to be bought, and nothing to be sold there”:

the shop had [...] the air of being in a legal neighbourhood, and of being, as it were, a dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law. There were a great many ink bottles. There was a little tottering bench of shabby old volumes, outside the door, labeled, ‘Law Books, all at 9d.’ [...] A little way within the shop door, lay heaps of old crackled parchment scrolls, and discoloured and dog's-eared law-papers. I could have fancied that all the rusty keys, of which there must have been hundreds huddled together as old iron, had once belonged to doors of rooms or strong chests in lawyers' offices. The litter of rags tumbled partly into and partly out of a one-legged wooden scale, [...] might have been counsellors' bands and gowns torn up. One had only to fancy [...] the yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients, to make the picture complete.  
(67-8)

Krook himself seems to be “a dirty hanger-on and a disowned relation of the law.” He has earned the nickname “The Lord Chancellor of the Court of Chancery” and he easily invokes the corrupt courts of a rapacious legal system that picks clean the bones of its clients. The

odds and ends that fill his shop are associated with the law or are rejected items from the legal system, inviting the reader to imagine a reading of the scene in which Krook literally picks clean the bones of his clients. Surrounded by the rags and bones he purchases from the less fortunate (often victims of the legal system), Krook comes to a fitting mortal end. His death is one of the most compelling examples in Dickens's novel of a moment that feels emotionally authentic, regardless of its factual basis. When Krook combusts, the vapors condense into "a thick, yellow liquor [...] which is offensive to the touch and sight, and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it" (516). This is the essence of Krook, and the legal system that he has come to represent, with its corrupt and rapacious consumption. Spontaneous combustion symbolizes a kind of poetic justice—an emotionally satisfying and particularly apt cause of death.

It hardly seems surprising, then, that his cause of death was selected precisely for symbolism, not scientific accuracy. Dickens explains in his letter to Lewes that before he ever began to research the scientific plausibility of spontaneous combustion, he imagined Krook's combustion as an analogy for the self-destructive and murky legal system. He writes, "[T]he incident [...] came into my mind, as having that analogy in it which is suggested at the end of the chapter."<sup>59</sup> The chapter concludes as follows:

The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name Your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally – inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only – Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died. (519)

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<sup>59</sup> Dickens, "To G. H. Lewes" 27 Feb. 1853, *Letters*, vol. 7, 32.



Regardless of the empirical proof (or lack thereof) that would support the scientific probability of such a death, it seems clear that its larger significance in the novel is as a metaphor of smoldering self-destruction, the “corrupted humours of the vicious body” that mimic the self-perpetuating and self-consuming court system. The facts of spontaneous combustion hardly seem to be the issue at all, and yet that gap between fiction and scientific reality suddenly becomes vexing for Dickens when his metaphor threatens to separate the emotional resonance of Krook’s death from the empirical facts.

The inquest that takes place in the novel introduces “men of science and philosophy” who arrive to work through the problem of Krook’s spontaneous combustion scientifically (532). This occurs in the first chapter to be published after Lewes’s letters appeared in *The Leader*, and is easily read as a direct response to Lewes’s complaints.<sup>60</sup>

Dickens writes:

Some of these authorities (of course the wisest) hold with indignation that the deceased had no business to die in the alleged manner; and being reminded by other authorities of a certain inquiry into the evidence of such deaths [...] <sup>61</sup> still they regard the late Mr. Krook’s obstinacy, in going out of the world by any such byeway, as wholly unjustifiable and personally offensive. The less the court understands of all this, the more the court likes it. (532)

Mimicking the mysterious origins, widespread interest, and inexplicable disintegration of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which “drags its dreary length before the Court, perennially helpless” (17) until at last the case ends having been absorbed in court costs, Krook’s death is a puzzle with no satisfactory outcome. Dickens’s fictional investigation manages to cleverly mock scientists and the Court of Chancery without ever compromising the novel’s claim of accuracy in regard to spontaneous combustion itself.

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<sup>60</sup> Haight, 54.

<sup>61</sup> Dickens includes here a list of published cases of Spontaneous Combustion.

Although Dickens was clearly unwilling to admit that he was wrong about the science, *Bleak House* continually insists that the preferable mode of knowledge is not scientific fact but emotional feeling or intuitive perception. As the coroner exclaims, “[T]hese are mysteries we can’t account for!” (533). Dickens’s fiction celebrates those mysteries: the existence of human connections and relationships that are intuitive rather than rational. His novels open up space for meanings that move beyond the literal and the empirical but are nonetheless true. Intuition and imagination are emotional modes of understanding that often prove to be shorter routes to uncovering the truth. These truths may then be verified by empirical or objective means, but only belatedly and – even with the inquisition of “men of science and philosophy” – perhaps never entirely satisfactorily. The inquest, meant to be a thorough and objective inquiry into Krook’s death, appears doomed to repeat and recycle the same arguments, over and over in the style of Jarndyce and Jarndyce until it, too, has simply worn itself out. Meanwhile, the feeling – that Krook’s death is appropriate and grotesquely satisfying – withstands scientific inquiry (and even withstands Lewes’s objections).

As many critics have argued previously, the influence of nineteenth-century science on its contemporary fiction can hardly be overemphasized.<sup>62</sup> Peter Allan Dale and Jonathan Smith have each written persuasively about the ways nineteenth-century science and literature overlap in their desires to comprehensively understand the world.<sup>63</sup> Smith asserts

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<sup>62</sup> See Levine’s *Darwin and the Novelists*, see also Suzy Anger, *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and Patricia Murphy, *In Science’s Shadow: Literary Productions of Late Victorian Women* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

<sup>63</sup> Peter Allan Dale, *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture: Science, Art, and Society in the Victorian Age* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) and Jonathan Smith, *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

that it is incorrect to simplify the issue of science and literature into distinct discourses that were either oppositional or compatible, and he argues that the relationship between these disciplines was ultimately a complementary one.<sup>64</sup> But as Dickens's and Lewes's (friendly) dispute illustrates, the tensions that existed between literature and science were representative of the larger anxieties of the age – especially the depletion of human feeling in the wake of scientific analysis and progress. *Bleak House* questions the authority of logic and reason even as it attempts to assimilate these with the feelings of the heart. In employing intuition as well as empirical analysis to obtain information, Dickens suggests that these reading methods are compatible and, as Smith would say, complementary. Dickens's refusal to back down from the “facts” of Krook's spontaneous combustion can be read as a firm insistence that the emotional authenticity of Krook's demise is in accordance with scientific fact. This speaks to a determination seen elsewhere in the novel that emotional feeling will not be beaten down under the withering and literal-mindedness of science as represented by Lewes. But at the same time, then, there is something problematic about the need to corroborate the “truth” of spontaneous combustion with scientific fact. This speaks to the other side of the anxiety—that by insisting on a correspondence between feeling and fact, it will then follow that the truths of the heart we might find in fiction now require validation by way of scientific proof.

Given this uneasy relationship, moments of empiricism and intuition become a way into the novel, helping to illuminate both the promising solution that emerges from a combination of these two reading methods and the troubling unease that comes from the mutual dependency of oppositions. As long-held convictions were unsettled by new developments in the sciences, empirical evidence came to be relied upon as the standard of

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<sup>64</sup> Smith, 6-8, 236-7.

proof. At the same time, empirical evidence was admittedly insufficient when it came to answering certain questions: Victorians were intrigued by phenomena they still could not explain and “mysteries we can’t account for!” (533). Rather than abandon traditional beliefs entirely, or, alternatively, refuse to acknowledge the expansive implications of scientific discovery, many Victorians looked for ways to assimilate two methods of understanding the world, holding empirical science and traditional beliefs in a careful balance within the shifting Victorian epistemology. In *Bleak House*, the distinction is not between a religious tradition and scientific progress, but gets refigured in Dickens’s characters as a conflict between an intuitive sense of humanity or human connections and a purely objective and mechanical method of consumption, control, and self-preservation.<sup>65</sup> Science is depicted as an inductive process that begins with observation of empirical facts. It is simply a method of gathering facts, facts that often support intuitive notions. But when they don’t—when empiricism and intuition conflict—the question of how best to read the world becomes a dramatic concern. The danger of empirical analysis in *Bleak House* is that it fails to take into account those aspects of human life that are not empirical – the emotions, relationships, and personal connections that are so vital to Dickens’s novel and to its protagonist/narrator, Esther Summerson.

The gap between fact and feeling is often figured in *Bleak House* as a discrepancy between empirical and intuitive modes of understanding. This is a gap that the novel (and Dickens, in his letters to Lewes) tries to close. For Dickens, the scientific method or empirical approach to reading the world merely corroborates what the heart already knows. His equal reliance on both intuitive and empirical discoveries in *Bleak House* is one way that

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<sup>65</sup> In *Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: MacMillan 1986), J.A.V. Chapple notes briefly that in *Bleak House*, “Dickens’ interrelated metaphors, drawn from chemistry, astronomy, physiology and medicine, are correlated with the various agencies of social control” (43).

he both balances and draws attention to the tension between these two methods of reading the world. Andrew Sanders notes that Dickens's contemporaries considered him "the quintessential 'modern' man," as evidenced by Richard Hengist Horne's collection of essays, *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844), which featured Dickens as its frontispiece and subject of the opening essay.<sup>66</sup> Sanders explains, "To Horne [Dickens] was at once an '*instinctive*' writer in that 'his best things are suddenly revealed to him' and an 'objective' thinker in that his mind has a 'practical tendency'."<sup>67</sup> The spirit of the Victorian age – and its novels – is in many ways exemplified by this paradoxical combination of instinct and objectivity. Dickens, in his efforts to represent the human experience of Victorian England, was, as Sanders states, "a 'realist' writer tempered by an instinctive 'fancy,' one perhaps uniquely equipped to transform established norms of fiction into something expressive of the noisy anomalies of the age."<sup>68</sup>

An examination of the ways different characters employ intuition or empirical observations to unravel mysteries illustrates Dickens's ambivalence about prioritizing a scientific reading of the world. Unlike George Eliot, who carefully employs the scientific method to human conduct, analyzing and detailing the motivations of human behavior, Dickens gives obvious preference to the imagination and intuition, creating unexpected but significant emotional connections between otherwise disconnected characters. Eliot exposes the foibles and flaws of protagonists and antagonists alike; Dickens's characters are perhaps more easily characterized as either generous or self-serving. Significantly, their use of either empirical data or intuitive feeling to read and understand the world is directly related to their

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Sanders, *Dickens and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 42. See pp. 39-43, for a useful discussion of the way Horne presents Dickens within the context of his contemporary England.

<sup>67</sup> Sanders, 42.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

selfish or unselfish desires. This once again suggests that the practice of extensive analysis can erode not only one's appreciation for the finer things in life, but also one's sense of empathy and compassion. Despite Dickens's prefatory insistence on facts, his novel continually privileges intuitive discoveries.

Law clerk Mr. Guppy represents the corrupting force of the legal system in its more ineffectual form. His analysis of a portrait of Lady Dedlock leads him to speculate about her remarkable resemblance to Esther Summerson and the material value of such a discovery. Lady Dedlock's wealth and status are signified by specific details in the portrait, which has been reproduced and made available for public consumption:

Mr Guppy [...] looks with admiration, real or pretended, round the room at the Galaxy gallery of British beauty; terminating his survey with the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantel-shelf, in which she is represented on a terrace, with a pedestal upon the terrace, and a vase upon the pedestal, and her shawl upon the vase, and a prodigious piece of fur upon the shawl, and her arm on the prodigious piece of fur, and a bracelet on the arm.

'That's very like Lady Dedlock,' says Mr Guppy, 'It's a speaking likeness.'  
(510)

Whatever the resemblance to Lady Dedlock in the portrait's reproduction, the description of the portrait defines her not by inherent qualities that might have been intuitively sensed by the artist or viewer, but by the trappings of her social class – the terrace, the vase, the fur, the bracelet. To Guppy's shrewd empirical eye, Lady Dedlock's portrait "speaks" not only of her physical resemblance to her unknown and illegitimate daughter, Esther Summerson, but also to his own potential gains. "Your ladyship, I do assure you," Guppy later confronts Lady Dedlock, "that having Miss Summerson's image imprinted on my art – which I mention in confidence – I found [...] such a resemblance between Miss Esther Summerson and your ladyship's own portrait, that it completely knocked me over" (464). The substitution of "art" for "heart" hints at the replacement of empirical evidence for personal relationships in Guppy's own mind. As the jewels and fur indicate Lady Dedlock's wealth,

they symbolize what she stands to lose and what Guppy hopes to gain by way of his interest in Esther Summerson.

Sensation novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon also uses the portrait of a beautiful woman with a dark secret, and that portrait too will prove to be a significant clue in unraveling the mystery. But unlike Lady Audley, whose portrait seems to reveal her most demonic capabilities, Lady Dedlock's portrait depicts a woman who is threatened rather than threatening. Her portrait hangs in her home at Chesney Wold and reflects the status she has obtained through her marriage to Sir Leceister Dedlock. As a symbol of her situation, it rather sympathetically indicates that the outside world seeks to destroy her, rather than the existence of some sort of inner evil that threatens to betray her:

... the fire of the sun is dying. Even now the floor is dusky, and shadow slowly mounts the walls, bringing the Dedlocks down like age and death. And now, upon my lady's picture over the great chimney-piece, a weird shade falls from some old tree, that turns it pale, and flutters it, and looks as if a great arm held a veil or a hood, watching an opportunity to draw it over her. Higher and darker rises the shadow on the wall – now a red gloom on the ceiling – now the fire is out. (641)

Although the threatening shadow touches them all, it's clear that Lady Dedlock is the one who is most vulnerable: "But of all the shadows in Chesney Wold, the shadow in the long drawing room upon my lady's picture is the first to come, the last to be disturbed. At this hour and by this light it changes into threatening hands raised up and menacing the handsome face with every breath that stirs" (642). This imaginative fancy – a dangerous shadow – becomes an empirical fact when it is personified in the character of Mr. Tulkinghorn, another member of the legal profession, whose passionless interest in uncovering Lady Dedlock's secrets will prove far more threatening than Guppy's clumsy efforts at blackmail. The connection between Lady Dedlock's fate and her portrait's shadows is underscored a few pages later when, at the mere mention of the lawyer's name,

“a shade is on my lady’s face” – a shadow the narrator attributes to either “the gathering gloom of evening” or “the darker gloom within herself” (646).

The lawyer Tulkinghorn is another empiricist in Dickens’s novel. He is a keen reader of texts and faces, and as Robert Tracy notes in his article on reading and misreading in *Bleak House*, Tulkinghorn is “trained to subject a text to sustained scrutiny, to test its meanings and authenticity, and to understand that its words have consequences.”<sup>69</sup>

Tulkinghorn’s life work is the collection of facts. He is the quintessential example of a character entirely without “*Negative Capability*,” obsessively seeking empirical evidence. He relentlessly investigates Lady Dedlock with no qualms about what he might uncover: “He is indifferent to everything but his calling. His calling is the acquisition of secrets and the holding possession of such power as they give him, with no sharer or opponent in it” (581). His tendency to collect and accumulate information and evidence has become his defining characteristic: “He is surrounded by a mysterious halo of family confidences; of which he is known to be the silent depository” (23). As Sir Leceister’s lawyer he is “mechanically faithful without attachment” (581). This loyalty sans personal feeling pitches empirical data against intuitive responses and makes Tulkinghorn a villain, armed with his powerful and unfeeling store of secrets. Like many of Dickens’s characters, his personality seems to manifest itself physically, offering material evidence for the emotional truths he symbolizes: “One peculiarity of his black clothes, and of his black stockings, be they silk or worsted, is, that they never shine. Mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light, his dress is like himself” (23). Much like the law clerk Guppy, Tulkinghorn is also a self-interested empiricist, seeking to collect information to suit his own aims. He represents the legal system as one of its

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Tracy, “Reading and Misreading *Bleak House*,” *Dickens Quarterly* 20:3 (2003): 167.



worst manifestations – an imbalance of power in which the ruthlessness is confused with the pursuit of justice and empirical evidence is employed as a weapon.

Empiricism and intuition are employed in *Bleak House* as alternative methods of reading the world – they often can be employed to discover the same truths, but the means of achieving those ends make all the difference. Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock exemplify this distinction. Each is interested in determining the identity of an anonymous law clerk and their investigations create “parallel but rival readings of evidence,” beginning with the legal document written in a hand that first captures Lady Dedlock’s interest and, consequently, Tulkinghorn’s attention.<sup>70</sup> Both attempt to discover the copyist behind the document: Lady Dedlock’s search is an emotionally and intuitively driven effort to locate her former lover; Tulkinghorn’s interest in the mystery is purely professional in the worst sense. He is not motivated by a desire to harm Lady Dedlock, but his compulsion to collect the evidence, supposedly in the best interests of the Dedlock family, is inextricable from the sense of power he derives as “the steward of the legal mysteries, the butler of the legal cellar, of the Dedlocks” (24). Dedicated to his job, Tulkinghorn will be in dogged pursuit of Lady Dedlock’s secret: “Whether he be cold and cruel, whether immovable in what he has made his duty, whether absorbed in love of power, whether determined to have nothing hidden from him . . . it may be that my Lady had better have five thousand pairs of fashionable eyes upon her, in distrustful vigilance, than the two eyes of this rusty lawyer” (459).

Even as she knows that he watches her, Lady Dedlock continues her search for truth, her emotional response compelling her to uncover the identity of the law writer, who turns out to be her former lover. Tulkinghorn pursues the same mystery for very different reasons. When he finds evidence, he is not delighted or thrilled, but “sedately satisfied”

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<sup>70</sup> Tracy, 168.

(652). Embodying the tension between analytical thought and moral understanding, Tulkinghorn's emotions appear to have been stunted by his empirical pursuits: "To say of a man so severely and strictly self-repressed that he is triumphant, would be to do him as great an injustice as to suppose him troubled with love or sentiment, or any romantic weakness"

(652). Finer feelings are sacrificed to empirical facts and Tulkinghorn's lack of compassion makes him a villain. His systematic process of observation and deductive analysis plays opposite Lady Dedlock's secret, passionate, and desperate investigation to discover Nemo the law-writer's true identity. In an inversion of Braddon's dramatic mystery, Dickens makes a victim out of the fallen woman and a villain out of the legal officer who doggedly investigates her past. The mere facts of the case in *Bleak House*, as in *Lady Audley's Secret*, fail to reveal the whole story. But the story Dickens is interested in telling is one of human feeling and compassion rather than empirical evidence and blind justice.

Blind justice, we might suppose, would not look kindly on Lady Dedlock. The Court of Chancery is as unfeeling and mechanical as Tulkinghorn himself. With lawyers like Tulkinghorn as its agents, the courts are a puzzling and exhausting system that clings to facts at the expense of moral understanding. If the dirty rag and bottle shop illustrates the court's voracious appetite for its clients, Krook's illiteracy is a darkly comical personification of the legal system's inability to decipher what really matters. Although he spends his life purchasing and collecting written documents, Krook is incapable of knowing their true value. He can crudely copy the written marks but can divine no meaning from them; he recognizes the form but remains ignorant of the substance. He refuses to ask anyone to teach him to read, provoked by the wild suspicion that they might deliberately teach him incorrectly. This form of blindness is not impartial; it is dangerously isolating and unfeeling.

Krook's self-imposed blindness reaches beyond the written page to obscure human encounters as well. When Nemo's dead body is discovered, his identity is a mystery. The medical examiner thinks perhaps Krook, as his landlord, would know something of Nemo's past and remarks to the shopkeeper, "I recollect once thinking there was something in his matter, uncouth as it was, that denoted a fall in life. Was that so?" Krook responds, chillingly, "You might as well ask me to describe the ladies whose heads of hair I have got in sacks down-stairs. Than that he was my lodger for a year and a half, and lived – or didn't live – by law-writing, I know no more of him" (168). Assessing people by the way they earn money, whether desperately selling their hair or scratching out a living as a law writer, Krook fails to account for any other measure of worth. Poor Jo, the little crossing sweep, is as illiterate as Krook in terms of reading and writing, but offers a description of the late Nemo that is far more telling: "He wos wery good to me, he wos!" (181).

Tulkinghorn's devotion to empirical evidence similarly blinds him to immaterial truths; quantifying the world as he sees it leads him to discount those whom he feels are relatively unimportant. Tulkinghorn lacks emotional responsiveness to the data he collects; as a result, he misses or misreads the two women whose decisions will change his life. Lady Dedlock's attempts to thwart his discovery by dressing up in the disguise of her servant should hardly have been successful: "between [her] plain dress, and her refined manner, there is something exceedingly inconsistent. She should be an upper servant by her attire, yet, in her air and step, though both are hurried and assumed – as far as she can assume in the muddy streets, which she treads with an unaccustomed foot – she is a lady" (260). In fact, many who notice her on the street are not fooled by her costume: "Her face is veiled and still she sufficiently betrays herself to make more than one of those who pass her look

round sharply” (260). Surely her disguise would not pass muster under the lawyer’s shrewd gaze. But as she walks by his window, he fails to see her:

Why should Mr. Tulkinghorn, for such no-reason, look out of window? ... So he does not look out of window. And if he did, what would it be to see a woman going by? There are women enough in the world, Mr. Tulkinghorn thinks – too many; they are at the bottom of all that goes wrong in it, though, for the matter of that, they create business for lawyers. What would it be to see a woman going by, even though she were going secretly? They are all secret. Mr. Tulkinghorn knows that very well. (259-60)

Tulkinghorn’s misogynistic dismissal of women indicates a weakness in empiricism: it relies on the viewer to determine what material warrants observation. Empirical evidence fails Tulkinghorn in this situation, not because it is deliberately misleading (clearly, Lady Dedlock has the “air and step” of a lady no matter what she is wearing) but because he does not deign to notice a woman walking by his window. Unwilling to sort through the non-empirical sentiments he associates with women – too many, too troublesome, too secretive – he fails to observe the appearance of the woman who holds the answer to the mystery he is eager to solve.

As I’ve suggested, the analytical empiricism Tulkinghorn has practiced professionally has taken its toll on his moral nature. Its detrimental effects are underscored by his death, which the novel suggests could have been prevented if Tulkinghorn had simply been part of the human network of connections and relationships that sustain us. Tulkinghorn, who keeps so many secrets, has no one in his confidence. As he walks home, unsuspecting that a murderer lurks in wait, his self-imposed isolation is implicated in the approaching catastrophe: “He is in the confidence of the very bricks and mortar. The high chimney-stacks telegraph family secrets to him. Yet there is not a voice in a mile of them to whisper, ‘Don’t go home!’ ” (747). The one friendship Tulkinghorn had came to an untimely end, a consequence, it seems, of the soul-sucking practice of legal analysis: “one bachelor friend of

his, a man of the same mould and a lawyer too, who lived the same kind of life until he was seventy-five years old, and then suddenly conceiving (as it is supposed) an impression that it was too monotonous, gave his gold watch to his hair-dresser one summer evening and walked leisurely home to the Temple and hanged himself” (353). With the assignment of monotony as the motive for suicide, the dry and withering routine of the lawyer’s profession becomes inescapable except through death. Tulkinghorn’s reaction to his friend’s death goes unmentioned but the gift of the gold watch to a hair-dresser casts a melancholic doubt on the intimacy of their friendship. His own life is comprised solely of concrete facts and empirical data, leaving little space for emotions of any sort, and presenting no relationships that might save him from his fate. Tulkinghorn is finally shot to death by Lady Dedlock’s maid, Mademoiselle Hortense, after he refuses to assist her and threatens to imprison her, not to protect Lady Dedlock but to keep her secret for himself and his own gains.

If Tulkinghorn illustrates the detrimental effects of empiricism and analysis, and the way they seem to suffocate other methods of understanding, Esther Summerson is Dickens’s answer to this problem. Esther is an ideal combination of domestic practicality perfectly aligned with a sense of empathy that allows her to move beyond empirical facts to an intuitive reading of persons and relationships. Esther explains at the start of her narrative, “I had always a rather noticing way . . . a silent way of noticing what passed before me, and thinking I should like to understand it better” (28). Esther’s “way of noticing” is a far cry from Tulkinghorn’s unflinching scrutiny. With her typical (and occasionally wearying) modesty, Esther minimizes the efficacy of her method of reading the world: “I have not by any means a quick understanding. When I love a person very tenderly indeed, it seems to

brighten” (28).<sup>71</sup> As Dickens’s heroine and one of the few characters in *Bleak House* who gets a happy ending, Esther’s modest appraisal of her not very quick understanding is an understated argument for the virtues of a non-empirical, intuitive, and emotional method of reading the world. Her understanding brightens as a result of love, which shifts the meaning of “understanding” from the comprehension of material fact to a more nuanced and imaginative notice of things that may or may not be visible. Of course, Esther, in her compulsion for self-deprecation, hastens to add, “But even that may be my vanity” (28). In spite of what seems like an initial unwillingness to trust her intuition, and her ongoing habit of qualifying it, Esther’s “silent way of noticing” is consistently more accurate as well as more desirable when juxtaposed with Guppy’s sharp observations and Tulkinghorn’s dogged investigations.<sup>72</sup>

Esther’s intuition is highlighted by her astute inference in sensing relationships, allowing for a silent communication between herself and those she knows and loves. She serves as an example of the unspoken and often unacknowledged connections that exist among people (a major theme of *Bleak House*). Her intuition is one form of human connection that cannot be replaced by scientific fact or legal evidence, even if these discoveries ultimately correspond with Esther’s perceptions. When she is reunited with her guardian, Mr. Jarndyce, she does not consciously recognize him, but notes, “his voice had connected itself with an association in my mind that I could not define” (83). Their relationship rapidly develops to the point that Esther seems almost to read his mind:

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<sup>71</sup> In her article, “Esther Summerson: The Betrayal of the Imagination,” *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 6 (1976): 1-13, Joan Winslow argues that Esther’s inability to trust her instincts is her ultimate failure. I disagree with Winslow’s assertion. Rather than watching her failure, I suggest that we witness Esther’s struggle with the problem of reconciling empirical fact and intuitive feeling.

<sup>72</sup> Judith Wilt notes that in writing Esther’s narrative, Dickens shifts from a masculine perspective to a self/other point of view that she suggests is gender-particular. See her article “Confusion and Consciousness in Dickens’s Esther,” *Journal of Narrative Techniques*, 32:3 (Dec. 1977): 285-309.

“though Mr. Jarndyce’s glance, as he withdrew it, rested for but a moment on me, I felt as if, in that moment, he confided to me – and knew that he confided to me, and that I received the confidence – his hope that Ada and Richard might one day enter on a dearer relationship” (93). Esther also senses Ada and Richard’s romantic affection long before they confess their engagement to her, and, inferring a much less obvious truth, she speculates that Jarndyce’s friend Mr. Boythorn must once have been disappointed in love. She asks Jarndyce if Boythorn had ever meant to be married and he replies, “How did you find that out?” (143). Esther’s ability to detect gentleness and wistfulness in the boisterous gentleman suggests a method of reading that reaches beyond the limits of material evidence, even if she is not always sure what to do with the knowledge she has. Jarndyce explains to her that Boythorn’s love “died to him,” and that same night Esther dreams “of the days when I lived in my godmother’s house” (147). It is much later that we discover Esther’s prescient awareness of their connection: Boythorn’s former love was none other than Esther’s godmother/aunt. In a pattern that will continue through the novel, Esther’s intuitive and fanciful notions are uncannily correct, even though she continually qualifies or dismisses them: “I am not sufficiently acquainted with such subjects to know whether it is at all remarkable that I almost always dreamed of that period of my life” (147). In fact, Esther’s dreams or resurfacing memories of her childhood are always significantly related to an encounter in which she intuitively – or, in Boythorn’s case, almost clairvoyantly – recognizes a connection to her past. Her world is one of friendship, devotion, affection, and gratitude, and as such could scarcely be further removed from Tulkinghorn’s power, secrets, facts, and obligation.

Her encounter with Lady Dedlock is still further indication that Esther’s emotional response to those she meets offers a deeper and quicker insight to the truth than

Tulkinghorn's stealthy collection of evidence. Esther's relationship with Lady Dedlock is one in which intuition and legal evidence are first opposed, then intertwined, then partially obscured. Esther's first encounter with Lady Dedlock is confusing rather than enlightening. Her inexplicable emotional response feels like "an unmeaning weakness" and she confesses, "It made me tremble so, to be thrown into this unaccountable agitation" (292). The agitation that Esther cannot account for results from an emotional recognition that – unlike Guppy's realization of an empirical, physical family resemblance – Esther cannot clearly quantify. Esther studies Lady Dedlock intently, searching for empirical facts that would explain her response: "I knew the beautiful face quite well, in that short space of time" (290). Tellingly, Esther initially questions whether "Lady Dedlock's face accidentally resemble[d] my godmother's?" but the empirical data available to her offers little information: "the expression was so different, and the stern decision which had worn my godmother's face, like weather into rocks, was so completely wanting in the face before me, that it could not be that resemblance which had struck me" (292).

Esther is bewildered by her instinctive reaction to Lady Dedlock, which releases half-buried memories of her childhood, significantly linked to visual memories of herself: "very strangely, there was something quickened within me, associated with the lonely days at my godmother's; yes, away even to the days when I had stood on tiptoe to dress myself at my little glass, after dressing my doll" (290). This hazy recognition – the "something [that] quickened within" her – is an allusion to a child in the womb, but it also suggests an important link between the emotional and empirical; Esther recalls the sensory, empirical experience of looking into a mirror. Ultimately, the physical resemblance Esther and Lady Dedlock share will clearly establish the relationship that Esther has only begun to recognize, but at that point empirical evidence will prove to be a threat rather than a resolution. This



conflict between emotional and rational responses to their mother-daughter relationship is distressing and it emphasizes the greater value of friendship and goodwill over bloodlines and legal duties.

Although her narrative is significantly informed by intuitive modes of understanding, Esther continually acknowledges the authority of material facts, and often analyzes them quite shrewdly. While she remains vague about Lady Dedlock's physical appearance, other characters are described in clarifying detail: "an old coachman, who looked as if he were the official representative of all the poms and vanities that had ever been put into his coach" (289); "the handsome face and fine responsible portly figure of the housekeeper," (290); "the ceremonious, gouty, grey-haired gentleman [...] Sir Leicester Dedlock" (292). But Esther never offers a specific description of Lady Dedlock's appearance. She is either unable or unwilling to see the resemblance to herself, and she remains mystified by her own response, "But why her face should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps of old remembrances; and why I should be so fluttered and troubled (for I was still) by having casually met her eyes; I could not think" (292). Without her emotional perceptions, her analysis of the situation is woefully incomplete. The flip side of this is also true: lacking a logical explanation, Esther's intuitive responses seem fragmented and inexplicable, and are likely to be dismissed unless a rational explanation is made available. Esther's language makes a distinction between her emotional response "fluttered and troubled" and a logical reason for that response. The lack of rationality is problematic for Esther and it becomes clear that the narrative will eventually explain her emotional reaction. Until she is provided with empirical data to justify her reaction, Esther continues to be bewildered by the effect that Lady Dedlock has upon her: "I had never heard the voice, as I had never seen the face, but it affected me in the same strange way. Again, in a

moment, there arose before my mind innumerable pictures of myself” (296). References to a looking glass and “pictures of myself” again reinforce a hazy sort of empiricism, suggesting visual, physically apparent information that Esther should be able to process. We might assume that Esther, like Guppy, should, in fact, be able to recognize the remarkable physical resemblance between herself and Lady Dedlock. When the empirical evidence goes unacknowledged except as its absence, “I had never heard the voice, as I had never seen the face,” it prompts confused memories of her own mirrored reflection. Her assessment of the situation remains decidedly sentimental, fanciful, and imaginative, as if it were frozen in that moment of childhood when she stood on tiptoe to see the mirror.

This imaginative state may seem futile but it is also freeing. Unbound by the firm rules of logic or rationality that sharpen and limit a mind like Tulkinghorn’s, Esther moves beyond the empirical to perceptively intuit Lady Dedlock’s emotions, “I had a fancy [...] that what this lady so curiously was to me, I was to her – I mean that I disturbed her thoughts as she influenced mine, though in some different way” (366). But Esther can find no empirical basis for this imagined reciprocity of feeling. She tries to dismiss these notions because she can find no factual or rational basis for them: “I felt this to be a foolish weakness. Indeed, I felt the whole state of my mind in reference to her to be weak and unreasonable; and I remonstrated myself about it as much as I could” (366). Esther finds her relationship with Lady Dedlock to be, at that moment, literally unrecognizable: she cannot *see* any empirical evidence to support her “fancy.” This encounter illustrates the mutual dependence of intuition and empiricism. Dickens does not replace empirical evidence with intuition (intuition alone is insufficient) but his characters continually intuit “truths” long before they have empirical evidence to support them. Evidence comes later, as perfunctory proof of the sweeping realizations characters have already made.

When Esther and Lady Dedlock meet again, their relationship is at last made explicit. However, even in this scene it is revealed to the reader first by Esther's intuitive reaction, then by Lady Dedlock's logical explanation. Esther's assessment of Lady Dedlock's appearance quickly shifts to an intuitive reading of her countenance:

I was rendered motionless. Not so much by her hurried gesture of entreaty, not so much by her quick advance and outstretched hands, not so much by the great change in her manner, and the absence of her haughty self-restraint, as by a something in her face that I had pined for and dreamed of when I was a little child; something I had never seen in any face; something I had never seen in hers before. (578)

Esther can empirically account for each piece of physical, material evidence that might link her to Lady Dedlock – her gestures, her pace, her posture, her mannerisms. These identifiable changes are listed and then dismissed as Esther is overwhelmed by an obscure sense of “something” – “something in her face that I had pined for and dreamed of when I was a little child” (292). This “something” is decidedly non-empirical, an intuitive recognition of the mother/daughter relationship they were denied, the connection that Esther “had pined for and dreamed of” as a child. The “facts” are not at issue here – there is no mention of physical similarity or visual recognition. Esther cannot identify any specific, empirical evidence of their relationship and as a result their connection, though real, still seems fleeting and elusive. A moment later, “Lady Dedlock stopped, upon the instant, and changed back almost to what I had known her” (578). This change back – qualified by that quiet “almost” – again refers to the non-empirical quality of an expression, an emotion, a perception. These fleeting glimpses of truth are unscientific and legally inadmissible; they are also unmistakably accurate. Even though Esther claims to dismiss her intuition, she will ultimately discover that she has correctly imagined the significant connection that exists between herself and Lady Dedlock. Esther's intuition has, to a certain extent, prepared her (and the reader) for Lady Dedlock's confession that she is indeed Esther's “wicked and

unhappy mother!” (579). In that moment, Esther’s intuition gets confirmed as legal and biological fact.

Almost as abruptly, Esther’s narrative shifts quite suddenly from her intuitive recognition of a childhood longing to an empirical assessment of the situation. Esther’s first concern is whether she and her mother look enough alike that their secret could be discovered—or could have before Esther became ill: “I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness; as that nobody could ever now look at me, and look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us” (579). Now that Esther’s mysterious and vague recognition has been confirmed, her fluttering “scraps of remembrance” are replaced by an undeniable familial resemblance, conveniently effaced by Esther’s smallpox scars. Material facts come into play as a mark of separation rather than connection. Esther’s discovery of her mother is significant not because of their (former) shared characteristics but because of the void she feels—those irretrievable moments of her childhood in which a mother’s love was painfully absent. The emotional pain and loss is irrecoverable; the reality of their familial relation does not change the absence of a relationship between the two.

In telling the story of Esther and her mother, Dickens demonstrates the highly inflated value of empirical evidence and, at the same time, its worthlessness in regard to telling truths that matter. In the end, the lack of physical evidence allows the secret to remain hidden and Lady Dedlock’s reputation is untarnished. Emotions are quickly locked away and the legal facts of the case are not revealed. Esther’s intuition proved true, but the consequences of her recognition rest on the empirical evidence of her face and its resemblance to her mother’s—evidence that no longer exists. Consequently, we can see

that modes of cognition and matters of proof are in flux and interdependent in Dickens's novel. Esther and Lady Dedlock's relationship blurs the very boundaries that seem to clearly divide empirical and intuitive methods of reading the world.

The story of Esther and Lady Dedlock is very much a tale of individuals who fall victim to a system of empiricism that has no way to account for emotions. The brief reunion between mother and daughter is particularly painful because of that abrupt shift from intuitive, emotional reactions to an empirical, analytical assessment of their situation. This shift in focus maintains the force of the status quo in regard to Lady Dedlock's social standing and necessarily divides the mother from her daughter. Without empirical evidence, the two are once again distanced from each other. Their intuitive connection will never be recovered and Esther finds herself once again motherless: "She was so firm, that she took my hands away, and put them back against my breast, and with a last kiss as she held them there, released them, and went from me into the wood. I was alone" (582). Lady Dedlock has resigned herself to the mercy of a social system that would be concerned only with the biological and legal facts of a child born out of wedlock. As Sir Leceister Dedlock's wife, she has become complicit with a system that has no tolerance for aberrant emotion. Following the angst-ridden rule of fact and feeling in inverse-proportion to one another, her increased capacity for factual analysis as a means a self-preservation seems to have limited her capacity for emotional response.

Esther's response is quite the opposite: her sensitivity to other's needs is apparently heightened by her experience as an unloved child. Having no family of her own, Esther reaches out and forms relationships with people whose only tie to her is an emotional connection. In contrast to Lady Dedlock's firm composure, Esther redirects her emotions toward her friend Ada, in a friendship forged by love rather than biology, a connection based

on coincidence and mutual affection. Esther was unable to share an emotional reunion with her mother because they were both preoccupied by the threatening implications of the facts of their relationship. There was no space in that moment for feeling. With her childhood need for love and affection still unfulfilled, Esther turns to Ada, who comforts her exactly as a mother might, and precisely as Esther's longed-for mother did not, "holding my scarred face to her lovely cheek, bathing it with tears and kisses, rocking me to and fro like a child, calling me by every tender name that she could think of, and pressing me to her faithful heart" (588).

During the course of the novel, factual analysis and intuitive responses are continually held in a vexed relationship as the truths they reveal seem mutually exclusive, yet inextricable from one another. As the novel privileges Esther's intuitive senses over the empirical evidence (even when Esther herself claims not to) it presents an implicit critique of the materialist and legalistic society in which she lives, and "its perverse replacement of virtues of the heart with those of the intellect."<sup>73</sup> Throughout the novel, Dickens seems earnestly committed to the sort of factual accuracy he describes to Lewes, but he is equally invested in illustrating the detrimental result of a purely fact-based approach to reading the world. The legend of the Ghost's Walk at Chesney Wold is a significant complication in these (rather convenient) binaries I've identified. The legend defies rational explanation and leans toward the supernatural: "If the tread is an echo, it is an echo that is only heard after dark, and is often unheard for a long while all together. But it comes back, from time to time; and so sure as there is sickness or death in the family, it will be heard then" (114). Perhaps even eerier is its relentless repetition: "Whatever the sound is, it is a worrying sound... and what is to be noticed in it, is, that it *must be heard*. My Lady, who is afraid of

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<sup>73</sup> Joseph Sawicki, "'The Mere Truth Won't Do': Esther as Narrator in *Bleak House*," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 17:2 (Spring 1987): 209.

nothing, admits that when it is there, it must be heard. You cannot shut it out” (114). In a world that requires the scientific investigation of spontaneous combustion and the relentless machinery of the Court of Chancery, ghosts and the echo of ominous footsteps should be out of place. The fact that they are all present in the text speaks to its particular cultural moment and, I believe, to Dickens’s interest in representing perceptions and methods of reading the world, including the possibility of simultaneously entertaining two contradictory ideas. The uneasy juxtaposition of the fantastic and the factual also exemplifies ambivalence about cultural shifts. *Bleak House* fails to idealize an aristocratic tradition (and the ghosts that accompany it) even as it suggests the vicissitudes of modernity may be as ominous as haunting footsteps that foretell tragedy.

Dickens continues to play with the concurrence of fact and fancy, empiricism and intuition, and even realism and romance, when he takes the legend of the Ghost’s Walk and makes it profoundly empirical – confirming the truth of the legend without the presence of a ghost. Esther, who was once repelled from Chesney Wold by an “indefinable feeling,” is now drawn to the house – a building that represents the life Lady Dedlock has received in exchange for unknowingly giving up her infant daughter. With the daughter’s return, those eerie footsteps on the Ghost’s Walk become remarkably corporeal. Esther notes, “my echoing footsteps brought it suddenly into my mind that there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost’s Walk; that it was I, who was to bring calamity upon the stately house; and that my warning feet were haunting it even then” (586). The sound of footsteps shifts from a supernatural tale or even inexplicable echo to the firm tread of human feet and the tangible consequences of a secret revealed. In *Bleak House*, reason and imagination are paradoxically interchangeable and oppositional. The Ghost’s Walk and the tread of Esther’s

footsteps are a perfect example of Dickens's contradictory yet coinciding narratives of intuitive sensation and empirical fact.

Nowhere do these oppositions continue to merge and separate more rapidly than in the character of Inspector Bucket, who is called to investigate Tulkinghorn's murder. One of the first professional detectives to appear in nineteenth-century literature, Bucket's most notable quality is his keen observation. Dickens highlights Bucket's unique combination of ordinary and extraordinary qualities: "He is a stoutly-built, steady-looking, sharp-eyed man in black, of about the middle age. Except that he looks at Mr. Snagsby as if he were going to take his portrait, there is nothing remarkable about him at first sight" (355). This silent alertness, an ability to notice what others overlook, is now a classic detective trait, and familiar to mystery readers who have learned to scour novels for "clues" that the detective will also discover. Mr. Bucket, however, has an eye for both the physical, empirical facts, and the more elusive, immaterial, even emotional truths that a suspect might unconsciously reveal: "For the most part Mr. Bucket notices things in general" (358). His rather uncanny ability to blend in with his surroundings, seeming to appear and disappear at will, lends him a particular gift for understanding human motivations. This seems to be the professional detective's version of the empathy that Esther expresses and Tulkinghorn lacks.

Bucket's remarkable ability to combine factual analysis and intuitive perception makes him an excellent detective, but this skill also belongs to another character in the novel who makes his living off the kindness of strangers and has developed a knack for reading personalities as well as appearances. When Jo, the crossing-sweep from Tom-All-Along's, encounters Lady Dedlock dressed in her disguise as a servant, "even he has got at the suspicion of her being a lady" (261). Lady Dedlock flatly denies this, but the empirical evidence speaks for itself: Jo "silently notices how white and small her hand is, and what a



jolly servant she must be to wear such sparkling rings” (264). His initial perception of her social status is supported by the empirical evidence of her hands, in spite of the fact that her clothing seems to contradict this. If she is not a lady, then she must be “a jolly servant.” Jo’s empirical assessment is tested later in the novel when Inspector Bucket brings Lady Dedlock’s maid Hortense before Jo and asks him to identify the woman whom he led to Nemo’s grave. Jo is confused by the contradictory evidence: “that there’s the wale, the bonnet, and the gownd. It is her and it ain’t her. It ain’t her hand, nor yet her rings, nor yet her voice. But that there’s the wale, the bonnet, and the gownd” (364). His unsophisticated attempt to comprehend the contradiction between appearances and actuality may sound as though he has been outwitted, but he simply finds himself unable to reconcile his intuitive impression of the first woman with the empirical facts as they stand before him. This is precisely the same problem Inspector Bucket faces when he is called to action.

As a professional detective, and agent of the legal system, Bucket makes intuitive assessments of individuals and situations, but must balance his instinctive perceptions with verifiable, empirical facts, which are given first priority. The arrest of George Rouncewell for Tulkinghorn’s murder is an example of the problematic hierarchy. Bucket explains, “If you ask me ... whether from the first I believed George to be the murderer, I tell you candidly No; but he might be; notwithstanding; and there was enough against him to make it my duty to take him, and get him kept under remand” (833). Bucket must act against his intuition when the evidence requires it, and the circumstantial evidence against George Rouncewell is undeniable. The murder occurred in Lincoln’s Inn Field on a night when George had been there. George has “been heard more than once in a wrangle” with the lawyer and Tulkinghorn “may have been heard to call [George] a threatening, murdering, dangerous fellow” (766). Based on these facts, his arrest is unavoidable. Still, George’s

innocence undermines both the assuredness of empirical evidence and the efficacy of the legal system that relies upon it.

George is willing to trust the legal system, confident that the truth will be uncovered and his innocence revealed. Jarndyce, on the other hand, believes in George but is all too familiar with court proceedings: “But my good fellow, even an innocent man must take ordinary precautions to defend himself” (795). George’s presumed guilt is the result of a discrepancy between observable facts and unproven truth: “I have stated to the magistrates ‘Gentleman, I am as innocent of the charges as yourselves; what has been stated against me in the way of facts, is perfectly true; I know no more about it’” (795). The problem is that the legal system, like the scientific philosophers at the inquest for Krook, bases its rulings solely on empirical evidence and thereby misses the entirety of the situation, possibly mistaking the truth entirely simply because other explanations seem more plausible. For George, things seem clear and simple: “What more can I do? It’s the truth.” But, as Jarndyce insists, “the mere truth won’t do” (795). Empirical evidence can mislead and disguise the truth but remains essential in proving it as well. Sensing, intuiting, imagining, even *knowing* the truth is meaningless without empirical evidence to support it. In a world where outcomes seem almost pre-ordained according to class, rank, and wealth, empirical evidence should be the great equalizer, but depending on material facts is not always so simple – the “mere truth” is never enough.

Dickens’s ambivalence about the relationship between empirical evidence and intuitive perception is echoed in the novel’s ambiguous portrayal of Bucket’s true skill as a detective—does it lie in his ability to quietly observe and collect evidence? Or does he succeed because of his perceptive response to others? Tulkinghorn’s killer is discovered not by tracing a series of clues, but in a flash of inspiration over the dinner table. Bucket is

dining with his wife and Mademoiselle Hortense when he glances over at Lady Dedlock's former servant: "By the living Lord it flashed upon me, as I sat opposite to her at the table and saw her with a knife in her hand, that she had done it!" (833). Armed with this revelation – and little else to suggest that he is correct—Bucket sets out to collect enough empirical evidence to prove it. He uses George as a suspect to put Hortense off her guard and enlists his wife to "keep watch upon her, night and day" (834) until he can at last confront her with the facts of the case. Her confession will eventually exonerate George and vindicate Bucket's intuition.

Dickens's emphatic defense of the scientific authenticity of spontaneous combustion in the Preface to *Bleak House* may seem like a naïve, misguided, and even pointless gesture, when introducing a work of fiction. But as I have shown, Dickens's insistence on this point speaks to a larger preoccupation within the novel with the tension between fact and feeling. Rooting a fantastic event, such as Krook bursting into flames as a consequence of consuming copious amounts of gin, in empirical fact is one way of making known the unknowable, and making believable the impossible. This blurred distinction between fantastical and scientifically documented evidence in Krook's case lends a plausible legitimacy to other events in the novel. If spontaneous combustion is a scientific fact, then the farfetched connections of friendship, acquaintance, and sympathetic understanding that link Sir Leicester Dedlock of Chesney Wold to little Jo of Tom's-All-Alone may also be believable. It is perhaps this sense of social purpose in Dickens's work that generated his preoccupation with facts that confirm feelings. Therefore, his metaphor needs to be supported by scientific fact just as intuition must be confirmed by empiricism in the novel. The mutual dependency of these modes of understanding confirms the novel's authenticity in representing the human plight. In the end, it doesn't matter if Krook's death is possible

or not, but Dickens defends it in an effort to establish a definite link between imagined feeling and empirical fact.

As a work of fiction, this may seem frivolous and unnecessary. But as *Bleak House* experiments with how we know what we know, the tension between what we intuitively feel, and what we can empirically prove, fuels the narrative. While Dickens ultimately suggests that our intuition and imagination are better and sharper methods of knowing, his novel also recognizes the necessity for empirical evidence, and that power lies with those who can unequivocally prove their case. Above all, *Bleak House* emphasizes the connection, sometimes framed as opposition, between feeling and knowing. What is at first a vague sensation eventually becomes a dramatic revelation; evidence belatedly supports intuition. Ultimately, the power is held by those who can prove their case; “the mere truth” is not enough if it is only imagined or intuited without any evidence. But if we could harness our imaginations as guides to empirical knowledge, *Bleak House* suggests that we would then be able to begin to understand the chaotic world in which we live.

Those who read the world imaginatively and intuitively – Esther, Jo, and Mr. Bucket – are favored in Dickens’s narrative. Empiricism is linked to the corrupt and self-consuming world of the Court of Chancery. Tulkinghorn, Guppy, and Krook (whose empiricism is particularly ironic since he “reads” the world without literally knowing how to read) represent a purely empirical approach to the world that is selfish, self-serving, and without compassion. Even when they manage to discover the correct answer, they are destroyed in the process. Krook explodes, Tulkinghorn is shot, Mr. Guppy’s advances are rejected. Lady Dedlock, too, dies tragically because she cannot express the emotions she so deeply feels. Esther, Inspector Bucket, and even Jo employ their intuition, tempered by careful observation, and actively or passively acquire the empirical evidence needed to support it.

For Dickens, the world of material facts should also be a world of imaginative and intuitive understanding – this is what connects people to one another and gives empirical facts meaning and significance.

These non-empirical modes of understanding embrace Keats's idea of "*negative capability*" and allow for a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of human desires and motivations. If empirical analysis is not tempered by finer emotional feeling, Dickens's narrative insists, significant avenues of understanding are crippled or even destroyed. *Bleak House* takes these connections, relationships, and events that seem far-fetched and impossible and deliberately grounds them in legal or scientific fact to highlight their validity in an increasingly mechanized world. This compromise upholds the authority of non-empirical modes of cognition and only reluctantly and belatedly verifies them with factual evidence. Dickens may have agreed with Lewes that his responsibility as a writer of fiction was to avoid "giving currency to a vulgar error," but clearly the "vulgar error" depicted in *Bleak House* is, as Keats put it, "irritable reaching after fact and reason" without valuing intuition or imagination as non-empirical methods of understanding.

“Mad To-Day and Sane To-Morrow”: Portraits and the Problem of Proof  
in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*

Published serially from 1861 to 1862, *Lady Audley’s Secret* titillated its readers and tormented its critics. Voicing the concerns of many who fretted about fiction’s effect on the nerves and the morals of its readers, Victorian critic W. F. Rae offered an anonymous commentary on Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s novel in the *North British Review*:

Lady Audley is at once the heroine and the monstrosity of the novel. In drawing her, the authoress may have intended to portray a female Mephistopheles; but, if so, she should have known that a woman cannot fill such a part. The nerves with which Lady Audley could meet unmoved the friend of the man she had murdered, are the nerves of a Lady Macbeth who is half unsexed, are not those of the timid, gentle, innocent creature Lady Audley is represented as being. Whenever she is meditating the commission of something inexpressibly horrible, she is described as being unusually charming. Her manner and her appearance are always in contrast with her conduct. All this is very exciting; but it is also very unnatural. The artistic faults of this novel are as grave as the ethical ones. (1865)<sup>74</sup>

W. F. Rae’s moral objections are remarkably congruent with his refusal to acknowledge a female capability for committing treachery *or* writing novels. Implying that success in either case would require a woman “half unsexed,” his review speaks to the major tension of the novel: Lady Audley’s readability. The assumption of readability in this case moves beyond the framework of a legible written text to a general expectation that appearances will, at least to a certain extent, reflect behavior. Without expecting a direct correlation or transparency between surface and substance, Lady Audley violates expectations of empiricism, which dictate that we should be able to know the world through our sensory experiences.

Although the limitations of such assumptions were widely recognized, Lady Audley’s failure to adhere to a physiognomical relationship between beauty and goodness is precisely what Rae considers “unnatural.” What Rae qualifies as “unnatural,” I am calling “unreadable,” in

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<sup>74</sup> W. F. Rae, (unsigned), “Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon,” *The North British Review* 43 (Sept. - Dec. 1865): 186-7.

the sense that Lady Audley's appearance defies traditional, empirical modes of understanding. Rae's problem with the novel – ethical, artistic, or otherwise – is that the way Lady Audley *looks* and the way she *acts* produce a contradiction that thwarts empiricism and necessitates other methods of interpretation.

Perhaps the quintessential “sensation novel,” Braddon's work has been categorized as one of those nineteenth-century texts that shifted the meaning of “sensation” from a term associated with sensory perception (and, therefore, empiricism) to a category of literature famous for the emotional and physical responses it produced in its readers (racing hearts, sweaty palms, and other undesirable reactions).<sup>75</sup> Alternatively read as a subversive or conservative text, *Lady Audley's Secret* challenges empirical approaches to reading the world and, in doing so, it demonstrates the extent to which the Victorian epistemology of empiricism rests upon cultural assumptions about class and gender. The “ethical” and “artistic faults” of which Rae complains occur at precisely those moments when Lady Audley resists cultural assumptions about the Victorian gender norms that her feminine beauty represents. Compounding this problem is that one cannot tell by looking that she is a “monstrosity”; her lovely appearance and charming manner “are always in contrast with her conduct.” Mirroring and distorting contemporary epistemological assumptions of readers and critics, Braddon's novel capitalizes on Victorian anxieties about gender, social roles, and how to accurately “read” the world and one's place within it.

Where Dickens insists that scientific fact actually corresponds with the metaphorical power of spontaneous combustion, Braddon undermines confidence in empirical methodology by insisting that data misleads and is open to misinterpretation. Like Dickens, she ultimately suggests that non-empirical modes of understanding—intuition, dreams, and

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<sup>75</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 17.

even animal instinct—are more accurate and more direct ways of getting to the truth. It quickly becomes obvious to the reader that, in Braddon’s novel, the non-empirical modes of understanding are almost always correct; yet they are rarely interpreted as trustworthy by the characters, who strive instead to rationalize and to find concrete evidence. This tension between non-empirical modes of cognition and strict empiricism not only drives Braddon’s plot, but also stirred much of the contemporary critical conversation about the novel. In her study of sensation novels, Ann Cvetkovich observes, “Even when [Victorian] critics emphasized the immorality of the events, such as murder to adultery, that moved sensation novel readers, they seemed especially concerned about the immorality of feeling itself, taking it as a sign of the absence of control or rationality.”<sup>76</sup> As if reenacting the preoccupations of Braddon’s novel, Victorian critics “feared the prospect of the reader reduced to a body reacting instinctively to a text.”<sup>77</sup> Braddon’s narrative capitalizes on both sides of the divide that she creates, positing rationality against emotion and privileging intuition while emphasizing the dramatic necessity of uncovering a series of physical clues that form the circumstantial evidence to prove Lady Audley is a criminal. In the end, the “facts” of the case may solve part of the mystery, but they also stifle the answers to significant non-empirical questions, leaving those issues unresolved at the close of the narrative.

*Lady Audley’s Secret* tells the story of Lucy Graham, a beautiful and charming governess who marries Sir Michael Audley, wealthy baronet. Her beauty (particularly her golden curls) and her feminine charms seem to have universal appeal. So much so that even Sir Michael’s nephew, the lazy and affable barrister Robert Audley, is quite taken with his aunt and only becomes temporarily distracted when his friend George Talboys returns home

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<sup>76</sup> Cvetkovich, 20.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



from seeking his fortune abroad. Unfortunately for George, his beloved young wife has died in his absence. Grief-stricken, he subsequently disappears. Robert's investigation into his friend's whereabouts leads him to become increasingly suspicious of the new Lady Audley. Her true identity as George's presumed-dead wife, the lengths she has gone to keep her identity a secret, and her criminal involvement in his disappearance are eventually and irrefutably proven by Robert's collection of circumstantial evidence (including George's reappearance). But Lady Audley deftly side-steps the empirical truth of her crimes by declaring herself mad. Her madness, maddeningly enough, cannot be empirically proven but she is sent away to an asylum, a conclusion that devastates Sir Michael and leaves Robert Audley to become the new and appropriate head of the Audley family.

Thrilling as these plot twists and turns may be, and as sensational as Lady Audley's crimes are (bigamy, arson attempted murder), the novel seems to resolve its narrative with a rather traditional closure. But at the heart of *Lady Audley's Secret* are questions that remain unresolved when the mystery is tidied up: How do we read a beautiful, feminine woman as a criminal? How does an empirical epistemology account for surfaces that deliberately and convincingly mislead the viewer? To what extent is an empirical assessment informed by non-empirical methods of understanding? How can we reconcile the accuracy of non-empirical modes of cognition like instinct and intuition with the non-empirical aberrance of "moral insanity"? In this chapter, I argue that *Lady Audley's Secret* simultaneously reinforces and undermines an empirical approach to reading the world, ultimately questioning the rationality of sensory experience on which rests empiricism and the order it maintains. Empiricism was integral to a Victorian bourgeois ideology that was invested in explaining away contradictions between surface and interiority even as it was quite aware of the inconsistencies in this practice. *Lady Audley's Secret* emphasizes particular middle-class

anxieties that emerge from social and cultural shifts of the mid-nineteenth century. It evokes the desire for precise, empirical methods for reading the world at the same time that it exposes their limitations.

Although the novel seems in many ways to reinforce social norms of class and gender that support the upper-class family and their subsequent, satisfying evolution into the respectability of the professional bourgeoisie, the question of readability in this novel problematizes both the patriarchy of the English country house family and the egalitarian meritocracy of the bourgeoisie. Because Lady Audley can—and does—pass as a member of an upper class family, the inherent value of an aristocratic bloodline and the empirical evidence of appearances are called into question. Troubling ambiguities and false signifiers populate the novel—from Lady Audley’s fair appearance that hides dark secrets, to the peaceful country estate that becomes a crime scene. *Lady Audley’s Secret* acknowledges at once the power and the danger of misread signs and ultimately seems to work toward suppressing the threat of false signifiers. In the end, Lady Audley is finally excised from the text, the aristocratic manor (and bloodline) saved from invasion by a convenient incarceration and a traditional marriage plot. But the dangers of misreading a woman like Lady Audley are perhaps not so easily dismissed. From changes in the rural landscape, to increasing legal and political rights for women, and newly flexible class mobility, Victorian society was effectively and radically reordering itself.<sup>78</sup> This novel uses the tropes of sensation to depict shifts and ruptures within bourgeois society; instead of empirical evidence supporting the respectability of the bourgeois professional, non-empirical modes of

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<sup>78</sup> These “changes” include the Enclosure Acts (a series of laws passed mostly between 1760 and 1830 that divided, redistributed, and fenced rural land), expansion of the railroad, public education, the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), and the Married Women’s Property Act (1870), among others. Lindsay Smith’s book *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) establishes the influence of photography on Victorian culture, particularly visual and aesthetic theory.

cognition propel the narrative and invite speculation about who truly belongs in Audley Court.

Drawing vast popular readership from various levels of society, sensation novels are most famous for their irresistible scandals: “the lurid mix of coincidence and treachery, supernatural overtones, dark family secrets, criminal detection, insanity and incarceration, hairbreadth escapes—the whole armory of excitations that both exaggerate and exhaust the sedentary reader’s urge for a more thrilling daily milieu.”<sup>79</sup> Victorian critics fretted over the fate of these readers, labeling the novel a “cheap and harmful commodity,” particularly dangerous for the women presumed to be its most rapacious consumers.<sup>80</sup> Literary critics today continue to debate whether sensation fiction undermines or reinforces the dominant values of bourgeois respectability, or – in its movement away from the conventions of realism, manages to do both.<sup>81</sup> Empiricism has been occasionally explored in articles that address the contradiction between Providence and circumstantial evidence in Braddon’s novel.<sup>82</sup> However, few studies have looked closely at the way Braddon’s sensation novel participates in a specific cultural discourse that engages and seeks to reconcile the apparent contradictions between differing modes of cognition.

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<sup>79</sup> Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth Century British Fiction* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 215-16.

<sup>80</sup> Terry Lovell, *Consuming Fiction* (New York: Verso, 1987), 54.

<sup>81</sup> Much critical attention has been given to the sensation novel’s treatment of the unsavory and hidden aspects of the middle-class. Ann Cvetkovich, Kate Flint, Winifred Hughes, Lyn Pykett, and Elaine Showalter have produced critical work that emphasizes the way sensation novels undermined Victorian gender ideology. See Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Kate Flint’s *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: The Sensation Novel of the 1860s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Lyn Pykett, *The ‘Improper’ Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>82</sup> See, respectively, Patricia Marks, “‘The Boy on the Wooden Horse’: Robert Audley and the Failure of Reason,” *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 15:2 (1994): 1-14 and Jonathan Loeburg, “The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction,” *Representations* 13 (1986): 115-37.

My reading of *Lady Audley's Secret* examines the novel's interest in the mutual influence of empirical and non-empirical modes of cognition, and the way Braddon both privileges and problematizes non-empirical methods of understanding. Circumstantial evidence seems to triumph in the end, but Robert Audley as amateur detective continually relies on non-empirical apprehension to make his discoveries. Furthermore, concrete evidence of Lady Audley's crime ultimately gets overshadowed by a declaration of madness that never gets fully realized as empirical fact—largely because she doesn't *appear* to be insane.<sup>83</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, in his work on the sensation novel, identifies “epistemological empiricism” (roughly defined as an equivalence between seeing and knowing) as an ideological basis for nineteenth-century fictional realism. Brantlinger asserts that nineteenth-century fiction, specifically the sensation novel, both breaks from and relies upon this realist tradition.<sup>84</sup> In *The Realistic Imagination*, George Levine also affirms that the epistemology of realism “was empiricist, with its tendency to value immediate experience over continuities or systems of order, and it was obviously related to the developments in empirical science as they ran through the century.”<sup>85</sup> I suggest that *Lady Audley's Secret* challenges this form of epistemological empiricism by collapsing the binary of imagination and rationality. Braddon depicts the imagination of the Pre-Raphaelite artist, the empirical work of the detective, and the diagnosis of a psychologist as equally interpretive and subjective methods of reading the world. Instead of assuming that seeing and knowing are epistemologically identical, Braddon's novel responds to Victorian anxieties about gender, class, and morality by

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<sup>83</sup> Feminist critics have long questioned Lady Audley's alleged madness. See particularly Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

<sup>84</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 143.

<sup>85</sup> George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 18.

depicting a method of reading the world that depends, rather problematically at times, on logic *and* intuition.

In *Lady Audley's Secret*, extensive descriptions of people and places serve to thwart and maintain an empirical epistemology. If realist novels begin, as Brantlinger suggests, with “the assumption that empiricism and its corollary, fictional realism, are inevitable, hegemonic, the only sensible, accurate way to understand and portray the world,”<sup>86</sup> then melodramatic and sensational events disrupt not just the realism of the novel, but the empirical epistemology of nineteenth-century society. The assumption that the world is essentially knowable was not simply a naïve or nostalgic point of view to which Victorians clung in the face of change. Rather, as Rita Felski argues, the advancing commodity culture of the nineteenth century required an increasing reliance on recognizable and readable signs. In *The Gender of Modernity*, Felski notes that the nineteenth-century created a context “in which mass-produced signs, objects, and commodities constitute[d] increasingly significant yet unstable markers of subjectivity and social status.”<sup>87</sup> Consequently, identity could be newly understood as a matter of surface and sign rather than inherent substance. With identities relational and in flux in a way that had been unimaginable a century before, identity was newly – and dangerously – unstable. The physiognomical descriptions that Braddon employs capitalize on this instability by highlighting the unreliability of outward appearances.

By the 1860s, scientific developments had come a long way from the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology, but the influence of these outdated methodologies still lingered in the public imagination. In his study of Pre-Raphaelite painting, J. B. Bullen

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<sup>86</sup> Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, 146.

<sup>87</sup> Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 99. Qtd. in Kathy Psomiades, *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 8.

argues that however outdated or “medieval” the connection between “virtue and physiognomy” may seem to us today, such assumptions still carried a certain culture cachet: “If beauty was no longer a guarantee of moral rectitude, it remained a powerful element in sexual politics, while its opposite, ugliness and deformity, were taken seriously as indices of criminal or degenerate behavior.”<sup>88</sup> In spite of increasing awareness that beauty and behavior were not necessarily a correlative of one another, the desire to read character and even to predict behavior based on appearances were still part of Victorian culture and its institutions. Pseudosciences like physiognomy and phrenology lingered because their claims to account for empirical data seemed to afford them legitimacy. They appealed to the anxiety of a social system that had moved rapidly from aristocratic patriarchy to a bourgeois, industrialized society. In keeping with the popular notion of physiognomy—that the outer signifier is an authentic representation of the inner being—the novel’s detailed descriptions of Lady Audley underscore the desire for and the impossibility of a world in which surfaces accurately reflect interiority.

As the mystery unfolds, lengthy descriptions alternatively construct and thwart a physiognomic reading. Following physiognomist Johann Caspar Lavater’s assertion that a “highly prized physiognomical sensation” is a trustworthy interpretation of character, the novel introduces the notion that the empirical evidence of beauty is a reliable method of assessing character, only to establish its falsity.<sup>89</sup> The mismatch of surface and interiority was hardly a surprise—phrenologist Johann Gaspar Spurzheim had criticized physiognomy’s

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<sup>88</sup> J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 83. The relationship between deformity and degeneracy is exploited in many nineteenth century novels, including Braddon’s novel *Aurora Floyd*, 1863 (New York: Garland, 1979), in which the title character, an inadvertent bigamist, is framed for murder by a “hump-backed” man whose evil intentions match his malformation.

<sup>89</sup> Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy; For the Promotion of the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind*, vol. II, trans. Thomas Holcroft (London: Whittingham, 1804), 231.

naiveté as early as 1804, when he wrote that “Lavater himself was obliged to acknowledge that ungainly forms are sometimes combined with honesty of character, and [...] individuals, beautiful and well-proportioned are occasionally deceitful.”<sup>90</sup> The knowledge that physiognomy’s theories were flawed, however, did not mean that discrepancies between appearances and actuality were any less unsettling; a desire for an accurate and empirical system of character assessment still existed. Kate Summerscale writes in her study of a famous nineteenth-century murder that “[t]he mid-Victorians were transfixed by the idea that faces and bodies could be ‘read’, that inner life was imprinted on the shapes of the features and the flutter of the fingers.”<sup>91</sup> *Lady Audley’s Secret* capitalizes on the desirability of such a system even as its title character defies that sort of empirical assessment.

When we first meet Lady Audley, she is Lucy Graham, the humble (but beautiful!) governess, adored by all who know her. Sir Michael Audley (wealthy baronet) is smitten by “those soft and melting blue eyes; the graceful beauty of that slender throat and drooping head, with its wealth of showering flaxen curls; the low music of that gentle voice; the perfect harmony which pervaded every charm, and made all doubly charming in this woman.”<sup>92</sup> More than merely pretty, Miss Lucy Graham “was blessed with that magic power of fascination by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile” (11). The potential danger of an intoxicating charm is neutralized by the narrator, who insists “Wherever she went she seemed to take joy and brightness with her...everybody, high and low, united in declaring that Lucy Graham was the sweetest girl who ever lived” (11-12). A

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<sup>90</sup> Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, “From *Phrenology in Connection with the Study of Physiognomy*,” *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology*, ed. Laura Otis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 383.

<sup>91</sup> Kate Summerscale, *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher: A Shocking Murder and the Undoing of a Great Victorian Detective*. (New York: Walker & Company, 2008), 84.

<sup>92</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, 1862 (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 12. Hereafter all references from the novel are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

few chapters later, Lucy's amiable disposition has not been altered by her advantageous marriage:

...wherever she went she seemed to take sunshine and gladness with her. [...] The innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness... Her fragile figure, which she loved to dress in heavy velvets and stiff rustling silks, till she looked like a child tricked out for a masquerade, was as girlish as if she had but just left the nursery. (55)

The detailing of Lucy Graham/Lady Audley's features as an extension of her "amiable and gentle nature" evokes a physiognomical reading of the beautiful, feminine ideal that is both true and false—her good deeds are as real as her bad ones (12). This description infantilizes her while simultaneously casting her as a Victorian feminine ideal; the possibility that this woman could be a criminal seems impossible and shocking. Of course, part of the thrill of the sensation novel is that the reader is complicit in forming a perception of Lady Audley that they can already anticipate will be dramatically reversed: the very woman who beams "[t]he innocence and candour of an infant" is the one whose beauty must hide her titular secret.

In Braddon's novel, the reliability of physiognomy depends on the viewer's interpretation—a process of analysis that includes the assessment of non-empirical data. Lavater explains the physiognomist's perspective: "To the clearest and profoundest understanding, the true physiognomist unites the most lively, strong, comprehensive imagination, and a fine and rapid wit."<sup>93</sup> Lady Audley's physical appearance can, it seems, reveal her secrets, but only through careful interpretation. Peter Brooks's work on physical description in narrative suggests that the body is "a site of signification—the place for the

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<sup>93</sup> Lavater, 99.



inscription of stories—and itself a signifier, a prime agent in narrative plot and meaning.”<sup>94</sup>

Lady Audley’s appearance, then, is intended to be read and interpreted in a particular way.

The reader is expected both to employ and to resist certain assumptions that rest in physiognomy. Only through the application of “imagination” and “wit” can we discover that Lady Audley’s countenance both hides and reveals her crimes.

It becomes quite clear that Lady Audley’s beauty cannot simply be read as empirical evidence of her goodness when the narrator admits just a few paragraphs later that reading surfaces is a problematic practice:

We hear every day of murders committed in the country. Brutal and treacherous murders; slow, protracted agonies from poisons administered by some kindred hand; sudden and violent deaths by cruel blows, inflicted with a stake cut from some spreading oak, whose very shadow promised – peace. In the county of which I write, I have been shown a meadow in which, on a quiet summer Sunday evening, a young farmer murdered the girl who had loved and trusted him; and yet even now, with the stain of that foul deed upon it, the aspect of the spot is – peace. No crime has ever been committed in the worst rookeries about Seven Dials that has not been also done in the face of that sweet rustic calm which still, in spite of all, we look on with a tender, half-mournful yearning, and associate with – peace. (57)

Lady Audley’s peaceful countenance and the country’s tranquil landscape are clearly juxtaposed as moments of *misrepresentation*, peaceful facades that obscure rather than signify their “foul deed[s].” In this case, empirical evidence clearly fails to represent the facts accurately; it may even obscure the brutality and violence that once occurred. In cases such as this, non-empirical modes of cognition must find a way to fill in the blanks, to see what is no longer visible.

A Pre-Raphaelite portrait of Lady Audley is central to the novel’s contention that Lady Audley’s appearance is a form of empirical evidence that can be accurately assessed by an artistic imagination. The painting hangs in Lady Audley’s boudoir and manages to

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<sup>94</sup> Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 5-6.

represent her as a symbol of feminine beauty and danger simultaneously. References to the visual arts and even meticulous descriptions of a painting or portrait are quite common in nineteenth-century novels, but the Pre-Raphaelite painting in Braddon's novel is particularly significant both as plot device and cultural commentary. In her book, *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel*, Sophia Andres argues that employing art, and Pre-Raphaelite paintings in particular, in their fiction "offered Victorian novelists multifarious ways through which they could elevate the novel in the cultural and literary hierarchy, endowing it with poetical complexity and sophistication."<sup>95</sup> Championed by John Ruskin and eventually gaining much popular appeal, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was a group of artists known for appropriating the general precepts of physiognomy in their efforts toward a realistic representation that was both naturalistic and symbolic. They incited some controversy in the art world with their sensual depiction of women, and were either valued or derided for the extensive detail in their painting. By including this particular kind of portrait, Braddon's novel implicitly aligns the controversy of the sensation novel with the public debate about the Pre-Raphaelites.

Recent criticism regarding the Pre-Raphaelites focuses on the pairing of symbolism alongside realism, noting that while the Pre-Raphaelites were famous for their attention to specific details of their live models, they often represented them as physiognomic types, imbuing their features with symbolic significance.<sup>96</sup> Generally, Victorian audiences followed

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<sup>95</sup> Sophia Andres, *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 19.

<sup>96</sup> See Tim Barringer, *The Pre-Raphaelites: Reading the Image* (London: Wiedenfield and Nicolson, 1998); Julie Codell, "Expression over Beauty: Facial Expression, Body Language and Circumstantiality in the Paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood," *Victorian Studies* 29 (1986): 255-90; Mary Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), George Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), and Richard Stein's *The Ritual of Interpretation: The Fine Arts as Literature in Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pater* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975). Lucy Hartley's article, "Putting the Drama into Everyday Life" is a notable

Ruskin's lead in reading the paintings for a moral narrative and using physiognomy as an indication of that narrative in art.<sup>97</sup> Braddon's use of the portrait thus reinforces a particular kind of empirical epistemology that combines realistic detail with implicit connotations, linking the work of the artist to that of the novelist. As Alison Byerly observes, countless nineteenth century novels are "filled with both explicit references to artworks that have a function within the narrative [...] and metaphors that implicitly compare the novelist's own representation to specific forms of art."<sup>98</sup> In *Lady Audley's Secret*, the Pre-Raphaelite painting offers a glimpse of the secrets that Lady Audley (or the narrative) is hiding.

In a cultural context, Lady Audley's portrait provides a visual focal point for the tensions of class and gender in the novel that can be meaningfully related to questions about the reliability of empirical analysis:

Yes; the painter must have been a pre-Raphaelite. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have painted, hair by hair, those feathery masses of ringlets with every glimmer of gold, and every shadow of pale brown. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated the every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait. (p. 72)

The narrator's account of the painting reflects the range of Victorian responses to the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic, as well as a preoccupation with what the portrait suggests about Lady Audley in terms of gender, class, and morality. J. B. Bullen argues that "the 'Pre-Raphaelite body' in both painting and literature [...] reveal[s] underlying stresses and neuroses which

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exception to the majority opinion. She argues that the Pre-Raphaelites were less interested in symbolism and more interested in an empirical representation of specific individuals.

<sup>97</sup> Kate Flint, "Reading *The Awakening Conscience* Rightly," 50-1.

<sup>98</sup> Alison Byerly, *Realism, Representation and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

were not, strictly speaking, pictorial or even aesthetic in their origins.”<sup>99</sup> The anxiety about the portrait is that the empirical data it contains—the painstaking representation of every hair in the mass of ringlets—fails to fully account for the disturbing attraction and repulsion that the viewer feels. Underlying the narrator’s dismissive attitude about the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic is a middle-class anxiety about female sexuality (particularly working class females).

For nineteenth-century readers, Braddon’s reference to the Pre-Raphaelites would have alluded not only to the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic, but also the more scandalous sub-text of the Pre-Raphaelite artists themselves and the romantic relationships that developed between the artists and their models. Presuming the reader’s familiarity with the Pre-Raphaelites’ use of working class women as models for famous heroines (Ophelia, Helen of Troy, etc.), the portrait subtly identifies Lady Audley as an imposter long before the narrative reveals her secret. The narrator’s disapproval of the painting comes down on the side of a bourgeois status quo, who found the Pre-Raphaelites’ depiction of sexualized women threatening to a staunch bourgeois morality. As Julie Codell observes, “understanding the ties between anatomical language and the symbolic meaning of that language as a social and moral nexus of values may help to explain the vehemence of the critics’ attacks against the PRB depictions of faces and bodies.”<sup>100</sup> The narrator’s distaste for the painting corresponds with the initially unfavorable response of the Victorian public to the sensuous beauty of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Bocca baciata* (1859),<sup>101</sup> whose red lips and red-gold hair may be

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<sup>99</sup> Bullen, 5. For more on the social and cultural significance of Pre-Raphaelite painting, see Lindsay Errington’s *Social and Religious Themes in English Art, 1840-1860* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), Kate Flint’s *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, Kathy Psomiades’s *Beauty’s Body*, and Lindsay Smith’s *Victorian Photography, Painting, and Poetry*.

<sup>100</sup> Codell, 285.

<sup>101</sup> Bullen, 107. Bullen argues that D. G. Rossetti’s *Bocca baciata* (painted in September 1859) presents a sexualized woman without apology or explanation. The only context for the painting is Boccaccio’s scandalous narrative of female sexual experience, a connection made explicit by Rossetti’s inscription of the concluding

reminiscent of Lady Audley's fictional portrait. Victorian audiences were similarly troubled by the implications of William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853), which portrays a kept woman realizing the error of her ways and attempting to escape the lap of her male companion.<sup>102</sup> Much like W. F. Rae's dismissal of Braddon's novel in his review, public response to Pre-Raphaelite paintings seems to have had more to do with the sensations evoked by the art than with the quality of the work and it is these sensations that Braddon exploits.

The Pre-Raphaelites' artistic philosophy compelled them to depict the idiosyncrasies of their models while painting them into significant contexts. This aesthetic has been summarized as one designed "to capture the dramatic conditions of everyday life,"<sup>103</sup> which corresponds with the drama and realism that sensation novels attempt to portray—as Henry James put it, "the most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors."<sup>104</sup> The description of the Pre-Raphaelite painting that hangs in Lady Audley's boudoir reveals what is implicit in Braddon's novel: objects and details signify something else, a larger, metaphorical meaning and must be imaginatively read and interpreted. Kate Flint notes that "The connection between 'readable' pictures on the one hand, and the

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lines of Boccaccio's story on the back of the painting, "Bocca baciata non perda ventura, anzi rinnova come fa la luna," which can be translated, "A kissed mouth doesn't lose its freshness, for like the moon it always renews itself" (Bullen 90-1). Bullen writes, "In Boccaccio's story, and in the picture to which it is linked, sexual experience, far from being morally deleterious, is actually an enhancing virtue" in spite of the story's "subtext about violence and treachery induced by sexual attraction" (93, 108).

<sup>102</sup> Pre-Raphaelite paintings were scrutinized as heavily as any other item of popular culture widely available for consumption. In "Reading *The Awakening Conscience* Rightly," *Pre-Raphaelites Re-Viewed*, ed. Marcia Pointon (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), Kate Flint notes, "At a time when even Gaskell's own daughters were forbidden [to read Gaskell's novel] *Ruth* and *David Copperfield* was widely considered unsuitable reading for girls, *The Awakening Conscience* brought a private subject openly, dangerously, within a less controllable sphere than that of family reading" (64).

<sup>103</sup> Lucy Hartley, "Putting the Drama into Everyday Life: The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and a Very Ordinary Aesthetic." *Journal of Victorian Culture*. 7, no. 2 (2002 Autumn): 188.

<sup>104</sup> Henry James, qtd. in Lyn Pykett's *The Improper Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1992), 83.

combination of elaborate yet resolved plots, emphasis on the moral aspect of cause and effect, and the solid specificity of detail embraced by the mid-Victorian novel on the other, scarcely seems accidental.”<sup>105</sup> The copious descriptions of Lady Audley’s appearance and the detailing of her portrait both imply an empirical readability on the surface; however, the opposition between these descriptive passages undermines the empiricism they would seem to support. This invites a more imaginative interpretation of surfaces, one that relies on non-empirical modes of cognition.

Artistic imagination at its best, according to John Ruskin, would authentically and accurately represent the truth of the subject depicted. Ruskin writes in *Modern Painters* that “...a truly imaginative work results...from the painter having told the whole pith and power of his subject and disdaining to tell more.”<sup>106</sup> The unnamed artist in *Lady Audley’s Secret* creates a portrait of his subject that is a remarkable resemblance and still manages to reveal more than the ordinary observer can see:

It was so like and yet so unlike; it was as if you had burned strange-coloured fires before my lady’s face, and by their influence brought out new lines and new expressions never seen in it before. The perfection of feature, the brilliancy of colouring, were there; but I supposed the painter had copied quaint mediaeval monstrosities until his brain had grown bewildered, for my lady, in his portrait of her, had something of the aspect of a beautiful fiend.

Her crimson dress, exaggerated like all the rest in this strange picture, hung about her in folds that looked like flames, her fair head peeping out of the lurid mass of colour, as if out of a raging furnace. Indeed, the crimson dress, the sunshine on the face, the red gold gleaming in the yellow hair, the ripe scarlet of the pouting lips, the glowing colours of each accessory of the minutely-painted background, all combined to render the first effect of the painting by no means an agreeable one. (72)

The narrator acknowledges the force of portrait only to undermine it by insisting that the painter’s “brain had grown bewildered.” This passage serves to focus the reader’s attention

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<sup>105</sup> Flint, “Reading *An Awakening Conscience* Rightly,” 51.

<sup>106</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 1860 (New York: Merrill, 1893), 82.

on the very details it claims to deride.<sup>107</sup> The reader is invited to relish the sensual detail of the portrait while the narrator's tone remains skeptical and dismissive; in fact, the narrator endorses Lady Audley's appearance only when she appears innocent and childlike.

Other characters in the novel, however, allude to the striking accuracy of the artist's rendering of Lady Audley. Lady Audley's step-daughter Alicia summarizes the authority of the artist when she remarks,

I think that sometimes a painter is in a manner inspired, and is able to see, through the normal expression of the face, another expression that is equally a part of it, though not to be perceived by common eyes. *We* have never seen my lady look as she does in that picture; but I think that she *could* look so. (73)

This glimpse into hidden possibilities thus becomes a moment of legibility in the novel, when the painter reveals what Lady Audley carefully keeps hidden—both the sinister and sensual sides of her character. The Pre-Raphaelites' artistic code, as described by William Rossetti, maintains “a determination to realize incident, and especially expression, from the painter's own point of view – to make things as intense and actual as he could, quite careless of whether the result would be voted odd, *outré*, horrid, frightful, and all the rest of it.”<sup>108</sup> In accord with this philosophy, the depiction of Lady Audley takes a beautiful woman to the brink of the grotesque, using her outer form to reveal an inner truth. If Lady Audley's appearance offers proof of her criminal behavior, it is uncovered first not by a detective's investigation, but by an artist's imagination. The portrait achieves the artistic goals of intensity and actuality not with a photographic verisimilitude, but by imagining and depicting the essence of an individual.

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<sup>107</sup> Pykett, 92.

<sup>108</sup> William Rossetti, *Fine Art, Chiefly Contemporary* (MacMillan and Co., London, 1867); quoted by Codell, 266.

It is this combination of specific details into a symbolic whole that also accords the work of the artist with that of the novelist. The inclusion of vivid, exaggerated colors, “the crimson dress, the sunshine on the face, the red gold gleaming in the yellow hair, the ripe scarlet of the pouting lips,” and more mimetic details, including “each accessory of the minutely-painted background” individually do not signify much, but their combination depicts a powerful and dangerous female, inserted in the wealthy country estate. The painting in *Lady Audley’s Secret* shows us how nineteenth-century novels were intended to be read: not as a *mirror* of life, but as a *portrait*; not a depiction of how life *is*, but how it *might be*. Rather than a list of empirical data, the novelist includes a careful selection of empirical facts that, when carefully read, spur larger, imaginative and intuitive associations. Those movements take us beyond empiricism, give the story its real meaning, and, ultimately, reveal Lady Audley’s secret.

Detailed physical descriptions of Lady Audley and her “wonderful curls” (13) have, thus far, invited the reader to participate in what Sophia Andres calls a “sociopolitical construction of gender”;<sup>109</sup> a construction that is essentially empirical, based on visible difference rather than inherent capacity. The narrator makes it clear that Lady Audley’s golden curls and fair face, rather than her disposition, are responsible for much of her “magic power of fascination” (11-12). Almost all of the information we have about Lady Audley is merely a detailing of how she looks. These conventional gender constructions of charming innocence and childlike beauty that define Lady Audley’s character are turned upside-down by the portrait and the secrets to which it alludes. As Andres explains, “Lady Audley’s infantile face, which proves irresistible to everyone, for example, is representative of the Victorian culture’s worship of the child-woman, the Angel in the House who in

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<sup>109</sup> Andres, 3.



Braddon's case turns into a self-aggrandizing 'fiend.'<sup>110</sup> The Pre-Raphaelite painting discloses "societal contradictions that [reveal] alternative constructions of gender."<sup>111</sup> The reversal of feminine stereotypes to murderous extremes has significant social implications, but I am most interested in the overarching anxiety about visible signs that are not comprehensive indicators of truth. As a result, the most perfect housewife could be capable of hiding dark secrets discernable to the imaginative eye of the artist, perhaps, but invisible to those closest to her. The Pre-Raphaelite painting is a symbol of the inner and outer Lady Audley. It resists orthodox expectations of gender by pairing female domesticity with transgressive force. The portrait becomes a center of gender politics wrapped up in a sensation mystery – a mismatch of surface and substance.

Lady Audley's physical beauty has enabled her to infiltrate the social sphere of Audley Court and to inhabit a privileged position there as Sir Michael's wife. But the visual representation of her beauty and wealth, that portrait commissioned by her husband in a demonstration of esteem and affection, essentially reveals her secret. The painting offers what Peter Brooks calls "a narrative aesthetics of embodiment, where meaning and truth are made carnal."<sup>112</sup> The very thing that makes Lady Audley erotic and desirable—her beauty—turns out to be the same thing that makes her frightening and deplorable. Her appearance is inscribed with previously unreadable signifiers that the portrait suddenly makes decipherable. The portrait is more than a "likeness" of Lady Audley; it reflects her true nature in a way that everyday observation of her appearance and behavior does not. In spite of all the emphasis on description, physical appearance is now troublingly illegible. The painting captures Lady

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Andres, 20.

<sup>112</sup> Brooks, 21.

Audley at a moment when the secrets hidden by her beauty break through the surface. She is defined in the portrait not as good nor bad nor mad, but as a contradiction—physical angel and moral demon—wrapped up in a single female body. The emergence of this hidden, demonic woman in the portrait demonstrates the deceptive capabilities of her physical appearance and highlights the vices that her virtue disguises. In a Victorian world intent on categorizing and confining a good woman to a peaceful domestic sphere and a mad woman to a madhouse, this co-existence is what makes Lady Audley diabolical, unnatural, and empirically unreadable.

The Pre-Raphaelite painting operates as an instructional guide for reading the novel by demonstrating that empirical facts must be imaginatively interpreted. When Robert starts diligently investigating George's disappearance, and becoming increasingly suspicious of Lady Audley's involvement, he becomes obsessed with collecting empirical evidence to prove her guilt. By employing the portrait as a revelation of her criminality long before Robert begins to suspect her, Braddon's novel suggests that the detective's empirical method of list-making and data-collecting may actually overlook truths that could be recognized intuitively. Still, *Lady Audley's Secret* continually emphasizes the power and authority of empirical evidence. The painter's interpretive work exposes the limitations of a purely systematic approach, but it also emphasizes the symbolic nature of specific details, indicating larger truths available to an observer who can piece together the greater meaning. This is akin to Robert's conscientious collection of empirical evidence:

A scrap of paper; a shred of some torn garment; the button off a coat; a word dropped incautiously from the over-cautious lips of guilt; the fragment of a litter; the shutting or opening of a door; a shadow on a window-blind; the accuracy of a moment; a thousand circumstances so slight as to be forgotten by the criminal, but links of steel in the wonderful chain forged by the science of the detective officer. (123)

Robert's list reiterates the importance of seemingly minor details, emphasizing the empirical process that creates the "wonderful chain" by recognizing signifiers in what appears to be insignificant, but ultimately relying on intuition and imagination to piece together empirical evidence.<sup>113</sup> Eventually, Robert's chain of circumstantial evidence creates a moral narrative in line with what the artist imagines in the portrait. Lady Audley's murderous attempt at arson is actually foreshadowed in the painting by her dress with "folds that looked like flames," surrounding her like "a raging furnace" (72). The "strange, sinister light" of her eyes and the "hard and almost wicked" shape of her mouth hint at a hidden evil that Robert may uncover without ever seeing it physically manifest. It takes the imagination of an artist in conjunction with the "science of the detective officer" to unveil the truth about Lady Audley.

As Robert Audley metaphorically "comes of age" in the novel and embraces his role as the new generation's patriarch, he participates in another version of the sociopolitical construction of gender roles—one in which he perpetuates a status quo of bourgeois patriarchy that attempts to compensate for the failure of empirical assessments of truth. Even before Lady Audley is recognized as a threat, Robert's intrusive masculine force proves dangerous to her. When Robert learns there is a portrait of his aunt, he is determined to show it to his friend George, even if it means sneaking into her rooms through a hidden crawl-space. When the two men crawl through a dark tunnel to emerge in Lady Audley's bedroom, it is difficult to ignore the implication of male penetration into a distinctly private, female space. Robert and George are an invasive masculine presence in Lady Audley's

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<sup>113</sup> Alexander Welsh, in *Strong Representations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), notes that this metaphor was often used in criminal investigations in the nineteenth century: "The chain most commonly meant circumstances causally connected in a believable narrative. It connoted strong connections, links of iron, but also a story that fell apart if one of the links was broken" (4). This emphasizes the power, but also the potential fragility of circumstantial evidence.

private rooms; they enter a private, interior space as voyeurs. Viewing the portrait satisfies Robert's and George's desire to see Lady Audley—and it strips away her secrets in a rather blatant version of voyeuristic desire manifested in the male gaze. Ignoring George's stunned response to the portrait (he has silently recognized his wife, hitherto presumed dead), Robert goes so far as to rearrange the easel and “[seat] himself on a chair before it for the purpose of contemplating the painting at his leisure” (72). Braddon's novel is somewhat prescriptive in making Lady Audley the object of the male gaze—a position from which she gains and loses her power. Peter Brooks notes that “vision is typically a male prerogative, and its object of fascination the woman's body, in a cultural model so persuasive that many women novelists don't reverse its vectors.”<sup>114</sup> In this case, Braddon follows a conventional cultural model and aligns the male point of view with an empirical epistemology that is problematically limited. Robert's intuition is hampered by his desire and he fails to understand fully the implications of the portrait because he is determined to operate within the bounds of empiricism at the same time he is (temporarily, at least) blinded by his attraction to Lady Audley.

In a grand country house like Audley Court, a portrait is a symbol of aristocracy, bloodline, and wealth. As a status symbol, it indicates position in an aristocratic family. Lady Audley's portrait, however, as a depiction of a woman whose position is a falsehood, becomes a gynecological rather than genealogical representation. The intrusion into the boudoir exposes Lady Audley's naked countenance rather than her naked body; in doing so, it indicates the simultaneous power and vulnerability of her position within the Audley family – a position that was achieved by virtue of her beauty and is now threatened by the painted display of it. Lady Audley's hidden portrait, and hidden history, may be safe from

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<sup>114</sup> Brooks, 88.

outsiders but she will be at the mercy of Robert Audley's investigation. Her private rooms and her hidden past prove to be as vulnerable to a masculine intrusion as Audley Court was susceptible to her illegitimate entry.

*Lady Audley's Secret* is as invested in the materialism of Audley Court as Lady Audley herself. The portrait, in addition to provocatively representing questions about empiricism and artistic interpretation, also works in a very pragmatic way: it forwards the plot and it meets readers' expectations by showing them the inside of an aristocratic country house. It fulfills the desires of middle-class readers, delighted to experience both the domestic reality and the sensational scandal of an aristocratic home. In Peter Brooks's commentary on nineteenth-century realism, he argues that these domestic fictions are based on a premise that I suggest is in keeping with the empirical epistemology that Braddon's novel both challenges and upholds: "one cannot understand human beings outside the context of the things that surround them, and knowing these things is a matter of viewing them, detailing them, and describing the concrete milieu in which men and women enact their destinies."<sup>115</sup> A list of the things that surround Lady Audley offers readers an understanding of her character, but only if they know *how* to read her. A background of luxurious items does not make Lady Audley a baronet's wife; it makes her a conspicuous consumer. Only if the empirical evidence is properly interpreted can the reader understand the truth about Lady Audley. Ultimately, Lady Audley's identity is both constructed and revealed by her material context.

The novel's elaborate descriptions of Lady Audley's domestic spaces within Audley Court operate similarly to the Pre-Raphaelite portrait by engaging in a specific cultural discourse—this one of materialism and wealth. Like the portrait, it offers visible evidence of

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<sup>115</sup> Brooks, 88.

non-empirical truths. In each case, Lady Audley functions as both a consumer and an object of consumption. Lady Audley takes radical action (from attempted murder to arson) in order to secure her position; once she has done so, she simply becomes one lovely object among many, eager to fulfill the domestic expectations of the mistress of Audley Court. The emphasis on her material surroundings highlights Lady Audley's delight in her rise in fortune, and heightens the contrast between her original lower middle class status and her position at Audley Court, as detailed in "the elegant disorder" of her dressing room (70):

The atmosphere of the room was almost oppressive from the rich odours of perfumes in bottles whose gold stoppers had not been replaced. A bunch of hothouse flowers was withering upon a tiny writing-table. Two or three handsome dresses lay in a heap upon the ground, and the open doors of a wardrobe revealed the treasures within. Jewellery, ivory-backed hair-brushes, and exquisite china were scattered here and there about the apartment. (70)

Listing the objects in Lady Audley's boudoir helps to chronicle her dramatic rise in status and speaks to the voyeuristic desires of the reading audience. However, a closer look at the disarray of Lady Audley's dressing room also reveals empirical evidence of her true character. Perfume bottles left open, clothing piled on the floor, and personal items scattered about her bedroom indicate wealth, but also suggest that an irresponsible and ill-bred woman has achieved it. Like the hothouse flowers, their beauty artificially cultivated, Lady Audley is nothing but *nouveau riche* – a position that middle-class readers can both envy and scorn. At a time when expansion of the railroad made day trips to tour country homes of the wealthy common place occurrences, Braddon addresses a specific cultural interest. The vulnerability of the wealthy to scandal and infiltration is part of the delight and the anxiety Lady Audley creates when she enters the aristocratic home—and a careful reader can take note of the empirical evidence that reveals the truth behind the lovely façade.

Lady Audley's secret past, as an impoverished and scarcely respectable member of the lower middle class is both exciting and disturbing because it establishes that dramatic

social mobility is a possibility—and that once it is achieved, one’s former status is nearly undetectable. Lady Audley’s great achievement—her marriage to Sir Michael—threatens an aristocratic way of life that is already on its way out. At the same time, Lady Audley’s eventual fall from her position as lady of the house suggests vulnerability for even the very rich: the possibility that wealth and status may be both inauthentic and easily lost. As Pykett argues, “This both articulates social insecurity in a time of rapid change, and also opens a space of the reader to believe that, like femininity, class and social status are a form of masquerade.”<sup>116</sup> The key element of Braddon’s novel is this combination of pleasure and anxiety, a voyeuristic desire to have persons and locations detailed visually, and a delightful dread that what we see may not match up with any sort of authenticity. As the middle-class agitated for transparency and democracy in government, Lady Audley represented the danger of not knowing who belongs and who doesn’t. Lady Audley represents the anxieties that cut both ways. If there were something truly inherent in an aristocratic bloodline, she does not have it and should be found out. She also fails to adhere to a bourgeois meritocracy, given her shady past and criminal behavior. The fact that she can evade detection—even for a time—on either front suggests both that the landed gentry are doomed and that an empirical epistemology is not the failsafe means of detection it might seem to be.

Because her outer appearance is so beautiful, Lady Audley’s place in her aristocratic domestic sphere seems completely natural and legible. However, her identity is so malleable that the relationship between her lovely appearance and her lovely home seems to become problematically reciprocal:

Beautiful in herself, but made bewilderingly beautiful by the gorgeous surroundings which adorn the shrine of her loveliness. Drinking-cups of

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<sup>116</sup> Pykett, 112.

gold and ivory, chiseled by Benvenuto Cellini; cabinets of buhl and porcelain, bearing the cipher of Austrian Maria Antoinette, amid devices of rosebuds and true lover's knots, birds and butterflies, cupidons and shepherdesses, goddesses, courtiers, cottagers and milkmaids; statuettes of Parian marble and biscuit china; gilded baskets of hothouse flowers, fantastical caskets of Indian filigree work; fragile teacups of turquoise china, adorned by medallion miniatures of Louis the Great and Louis the Well-beloved, Louise de la Valliere, and Jeanne Marie du Barry; cabinet pictures and gilded mirrors, shimmering satin and diaphanous lace; all that gold can buy or art devise had been gathered together for the beautification of this quiet chamber. (292)

Once again, Lady Audley seems to be one lovely object among many, and a silent threat to upper class traditions. She is surrounded by "all that gold can buy or art devise" which, rather than being inherited and traditionally in place at Audley Court, has been "gathered together for the beautification of this quiet chamber." She herself is one more delicate, shimmery item, an additional object of consumption surrounded by expensive merchandise that she has purchased with her newfound wealth or that has been purchased for her in honor of her new position as a member of the landed wealthy, now infected with the habits and desires of the middle class.

In marked contrast to Lady Audley, we have Sir Michael's bouncing, dog-loving, horse-riding, daughter, Alicia. Alicia represents a certain type of aristocratic authenticity, even if her status is beginning to lose its social potency in the second half of the nineteenth-century. The problem is that there is no clear, empirical way to account for Alicia as an insider and Lady Audley as an intruder. Alicia senses something is not right, but she searches in vain for evidence that would convince her father that Lady Audley is not what she seems. Unencumbered by the sexual attraction that blinds Sir Michael (and, initially, Robert, too) to Lady Audley's true character, Alicia reads her stepmother accurately; however, her antipathy toward Lady Audley is figured by the narrator as Alicia's problem, an aristocratic snobbishness or a childish resentment toward her step-mother, perhaps because "Lucy was better loved and more admired than the baronet's daughter" (55). Although she



is adored by virtually everyone she meets, Lady Audley has little success winning the affections of Alicia, who “set her face with a sulky determination against any intimacy between herself and the baronet’s young wife” (10). Lady Audley finds it “quite impossible to overcome Miss Alicia’s prejudices and dislike; or to convince the spoiled girl she had not done her a cruel injury in marrying Sir Michael Audley” (11). The narrator lightly explains away Alicia’s resentment as the pouting of a teenager who had “reigned supreme in her father’s house since earliest childhood” (10). The fact is that the aristocratic daughter has been displaced, not by a suitable step-mother, but by an intruder of a lower class, whose beauty hides her origins and her crimes.

Alicia invites an uneasy sympathy with aristocratic traditions she upholds, in part because she defies certain stereotypes herself. Her frank nature and occasional outbursts of temper garner the narrator’s disapproval; they also create an alternative version of womanhood that is less “perfect” than Lady Audley’s impeccable behavior, but emphatically more honest. Alicia finds it impossible to hide what she truly feels, even when finding the right words is a struggle. Alicia is at least vaguely aware that Lady Audley is subtly using her sexuality to manipulate Sir Michael and Robert but she is powerless to stop her. Her inarticulate dislike is a reaction to a dangerous and covert female sexuality, a real danger that proves impossible to explain to her father:

You think her sensitive because she has soft little white hands, and big blue eyes with long lashes, and all manner of affected, fantastical ways, which you stupid men call fascinating. Sensitive! Why, I’ve seen her do cruel things with those slender white fingers, and laugh at the pain she inflicted. (107)

Alicia comes forward with a declaration of eye-witness evidence for her dislike, insisting that she has seen Lady Audley’s “soft little white hands” cruelly inflicting pain. An eye-witness report, however, does little to persuade Sir Michael, who has seen no such behavior himself and cannot imagine his wife guilty of such action. The discrepancy between Lady Audley’s

appearance and the behavior that Alicia claims she has witnessed is so extreme that Sir Michael simply cannot fathom it. In her effort to persuade her father, Alicia has no proof but her own word against Lady Audley's, and her father's wife is a formidable opponent. Furthermore, she has not identified precisely what makes Lady Audley "fascinating" to "stupid men": the unmentionable sensuality of her beauty. Alicia is positioned as the virgin, who detects and is threatened by the sexually experienced woman, but her knowledge of Lady Audley's captivating power is vague and imaginative. Alicia cannot empirically account for a sexualized threat and her report of specific observations has been compromised by her well-known dislike for her stepmother, so her claims carry little weight. After all, Lady Audley's power is maintained not through the physical cruelty of which Alicia accuses her, but through a powerful physical attraction. Her unapologetic sexuality (bigamist that she is) has usurped the virginal Alicia's position as mistress of Audley Court. Alicia may read the situation accurately, but she cannot properly articulate it and she has no empirical evidence to prove it.

Because she cannot speak directly about sex, Alicia resorts to speaking "dog" instead, citing her pet Newfoundland's dislike of Lady Audley as another form of evidence against Lady Audley's character:

I'm very sorry, papa... I wish I could like her for your sake; but I can't, I can't, and no more can Caesar. She came up to him once with her red lips apart, and her little white teeth glistening between them, and stroked his great head with her soft hand; but if I had not had hold of his collar, he would have flown at her throat and strangled her. She may bewitch every man in Essex, but she'd never make friends with my dog. (107)

Sir Michael Audley angrily dismisses the implications of Alicia's accusations: "Your dog shall be shot," he warns, "if his vicious temper ever endangers Lucy" (107). A dog's reaction is far from the empirical evidence that would be needed to convince Sir Michael that his wife does not belong at Audley Court. But the authority of Caesar's animal instinct is a non-

empirical mode of understanding that the novel authorizes (not unlike the imagination of the artist). For example, at the moment of Lady Audley's entrance into the room, "the animal cowered down by the side of his mistress with a suppressed growl" (107). Rather than aggression, "[t]here was something in the manner of the dog which was, if anything, more indicative of terror than of fury, incredible as it appears that Caesar should be frightened of so fragile a creature as Lucy Audley" (107). Clearly, the physical attributes of Lady Audley's beauty that fascinate so many "stupid men" are ineffective on Alicia's canine companion, whose response to Lady Audley expresses both his well-bred loyalty to Alicia, the "true" mistress of Audley Court and his purely instinctive response to Lady Audley's duplicitous and dangerous character.

Purveyors of sensation novels may have followed Caesar's hint and delighted in their growing certainty that Lady Audley is far from the innocent she appeared to be, but poor Robert takes much longer than the reader to come to terms with this paradox. An inherently "good" character, his kindness is vouched for non-empirically (and therefore reliably) by stray dogs that seem to recognize him instinctively as "[a] man who would never get on in the world; but who would not hurt a worm" (36). If we know Lady Audley is evil because Alicia's dog fears her, we also know that Robert Audley may be supposed good: "Indeed, his chambers were converted into a perfect dog-kennel by his habit of bringing home stray and benighted curs, who were attracted by his looks in the street, and followed him with abject fondness" (36). Canine loyalty suggests a measure of good character that is readable on an instinctive level, offering non-empirical evidence of inherent characteristics that exist regardless of context or domestic surroundings. And yet, in Sir Michael's dismissal of Alicia's concerns and the narrator's quick dismissal of Robert's capability to "get on in the

world,” the narrator of *Lady Audley's Secret* continually disregards over other, non-empirical modes of cognition.

Robert begins the novel as the affable barrister, smoking a pipe and reading French novels, but he quickly becomes the amateur detective in an investigation that requires careful consideration of empirical and non-empirical forms of knowledge. When we first meet Robert, he is “a handsome, lazy, care-for-nothing fellow, of about seven-and-twenty; the only son of a younger brother of Sir Michael Audley” (35). Robert’s “lymphatic nature” (36) suggests that he is inclined toward a passive, though perhaps introspective approach to life, as opposed to the rationality and intellectual vigor one might expect from the professional barrister he “was supposed to be” (35). This conflict within his personality receives much attention in the novel as an inherent contradiction—a split that divides his intuition from the empirical evidence he requires in his professional capacity.

As Robert fulfills the role of amateur detective, he struggles with the apparent discrepancy between appearance and actuality, searching for a fool-proof method of reading that accounts for his strong sense of fate or providence. He obsessively collects material evidence in the form of physical clues he believes will eventually be linked to one other, hoping to empirically prove what may be known but cannot yet be seen: “I do not believe in the mandrake or in blood-stains that no time can efface. I believe rather that we may walk unconsciously in an atmosphere of crime, and breathe none the less freely. I believe rather that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer and admire its tranquil beauty” (143-4). Acknowledging that truth may be invisible, or may be hidden behind a beautiful countenance, Robert still must find empirical, in this case, legally admissible, evidence for the explanation that he already imagines is true.

Anxiety about what – or who – is readable, and how one finds empirical proof of indiscernible crimes is at the heart of the novel’s mystery. It’s the ambiguous visibility of Lady Audley’s guilt that makes the mystery so thrilling. As Ann Cvetkovich notes, “[t]he image of the beautiful and transgressive woman becomes sensational when we know that she is evil and we both see and don’t see her criminality in her appearance.”<sup>117</sup> The anxiety of readability is in full effect as Robert struggles to find a way to read Lady Audley, finding in her appearance or behavior some allusion to her hidden secrets. When Robert learns to read Lady Audley, he will have conquered her. His vacillation between methods of reading as he struggles to find the appropriate combination of empiricism and intuition creates much of the suspense in the novel.

Robert’s detective work is a prime example of the tension and reconciliation between empirical and non-empirical methods of understanding. In spite of his alleged professionalism, Robert’s vigorous investigation into Lady Audley’s past, prompted by George’s disappearance, continually wavers from a strictly empirical methodology to an imaginative sense of fate. Rather than following a clear set of visible clues, Robert’s line of inquiry is often determined by dreams and visions. In the course of his investigation, he searches for physical evidence: novels, letters, book inscriptions, luggage tags, gravestones, and bruises. But even as he claims the unassailable truth of circumstantial evidence and hand-written proof, his imagination is the driving force of his investigation: “A hand that is stronger than my own is beckoning me onward on the dark road that leads to my lost friend’s unknown grave” (255).<sup>118</sup> This beckoning hand becomes a recurring trope in the

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<sup>117</sup> Cvetkovich, 50.

<sup>118</sup> It is worth noting that Braddon borrowed the “beckoning hand” from Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, 1861 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), another wildly popular sensation novel that featured drawing

novel as he becomes more determined and yet more reluctant to discover Lady Audley's secret. Robert couches his role as an amateur detective in strangely passive terms, an investigation driven not by empirical evidence but by mysterious visions: "how pitiless I am, and how relentlessly I am carried on. It is not myself; it is the hand which is beckoning me further and further upon the dark road whose end I dare not dream of" (174). This division between Robert's rationality and the force of the beckoning hand emphasizes the potency of non-empirical visions, which lead him in the right direction even if they appear to defy logical avenues of understanding.

Robert staunchly maintains the authority of circumstantial evidence, but his dreams offer him a clear view of the mystery long before the novel directly reveals it.<sup>119</sup> His subconscious points clearly toward answers that empirical evidence has yet to provide:

In those troublesome dreams he saw Audley Court [...] threatened by the rapid rising of a boisterous sea, whose waves seemed fathering upward to descend and crush the house he loved. As the hurrying waves rolled nearer and nearer to the stately mansion, the sleeper saw a pale, starry face looking out of the silvery foam, and knew that it was my lady, transformed into a mermaid, beckoning his uncle to destruction. (244)

In his dream-vision, not merely his uncle but the entire structure of Audley Court falls victim to the flood. Waves and water will make their way into the cracks and crevices of the "stately mansion" invading and polluting "the house he loved." The power behind this force is none other than Lady Audley, specifically her sex appeal. She is recast as a mermaid, a symbol of dangerous sexuality that would lure sailors to their deaths: woman from the waist up, but a monster below the water's surface. Her seductive intrusion into Audley

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teacher turned amateur detective Walter Hartright, who follows "the Hand that leads men on the dark road to the future" (Collins, *The Woman in White*, 422).

<sup>119</sup> An edition of *Lady Audley's Secret* published in 1887 by Robert B. Davis, Publisher, New York included two additional dreams that were excluded from other editions, presumably because they too early and explicitly revealed the truth about Lady Audley (in chapter eight). See *Lady Audley's Secret* (New York: Dover, 1974) with introduction by Norman Donaldson for an unabridged and unaltered republication of the 1887 edition.

Court has become a destructive force that will contaminate the aristocratic home and ruin Sir Michael. The straightforward symbolism of Robert's dreams does not lead him astray but he is often averse to finding the evidence that will support what his sub-conscious already knows. Thus, intuitive and empirical methods of reading the world are given equal weight in the narrative, even when the narrative claims to adhere to the authority of visible facts. In this way, the empirical evidence uncovered by detective work and the revelations of Robert's intuitive visions work as co-narratives to reveal the truth. Empirical evidence will finally make Robert's case, but that happens long after his imagination (and, likely, the reader's) has resolved the mystery.

Driven by the urgency of his dream, Robert is desperate to find a way to read Lady Audley that reaches beyond an empirical appraisal of her appearance. He has carefully collected all of the circumstantial evidence against her, but he remains certain that the truth is somehow hidden beneath the surface of her beauty. Like the artist who envisioned the "demonic" capabilities of a clever and sensual woman in her portrait, Robert is determined to read the truth in Lady Audley's appearance: " 'She shall look at me,' he thought, 'I will make her meet my eyes, and I will read her as I have read her before. She shall know how useless her artifices are with me.' " (217). He seeks a visible, empirical sign of guilt in her countenance, something to confirm his worst suspicions.

Robert's continual struggle between a trust in empirical evidence and his reliance on the more intuitive cognition of dreams and hunches creates a tension between methods of reading that the novel never quite resolves. Robert remains troubled by his heavy reliance on intuition and his own imagination. He questions not just the efficacy of his investigation but his own mental stability:

Why was it that I saw some strange mystery in my friend's disappearance?  
Was it a motion or monomania? What if I am wrong after all? What if this

chain of evidence which I have constructed link by link is woven out of my own folly? What if this edifice of horror and suspicion is a mere collection of crochets – the nervous fancies of a hypochondriacal bachelor? ... Oh, my God, if it should be in myself all this time that the misery lies; if— (252).

The tension between his intuitive beliefs and his desire for empirical evidence has created a strain that is great enough to make him fear that his chain of circumstantial evidence is nothing more than “a mere collection of crochets,” an effeminate flight of fancy, quite opposed to the authority of empirical evidence. Vacillating from confidence in the evidence at hand to fear that he is merely a “hypochondriacal bachelor” obsessed with imaginary suspicions, Robert must find a way to make the two reading methods compatible.

At last, the physical proof required by law and logic comes in the form of a handwriting match. The handwriting that inscribes a book to given George Talboys by his wife Helen is an identical match to a letter written by Lady Audley that Robert saw early in the novel and visible proof of something else: “I should know what she was like by this slip of paper. Yes, here it all is – the feathery, gold-shot, flaxen curls, the penciled eyebrows, the tiny straight nose, the winning childish smile, all to be guessed in these few graceful up-strokes and down-strokes” (66). Lady Audley’s handwriting is a written manifestation of her ideal feminine appearance, but it also becomes undeniable proof of the secret past that her beauty and charm have hidden. Her handwriting simultaneously represents and strips away her artful disguise. Unlike the portrait, this is empirical evidence, not subject to interpretation. It confirms what Lady Audley’s innocent face has denied, and it supports Robert’s hitherto unsubstantiated belief that Lady Audley was involved in George’s disappearance.: “I have the handwriting in my pocket-book which is the evidence of the conspiracy [...] It remains for me to discover the darker half of my lady’s secret” (252). The scientific empiricism of handwriting analysis rules the day and defeats Robert’s anxiety about his growing obsession with Lady Audley and her hidden secrets. However, he would never



have uncovered the evidence without relying on his own intuition and following the beckoning hand of his visions. This complicated relationship between methods of reading the world illustrates a particular struggle, not only between empiricism and intuition but between sanity and madness.

As Robert debates his monomaniacal tendencies and Lady Audley later finds explanation for her crimes in insanity, the novel speaks to Victorians' questions about the emerging science of psychology and its relationship to an empirical epistemology. Braddon directly enters the contemporary discourse of psychology when Lady Audley is confronted by Robert and she dramatically exclaims, "You have used your cool, calculating, frigid, luminous intellect to a novel purpose. You have conquered – a MADWOMAN!" (340). Although critics continue to debate the probability of Lady Audley's madness, her self-diagnosis allows Braddon to capitalize on a common social trope, an "association between madness and the feminine which was pervasive in nineteenth-century culture."<sup>120</sup> Female madness safely explains away Lady Audley's crimes and assures the ascendancy of a bourgeois hegemony. But because she doesn't look crazy or act crazy all the time, Lady Audley's madness not only challenges assumptions about insanity and gender, but it also problematizes psychology's place in an epistemology of empiricism and suggests that it may be complicit with a bourgeois and masculine status quo that has no place for a threatening female force.

As psychology emerged in the nineteenth-century, it was not yet a specialized branch of medicine and it was at first closely tied to philosophy. Rick Rylance demonstrates that prior to the modern practice of increasing specialization, a variety of intellectuals were influential in constructing both theories and public perceptions of psychology:

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<sup>120</sup> Pykett, 89.

“Economists, imaginative writers, philosophers, clerics, literary critics, policy-makers, as well as biomedical scientists contributed to [psychology’s] formation.”<sup>121</sup> By the second half of the nineteenth century, psychology and psychiatry, with their interests in diagnosing, treating, and controlling insanity, were becoming increasingly professional but at the same time were acquiring an immense amount of public interest. Public health was a particular preoccupation and in that vein Victorian psychology was “powerfully normative and, on the whole, sought a bland elimination of unruly subjectivity.”<sup>122</sup> Gone were the moral absolutes of physiognomy, but psychology continued to operate as a mainstay of the bourgeois hegemony; its emphasis on empiricism fluctuated accordingly. In *Lady Audley’s Secret*, psychology functions as what Peter Brooks calls “a discipline for those bodies that are improperly governed by their minds.”<sup>123</sup> Although medical doctors were considered authorities on the subject, the definition of “improper” in regard to mental health was largely determined by a bourgeois system of moral and social propriety rather than a clear set of empirical definitions.<sup>124</sup>

In the 1860s, the new genre of sensation fiction capitalized on public anxiety about identifying and treating mental illness. The previous decade had seen a number of cases in which it was discovered that sane individuals had been committed to asylums. Catering to this public interest, medical journals and popular magazines alike covered accounts of insanity and methods for treating it, as well as debates on medico-legal definitions of insanity. Braddon’s novel capitalizes on the interest and anxiety these articles produced.

Helen Small notes, “The year 1858-9 saw the first of two major ‘lunacy panics’ in Britain,

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<sup>121</sup> Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>123</sup> Brooks, 221-2.

<sup>124</sup> See Pykett, 110-12.

following the exposure of numerous cases in which sane men and women had been wrongly diagnosed as insane and denied recourse to legal or other means of contesting their certification.”<sup>125</sup> Small argues that novels like *Lady Audley’s Secret* and Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* “addressed the crisis, giving imaginative force to public fears about the competence and trustworthiness of doctors who cared for the mad.”<sup>126</sup> In a “ripped from the headlines” fashion, Braddon’s novel addresses public concern about a specific crisis of empiricism and readability in regard to mental illness. The question is whether her criminality and her madness are one and the same. Lady Audley manages to hide her crimes under the guise of beauty and charm. However, when her secrets are uncovered the consensus is that because of her extraordinary beauty and charm she must be crazy rather than criminal. Lady Audley’s alleged madness operates as a sort of insanity plea in which madness is socially preferable to criminality—women should preferably be deranged rather than depraved. In keeping with this notion of social order, Lady Audley is somewhat arbitrarily locked away by a doctor rather than a judge. Her sentencing occurs in the context of a widespread public fear about the “wrongful confinement” of “awkward individuals by their relatives.”<sup>127</sup> Tales like these increased the desire for empirical evidence of insanity.

Lady Audley’s madness is most sensational and frightening because it defies an empirical diagnosis and has been completely disguised by her charm and beauty. Without a demonstration of the unrestrained lunacy that had previously defined “madness,” doctors and intellectuals looked for other identifying characteristics in an effort to find a visible

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<sup>125</sup> Helen Small, *Love’s Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 184. In response to public outcry, the Medical Act of 1858 established an official registry of physicians and regulated the education of doctors.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>127</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor and Russell Crofts, Introduction to *Lady Audley’s Secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon (London: Penguin, 1998), xxvi.

connection between one's mental state and outward appearance, or sought a clear explanation when a connection between inner madness and outer appearance was not evident. James Cowles Prichard's 1835 "A Treatise on Insanity" addresses the phenomenon of rational appearance and latent madness with the term "moral insanity," defined as:

a moral perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties, and particularly without any insane illusion of hallucination. [...] The individual is found to be incapable, not of talking or reasoning upon any subject proposed to him, for this he will often do with great shrewdness and volubility, but of conducting himself with decency and propriety in the business of life.<sup>128</sup>

In other words, an individual who looks and acts perfectly normal but is capable of committing heinous crimes (i.e. bigamy, arson, and attempted murder) must be morally insane rather than merely self-centered or unfeeling. The absence of irrationality as a marker of insanity was a disturbing possibility. It made the signs of madness all the more obscure and all the more crucial to discover. A contradiction between appearance and actuality may be inevitable, but insanity is easier to account for than criminality in a woman like Lady Audley. In Braddon's novel, diagnosing Lady Audley as "morally insane" is questionable, but it also settles the problem of Lady Audley conveniently by making sense of her within another frame of causation. It deflects an unacceptable truth based on one reading of the evidence to another kind founded on the emerging "science of the mind." The story is sensational, but her madness actually makes it more palatable than the tale of a beautiful and feminine criminal who is not out of her mind.

Moral insanity becomes a rather convenient category in which to place a woman who exhibits both domestic virtues and a disregard for human life. Where immoral behavior

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<sup>128</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*, 1835, *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, eds. Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 252.

makes Lady Audley unknowable, inexplicable, and uncontrollable, madness makes her an anomaly that can yet be diagnosed, understood and contained, paradoxically resisting and inviting an empirical understanding. When Dr. Mosgrave is called in to consult about Lady Audley's alleged madness, he muses to Robert, "...there is no evidence of madness in anything she has done. [...] She employed intelligent means, and she carried out a conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that" (370). But his initial assessment will be revised after he meets her, although no empirical evidence is offered for the change of opinion.

When Dr. Mosgrave meets with Lady Audley herself, she acknowledges his desire for an empirical diagnosis: "You are watching for some sign of the dreadful taint in my blood" (374). Whatever sign exists, it is never clearly described. The reader is not privy to further conversation between Lady Audley and her doctor but after their meeting, Dr. Mosgrave amends his initial response and firmly declares, "There is latent insanity! Insanity which might never appear; or which might appear only once or twice in a life-time." "Latent insanity" allows Lady Audley to be categorized within an empirical system of knowable and definable categories that accounts for her aberrant behavior without granting her agency. This process is problematized by the ambivalence of the doctor's explanation: "The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood. She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. [...] She is dangerous!" (372). Dangerous, perhaps, but also neatly categorized in such a way that she can now be controlled. D. A. Miller argues that "the best way to read the madwoman" is not to consider the circumstances that might have driven her mad, but rather understand the implications of such a diagnosis: "madness that, like a fate, lies ever in wait to 'cover'—account for and occlude—whatever behaviors,

desires, or tendencies might be considered socially deviant, undesirable, or dangerous.”<sup>129</sup>

Offering latent insanity as the comforting conclusion that leaves the Audley family intact, the implications of Dr. Mosgrave’s declarations align the medical profession with a bourgeois methodology that is only tenuously connected to empiricism. Dr. Mosgrave’s diagnosis appears to be based not on empirical evidence, but on some kind of intuitive glimpse of what may lie hidden beneath the surface; or, perhaps, on an instinctive impulse to protect the status quo by containing and controlling a threatening intruder. Lady Audley’s removal to an asylum highlights the divide between empirical science and mental illness in the nineteenth century. Braddon’s novel does little to suture that divide, exposing instead the complicity of a Victorian epistemology of empiricism and the values of a middle class meritocracy.

The question of Lady Audley’s madness is also a question of identity. If she is both a woman and criminal, it follows that she *must* be mad. But if she is mad, it is an invisible malady – a truth that lurks beneath the surface of a lovely and accomplished woman who fits perfectly in the domestic haven of Audley Court. Insanity offers Lady Audley a release of responsibility so that her criminal defect can be categorized and contained with little embarrassment to the Audley family. At the same time, Lady Audley’s careful self-control suggests her madness is both subversive and opportunistic. In *Somatic Fictions*, Athena Vrettos suggests that madness allows one “to transgress somatic and psychic boundaries” which, consequently, establishes “the potential instability of human identity.”<sup>130</sup> Anxiety about identity is a reflection of social instability in the nineteenth century, and instability is of utmost concern in *Lady Audley’s Secret*—unstable class structures, unstable gender

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<sup>129</sup> D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 169.

<sup>130</sup> Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 3.

boundaries, unstable mental health—these are the preoccupations of a society concerned with shifting norms and changing ideologies, and desiring a methodology at least nominally grounded in empiricism to prevent chaos in the midst of change.

But the middle class values that the novel upholds are problematically inconsistent with the assuredness of the empiricism to which it claims to subscribe—as evidenced by the ambiguity of the notion of moral insanity. Ann Cvetkovich observes that while Lady Audley’s guilt is certain, her madness is far more equivocal; ultimately, “madness becomes a term to apply [...] to anyone. The novel is extremely sensitive to the normalcy of madness.”<sup>131</sup> Lady Audley herself remarks to Sir Michael, “People are insane for years and years before their insanity is found out. *They* know they are mad, but they know how to keep their secret; and, perhaps they may sometimes keep it till they die” (283). The implication here is that madness may lie dormant – an unstable but invisible presence. In a narrative preoccupied with readability and empirical evidence, the security of the novel’s conclusion is undercut by the possibility that madness lurks in all of us.

This notion that we each could be at anytime susceptible to madness was vivid in the public imagination. A writer for *The Times* articulated the anxiety of ambivalence a few years before *Lady Audley’s Secret* was published:

Nothing can be more slightly defined than the line of demarcation between sanity and insanity ... Make the definition too narrow, it becomes meaningless; make it too wide, and the whole human race becomes involved in the dragnet. In strictness we are all mad when we give way to passion, to prejudice, to vice, to vanity; but if all the passionate, prejudiced and vain people were to be locked up as lunatics, who is to keep the key to the asylum?<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Cvetkovich, 66.

<sup>132</sup> *The Times*, Saturday, July 22, 1854, 8, column F.

*Lady Audley's Secret* asks its readers how we can empirically account for symptoms that are constantly in flux; how we can diagnose a mental state consistent only in its changes:

Mad-houses are large and only too numerous; yet surely it is strange they are not larger, when we think of how many helpless wretches must beat their brains against this hopeless persistency of the orderly outward world, as compared with the storm and tempest, the riot and confusion within; -- when we remember how many minds must tremble upon the narrow boundary between reason and unreason, mad to-day and sane to-morrow, mad yesterday and sane to-day. (206)

The empirical evidence of madness, then, is problematized not only by “the narrow boundary between reason and unreason” but by one’s ability to cross that boundary and come back: “mad to-day and sane to-morrow, mad yesterday and sane to-day.” Certainly Lady Audley’s shift between fulfilling her role as mistress of Audley Court and murderous incendiary is one example of crossing this boundary. But Robert’s movement between empirical facts and his dreamy intuition is another version of an undetectable mental instability. This fluctuation between empirical and intuitive cognition recasts the division between sanity and madness quite differently, particularly because in either case there is no observable outward change. The nebulous and invisible boundary between sanity and madness makes urgent the desire to differentiate between the two empirically, while the novel suggests that such differentiations may be arbitrary at best, always open to interpretation.

If Lady Audley’s infiltration is dangerous to the Audley family, it is because of her illegible appearance rather than her destructive force. As Winifred Hughes observes, Lady Audley “has no objections to the conventional middle-class values of domesticity and respectability; in fact, she commits bigamy in order to get them and murder in order to keep them.”<sup>133</sup> Her ideal feminine exterior conceals a ruthless ambition that, far from being anti-

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<sup>133</sup> Hughes, 127.



establishment, actually subscribes to the bourgeois ideology that her criminal activity (coupled with her lower class status) threatens to destroy. Lyn Pykett notes the irony in Lady Audley's position: "she simultaneously qualifies as an icon of gentility and threatens the gentility of the gentry by gentrifying the middle class."<sup>134</sup> Her "madness" emerges from a desire to uphold the very social order that her presence disrupts, prompting her permanent removal from her domestic sphere in order to maintain a suitable family lineage.

What makes Lady Audley truly dangerous is that—in spite of her madness, and in spite of her crimes—she is so darn beautiful. The novel's real mystery—the source of its popular appeal and the point of its contention—rests in this physical conflation of danger, madness, and feminine allure. Lady Audley is exposed as a bigamist and would-be murderer (thrice), who all the while appeared to be an ideal Victorian wife, the epitome of virtue and decorum. Her transgressions cross class and gender lines, defying the social expectations warranted by her appearance, her social status, and her public decorum. Unable to reconcile murder with ideal femininity, the middle-class orthodoxy must find a palatable explanation: madness. Lady Audley's explanation of a family history of madness makes the explanation probable, but the problematic connection between feminine beauty and latent madness underscores the novel's preoccupation with appearances as a form of empirical evidence. The ambiguous relationship between truth and visibility is part of the impetus to search for a successful method of reading the world—one that can seek out what empiricism may fail to see.

In the end, Braddon uses madness to simultaneously challenge a bourgeois hegemony that limits opportunities for women and to secure a conventional conclusion that

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<sup>134</sup> Taylor and Crofts, xx.

reinstates the status quo of a prosperous bourgeois patriarchy. But she also offers a method of combining romance and realism that not only creates a narrative but teaches us how to read it. Lady Audley's madness pushes the boundaries of empirical realism but stops short of abandoning them all together; it explains away her disruptive force as an aberration, and it enables the novel to safely and conventionally dispose of a monstrous murderer. But her madness is deliberately ambiguous, excusing crimes that could also be explained in social, political, or sexual terms. The diagnosis of "latent insanity" hints toward what Ann Cvetkovich identifies as "a more pervasive, albeit socially constructed, form of madness, produced by a consumer culture and contemporary urban life rather than a madness that can be attributed to a crime, heredity, or femininity."<sup>135</sup> In this world of "consumer culture and contemporary urban life" a new form of madness results from—and all too clearly illustrates—the realization that an empirical understanding of the world is drastically incomplete. Braddon finally rewards Robert for solving the mystery, and confines Lady Audley until her death, but the questions about inner truth and outward appearance, and about what it means to be mad and who decides what madness is, continue to undermine the otherwise conventionally happy ending.

The ending, which "leaves the good people all happy and at peace" (439) is an attempt to fold cultural assumptions about gender and class into an empirical epistemology that rewards middle class values. Robert's discovery of Lady Audley's deceitful femininity has, happily, resulted in the discovery of his own masculine identity and he asserts himself in the end as a husband, father, and barrister, the new generation of middle class morality. The other men in the story do not fare so well. Sir Michael is a brokenhearted man, prepared to live out the final days with his daughter and her new husband, and Audley Court has been

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<sup>135</sup> Cvetkovich, 68.

abandoned. George and his son move in with Robert, who has married George's sister Clara. In spite of the tidy conclusion, *Lady Audley's Secret* breaks from many of its counterparts by retaining a sense of mystery at the very last. The novel's final paragraphs, in their description of Audley Court, echo the anxieties of misleading appearances and unanswered questions:

Audley Court is shut up, and a grim old housekeeper reigns paramount in the mansion which my lady's ringing laughter once made musical. A curtain hangs before the pre-Raphaelite portrait [...] The house is often shown to inquisitive visitors, [...] and people admire my lady's rooms, and ask many questions about the pretty, fair-haired woman, who died abroad. (436)

Ending with the Pre-Raphaelite portrait reestablishes the problem of reading the world. It intensifies the anxiety that the home is vulnerable to undetectable threats, that an empirical reading is unreliable, and maybe impossible. The Pre-Raphaelite painting exposes Lady Audley for what she is in an artist's intuitive interpretation of her criminality and her sexuality (which are, arguably, one and the same). But now the painting is behind a curtain, kept hidden from visitors, just as Lady Audley's beauty hid the truth of her crimes from all those who met her.

Rather than dismissing empiricism all together, the remaining presence of the portrait also suggests that the world and the people within are, in fact, knowable. After all, the artist's vision implies that an evil criminality has some sort of physical presence after all, perhaps one that is not fully detectable by intuition or empirical methods alone, but one that lurks just beneath the surface, requiring an intuitive reading that can later be accounted for with empirical evidence. The power of the sensation novel to thrill and excite the reader lies partly in its ability to link its romance with its realism, to intertwine the empirical with the imagination. *Lady Audley Secret*, which insists that empirical science cannot quite encompass Alicia Audley's intuitive dislike, or the beckoning hand that haunts Robert Audley's vision,

but in order for these metaphysical truths to be taken seriously in the modern Victorian world, we must find a way to read the truth in its empirical manifestations—to identify a visible, physical presence and to determine how it aligns with the truths we instinctively intuit.

“The Incredible Not Always Impossible”: Moral Certainty and Circumstantial Evidence  
in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*

Lastly, physical investigation, more than anything besides, helps to teach us the actual value and right use of the Imagination—of that wondrous faculty, which, left to ramble uncontrolled, leads us astray into a wilderness of perplexities and errors, a land of mists and shadows; but which, properly controlled by experience and reflection, becomes the noblest attribute of men; the source of poetic genius, the instrument of discovery in science, without the aid of which Newton would never have invented fluxions, nor Davy have decomposed the earths and alkalies, nor would Columbus have found another Continent.

– Address to the Royal Society by its President Sir Benjamin Brodie, November 30, 1859<sup>136</sup>

A year before Dickens and Lewes exchanged conflicting (and increasingly cantankerous) opinions about the possibility of spontaneous combustion, Dickens’s friend, colleague, and fellow-writer Wilkie Collins also wrote a series of letters to G. H. Lewes’s weekly periodical, *The Leader*. In this correspondence, published between January and March of 1852 and titled “Magnetic Evenings at Home,” Collins responds to Lewes’s skepticism regarding the practices of mesmerism and animal magnetism, practices that – as evidenced by Collins’s letters – were still as engaging as they were controversial, and had yet to be firmly established as pseudo-science, even at mid-century.<sup>137</sup> In his final letter to Lewes on this subject, dramatically titled, “THE INCREDIBLE NOT ALWAYS IMPOSSIBLE,” Collins systematically refutes arguments that Lewes had published in *The Leader* just two days earlier, under the headline, “The Fallacy of Clairvoyance.”<sup>138</sup>

Lewes’s article describes an alleged clairvoyant whom he had witnessed and his subsequent tests of another self-declared clairvoyant (both failed to convince Lewes). Of the

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<sup>136</sup> Epigraph to John Tyndall’s lecture “The Scientific Use of the Imagination,” *Fragments of Science: A Series of Detached Essays, Addresses, and Reviews*, vol. II (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 101-102.

<sup>137</sup> See Alison Winter’s *Mesmerized: Power of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 4-6. See also Sharrona Pearl, “Dazed and Abused: Gender and Mesmerism in Wilkie Collins,” *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, eds. Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne (Rodopi: Amsterdam-New York, 2006), 163-170.

<sup>138</sup> Wilkie Collins, “The Incredible Not Always Impossible,” *The Leader* (3 Apr. 1852), 328. G. H. Lewes, “The Fallacy of Clairvoyance,” *The Leader* (27 March 1852), 305.

session he witnessed himself, Lewes asserts that the alleged clairvoyant had been prompted; he also acknowledges why so many observers have been fooled into believing such a fallacy: “every man who has made any scientific researches will know how excessively difficult it often is to recognise a fact—to know it for what it is.”<sup>139</sup> Facts, empirically derived, obviously require visible and verifiable evidence, but, in spite of empiricism’s reliance on sensory experience, a room full of eye-witnesses is insufficient proof. Lewes explains, “The facts of clairvoyance may seem simple and appreciable enough to persons who ‘believe their eyes,’ as they say; but scientific men know the truth of Dr. Cullen’s sarcasm, that people are never so little to be believed as when narrating what they have seen.”<sup>140</sup>

Wilkie Collins bristled at the implication that he had been deceived by a parlor trick. In his reply, he rejects Lewes’s assertion that a clairvoyant Collins endorsed must have been prompted through “leading questions, by intonations, by the hundred suggestions of voice and manner.”<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, in response to Lewes’s dismissal of personal testimony as reliable evidence, Collins echoes Lewes’s language of scientific inquiry, insisting that “a crucial instance” of mesmerism at which he was present, can provide proof “as clear and direct as evidence can possibly be.”<sup>142</sup> Collins concludes:

I write this letter (my last) not with any wish to enter a controversy on the general subject of clairvoyance, but simply to vindicate the special experiment to which you have referred in your letter, as a genuine experiment; and to try and show you, by clear straightforward evidence, that my friend and myself were not duped by our own imaginations – not misled by any deception of our own sense – and not unmindful of using every possible caution, as well of raising every fair difficulty in selecting and

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<sup>139</sup> Lewes, “The Fallacy of Clairvoyance,” 305.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. Dr. William Cullen (1710-1790) was a leading British physician of the eighteenth century.

<sup>141</sup> Collins “The Incredible Not Always Impossible,” 328.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

prosecuting our test of the merits of clairvoyance.<sup>143</sup>

Using the language of empirical science, Collins asserts the authority of his sensory experience. He qualifies the evening as “a genuine experiment,” implying that he is perfectly capable of recognizing a fact and “knowing it for what it is.” He is careful to rely on “straightforward evidence” that he insists is not susceptible to misinterpretation. Collins readily admits that individual experience requires scientific verification. He implicitly acknowledges that a witness’s imagination could potentially lead one (as Brodie suggests) “astray into a wilderness of perplexities and errors,” but Collins stresses that he and his friend “were not duped by our own imaginations.” This exchange embodies contemporary debates about mesmerism and scientific evidence—concerns that swirled amidst public opinion. These letters also illuminate the inextricable relationship between the imagination and empirical evidence—a point of contention from which *The Moonstone* draws its mystery, and which inevitably muddled the empiricism of nineteenth-century science.

In writing *The Moonstone* in 1868, several years after this correspondence with Lewes, Collins returns to these questions about the reliability of empirical evidence and the influence of the imagination on a scientific investigation. Although his novel arguably supports a scientific approach to reading the world, everything from its detective story plot to its narrative structure undermines Collins’s previous confidence about the reliability of eye witness testimony. In fact, even as it seeks scientific verification, *The Moonstone* challenges the notion that one can read the world objectively and definitively. As a novel comprised of several first-person narratives, *The Moonstone* claims “not to present reports but to produce

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<sup>143</sup> Collins, “The Incredible Not Always Impossible,” 328.

witnesses.”<sup>144</sup> Each individual testimony invites careful scrutiny, recalling Collins’s own acknowledgement that one must vigorously test the facts, lest those present be led astray by a “deception of our own senses.” In his letters written to Lewes sixteen years earlier, even as he expressed sincere faith in what he believed to be a progressive scientific experiment, Collins was already acknowledging that sensory experiences are essential to empirical evidence and yet could be misleading. *The Moonstone* takes that puzzle as a launching point to demonstrate that science’s investigation of physical phenomena is, for better or worse, inherently related to the imagination, to intuition, and to an individual’s unique perception – a perspective that reaches beyond mesmerism to shape a more general approach to reading the world.

The mystery of *The Moonstone* revolves around the loss of the exotic gem from which the novel gets its name. Its disappearance drives two parallel plots to locate and reclaim it: the objective, systematic, and empirical work of the detective, and the intuitive, passionate, and mysterious calling of three Brahmin Indians. Things get complicated when the seemingly cut and dried distinctions between these two methods of reading the world (the “factual” and the “fantastic”) become blurred, and the divisive plot lines move together in an amateur investigation and culminate in a scientific experiment. Premonitions, inexplicable and unpredictable human behavior, and the imaginative aspect of scientific speculation problematically and productively link “empirical” England with the exotic and mysterious “Hindoo superstition” (51).

The mystery begins during Rachel Verinder’s birthday dinner. She seemed delighted with the gift of the valuable diamond, a birthday present from her late uncle, Colonel John Herncastle, whose military career had taken him to India where he confiscated the

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<sup>144</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, 1868 (London: Penguin, 1998), 197. Hereafter all citations to this novel will reference this edition and will be made parenthetically.



Moonstone. When it disappears from Rachel's bedroom during the night, her reaction to its loss is a mystery in itself: at once angry and reticent, she clearly regrets its loss; at the same time, she makes no effort to assist in the investigation. In fact, she refuses to explain herself to anyone, cuts off all contact with her cousin and love-interest, Franklin Blake, and, as a result, becomes the prime suspect in the eyes of investigating detective, Sergeant Cuff. In writing the narrative of mystery and detection, Collins establishes empiricism and intuition as alternative methods of discovering the truth about the diamond's disappearance. These perspectives are paradoxically contradictory and complementary. Part of the mystery is solved through a controversial scientific experiment in which the scientist usurps the role of the detective. The ultimate solution requires an assimilation of circumstantial evidence with intuition which the characters are "morally certain" is true (230). The narrative works out the possibilities and the difficulties of this process.

The necessity of combining the methodology of an empirical investigation with an imaginative or intuitive perspective emerges early in the novel as all signs point to Rachel's guilt and yet all those who know her staunchly defend her innocence. Puzzled by her behavior, Franklin insists, "Rachel's conduct is perfectly intelligible, if you will only do her the common justice to take the Objective view first, and the Subjective view next, and the Objective-Subjective view to wind up with" (180). His seemingly muddled method of analysis captures the novel's preoccupation with a method of reading the world that accounts for both the empirical evidence—the "facts" of the case—and the intangible elements that seem to be equally important in solving the mystery: character, motivation, and personal feeling. These non-empirical elements are crucial for solving the puzzle; they also help to define the novel as a genre. It is precisely this desire to assimilate the empirical with the imaginative that underscores the general appeal of detection in many Victorian

novels. In Collins's novels especially, the attraction of the detective process is not simply the desire to systematically account for whodunit but to determine the whys and hows of the situation.

In his work on *The Moonstone* and detective fiction, Ronald R. Thomas emphasizes the elaborate plotting of detective fiction in explaining its popular appeal, a mystery with clarity only available in hindsight. Thomas argues that *The Moonstone* "dramatises a sustained effort to recover a lost incident, connecting contemporary circumstances with historical origins, and assembling a 'chain of evidence' that will link the present to the past by explaining the truth about a mysterious sequence of events."<sup>145</sup> But as Peter Thomas observes, *The Moonstone* is most preoccupied with proving Franklin Blake's innocence; revealing Godfrey Ablewhite as the true culprit is little more than a byproduct of clearing Franklin's name.<sup>146</sup> I suggest that this emphasis on establishing innocence, on ensuring the individual is not lost in a bewildering bureaucratic system of irrefutable-but-untrue evidence, illustrates the necessity of uniting the empirical with the imaginative. Detective fiction speaks to a longing to fully understand the mysteries of human life, but also, and equally, to the desire not to give up everything to empiricism.

Franklin's attempts to understand Rachel's behavior exemplify the challenge of developing a system that combines objective and subjective perspectives in an effort to account for the seemingly inexplicable. In *The Moonstone*, Objective and Subjective points of view correspond respectively with empirical and emotional methods of interpreting events. One can objectively conclude, as does Franklin, that "the lost [*sic*] of the Moonstone ...

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<sup>145</sup> Ronald R. Thomas, "The Moonstone, Detective Fiction and Forensic Science" in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 65.

<sup>146</sup> Peter Thomas, *Detection and Its Designs: Narrative and Power in Nineteenth-Century Detective Fiction* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1998), 93-94.

threw her into a state of nervous excitement” (180). Subjectively, then, given Rachel’s “state of nervous excitement, how are we to expect that she should behave as she might otherwise have behaved to any of the people about her?” (180). What follows is the “Objective-Subjective explanation”: “Rachel, properly speaking, is *not* Rachel, but Somebody Else” (181). Franklin’s “Objective-Subjective explanation” initially seems like nonsense, his misguided attempt to explain her sudden lack of romantic interest. But as we discover in the final pages, he nearly gets it right. His speculative solution—that Rachel is not Rachel at all—succinctly foreshadows the novel’s eventual explanation: the Diamond thief was actually one person but (contrary to empirical evidence and eye-witness testimony) turned out to be someone else. Franklin’s confusing explanation also underscores the way subjectivity itself was a preoccupation of the nineteenth-century novel. The connection between one’s inner and outer status was slippery and unreliable, and Braddon and Collins both exploit and interrogate the notion that people are not always what they seem. The solution to the mystery lies in finding a way to combine these empirical and intuitive perspectives into a legitimate process of investigation, a factual verification that complements an intuitive truth.

This distinction between fact and feeling recalls Dickens’s spectrum of intuitive and empirical truths. In *Bleak House*, intuitive knowledge was privileged over reductive empirical facts and empiricism merely served to affirm intuition. *Lady Audley’s Secret* upheld the superiority of empiricism yet revealed the undercurrent of intuition in its methodology. Collins’s narrative moves toward an Objective-Subjective perspective even as it acknowledges the inherent paradox of this position. As I will demonstrate, this uneasy process of assimilation both subverts and sustains a comfortable belief in an empirical epistemology that Collins’s novel links to a sense of English nationalism. Collins pairs

trustworthy Englishness and its straight-forward empiricism against the mysterious spirituality of the Brahmin Indians, but I suggest that the real mystery *The Moonstone* uncovers is the way that non-empirical moments of superstition and intuition inform the detection process and constantly connect these two cultures.

Epitomizing the positivism associated with Victorian England, house-steward Gabriel Betteredge wonders at Franklin's Objective-Subjective speculations, at last attributing such a perspective to Franklin's continental education – his “wonderful foreign training” (40). Although Franklin's Objective-Subjective point of view seems to denote a comprehensive perspective, there is an uneasiness associated with it as well. During the process of investigation, Franklin, normally “brisk and bright,” becomes “unaccountably, a slow, solemn, and pondering young man” (54). Betteredge can only assume that “these puzzling shifts and transformations in Mr. Franklin” are a product of his continental education: “As a consequence of this, he had come back with so many different sides to his character, all more or less jarring with each other, that he seemed to pass his life in a state of perpetual contradiction with himself” (55). Thus, even as Franklin's diminished Englishness offers him a cosmopolitan perspective, the inner turmoil and the unpredictable behavior with which it corresponds are problematically removed from English empiricism. Betteredge, for one, refuses to join Franklin in considering both sides of the question. Instead, he “steered a middle course between the Objective Side and the Subjective side. In plain English I stared hard and said nothing” (54). His “plain English” in this instance seems to be both rhetorical and behavioral – continually intrigued by the possibilities of intuition, presentiment, and his own “superiority to reason,” Betteredge will pay lip service to an empirical approach to understanding the world even as his own experience moves beyond it.

Betteredge articulates the anxiety that corresponds to the realization that material facts are questionable rather than definitive. In the wake of the missing diamond and misleading evidence, Betteredge relishes the opportunity to perform the simple task of harnessing the horses. The tangible reality of horse and harness is a welcome change from the mystery of the Moonstone:

In the infernal network of mysteries and uncertainties that now surrounded us, I declare it was a relief to observe how well the buckles and straps understood each other! When you had seen the pony backed into the shafts of the chaise, you had seen something which there was no doubt about. And that, let me tell you, was becoming a treat of the rarest kind in our household. (103)

Betteredge's brief refuge in the material world of buckles and straps is a relief—a nod to traditional tasks and to the solid respectability of empirical facts. His delight in seeing “something which there was no doubt about” indicates the troubling unease brought on by circumstantial evidence that confuses rather than elucidates the truth. Betteredge's comfort in the horse harness and the material certainty it represents is a comical depiction of his materialism, a component of his faith in an epistemology of empiricism. But his allegiance to material facts is complicated by his faith in Rachel's innocence and his devotion to the great literary truth of *Robinson Crusoe*. These non-empirical certainties make clear that even the world of the house steward cannot be reduced to pure materialism.

The simultaneous holding of contradictory beliefs is a paradox which faced many Victorians as nineteenth-century scientific developments created an uneasy relationship with traditions of the past. As Betteredge illustrates, developments were typically well-received unless they conflicted with a traditional sense of morality. Expressing his pride in Britain's progress, Betteredge dismisses the Indians' ink reading as “hocus-pocus” (52) and muses in regard to the mystery of the diamond, “Who ever heard the like of it – in the nineteenth century, mind; in an age of progress, and in a country which rejoices in the blessings of the

British constitution? Nobody ever heard the like of it, and, consequently, nobody can be expected to believe it” (46). Here Betteredge seems to be the quintessential no-nonsense Englishman, clearly invested in material facts and convinced by nothing less than empirical evidence. But Betteredge unwittingly contradicts his own rationality as he continually and proudly asserts himself, “constitutionally superior to reason” when it comes to believing Rachel guilty (174). The paradox here is his claim that the source of his opposition to empirical facts has a physical, empirical presence—his “constitution” or physical make up. Unwilling to dismiss material facts, Betteredge attempts to bring his unreasonable faith in Rachel’s innocence into the realm of empiricism.

Betteredge’s devout pragmatism is balanced by his equally devout faith in *Robinson Crusoe* as a text of wisdom and guidance. In fact, he bestows Defoe’s novel with an almost religious significance, taking particular passages out of context and applying them to his own experience. In reference to a passage that includes the line, ‘Fear of Danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than Danger itself,’ Betteredge remarks enthusiastically, “The man who doesn’t believe in *Robinson Crusoe* after *that*, is a man with a screw loose in his understanding, or a man lost in the mist of his own self-conceit! Argument is thrown away upon him; and pity is better reserved for some person with a livelier faith” (86). Betteredge’s faith in *Robinson Crusoe* is satirized through the amusing discord between his positivist sensibility and his quasi-religious faith in Defoe’s novel, itself a fictional testament to the empirical and the practical, told in the first person and claiming to be autobiographical. The unacknowledged conflict between positivism and other avenues of understanding is exaggerated in Betteredge’s character but is rather representative of the status quo. Dismissing those who would disagree as having “a screw loose in [their] understanding,” Betteredge exemplifies the tension between empirical rationality and intuitive faith as

methods of understanding—a tension that was subject to much discussion and debate in the nineteenth century and one that leads to productive discovery in *The Moonstone*. In this way, Collins uses Betteredge to typify an English perspective that would shun the foreign superstition of the Indians as mere “hocus-pocus” all the while clinging to wild superstitions of its own and claiming they fit within an epistemology of empiricism.

Rather than searching for a productive combination of methods, many of *The Moonstone*'s characters (like Betteredge) try to “steer a middle course” which essentially consists of simultaneously holding two opposing points of view without ever acknowledging the paradox. The Prologue sets this tone for the novel with its narrator's unyielding adherence to an epistemology of empiricism and his equally firm confidence in his own superstitions. The narrator, a soldier recalling his time spent in India with Colonel John Herncastle, asserts, “I declare, on my word of honour, that what I am now about to write is, strictly and literally, the truth” (11). The definition of “truth” in the novel is clearly as fraught as Lewes's article on clairvoyance suggests, with narrators continually inferring and even imagining what actually happened. The narrator of the Prologue proceeds to speculate about the possibility of events that may or may not have occurred when he was not present. Taken from “a Family Paper,” the Prologue tells the story of “The Storming of Seringapatam,” during which a diamond guarded by Brahmin Indians was apparently seized by John Herncastle. The narrator explains the cultural significance of the Yellow Diamond and the Brahmins' belief in a deity who promised “certain disaster to the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem, and to all of his house and name who received it after him” (12).

Although this curse is dismissed as superstition and gives the narrator little pause, he is greatly troubled by the crime he believes Herncastle committed. The narrator suspects

that Herncastle murdered three Brahmin Indians in order to take the diamond, but he refuses to accuse him without material proof: “I cannot prevail upon myself to become his accuser – and I think with good reason. If I made the matter public, I have no evidence but moral evidence to bring forward” (15). “Moral evidence” is sufficient for establishing truth in this case but it is not sufficient cause for action without the certainty of empirical evidence or an eye-witness: “I cannot say that my own eyes saw the deed committed” (15-16).

Without this essential evidence against him, Herncastle goes unquestioned and is free to take the stolen diamond to England, and to set the events of the novel in motion by giving it to his niece for her birthday. The legendary curse is never given any direct validity in the novel, but the events that ensue after Rachel receives—and subsequently loses—the Moonstone suggest that the narrator’s “moral evidence” is sufficient proof of Herncastle’s wrongdoing. Rather than “steering a middle course,” the novel, in a sense, has it both ways, dismissing superstitions even as the mysterious predictions are manifested in the plot.

The plot of *The Moonstone* continually validates moral evidence as a legitimate but culturally specific method of finding the truth. The prologue’s narrator demonstrates his prejudice when he insists, “I attach no sort of credit to the fantastic Indian legend of the gem,” at the same time admitting, “I am influenced by a certain superstition of my own in this matter”:

It is my conviction, or my delusion, *no matter which*, that crime brings its own fatality with it. I am not only persuaded of Herncastle’s guilt; I am even fanciful enough to believe that he will live to regret it, if he keeps the Diamond, and that others will live to regret taking it from him, if he gives the Diamond away. (16, emphasis mine)

While the narrator clearly wants to distinguish between his own sense of moral consequences and the Indian curse, there is no mistaking the alignment of his conviction with the “fantastic Indian legend.” The narrator’s self-deprecation (“my delusion”) may



make his “conviction” more palatable to a society that claims to adhere to an empirical epistemology, but the Prologue (and the events that follow in the narrative) clearly establishes the English investigation of crime as parallel to the Indians’ spiritual search for the missing yellow diamond. In granting validity to the former, the novel assigns an unsettling legitimacy to the latter as well.

The parallels between Victorian moral values and Hindu beliefs are complicated by the satiric portrayal of Miss Clack, evangelical spinster and one of *The Moonstone*’s narrators. In an exaggerated version of the Prologue’s contradictory perspective, Miss Clack’s declarations of Christian servitude never succeed in disguising her true nature. As Franklin Blake states in his addendum to Miss Clack’s narrative, “I am happy enough at the present moment, not only to brave the smartest exercise of Miss Clack’s pen, but even to recognize its unquestionable value as an instrument for the exhibition of Miss Clack’s character” (202). Miss Clack’s religiosity serves as a counter to a strictly empirical perspective at the same time it offsets the Hinduism of the Brahmin Indians. Her strict fundamentalism operates as an alternative epistemology – she understands a specific and revealed truth, rooted in her literal interpretation of the Bible and religious tracts (a philosophical approach that is unmistakably similar to Betteredge’s faith in *Robinson Crusoe*). Far from an enlightened point of view, however, Collins exposes Clack’s perspective as narrow and limiting. Clack’s narrative is most illuminating in moments in which she is entirely unaware that she inadvertently exposes a truth very different from her perception.

Miss Clack’s portrayal of Godfrey Ablewhite as the paragon of Christian virtue is likely to alert the reader that he will ultimately be revealed as quite the opposite. When he is captured and searched by the Indians in pursuit of the diamond (a rather obvious clue that he must be somehow involved in the diamond’s disappearance), Clack interprets the

circumstances to mean that “Mr. Godfrey had been the victim of some incomprehensible error, committed by certain unknown men. A dark conspiracy was on foot in the midst of us; and our beloved and innocent friend had been entangled in its meshes” (207). Clack’s exaggerated tone seems lifted from another genre; it implies her distance from a straightforward, empirical point of view, but it also exposes how her superficial obsession with religion has handicapped her intuitive understanding of the world. Clack goes on to muse, “When the Christian hero of a hundred charitable victories plunges into a pitfall that has been dug for him by mistake, oh, what a warning it is to the rest of us to be unceasingly on our guard! How soon may our own evil passions prove to be Oriental noblemen who pounce on us unawares!” (207). The personification of worldly passion in the form of Oriental noblemen is Clack’s misguided interpretation of the circumstantial evidence, an extension of her misguided interpretation of Christian duty. But even as she defends Godfrey, she unwittingly reveals truths about him that are as yet undiscovered – his own “evil passions” left him scrambling for money to pay his debts and were then personified in the form of Oriental noblemen, the Brahmin Indians intent on retrieving the Moonstone from its true thief.

Miss Clack is perhaps the most transparent example of a subjective interpretation of “plain facts.” As Alexander Welsh demonstrates, the narrative structure of *The Moonstone* is evidence of the novel’s “insistence on different points of view and on the difficulty of representation.”<sup>147</sup> The difficulty of representing the facts of the case highlights the role of observer as interpreter in empiricism and is a reflection of the epistemological dilemma familiar to many Victorians: the gap between empirical and non-empirical forms of knowledge. Collins anticipates a reader who relies upon this distinction, but who is also

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<sup>147</sup> Alexander Welsh, *Strong Representations*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), ix.

familiar with the experience of overlap between empirical and intuitive methods of getting at the truth. Clack's portion of the novel, which claims to follow Franklin's rules by starting with "plain facts" and writing only "as far as our own personal experience extends, and no further," actually reinforces the ambiguity of "facts" and blurs the distinction between empirical and intuitive experience (21-2). As Ross C. Murfin explains in his article on Dickens and Collins, Collins's work emphasizes that "[m]uch personal experience is imaginative [...] and much of what gets written, consequently, is not factual."<sup>148</sup>

In its construction as a series of first person narratives, Collins's novel almost seems to respond directly to Lewes's assertion in their published exchange of letters that "people are never so little to be believed as when narrating what they have seen."<sup>149</sup> This concern underscores the difficulty of approaching an objective truth from a subjective point of view—a problem that Collins's novel tries to mitigate with its multiplicity of narrators and attention to material facts. Writing in hindsight but limiting themselves to their own experiences, the narrators unwittingly expose the interpretive influence of human experience on empirical facts, juxtaposing moral judgment and material evidence as equal parts of an eye-witness report. This complexly wrought process gestures toward the difficulty of telling an unbiased and objective truth. Betteredge innocently suggests as much when he imagines "a member of the family reading these pages fifty years hence. Lord! what a compliment he will feel it, to be asked to take nothing on hearsay, and to be treated in all respects like a Judge on the bench" (197). The irony is, of course, that *everything* is hearsay. Jenny Bourne Taylor argues that the narratives are actually meant to reveal "the shifting and provisional

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<sup>148</sup> Ross C. Murfin, "The Art of Representation: Collins' *The Moonstone* and Dickens' Example" *ELH* 49.3 (Autumn 1982): 654-55.

<sup>149</sup> Lewes, "The Fallacy of Clairvoyance," 305.

nature of evidence, the arbitrary and unreliable nature of memory.”<sup>150</sup> Collins explicitly uses the analogy of witnesses appearing before a judge only to emphasize the essential impossibility of telling “nothing but the truth.” Each narrative becomes a piece of evidence itself – and therefore as potentially misleading as it is potentially revelatory. The reader must sift through the information, realizing that what seems empirical may be unreliable, and that the most significant evidence may be feeling, not fact.

The unreliability of eye-witness narratives would have been no real surprise to Collins’s Victorian readers. In his study, *Strong Representations*, Alexander Welsh demonstrates that the nineteenth-century courts valued circumstantial evidence over eyewitness testimony, should they stand in opposition. Welsh cites William Paley’s *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1812), in which Paley summarizes this ideological perspective, articulating the desire for immutable evidence: “A concurrence of well authenticated circumstances composes a stronger ground of assurance than positive testimony, unconfirmed by circumstances, usually affords. Circumstances cannot lie.”<sup>151</sup> The reliability of circumstantial evidence, along with the truth-value of eyewitness testimony, is precisely what Collins challenges in *The Moonstone*. Information that is both legally admissible and undeniably compelling in a nineteenth-century court of law is held as a standard of truth and simultaneously undermined by a work of fiction that demonstrates the potential fallacies of its cultural epistemology. As Welsh observes, in nineteenth-century England, “narrative consisting of carefully managed circumstantial evidence, highly conclusive in itself and often scornful of direct testimony, flourished nearly everywhere—not only in literature but in

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<sup>150</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), 202.

<sup>151</sup> Qtd. in Welsh, *Strong Representations*, 16.

criminal jurisprudence, natural science, natural religion, and history writing itself.”<sup>152</sup>

“Circumstances cannot lie” became a kind of slogan for empiricists across disciplines—a satisfying remark that Collins’s novel provokingly calls into question. Rather than presenting—as George Eliot does—an omniscient narrator to describe the circumstances of human behavior and then to explain them through examination of historical and material situations, Collins offers a series of unreliable narratives: circumstantial evidence, bound up in eye-witness testimony. In *The Moonstone*, circumstances *can* lie and people are not always what they seem. If both eye-witnesses and circumstantial evidence are equally unreliable, what method is there for getting at the truth?

The answer to this question depends, of course, on who’s asking. Collins’s novel seems to set up material facts only to undermine their authenticity. The clairvoyance or mesmerism of the Brahmin Indians is juxtaposed with the empirical investigation of the British detective. What is perhaps most significant about these categories is not their clear distinctions, but rather their slipperiness. The narrators of *The Moonstone* tend to make arbitrary and nebulous distinctions in regard to intuitive understanding and fact-based analysis. There is a presumed difference between an acceptable sort of premonition (usually a vague sense of foreboding experienced by an upstanding English citizen) and the far more suspicious and problematic belief in the “marvellous and supernatural”—the superstitions associated with the Brahmin Indians who arrive in England to search for the Moonstone. The novel highlights these distinctions with narrators who are eager to disassociate themselves from the mysterious clairvoyance of the Indians; at the same time, it undermines a sense of difference with the uncanny accuracy of the Indians’ non-empirical visions.

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<sup>152</sup> Welsh, ix.

Early in the novel, the three Indians' method of locating the Moonstone is depicted as a scene of mysterious clairvoyance:

...the Indian took a bottle from his bosom, and poured out of it some black stuff, like ink, into the palm of the boy's hand. The Indian – first touching the boy's head, and making signs over it in the air – then said, 'Look.' The boy became quite stiff, and stood like a statue looking into the ink in the hollow of his hand. (31)

After gazing at the pool of ink, the boy then reports that "It is on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel to-day" (31). Unable to give further details, the boy protests, "I am tired. The mist rises in my head, and puzzles me. I can see no more to-day" (32). The novel makes no claims for the reliability of ink-reading (in fact, the Indians' investigative methods are depicted as suspect and menacing, though ultimately successful), but in a tacit avowal of intuition—and perhaps even a form of clairvoyance—this vision turns out to be exactly right: Franklin Blake will fulfill the prophecy, arriving with the diamond for Rachel. Upon realizing that he unknowingly fulfilled the presentiment, Franklin declares himself open-minded to non-empirical modes of understanding. Unlike other characters (like Betteredge, who professes faith in rationality while simultaneously defying it) Franklin sets up his future success as an amateur detective by acknowledging that "truth" may not be fully represented by empirical facts: "I am an imaginative man; and the butcher, the baker, and the tax-gatherer, are not the only credible realities in existence to *my* mind" (52). He is willing to entertain the possibility of "a plot with some old Hindoo superstition at the bottom of it" (51) and looks for moments of connection rather than disparity.

The inky vision functions primarily as a means of distinguishing the Indians' search for the diamond from their English counterparts'. English traveler Mr. Murthwaite, a rationalist noted for having "a weary look, and a steady, attentive eye" is the novel's resident

expert on foreign cultures (77). He explains away the clairvoyance with a reference to mesmeric science: “The clairvoyance in this case is simply a development of the romantic side of the Indian character. [...] Their boy is unquestionably a sensitive subject to the mesmeric influence – and, under that influence, he has no doubt reflected what was already in the mind of the person mesmerizing him” (290). In his public conversation with Lewes in 1852, Collins had defended the mesmeric practices of his friend and family doctor, John Elliotson. At that time, Collins’s support of mesmerism spoke for a significant portion of the general public (and number of scientists and philosophers) who still found the power and possibility of mesmerism quite persuasive. But by the late 1860s, when Collins was writing *The Moonstone*, the majority of the public had followed the scientific community in its shift away from the mesmeric sciences and toward acceptance of a biological and physiological understanding of the nervous system.<sup>153</sup> Although *The Moonstone* does not endorse mesmerism, it flirts with the possibility of it and other non-empirical modes of understanding, continually highlighting Collins’s insistent claim, “The incredible [is] not always impossible!”

Elliotson himself died the same year that *The Moonstone* was published and, despite the presence of mesmerism in the novel, it is likely that by 1868 Collins was no longer the active proponent he once had been. Still, mesmerism serves its purpose well in *The Moonstone* by offering a plausible explanation of hypnotic influence that serves to satisfy skeptics and empiricists in the novel. Mesmerism symbolizes the controversy that science generally embodied in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, particularly as it figured in contemporary literature. As Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne observe in their introduction to *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, “Scientific orthodoxy and literary authority were constantly in flux

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<sup>153</sup> Winter, 5-9.

throughout the nineteenth century.”<sup>154</sup> Science in *The Moonstone* is a systematic procedure from which it is presumed that “facts” can be inductively determined, but it is also infused with imaginative possibilities. This combination is more than a little uneasy; mesmerism gets mixed up with clairvoyance and what appear to be empirical facts turn out to be as controversial as individual opinions. Most significantly, these moments of factual uncertainty propel the narrative forward rather than leading it astray.

Some critics suggest that the assimilation of the superstitious and the scientific in *The Moonstone* ultimately diminishes the credibility of science as a final authority in the novel.<sup>155</sup> Although the authority of any one version of “truth” is certainly undermined in the course of the narrative, I believe that the ambiguity of science in the novel speaks more to the discipline’s diverse history rather than to a nagging flaw in the mystery’s solution. Science in *The Moonstone* is still a fairly uneasy assimilation of speculation and fact-finding. The scientist Ezra Jennings, who proposes an experiment to solve the mystery, is himself an example of this complicated combination. His work straddles the division between modern physiology and antiquated theories about the mind/body relationship. Mesmerism fits neatly into this moment of progress that has not entirely let go of the past. As Alison Winter explains in her expansive study of mesmeric practices in Victorian England, mesmerism didn’t just disappear: “Rather than being exposed as fraudulent or explained away by progressive science, it was absorbed into other practices, particularly psychic research, physiology, and psychoanalysis.”<sup>156</sup> Whatever Collins’s opinion of mesmerism by 1868, the novel makes the most of its notoriety. Mesmerism functions as a quasi-scientific explanation that neutralizes

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<sup>154</sup> Willis and Wynne, *Victorian Literary Mesmerism* (Rodopi: Amsterdam-New York, 2006), 7.

<sup>155</sup> Philip O’Neill, *Wilkie Collins: Women, Property and Propriety*, (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1988), 19.

<sup>156</sup> Winter, 8.



the otherwise completely inexplicable clairvoyance of the Brahmin Indians. Rather than undermining the authority of Ezra Jennings's scientific experiment toward the end of the novel, mesmerism infuses science with a vast sense of possibility that unites the material with the metaphysical. In *The Moonstone*, mesmerism functions as a promising, albeit problematic, link between the empirical and the metaphysical, one that uneasily connects the work of the respectable scientist with the superstition of the strange foreigners.

It is precisely this unsettling connection between the world of science and superstition that lawyer and friend of the Verinder family, Matthew Bruff, vehemently resists. Like Betteredge, Bruff claims allegiance to rationality. On the contrary, though, Bruff's approach to the mystery relies heavily on a moral certainty that is purely intuitive to the point of being irrational, no matter what sort of logic he claims to follow. Bruff explains that his inquiry into the missing diamond and the presence of the Indians in England has a specific purpose: his "object in following the Indian plot, step by step, is to trace results back, by rational means, to natural causes" (291). This strategy, Bruff feels, is strictly empirical in a way that the hypothetical experiment, which requires a reenactment of the night the diamond disappears, is not. He insists that such an experiment would be no more than "a piece of trickery, akin to the trickery of mesmerism, clairvoyance, and the like" (402). Bruff's protests get to the heart of the mystery in *The Moonstone*—the moment when the Objective meets the Subjective and distinctions between fact and imagination become significantly blurred. The dangers of science seem to be inextricable from its possibilities and it becomes a source of anxiety too closely linked to the inexplicable. Ironically, the seemingly obvious conflict between what one feels to be true and what one can prove is taken in stride, with the facts subsumed under the surety that comes from knowing someone's character. As Sergeant Cuff will discover when his investigation begins, no

matter how fervently the British middle-class claims to trust empirical evidence, they find their own “moral certainty” equally persuasive.

Professional detective work in *The Moonstone* strives to be utterly empirical, which is its greatest strength as a source of authoritative truth; ironically, it is also its crucial flaw. Sergeant Cuff is the Scotland Yard detective who arrives from London to investigate the diamond’s disappearance.<sup>157</sup> His most important skill is keen observation: “His eyes, of steely light grey, had a very disconcerting trick, when they encountered your eyes, of looking as if they expected more from you than you were aware of yourself” (106). Cuff investigates the facts, which, in theory, should unequivocally reveal the criminal and, presumably, divulge his or her motive in the process. Cuff is the English response to the clairvoyant practices of the Indian trio. He carefully and methodically solves the case in a “step by step” fashion that presumably would meet the lawyer Bruff’s approval. It’s interesting that what distinguishes Cuff from other characters in the novel—and what finally gets him dismissed from the case—is his absolute allegiance to the empirical facts, even when they contradict the intuitive knowledge of others involved in the case.

According to an empirical epistemology, everything that can be known can be discovered and verified through the senses. Accordingly, close scrutiny of the material evidence should objectively explain who committed the crime and how and why they did it. Sergeant Cuff’s observation begins with the smear of paint on the door, a clue that had been dismissed by the local Superintendent Seegrave as “a mere trifle.” Sergeant Cuff’s empirical approach has little patience for Seegrave: “In all my experience along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world, I have never met with such a thing as a trifle yet” (109). Like the scientist and the novelist, the detective’s success is similarly built upon discovering

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<sup>157</sup> The detective branch of the Metropolitan Police was established in Scotland Yard in 1842.

significance in the seemingly insignificant. Cuff's job is to carefully collect these "trifles" until the circumstantial evidence leads him to draw a conclusion based on his own experience, which tells him "that young ladies of rank and position do occasionally have private debts which they dare not acknowledge to their nearest relatives and friends" (172). Motive and opportunity, based on an empirical assessment of the facts of the case, belong only to Rachel Verinder and her servant Rosanna Spearman.

Cuff's detective work is deliberately separated from his moral judgment—a division that should be ideal in terms of objectivity and lack of bias—but blind justice becomes threatening when it points toward the innocent. Moreover, empirical analysis of facts gets inevitably complicated by social assumptions that influence the interpretation of material evidence. Cuff believes his detective work is based strictly on empirical facts informed by previous experience but his crucial mistake results from making incorrect assumptions about motivations. Although he correctly divines that the servant Rosanna Spearman is mixed up in the disappearance of the Moonstone, he mistakes her motivation. Without a subjective understanding of motive, an objective assessment of evidence leads in the wrong direction. Sergeant Cuff is entirely accurate when he observes that the paint on Rachel's door must have been smeared by a nightgown which is now nowhere to be found; he is also correct that only Rosanna had the opportunity to replace an item in the household linen. This evidence, coupled with her unfortunate past, which included an arrest for theft, Rosanna clearly appears to have been involved in the Moonstone's disappearance. Of course, Rosanna *is* involved, but not in the way the evidence suggests. Her personal motives are a well-guarded secret and none of the men investigating can understand them. Betteredge notes, "Neither Mr. Franklin, with his wonderful foreign training, nor I, with my age, experience, and natural mother-wit, had the ghost of an idea of what Rosanna Spearman's

unaccountable behavior really meant” (40). Only Betteredge’s daughter Penelope intuits what these men have missed: “there’s only one explanation of it. Rosanna has fallen in love with Mr. Franklin Blake at first sight!” (58). Empirical evidence had no way of proving poor Rosanna’s romantic feelings. When Rosanna hides crucial evidence, she is not morally guilty the way Cuff believes her to be; that is, she conceals evidence to protect Franklin, not to assist Rachel or to benefit herself. Compared to the moral certainty of Penelope’s sympathetic understanding, the limitations of empiricism make it harsh and unkind. In an inverse example of the assumption that a beautiful woman can’t be an opportunistic criminal, the idea of a misshapen servant girl falling in love with a gentleman is far more incomprehensible to the investigators than the possibility of Rosanna’s guilt.

Cuff’s theory develops solely from the empirical evidence he collects as an objective observer; he never speculates about the improbable. This efficient and methodical approach has connected Cuff to real-life Scotland Yard detective John Whicher; critics have noted that the two share a penchant for detail and an open-minded willingness to suspect wealthy family members as well as servants.<sup>158</sup> Whicher was most famous for his investigation of the Road House murder of 1860, in which a little boy was murdered and all evidence pointed to the crime having been committed by a member of his household, perhaps a family member.<sup>159</sup> Collins is believed to have drawn some of the details of *The Moonstone* from the facts of that tragedy, particularly a missing blood-stained nightgown presumed to be crucial evidence in the young boy’s murder. Perhaps the most remarkable similarity, however, is that Sergeant Cuff, like Detective Whicher, gets removed from the case for dutifully and

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<sup>158</sup> See Ronald Thomas, 65, and Welsh, *Strong Representations*, 217.

<sup>159</sup> For further discussion of the Road House murder and Whicher’s role in the investigation, see Kate Summerscale, *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher: A Shocking Murder and the Undoing of a Great Victorian Detective* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008).

relentlessly follows the empirical evidence, even when it points to a young woman whom everyone insists must be innocent. Of course, Cuff is proved wrong while Whicher was eventually vindicated—the young girl he suspected of murdering her brother later confessed. The tragic real life crime of the Road House murder underscores the complicated problem of accounting for empiricism and intuition when either could be wrong and both are enmeshed in social or cultural assumptions. Collins puts the opposite spin of Whicher's story, demonstrating the limitations of empiricism, but the factual and fictional detective tale each illustrates a cultural preoccupation with these alternative methods of cognition and the unacknowledged influence of social assumption or personal bias.

Cuff's persistence in following the empirical facts of the case is admirable; the detective remains a trustworthy and respectable figure even when his assessment of the facts fails to reveal the whole truth. Circumstances are powerfully convincing, and even loyal Betteredge intuitively senses that the evidence seems to be pointing in a disturbing direction: "A kind of cold shudder ran through me, which I couldn't account for at the time. I know, now, that I must have got my first suspicion, at that moment, of a new light (and a horrid light) having suddenly fallen on the case, in the mind of Sergeant Cuff" (112). Betteredge is right: Cuff has come to the conclusion that Rachel—with Rosanna's help—is behind the diamond's disappearance. The circumstances—especially her silence on the matter—indicate that his suspicion is quite reasonable. But the facts of the case have nothing to do with her innocence as a matter of moral certainty. For those who know Rachel, her guilt is impossible, no matter what the evidence says. Nevertheless, Sergeant Cuff is committed to following the empirical evidence where it leads – even when it leads to his removal from the case.

Sensitive to the emotional response even as he is determined to present the facts, Cuff explains his suspicions to Lady Verinder somewhat apologetically: “That is the conclusion which my experience draws from plain facts. What does your ladyship’s experience say against it?” (173). Lady Verinder’s response is a flat denial. Her refusal to believe the “plain facts” is an important conflict in the novel. When her intuition about her daughter is posited against factual evidence, Lady Verinder’s intuition is the more trustworthy indicator of the truth. She has been uneasy about Sergeant Cuff from the moment he arrived, perhaps because she already knew where the facts of the case might lead: “There is something in that police-officer from London which I recoil from – I don’t know why. I have a presentiment that he is bringing trouble and misery with him into the house. Very foolish and very unlike *me* – but so it is” (116). Betteredge speculates, “My lady’s horror of him might (as I have since thought) have meant that *she* saw his drift (as the scripture says) ‘in a glass darkly’ ” (121). Like many of the other characters in the novel, Lady Verinder seems to be typically rational and pragmatic; given a situation in which her feelings contradict the facts of the case, however, she has no qualms about dismissing the facts. Poor Lady Verinder, who will not live long enough to see the true thief revealed, is rather tragically correct about Sergeant Cuff’s bringing trouble, as she is about Rachel’s innocence. It is precisely Cuff’s whole-hearted reliance on empirical evidence that fulfills Lady Verinder’s intuitive presentiment that he will bring “trouble and misery with him into the house.” Lady Verinder’s response to Cuff’s suspicions may seem irrational but it is authoritatively final as well: “The circumstances have misled you” (173). Her response tellingly distorts William Paley’s famous slogan, “Circumstances cannot lie.” *The Moonstone* of course, is precisely interested in circumstances that do lie. Its sensation and its science lie in its ability to reveal empirical evidence to be as questionable as the biased opinions of

those involved in the case. Lady Verinder's faith in Rachel's innocence defies Cuff's rationality; her moral certainty in the face of seemingly conclusive material evidence exemplifies the conflict between fact and feeling that is carried forward in the narrative.

As D. A. Miller argues, the dispute between Sergeant Cuff and those who refuse to believe in Rachel's guilt (Lady Verinder, and also Betteredge and Bruff) is "explicitly epistemological: at one extreme, an 'outside' knowledge constituted by an interventionary reconstruction of its object; at the other, an 'inside' knowledge consubstantial with what it comes to know."<sup>160</sup> In *The Moonstone*, "outside" knowledge is circumstantial and empirical; insiders are privy to a subjective, intuitive understanding of Rachel's character that allows them to dismiss what would otherwise seem like indisputable proof. Betteredge remarks, "It was downright frightful to hear him piling up proof after proof against Miss Rachel, and to know, while one was longing to defend her, that there was no disputing the truth of what he said. I am (thank God!) constitutionally superior to reason. This enabled me to hold firm to my lady's view, which was my view also" (174). Here again Betteredge comically declares his allegiance to empiricism and simultaneously defies his own logic to trust in Rachel's innocence. Betteredge admits that based on circumstances alone, Rachel's guilt seems obvious: "If you desert me, and side with the Sergeant, on the evidence before you... I own I can't blame you for arriving at that conclusion" (197).

The epistemological divide gets quickly drawn and, as characters choose sides, most of them are quick to abandon an objective assessment of facts in order to defend Rachel. Intuitive knowledge provides a moral certainty that no evidence can dissuade, which undermines the authority of an empirical method of reading the world. Lawyer Bruff repudiates his previous allegiance to facts and rationality when he declares, "If the plainest

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<sup>160</sup> D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 40.

evidence in the world pointed one way and nothing but Rachel's word of honour pointed the other, I would take her word before the evidence, lawyer as I am!" (226). As the plot of *The Moonstone* unfolds, however, it becomes clear that, while moral certainty is surer than material fact, it is utterly ineffectual without it.

Bruff states the truth as he sees it, with little or no corroborating evidence: "Rachel's own innocence is ... beyond a doubt. Mr. Ablewhite's innocence is equally certain – or Rachel would never have testified to it. And Franklin Blake's innocence, as you have seen, unanswerably asserts itself. On the one hand we are morally certain of all these things" (230). But moral certainty actually offers little in the way of explanation and in that way is a very unsatisfactory way of knowing. Alexander Welsh simplifies Miller's consideration of an epistemological conflict when he suggests that "*The Moonstone* is largely a case of Bruff versus Cuff: faith in personal acquaintance rather than chains of circumstance."<sup>161</sup> This division between ways of knowing is, of course, necessary to the plot, but at the same time it runs the danger of oversimplifying the novel's efforts to move beyond an either/or choice between intuition and empirical fact by finding a way to unite these two perspectives.

Miller and Welsh rightly note a sharp division between these two modes of knowing, but I find *The Moonstone* to be most interested in bridging that difference, in finding a way to assimilate personal feeling with material fact. *The Moonstone's* conflict between physical proof and moral certainty is a version of the more generally perceived Victorian opposition between the physical and moral—a distinction that is both desirable and problematic. Taking for granted that verifiable facts would be far more persuasive than any one individual's fervent belief, *The Moonstone* starts from an assumption that favors empiricism, only to defy that epistemology by privileging intuition as a source of moral certainty. An

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<sup>161</sup> Welsh, *Strong Representations*, 228.



empirical investigation is refreshingly yet dangerously free from moral judgment. The problem with a strictly empirical investigation is that it leaves no room for human feeling, including sympathy, compassion, or an intuitive faith in another person's moral character. Even as *The Moonstone* scorns the misapplication of Victorian morality (eg. Miss Clack), it seeks an alternative epistemology that might counter the vast indifference of empiricism. The categorical separation of moral certainty from facts corresponds to an increasing desire to remedy this anxiety by combining these methods of knowing the world without diminishing the efficacy of either perspective.

An epistemological combination of sorts becomes indispensable when the novel makes clear that empirical evidence alone will never solve the case. This is most obvious because Rachel actually saw Franklin take the diamond. Her perspective is based on empirical evidence—evidence that illustrates the divide between “facts” and “truth,” proving that Franklin can be at once empirically guilty and morally innocent—both himself and not himself. Rachel is both correct and mistaken when she, at long last, confronts Franklin: “*You villain, I saw you take the diamond with my own eyes!*” (347). Objectively, she's right. The fact is that Franklin did remove the diamond from its drawer. This certainty convinces Rachel not only of Franklin's guilt, but also of Godfrey Ablewhite's innocence. Her interpretation of the material evidence is both extremely logical and profoundly incorrect. When her side of the story is finally told (more than halfway through the novel), the focus of the narrative shifts from how to find the Moonstone to how to clear Franklin's name. Given Franklin's innocence (and his ignorance of his role in the crime), there is no explanation except that the facts are misleading; the truth must be discovered another way.

The conflict between empirical evidence and moral certitude comes to a head when Franklin discovers the missing nightgown, a crucial piece of evidence that unquestionably

reveals the thief's identity with its tell-tale paint smear. Rather than solving the mystery, Franklin finds himself once again bewildered by the nametag on the nightgown: "I had discovered Myself as the 'Thief'" (314). This fact seems so impossible to believe that Betteredge is ready to throw out empiricism entirely. He turns on the nightgown, "pointing to it as if it were a living creature that could hear him, '*He's a liar, to begin with*'" (316). Betteredge comically verbalizes the anxiety about absolute proof that suddenly seems untrustworthy. Franklin is unwilling to simply disregard the facts but has no idea how to interpret this empirical evidence, given the moral certainty that he did not take the Moonstone: "The paint on the nightgown, and the name on the nightgown are facts" (316). Betteredge responds with well-meant advice that reflects the overthrow of his own formerly pragmatic point of view: "Take a drop more grog, Mr. Franklin, and you'll get over the weakness of believing in facts!" (316). It comes off as comic relief, but it also foreshadows the mystery's resolution. Belief in facts may not be a weakness, but it can certainly limit one's perspective and therefore hinder one from discovering the truth. It will require a comprehensive approach – one that bridges the distance between empirical and moral certainty – to establish the complete circumstances of the missing Moonstone.

In order to solve the mystery, the investigation must move beyond empiricism to discover not only who took the diamond but why it was taken. Facts may not always mislead, but even at their most straightforward they paint an incomplete picture. Facts may reveal the criminal but they fail to explain the motive. Because the motivations behind Rosanna and Franklin's actions—Rosanna's unrequited love and Franklin's opium-induced trance—are impossible to discover empirically, the innocence of each can only be intuitively surmised. As Bruff exclaims in frustration, "What is the use of my experience, what is the use of any person's experience, in such a case as that? It baffles me; it baffles you; it baffles

everybody” (230). In a baffling state of confusion, empirical evidence of guilt and the moral certainty of innocence appear at an impasse. Truth lies in motive, in intention, and the circumstantial evidence does not provide those answers. Another form of investigation is necessary; one that achieves the objective analysis of material evidence, but which also makes intuitive and imaginative leaps. Collins presents this possibility in the form of a scientific experiment proposed by Ezra Jennings, a character whose presence—like his science—is defined by unsettling physical and emotional oppositions.

In order to reach a comprehensive explanation, the novel turns from the world of empirical evidence and methodical police work to the more ambiguous discipline of science. *The Moonstone* challenges science’s status as a reliable and consistent source of practical knowledge; at the same time, it suggests that science has the power to unlock “the most mysterious of mysteries.” The excitement and possibility of science is present in Collins’s novel in a way that is lacking in earlier works with similar preoccupations, like those by Dickens and Braddon. As improbable as the mystery’s solution may seem, in many ways it reflects a sense of power and opportunity that represents the later-nineteenth-century’s emerging view of science. Ronald Thomas argues that much of *The Moonstone*’s significance lies in its use of contemporary forensic criminology: “The remarkable achievement of this novel is to convince [Franklin] Blake (and us) to approve of this bold experiment as acceptable practice and to submit to the sanctions of science for determining our guilt or innocence.”<sup>162</sup> *The Moonstone*’s mystery, as well as its scientifically inspired resolution, is rooted in nineteenth-century scientific practices, and the unique possibility of science to harness intuitive and empirical methods of reading the world. The mystery’s solution is found neither through the careful collection of empirical evidence nor through a sudden

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<sup>162</sup> Ronald Thomas, 74

intuitive glimpse of the truth. Instead, a scientific experiment becomes the Objective-Subjective method of achieving a comprehensive explanation.

Ezra Jennings enters the novel as the doctor's assistant with a mysterious past—a well-meaning stranger who helps solve the mystery by enacting “a bold experiment” (388). His speculations convince Franklin to reenact the events that occurred the night the Moonstone disappeared—complete with a replicated dose of laudanum that Jennings believes was secretly administered to Franklin by Mr. Candy, the family doctor. Jennings's scientific approach is the prime example of the possibilities and the problems that result from yoking two very dissimilar perspectives – in this case, his intellectual empiricism is coupled with a sympathetic form of intuition. The essential purpose of the scientific experiment that Jennings proposes is to combine the moral certainty of Franklin's innocence with the circumstantial evidence that seems to contradict it. Science is presented as uniquely capable of integrating this Objective-Subjective methodology. As Ira Bruce Nadel argues, science for Wilkie Collins “is not a rigorous, objective methodology, but a loose combination of rationalism and experiment, of observation and imagination.”<sup>163</sup> This combination is most significant not as a “loose” jumble of the empirical and the imaginative, but as a deliberate and purposeful assimilation of objective and subjective methods of investigation. Even as a comprehensive solution, however, the uneasy combination of these modes of understanding emerges as both the strength and weakness of the scientific pursuit.

The opportunity for this experiment comes from Jennings's meticulous research and his dedication to his employer, Mr. Candy. When the doctor falls ill shortly after the dinner party, Jennings's studies and sympathies combine as he carefully records Mr. Candy's delirious speech and attempts to fill in the blanks to create a coherent narrative. In this way,

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<sup>163</sup> Ira Bruce Nadel, “Science and *The Moonstone*,” *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction* 11 (1983): 240.

Jennings's personal devotion to Mr. Candy becomes interconnected with his research on "the intricate and delicate subject of the brain and nervous system" (374). Candy's fragmented speech, as translated by Jennings, reveals his passive but crucial role in the Moonstone's disappearance. It also explains Franklin's apparent guilt – the doctor's secret administration of laudanum resulted in Franklin sleepwalking. However, without Candy fully recovering his memory of that night, this theory lies too far in the realm of intuition to be a plausible explanation in an empirical investigation. These speculations must be tested and proven unequivocally if Franklin is to be cleared, which Jennings suggests can be done through scientific experiment.

Science is an empowering response to Franklin's confusion and stasis in the face of facts that are wrong yet appear irrefutable: "It is certain that I went into the room... it is certain that I took the Diamond. I can only meet those two plain facts by declaring that, do what I might, I did it without my own knowledge—" (381). Jennings uses science to respond to Franklin's quandary by integrating empirical fact with the moral certainty of Franklin's innocence: "First, that you entered Miss Verinder's sitting room and took the Diamond, in a state of trance, produced by opium. Secondly, that the opium was given to you by Mr. Candy – without your knowledge – as a practical refutation of the opinions which you had expressed to him" (385). Resistance to the experiment, particularly Bruff's protests that the experiment is "trickery," anticipates the resistance of Collins's readers, whose own position in an epistemology of empiricism (regardless of their own intuitive convictions) may render them skeptical of a scientific method based on hypothesis rather than on empirical evidence. At the same time, the possibility of proving an intuitive feeling is extremely appealing. Science succeeds in the novel because—like the novel itself—it manages to be both empirical and clairvoyant; it can "trace results back, by rational means,

to natural causes” and reveal “things invisible to their eyes” (290-1). Ideally, the scientific process will account for a “truth” by making the non-empirical visible in the results of a scientific experiment.

Interestingly for a climactic moment in the novel, the experiment actually reveals very little that we do not already know. Franklin unconsciously took the diamond; the real thief is someone who took it from him. Franklin’s innocence has been convincing all along, and when all is said and done, the diamond is still missing. The significance of the experiment lies in Rachel’s belief in Franklin’s guilt and the power of her empirical observations to overrule her personal feelings for him. Rachel is the only one, it seems, who truly needs to be convinced that Franklin is innocent, and the only thing that can refute her belief in his guilt is empirical evidence that proves his innocence. As a crucial moment in the novel, the experiment is in many ways rather farcical (Betteredge, for instance, is asked to replicate the furnishings and arrangements of the dinner party and frets over the loss of a stuffed buzzard that burst while in storage). Between the tension and the comedy, the experiment is deliberately overwrought. It is an apotheosis of the attempt to know definitively and authoritatively, to understand both the actions and the motives of the criminal. But instead of solving the mystery in such a way as to celebrate the absolute success of the scientific approach, the experiment simply proves that circumstances are not always what they seem and that we are not always responsible for our actions.

“Facts” – like Franklin’s guilt, solidified when Rachel saw him take the diamond – are verified and discredited over and over again in *The Moonstone*. But this experiment makes the leap from unreliable circumstantial evidence to a new possibility: not only can circumstances be both true and false, but our very consciousnesses can be manipulated. We are and are not ourselves. Unconscious motivations exist and may be made accessible

through science. But even that process seems incomplete at best – *The Moonstone* retains a sense of mystery that is unrelated to the loss of the diamond and the identity of the thief. Science is no easy answer – it seems instead to be the source of further questions, particularly regarding the complexity of human motivations.

Even as it presents science as a revelatory method of reading the world, *The Moonstone* is not without its reservations regarding scientific developments, as evidenced by the troubled and troubling scientist figure of Ezra Jennings. Jennings’s mysterious past and uncertain origins seem to make him uniquely capable of holding both an intuitive and empirical perspective. Jennings is himself an embodiment of contradictions:

Judging him by his figure and his movements, he was still young. Judging him by his face, and comparing him with Betteredge, he looked the elder of the two [...] Add to this a quantity of thick closely-curling hair, which by some freak of Nature, had lost its color in the most startlingly partial and capricious manner. Over the top of his head it was still of the deep black which was its natural colour. Round the sides of his head—without the slightest gradation of grey to break the force of the extraordinary contrast—it had turned completely white. (326)

The oppositions in Jennings’s outer appearance – young and old, black and white, and “the mixture of some foreign race in his English blood” (371) – seem to be physical manifestations of the contradictions within him: “Physiology says, and says truly, that some men are born with female constitutions—and I am one of them!” (373). Anne-Marie Beller suggests it is precisely because of these contradictions that Jennings is “the most successful of the various amateur detectives in *The Moonstone*.”<sup>164</sup> Jennings’s unique combination of intuition and reason, in this case gendered by his emotional constitution and his rationality as a scientist, represents the combination of mental processes necessary for solving the mystery. But a scientist is not simply a great thinker who is in touch with his feminine side. As A. D.

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<sup>164</sup> Anne-Marie Beller, “Detecting the Self in the Sensation Fiction of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon,” *Clues* 26.1 (2008): 53-4.

Hutter notes, “Ezra Jennings is the ultimate detective of the novel who succeeds precisely because he is able to see both the significance of the most trivial details and to allow his mind to wander past the boundaries of rational thought.”<sup>165</sup> The possibility that science holds lies in the capability of the scientist to use his imagination to view the problem from alternative perspectives. Jennings’s secret and tragic past seems to have equipped him with the ability “to adopt the perspective of others and thus use their subjective experience.”<sup>166</sup> As a result, he has the exceptional ability to achieve an Objective-Subjective view of the situation. An opium addict with a dark secret, he is not exactly the hero of the novel. Instead, he personifies all of the uneasiness that troubles a culture attempting to balance moral values with new discoveries. His experiment allows for the authority of empirical science infused with sympathetic feeling. As an ideal, he is representative of the cultural desire to abide by empiricism without losing compassion in the sterility of facts.

In bridging these two distinct modes of understanding, Jennings might be seen to serve as an example of the way reason and intuition come together in a complementary yet unsettling relationship. His character suggests that reason and intuition may be productively combined to solve a mystery, but this new method of reading the world raises as many questions as it answers. Jennings embodies the challenges of this assimilation. In spite of his best efforts, “the puzzling contradictions” that comprise his form are “more or less calculated to produce an unfavourable impression of him on a stranger’s mind” (369). His foreign appearance and the sketchy details about his past suggest that Jennings is more properly aligned with the trio of Brahmin Indians rather than the Verinder family. By implication, his imaginative science runs loosely alongside the “Hindoo superstitions” and is

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<sup>165</sup> A. D. Hutter, “Dreams, Transformations, and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction,” *Victorian Studies: A Journal of the Humanities, Arts and Sciences* 19 (1975): 183.

<sup>166</sup> Hutter, 183.



perhaps equally suspect. As Betteredge indignantly exclaims, “I am reckoned to have got as pretty a knowledge and experience of the world as most men. And what does it all end in? It ends, Mr. Ezra Jennings, in a conjuring trick being performed on Franklin Blake, by a doctor’s assistant with a bottle of laudanum – and by the living jingo, I’m appointed, in my old age, to be conjuror’s boy!” (403).

Betteredge’s wariness of Jennings’s experiment further highlights the problematic connection between Jennings’s work and the “trickery” of the clairvoyant Indians. Jennings’s past suffering is never fully explained, but it seems to be a driving force behind his efforts to assist Franklin: “I have mentioned an accusation which has rested on me for years. There are circumstances in connection with it that tell against me. I cannot bring myself to acknowledge what the accusation is. And I am incapable, perfectly incapable, of proving my innocence. I can only assert my innocence” (379). Jennings represents the fear associated with a faith in circumstantial evidence: the possibility that material evidence can be used to prove a falsehood—one that he is not at liberty to correct because the necessary proof may not even exist. Jennings thus attempts to do for Franklin what he cannot do for himself: align the empirical facts with the assertion of innocence and, in doing so, to embody an unreadable sign—to make the moral truth visible.

In his effort to convince Franklin (and the reader) that “Science sanctions my proposal, fanciful as it may seem,” Jennings authorizes his experiment by citing contemporary scientists, whose reputations speak to the varying perspectives within nineteenth-century science. Jennings begins with the relatively conservative Doctor William Carpenter (390). Carpenter was a professor of Forensic Medicine and of Physiology at University College and London Hospital. As a leader in the medical and scientific community, he openly criticized mesmerism and phrenology in favor of empirical

psychology. His main scientific interest was in the physiology of the nervous system. Carpenter led the way toward physiological psychology and had “a reputation for a careful and conservative approach to new scientific claims.”<sup>167</sup> The experiment is partly justified by one of Carpenter’s physiological principles: “There seems much ground for the belief, that *every* sensory impression which has once been recognized by the perceptive consciousness, is registered (so to speak) in the brain, and may be reproduced at some subsequent time, although there may be no consciousness of its existence in the mind during the whole intermediate period” (390).<sup>168</sup> This quotation is taken from Carpenter’s *Principles of Human Physiology*, published in 1842 (and held as the eminent publication in the field for many years following).<sup>169</sup> As a scientific source, it supports Jennings’s theory and satisfies Franklin’s skepticism. But Carpenter’s scientific methodology in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century also speaks to a larger concern of Collins’s novel – the particularity of an individual’s subjective experience and the essential role of the imagination in science.

Donald R. Benson, in his article “Facts and Constructs,” addresses the common misperception that nineteenth-century scientists were limited by their strict adherence to what they believed was a purely empirical framework. Benson notes that while writers and thinkers like Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill endorsed the sense of division between fact and feeling, many nineteenth-century scientists—among them William Carpenter—were

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<sup>167</sup> Hutter, 182.

<sup>168</sup> The fact that Franklin was in an opium-induced trance and has no memory of taking the diamond has invited and perpetuated some interesting psychoanalytic criticism about the role of the unconscious in Collins’s sensation novels. See Jenny Bourne Taylor’s *In the Secret Theatre of Home*.

<sup>169</sup> Nadel, 252.

well aware of the interpretative role of the scientist.<sup>170</sup> In his 1872 address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Carpenter argued that even fact-based scientific claims of Baconian science are necessarily interpretive. In his address, “Man the Interpreter of Nature,” Carpenter acknowledges that “[t]he Philosopher’s interpretation of Nature *seems* less individual than that of the Artist or the Poet, because it is based on facts which anyone may verify, and is elaborated by reasoning processes of which all admit the validity.”<sup>171</sup> Significantly, however, he cautions that empiricism cannot be equated with infallibility: “for it can be shown to be no less true of the Scientific conception of Nature, than it is of the Artistic or the Poetic, that it is *a representation framed by the Mind itself* out of the materials supplied by the impressions which external objects make upon the Senses; so that to each Man of Science, *Nature is what he individually believes her to be.*”<sup>172</sup>

*The Moonstone* is preoccupied with this correlation between the Poet and Scientist (later highlighted by George Eliot), represented in its narrative as each observer’s subjective point of view. Carpenter’s address underscores the potential unreliability of individual experience; Collins’s novel expands this notion of elusive objectivity, demonstrating that every experience is as imaginative or intuitive as it is factual. Admission of the scientist’s role as interpreter rather than mere recorder of data can empower but also threaten its legitimacy. *The Moonstone* undermines the sense of a final authority, but uses science to sanction its discoveries of “truth” because science can acknowledge the imaginative and intuitive paths by which truth is discovered. Indeed, the reference to Carpenter helps to

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<sup>170</sup> Donald R. Benson, “Facts and Constructs: Victorian Humanists and Scientific Theorists on Scientific Knowledge,” *Victorian Science and Victorian Values: Literary Perspectives* eds. James Paradis and Thomas Postlewait (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1981): 303.

<sup>171</sup> W. B. Carpenter, “Man the Interpreter of Nature,” *Victorian Science: A Self-Portrait from the Presidential Addresses of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, eds. George Basalla, William Coleman and Robert H. Kargon (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 418. Original italics.

<sup>172</sup> Carpenter, 419. Original italics.

reduce the sense of opposition between fact and feeling, as Carpenter argued for their mutual influence.

Defining Jennings's experiment in relation to contemporary scientific work seems to be a priority for Collins, whether he is insisting on its well-documented legitimacy or capitalizing on undiscovered potential. John Elliotson is also credited with some of the ideas behind Jennings's experiment, although Collins would have been aware of the notoriety associated with the man Jennings calls "one of the greatest English physiologists." The case to which Jennings refers was published in Elliotson's *Human Physiology* (1835). Collins quotes a passage from Elliotson, explaining the case that involved "an Irish porter to a warehouse, who forgot, when sober, what he had done when drunk; but being drunk, again recollected the transactions of his former state of intoxication" (390).<sup>173</sup> Without flatly endorsing mesmerism, *The Moonstone* still respectfully acknowledges Elliotson's unconventional and innovative investigation of phenomena, using his report as the inspiration for Jennings's scientific experiment and making the most of the controversies as well as the excitement that had at one time surrounded the mesmeric practices of John Elliotson.<sup>174</sup> Elliotson began his career as a physician and Professor of Medicine at the University College London. Intelligent, innovative, and charismatic, Elliotson looked to have a promising career and seemed a good fit at University College, which was "intended to be a place where faculty and students could develop innovative understandings of natural

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<sup>173</sup> It is worth noting that this passage "rests on the well-known authority of Mr. Combe" (Collins, *The Moonstone*, 390). George Combe, prolific phrenologist, in fact, apparently related the tale to Elliotson second-hand: " 'Dr. Abel informed me,' says Mr. Combe..." (390).

<sup>174</sup> See Alison Winter's *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) for a comprehensive study of the social history of mesmerism and its role in medical and scientific developments of the nineteenth century.

law unimpeded by the constraints of tradition.”<sup>175</sup> Elliotson’s early experiments in mesmerism and animal magnetism were certainly provocative and untraditional. In her study of mesmerism, Louise Henson writes that Elliotson’s claims “about the sensational therapeutic and clairvoyant powers of animal magnetism fuelled debates about the mysteries inherent in human nature and the curious interrelations of body and mind.”<sup>176</sup> These mysteries did not lose their intrigue, even after Elliotson’s career began a downward spiral as he faced accusations of faulty experiments and invalid data.<sup>177</sup> As scientific theories of mind and body moved toward psychology and evolutionary biology, Elliotson’s unflagging confidence in phrenology and mesmerism became detrimental to his reputation. He became increasingly marginalized within the medical and scientific community. Eventually he turned anti-establishment and resigned from the university in 1838, years before Collins defended clairvoyant experiments and Dickens cited Elliotson as a scientific source in his debate with Lewes about spontaneous combustion. The respectful reference to Elliotson in *The Moonstone* recalls his enthusiastic (if misguided) efforts to understand the mysterious relations between mind and body and helps to infuse Jennings’s experiment with the vast potential that is so crucial to Collins’s depiction of science.

Collins’s equal attention to two very different scientists suggests a significant similarity between the two, easily overlooked in light of their striking differences. Apart from specific references, *The Moonstone* more generally pays tribute to the larger framework of Elliotson’s *Human Physiology* and the way he assimilated non-empirical modes of understanding into a materialist worldview. His most famous work is driven by a theory of

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<sup>175</sup> Bernard V. Lightman, *Victorian Science in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 30.

<sup>176</sup> Louise Henson, “Mesmeric Delusions: Mind and Mental Training in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Writings,” *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, eds. Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 83-4.

<sup>177</sup> Winter, 95-98.

the mind and body which Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt summarize as “the scientific authorization to view the imagination as a life-giving organ and the imaginary work as the suspended vivacity of its author.”<sup>178</sup> *The Moonstone* is clearly invested in the significant connections between scientific knowledge and the imagination. It explicitly connects Carpenter with Elliotson in terms of Jennings’s experiment, but it also implies a complementary relationship between Carpenter’s insistence on the role of scientist as interpreter and Elliotson’s focus on the experiential significance of an individual’s imagination. In the novel, Jennings disregards the theoretical context that separates Elliotson from Carpenter and assimilates both theories into his own experimental hypothesis. He blurs the distinction between a qualified sense of empirical science and the progressive efforts of mesmerism, lumping both methods into an exploratory perspective that asserts the legitimacy of the scientific process but implies limitless possibilities rather than rigid categories.

Collins’s combination of imaginative and empirical approaches within a scientific investigation suggests that one of the great possibilities of progressive science is its capacity to link the apparently inexplicable and seemingly irrational with material fact. This potential capability affirms science as a source of progress and discovery but it also means that the boundaries between science and speculation are remarkably thin. Collins’s narrative itself essentially becomes an experiment: how to determine which methods of reading the world work best and how to account for forms of knowledge that do not fit in an objective assessment of the “plain facts.” When empiricism is not sufficient, *The Moonstone*’s scientific experiment is designed precisely to bring all of these factors together, causing it to feel somewhat fraught and over-determined.

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<sup>178</sup> Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 202.

The mystery of the Moonstone and the results of Jennings's experiment ultimately revolve around the mind-body divide. Opium is an empirical cause of this metaphysical dilemma, the solution to and source of the mystery. As Jennings explains to Franklin, "the case of the Irish porter may be your case. You may remember, under the influence of the second dose of opium, the place in which you hid the Diamond, under the influence of the first" (393). Opium exemplifies the domestic mysteries that make Collins's novel accessible and sensational. Its function in *The Moonstone* is simply to occlude Franklin's memory of his unconscious motivation. It serves as a viable explanation, familiar to Victorian readers as a drug that can be both remedy and vice. It also operates as another source of mystery – a connection to the East that invites an exotic culture into an English drawing room, a narcotic that acts as more than a sedative.

Collins's own opium use may have influenced the role of the drug in the novel as well as the composition of the novel itself. As Sandra Kemp remarks in her introduction to *The Moonstone*, "[a]s a novel about an experiment with opium written under the influence of opium, *The Moonstone* has always had a certain vogue."<sup>179</sup> In his 1871 Preface, Collins explains that while writing *The Moonstone* he was "struck prostrate... crippled in every limb by the torture of rheumatic gout" and that "[i]n the intervals of grief, in the occasional remissions of pain, I dictated from my bed" (5). Kemp notes that Collins later claimed that he could barely recall writing *The Moonstone* at all.<sup>180</sup> Although the use of opium can be read as a rather banal and convenient explanation for the mystery of a diamond whose significance spans continents, it actually raises as many questions as it answers. Instead of a convenient explanation, opium becomes the new heart of the mystery, with its unpredictable

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<sup>179</sup> Sandra Kemp, Introduction, *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins 1868 (London: Penguin, 1998), x.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

results and its capacity for dividing or uniting the mind and body. In the form of laudanum, it is an ordinarily prescribed drug—a vial in the medicine cabinet where the perceived superstitions of the East meet the self-proclaimed pragmatics and progress of nineteenth-century England. This mystery in the midst of medicine emphasizes that the mind is the very place where science meets superstition. The very proximity of these oppositions, like that of the East and West, the subjective and objective, the moral and physical, can be as illuminating as they are unsettling.

Although Jennings's experiment is successful in recreating Franklin's state of mind, it also demonstrates the limitations of empirical observation. Once the experiment is said and done, Franklin's innocence is obvious but the Moonstone is still missing and the thief is still unknown. Jennings regrets the inability to discover all of the facts surrounding the diamond's disappearance: "We have only partially reproduced the conditions, and the experiment has been only partially successful in consequence" (428). Still, this partial success is quite significant: science has proven the validity of moral certainty against empirical evidence.

Ezra Jennings, man of contradictions himself, demonstrates the capacity of science to blend seeming opposites into a viable and constructive method of reading the world — one that begins with imaginative speculation and ends with empirical evidence that can exonerate an innocent man. His experiment most significantly reveals how complicated motive is. Collins's experiment demonstrates that motive is the distinction between Franklin's guilt and innocence—and that it cannot be verified empirically. Combining objective and subjective views of the situation takes into account Franklin's feelings for Rachel, his suspicions about the danger of the diamond, and also poor Rosanna's feelings for Franklin. The experiment thus reveals the true possibility of being oneself and being



someone else at the same time. Franklin embodies this unconsciously: he appears to be the thief, but is actually innocent. Godfrey Ablewhite exemplifies this contradiction consciously and purposefully: he takes pains to appear innocent but is actually the thief. Motive (in this case, Godfrey's desperation for money) explains the mystery at last. Motive—not evidence—is the one thing upon which guilt or innocence hinges and motives are the province of the novelist.

Like *Bleak House*, *The Moonstone* represents empiricism as a system used to categorize, organize, and thereby limit the possibilities of the human imagination. In *The Moonstone*, however, science acts as the bridge between the empirical and the imaginative, the visible and the invisible, material fact and human motivation. These perspectives continually appear in opposition throughout Collins's novel but are ultimately revealed to work in tandem, producing an authoritative version of the truth that is both enlightening and disturbing. As *The Moonstone* demonstrates the advantages of combining empirical facts with intuitive beliefs, it also makes clear the pervasive cultural practice of separating them into distinct categories and never acknowledging the cultural assumptions that inform them. At the end of the novel, once Franklin's innocence is certain, it becomes obvious that Godfrey Ablewhite must have taken the diamond—previous assumptions about his good character were as mistaken as the empirical facts taken at face value. But by the time Godfrey is located, he has been murdered. This murder technically remains unsolved although all involved are absolutely convinced that the three Brahmin Indians at last succeeded in reclaiming their Moonstone. Sergeant Cuff, who returns to investigate this second crime, summarizes his speculations: "There is here moral, if not legal, evidence, that the murder was committed by the Indians" (451). Without a shred of circumstantial evidence to tie the Indians to Godfrey's death, his murderers will go unpunished. Ultimately, moral certainty is

not enough to defend the innocent or to prosecute the guilty. The limitations of material evidence reduce the efficacy of moral certainty.

Although Godfrey's killers escape due to lack of evidence, *The Moonstone* more significantly illustrates how easy it is to prove a falsehood, to find an innocent person caught in a web of circumstances that persuasively suggest guilt. The distinction between moral and legal evidence has contributed to much of the mystery—moral evidence is an intuitive truth that lacks the authority of empirical evidence, no matter how fervently it is believed. As the first-person narratives of *The Moonstone* illustrate, either form of knowledge can be mistaken. The problem is not just that both intuition and empiricism are equally fallible – the true mystery lies in their complex relationship with one another. Intuition must be verified by empirical facts; facts require intuition to be accurately interpreted. Science is a method used to negotiate this puzzle, to find a way to verify the gap between mind and body.

*The Moonstone* illustrates both constructive and troubling results of yoking the emotional with the empirical. Its preoccupation with this uneasy combination reveals the extent to which Victorians clung to multiple methods of knowing – unwilling to fully embrace material evidence without space for moral judgment, recognizing the unfairness of moral judgment without irrefutable proof. If science is to be a solution that can offer the benefit of the doubt and promise to remove all doubt, then it can—and must—make room for the imagination in its empirical progress. Science may offer the possibility of reconciliation between the apparent oppositions of intuition and empiricism. But as soon as we admit that empirical facts can never be completely objective, the mystery's resolution becomes slightly unstable. The scientific and the superstitious, the empirical and the intuitive, the objective and the subjective are pairs that Collins's novel reveals to be both productively interconnected and problematically inextricable.

“Some Truth of What Will Be”: Empirical Facts and Visionary Forces in George Eliot’s  
*Daniel Deronda*

[M]y writing is simply a set of experiments in life—an endeavor to see what thought and emotion may be capable of—what stores of motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better after which we must strive—what gains from past revelations and discipline we must strive to keep hold of as something more sure than shifting theory.<sup>181</sup>

- George Eliot

In the opening scene of George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, Deronda and Gwendolen are both in a gambling hall. As soon as Deronda catches sight of Gwendolen Harleth across the room, we are told that “he felt the moment become dramatic.”<sup>182</sup> As he gazes at her, he considers the novel’s opening question: “Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret form of expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance?” (I.1.7). For Deronda, these are empirical questions, preoccupied with specificities of her physical appearance in the context of a gambling hall where Gwendolen’s appearance generates much interest. But the empirical quandary quickly shifts to an ethical one as he scrutinizes her physiognomy, trying to determine what her outer appearance might reveal about her inner character: “Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams?” (I.1.7). Whatever Gwendolen is, she is certainly captivating. She draws attention from several others in the gambling hall: “she returned to her play, and showed the full height of a graceful figure, with a face which might possibly be looked at without admiration, but could hardly be passed with indifference” (I.1.9). Deronda’s interest in the unresolved questions that Gwendolen raises makes him the novel’s first and best example of an ideal reader who

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<sup>181</sup> George Eliot, “To Dr. Joseph Frank Payne,” 25 Jan. 1876, *The George Eliot Letters*, vol. VI, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 216.

<sup>182</sup> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 1876 (London: Penguin, 1995), I.1.7. All future references to this text will be made parenthetically and will include book, chapter, and page number.

begins with an empirical assessment but doesn't stop there.<sup>183</sup> He interrogates rather than accepts, actively questioning the empirical reality that he encounters and diligently studying surfaces for glimpses into their depths.

Over the course of the novel, however, purely empirical investigations fall away and George Eliot introduces a more pressing preoccupation. In *Daniel Deronda*, more than any of her other novels, Eliot tries to account for moments that seem to defy an empirical reading. With the inclusion of prophetic visions and hallucinatory ghosts that seem drawn from the conventions of sensation novels, Eliot reframes her depiction of humanity to account for phenomena that are decidedly non-empirical and yet consistent with a scientific and intellectual exploration of the world. These breaks from the accepted conventions of realism have often been explained away by literary critics who suggest that, in her final novel, George Eliot simply disregards the conventions of realism in order to achieve a different purpose. Eliot's contemporary, Edward Dowden, reviewed the novel in 1877 and argued that George Eliot abandons the tenets of realism, replacing "the exactitude of Science" with "an air of spiritual prescience."<sup>184</sup> A century later, Terry Eagleton has asserted that *Daniel Deronda* ushers in the end of an era: "*Daniel Deronda* marks one major terminus of nineteenth century realism – a realism buckling under ideological pressures it is unable to withstand."<sup>185</sup> Linda Shires offers a more nuanced reading when she suggests that *Daniel Deronda*

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<sup>183</sup> My consideration of *Deronda* as a reader continues to use "reading" to indicate an interpretation of empirical evidence in many different forms. This obviously differs from assessments in which critics consider Eliot's novel as a commentary on literary history and the relationship of reader to text. For this critical perspective, see Garrett Stewart's chapter "Mordecai's Consumption: Afterlives of Interpretation in *Daniel Deronda*," *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 301-328.

<sup>184</sup> Edward Dowden, "Review, *Contemporary Review*" Feb. 1877, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Carrol (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 445.

<sup>185</sup> Qtd. in William Myers, *The Teaching of George Eliot* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1984), 214.

“questions the premises of realism” in its exploration of cultural fragmentation.<sup>186</sup> Athena Vrettos, on the other hand, is representative of critics who uphold Eliot’s commitment to realism by arguing that the sensational moments in Eliot’s novel can be psychologically explained, ultimately allowing for the possibility that “all visionary powers are a function of nervous disease.”<sup>187</sup> Either approach—suggesting that *Daniel Deronda* has given up on the traditions of realism altogether, or that realism is achieved only by identifying these moments as symptoms of neurosis—seems, I think, to rather easily dismiss a larger project at work in *Daniel Deronda*. This chapter will demonstrate that these sensational elements are very much a part of George Eliot’s efforts at realistic depiction; in this case, an endeavor to account for the inexplicable by carefully and insistently placing it in the realm of the realist novel.

Gillian Beer, in her influential study *Darwin’s Plots*, traces the way George Eliot engages *Daniel Deronda* in a scientific discourse that considers issues of time, genealogy, transformation, and development.<sup>188</sup> Beer argues that in this novel we see a conscious and deliberate strain on the causal sequence that had defined Eliot’s previous work as a novelist. Unlike the careful ordering of events in *Middlemarch*, here we see Eliot question the order of experience, resisting a linear narrative. As is characteristic of Eliot, in *Daniel Deronda* every choice matters and the smallest of actions may shape history. But, as Beer writes, “here [Eliot] explores also the influence of the unperformed: the impulse given no expression, the sealed thought, the sequestered passion. Do these undischarged, half-conscious forces shape

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<sup>186</sup> Linda Shires, “The Aesthetics of the Victorian Novel: Form, Subjectivity, Ideology,” *Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 73.

<sup>187</sup> Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 75.

<sup>188</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

the future too?”<sup>189</sup> Beer is interested in the way Eliot engages with these questions of progress and development, shaped extensively by the work of Darwin and Comte. My study of *Daniel Deronda* begins with the manifestations of these “undischarged, half-conscious forces” in order to examine the way Eliot employs non-empirical modes of cognition as influential and significant methods of understanding the present and shaping the future.

In raising these epistemological questions, *Daniel Deronda* is preoccupied with many of the same contradictions and anxieties that I have suggested infuse the mysteries of Dickens, Braddon, and Collins. Eliot’s novel is similarly concerned with alternative modes of understanding and methods of reading the world. Eliot, however, moves beyond the anxieties of the sensation genre to pursue an intellectual argument that suggests there must be a system of validation for those moments of intuition; these non-empirical ways of reading the world must be brought into the realm of sensory experience. Non-empirical modes of knowledge are not entirely independent of the empiricism of scientific method, Eliot insists, but are instead both capacious and limited in different ways. In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot considers the relationship between empirical facts and what she calls an “emotional intellect”:

The driest argument has its hallucinations, too hastily concluding that its net will now at last be large enough to hold the universe. Men may dream in demonstrations, and cut out an illusory world in the shape of axioms, definitions, and prepositions, with a final exclusion of an act signed Q.E.D. No formulas for thinking will save us mortals from mistake in our imperfect apprehension of the matter to be thought about. And since the unemotional intellect may carry us into a mathematical dreamland where nothing is but what is not, perhaps an emotional intellect may have absorbed into its passionate view of possibilities some truth of what will be—the more comprehensive massive life feeding theory with new materials, as the sensibility of the artist seizes combinations which science explains and justifies. (VI.46.514)

Instead of regulating hallucinations to a space of neurological malfunction, Eliot links them to the rationality of empirical argument. Empirical science relies solely and entirely on

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 186-87.

sensory experience as a means of understanding the world; it maintains that even the most complex theories are inductive, beginning with specific experiences and drawing conclusions based on empirical data. The problem, however (as nineteenth-century scientists, including George Henry Lewes, realized), is that “no formulas for thinking will save us mortals from mistake in our imperfect apprehension of the matter to be thought about.” In other words, both dry intellectual cerebration and emotional understanding are subject to misapprehension. The key is the relationship between these two modes of understanding, the shift from logic to passion. They are mutually influential and even reliant on one another, not because of their cooperative similarities but because of the tension that exists between them. Comprehension lies, at least in part, in the recognition of the shift from dispassionate proof to the artist’s sensibility, “which science explains and justifies.”

In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot seeks a way to conceptualize things that cannot be adequately described in contemporary scientific discourse but that do exist. And so she introduces Gwendolen, a female protagonist who seems to have stepped out of a Mary Elizabeth Braddon novel, and Mordecai, a Jewish mystic whose prophetic visions are read by many as monomania. In telling the story of Gwendolen’s disastrous marriage and her consequential moral growth, and Mordecai’s reunion with his long-lost sister, she links these unlikely characters to a young man, Daniel Deronda, whose emotional intellect prepares him to be the hero of the novel. Deronda becomes Gwendolen’s moral guide and the recipient of Mordecai’s spiritual mission, which he undertakes as a cultural project after discovering his own Jewish ancestry, a secret kept by his estranged mother. As the events of the novel unfold, these three characters are further connected by their experience with or willingness to acknowledge the validity of visions that seem supernatural. In pushing the boundaries of realism and refusing to explain away modes of understanding that are non-empirical, George

Eliot borrows from sensation novels and recasts Dickens's spontaneous combustion problem in new terms, seeking an empirical assessment of these non-empirical phenomena.

Jean Sundrann, in her study of *Daniel Deronda*, has argued that these psychological phenomena get recast in melodramatic terms because that was the idiom most readily available to George Eliot.<sup>190</sup> As Sally Shuttleworth demonstrates, however, George Eliot had access to and made use of the language of physiology and psychology.<sup>191</sup> Shuttleworth, in her article "Science and Psychology in *Daniel Deronda*," argues that the sensational moments in *Daniel Deronda* are the products of Eliot's search for "a language and narrative methodology that could express her radical social vision."<sup>192</sup> This social vision is one in which the individual and society are representative of the relationship between part and whole, with the ultimate goal of reaching an organic union. Shuttleworth examines scientific explanations for phenomena of the novel and locates them in the physiological theories of Claude Bernard and the psychological theories of G. H. Lewes. This tension between sensation-novel tropes and scientific language is, I suggest, inherent to central themes of *Daniel Deronda*. Rather than focusing on her social project, this chapter will explore Eliot's novel as a representation of an intellectual theory that speaks to the same preoccupations and anxieties of the novels discussed previously, but recasts them as affirmative avenues approaching a comprehensive truth. It is precisely the connection between or combination of emotional extremes (i.e. melodrama or sensation) and scientific validity that is at the heart of *Daniel Deronda's* project. Ghosts, visions, and premonitions pervade the novel and instead of explaining them away, Eliot treats them as alternative modes of knowledge—modes of

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<sup>190</sup> Jean Sundrann, "Daniel Deronda and the Landscape of Exile," *English Literary History*, 39 (1970): 446.

<sup>191</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, "Science and Psychology in *Daniel Deronda*," *Victorian Science and Victorian Values*, eds. James Paradis and Thomas Postlewait (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1981), 289-292.

<sup>192</sup> Shuttleworth, 280.



cognition that sometimes operate as privileged avenues toward a comprehensive understanding of social ethics. Instead of starting with science then, Eliot begins with these inexplicable moments, but she uses them to create fact from feeling. The verification of these visions always occurs socially, when a face to face encounter with another person confirms the validity of a non-empirical experience.

Gwendolen Harleth's encounters with other people have been limited and one-sided when the novel begins. Conscious of her power as the center of attention, she is preoccupied with the way others see her and is confident that her future success is bound up in her appearance: "In Gwendolen's habit of mind it had been taken for granted that she knew what was admirable and that she herself was admired," as Deronda seems to realize when he first sees her (I.1.11-12). The empirical reality of her outer appearance shapes her inner self in ways that make her physiognomy and her moral fiber mutually influential.

Other anonymous characters consider her beauty as well:

'A striking girl – that Miss Harleth – unlike others.'

'Yes, she has got herself up as a sort of serpent now, all green and silver, and winds her neck about a little more than usual.'

'Oh, she must always be doing something extraordinary. She is that kind of girl, I fancy. Do you think her pretty, Mr. Vandernoodt?'

'Very. A man might risk hanging for her – I mean, a fool might.' (I.1.12)

Recalling the conventions of sensation novels, Gwendolen's beauty is fascinating and fearsome. Her serpentine appearance alludes to her future fall as both tempted and temptress. The ominous "risk [of] hanging" solidifies the romantic significance of her story and the risky bargain that Gwendolen makes when she confuses materialism with a moral code and marries out of financial desperation. It also foreshadows the dramatic and fatal conclusion of her marriage: a death by drowning rather than hanging, but one in which Gwendolen holds the rope that might have saved her husband's life.

The consideration of Gwendolen's beauty in the opening chapter is the novel's first attempt to address the conflict between and coherence of empirical reality and a sense of moral truth that defines a person's character. Gwendolen's appearance is both dangerous and appealing, and the complexity of this kind of desire, in which "the wish to look again is felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents" makes an empirical reading problematically limited (I.1.7). Deronda's response is to move from his empirical question to an ethical one, attempting to locate "the good or the evil" as it appears in her expression. Searching for moral character in facial features seems almost to harken back to the theory of phrenology, but in fact something quite different is at stake here. Although Eliot had once been intrigued by phrenology, it was well out of date by the 1870s and Eliot's contemporary scientific views were in keeping with the experimental science espoused by her companion, G. H. Lewes. Still, *Daniel Deronda* implies that some kind of relationship, albeit a more complex and sometimes contradictory one, exists between physical evidence and moral understanding.

A simple equivalency between body and soul is obviously out of the question, but even after she had given up on the pseudo-scientific claims of phrenology, George Eliot wrote in 1855, "I have never believed more profoundly than I do now that character is based on organisation. I never had a higher appreciation than I do now of the services which phrenology has rendered toward the science of man."<sup>193</sup> This "organisation" in which Eliot professes such faith is more sophisticated than phrenology's assignment of corresponding physical features and character traits. In her terms, it is an acknowledgment of the interdependence of body and mind, a vital connection that Lewes championed in his own work. As Lewes writes, "There is no state of consciousness in which object and subject are

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<sup>193</sup> George Eliot, "To Charles Bray," 16 Jul. 1855, *Letters*, vol. II, 210.

not indissolubly combined. There is no physical process which is not indissolubly bound up with the psychical modes of apprehending it.”<sup>194</sup> Lewes’s *Problems of Life and Mind* is preoccupied with the inclusion of metaphysics, or non-empirical phenomena, in empirical science. He writes in the opening chapter: “It is towards the transformation of Metaphysics by reduction to the Method of Science that these pages tend.”<sup>195</sup> The boundaries of positivism are not so much resisted as enlarged in *Daniel Deronda*, which was written at the same time G. H. Lewes’s own work in *Problems of Life and Mind* was exploring empiricism and metaphysics in the same inclusive manner. In fact, throughout Eliot’s fiction we see her efforts not to reduce inexplicable phenomena to a scientifically rational explanation, but to seek a way to account empirically for different modes of apprehending our ethical imperatives. In *Daniel Deronda*, the truths of social responsibility are verified when relationships among individuals change the course of history in meaningful (though often subtle) ways.

In the opening scene of the novel, Deronda and Gwendolen intently observe one another but are never formally introduced. Still, their encounter is significant. After losing at the roulette-table, Gwendolen sells a piece of jewelry to make up the sum. A short time later a small package is delivered to her: “Something – she never quite knew what – revealed to her before she opened the packet that it contained the necklace she had just parted with” (I.2.20). This moment of prescience is the first of Gwendolen’s premonitions that come true in the novel. Gwendolen cannot explain how she knew it was the necklace, no more than she can explain why she instantly concluded that Deronda was the stranger who sent it: “It was Deronda; he must have seen her go into the shop; he must have gone in immediately

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<sup>194</sup> George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, vol. III (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1891), 351.

<sup>195</sup> Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, vol. I, (London: Trübner & Company, 1874), 5.

after, and repurchased the necklace” (I.2.20). But she is correct on both accounts. She resents Deronda’s interference as sort of “supercilious mentor” (I.2.20). This encounter foreshadows the mentoring role that Deronda will take on much later in the novel, when Gwendolen turns to him in desperation after another, far more frightening, vision has come true. Their face to face encounter, as indirect as it might have been, is loaded with the weight of ethical significance as Deronda takes responsibility for a stranger’s necklace and Gwendolen finds herself humiliated rather than grateful.

The influence of society on the individual is an issue that preoccupies much of George Eliot’s fiction; perhaps more surprisingly, it is a consideration of Lewes’s scientific work as well. In *Problems of Life and Mind*, Lewes emphasizes the role of society in the development of human faculties.<sup>196</sup> Lewes writes that man’s “higher faculties are evolved through social needs. By this recognition of the social factor as the complement to the biological factor, this recognition of the Mind as an expression of organic and social conditions, the first step is taken towards the constitution of our science.”<sup>197</sup> The interplay of social and biological factors is an element of human experience that Eliot’s fiction has always explored, and the introduction of Gwendolen Harleth raises the stakes of that experiment. Gwendolen’s social conditions have so thoroughly affected her that her social experience is almost entirely comprised of her being the object of a superficial admiration. Gwendolen’s tragedy is in large part her inability to develop relationships that move beyond this formula because she is easily gratified by this kind of approval. Her moral failing will be her self-proclaimed satisfaction with material values and pleasant appearances that stand in

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<sup>196</sup> For further discussion, see Rick Rylance’s *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 276-9.

<sup>197</sup> George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, vol. IV (London: Trubner and Company, 1879), 6. Qtd. in Rylance, 276.

for meaningful relationships. Still, the narrator suggests we should feel some sympathy for this girl whose physical appearance is at once advantageous and self-destructive: “She had a *naïve* delight in her fortunate self, which any but the harshest saintliness will have some indulgence for a girl who had every day seen a pleasant reflection of that self in her friends’ flattery as well as in the looking-glass” (18).

For all the excitement that the novel creates with its premonitions and apparitions, it is still very much invested in the material realities that shape the lives of its characters. Gwendolen’s appearance opens the novel (and preoccupies Deronda) because there is no denying that it, more than anything else, will influence her future choices. She realizes the extent to which her beauty is literally her good fortune, which explains the hope she derives from looking in the mirror when news of her family’s unexpected descent into poverty reaches her. Catching a glimpse of her reflection, “her face gathered a complacency gradual as the cheerfulness of the morning. Her beautiful lips curled into a more and more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, leaned forward and kissed the cold glass which looked so warm” (I.2.18). The optimism Gwendolen derives from her reflection, even when facing the grim reality of financial ruin and limited opportunities, demonstrates the direct relationship her physical appearance has on the material and social realities of her life. Finding solace in her own reflection, the mirror-kiss indicates Gwendolen’s perception of her social value. This gives her a sense of worth she can calculate far more certainly than the ambiguous questions of morality that occupy Deronda’s mind when he looks at her.

If Daniel Deronda is the novel’s ideal reader, adeptly considering the empirical facts and their non-empirical implications, then Gwendolen Harleth illustrates the dangers of attuning oneself to a purely materialistic approach. Although her intuition is remarkably keen at other points in the novel, when it comes to meeting her future husband, Henleigh

Grandcourt, Gwendolen's emotional intellect is hindered by her narrow-minded materialism. At their initial introduction, Gwendolen's material concerns and superficial assessments overshadow a vague apprehension she cannot quite understand. Instead of using empirical evidence to promote further investigation, Gwendolen ignores her subconscious anxiety and instead focuses on the material facts in front of her. Her willingness to ignore her intuition in light of the empirical evidence becomes her failure, but those intuitive whispers are also an indication of her redemptive possibilities. Grandcourt's appearance, like Gwendolen's, speaks to the question of physical evidence of one's internal organization:

He was slightly taller than herself, and their eyes seemed to be on a level; there was not the faintest smile on his face as he looked at her, not a trace of self-consciousness or anxiety in his bearing; when he raised his hat he showed an extensive baldness surrounded with a mere fringe of reddish-blond hair, but he also showed a perfect hand; the line of feature from brow to chin undisguised by beard was decidedly handsome, with only moderate departures from the perpendicular, and the slight whisker was too perpendicular. It was not possible for a human aspect to be freer from grimace or solicitous wriggings; also it was not possible for a breathing man wide awake to look less animated. ... Grandcourt's bearing had no rigidity, it inclined rather to the flaccid. His complexion had a faded fairness resembling that of an actress when bare of the artificial white and red; his long narrow grey eyes expressed nothing but indifference. (II.11.111)

This extensive description of the "presumptive heir to the baronetcy" (I.9.91) is most notable because it is immediately followed by a narrative disclaimer: "Attempts at description are stupid: who can all at once describe a human being?" (I.11.111). The narrator, like Deronda, insists that an empirical assessment of Grandcourt's face and figure provides relatively little in the way of information that tells anything about his character. But where Deronda immediately began wondering about the moral fiber behind Gwendolen's striking appearance, Gwendolen avoids such considerations and summarizes her reaction to Grandcourt in a declarative statement: "He is not ridiculous" (I.11.112).

This description of Grandcourt is little more than a series of negations that hardly speak to the substance of the man but instead explain what he is not: not self-conscious, not animated, not rigid. Conspicuously absent from the description is any indication of a positive attribute. His flaccidity, his “faded fairness,” and his receding hairline suggest a man past his prime. His status is based on his title and his expected inheritance as the nephew of Deronda’s guardian, Sir Hugo Mallinger. *Daniel Deronda* continually emphasizes the inadequacy of empirical assessments – reminding the reader that “attempts at description are stupid” even as it undermines this claim by investing pages in description. Forest Pyle, in his reading of George Eliot’s work and Romantic ideology, observes that “[p]assages that schematize a narrative inability as an incapacity of language recur throughout George Eliot’s fictions.”<sup>198</sup> Pyle argues that this crisis of representation invites the reader to sympathize with the narrator’s difficult task: “Eliot’s narrators’ declarations of inability ask to be interpreted as more genuine efforts at interpretation: they function to induce the ‘sympathy’ they must represent.”<sup>199</sup> The crisis here is not just the limitation of language, but the inadequacy of a strictly empirical assessment. The novel continually insists that there are determinative truths that lie outside our sensory apprehension. The narrative constructs a world in which the reader and the other characters are expected to recognize non-empirical truths and to understand the implications of the negations in Grandcourt’s description. This process is rooted in empirical observation, but is able to make leaps based on non-empirical experience that derives more information than is available through observation alone. The novel posits that all assessments are partial and that real discoveries only emerge from openness to all modes of understanding.

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<sup>198</sup> Forest Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 162.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

This is not to say that empirical evidence and careful analysis of facts are not important. But equally important is a keen awareness of what cannot be gleaned from surface readings alone—an awareness and acceptance of intuitive impressions that speak to truth lurking beneath smooth surfaces. Although she seems to feel a sense of trepidation about him, Gwendolen’s materialistic reading of Grandcourt easily overlooks his flaws without considering what sort of cruelty and contempt might be reflected in his pale flaccidity and lack of animation. His waning physical features seem to indicate his entrenchment in a decaying system of aristocratic patriarchy that is no longer viable. But Gwendolen sees him only in the narrow context of her girlish world, a world from which he seems to offer a glamorous and intriguing escape. Her empiricism is limited instead of expanded by her imagination:

She rejoiced to feel herself exceptional; but her horizon was that of the genteel romance where the heroine’s soul poured out in her journal is full of vague power, originality, and general rebellion, while her life moves strictly in the sphere of fashion; and if she wanders into a swamp, the pathos lies partly, so to speak, in her having on her satin shoes. (I.6.53)

Imagining herself a romantic heroine of the satin-shoe variety, Gwendolen is a naïve empiricist with romance on her mind. She ignores the signs that might warn her away and misreads his moral character mostly because her interest is as superficial as her assessment.

Grandcourt’s arrival causes the self-assured Gwendolen to experience a “sense of surprise which made her feel less mistress of herself than usual” (II.11.114). More problematic is her sense that she cannot respond to the situation as she normally would: “for some mysterious reason—it was a mystery of which she had a faint, wondering consciousness—she dared not be satirical: she had begun to feel a wand over her that made her afraid of offending Grandcourt” (II.11.123). There is no definite empirical evidence to explain this “mystery” and Gwendolen, instead of seeking the source of her intuitive reaction



and acknowledging the validity of her “faint, wondering consciousness,” resolutely ignores her instincts. Grandcourt’s immorality is at first indicated only by Gwendolen’s unacknowledged reservations, and perhaps by the absent qualities used to describe his physical appearance. In those negations, the ambiguous, ghostly presence of his immorality hints at the reign of terror that will follow their marriage. Unlike Braddon’s sensational revelation, George Eliot is not relying on the shock of appearances that contradict an inner truth; it is perhaps more frightening that evil may have a perfectly banal appearance, and may even reveal itself in such subtle manifestations that we can convince ourselves to overlook them for a time. Instead of undermining an empirical assessment, Eliot links these metaphysical truths with material observations and suggests it may be possible to read within and beyond empirical evidence to find a moral truth.

Where Deronda’s perception of truth models the analysis of empirical facts tempered by intuition and a vastly sympathetic nature, Gwendolen’s headstrong emphasis on material facts and comforts demonstrates her capacity for willful misreading, and, eventually, the frightening way that moral truths have of making themselves apparent in spite of her best efforts. A good deal of Gwendolen’s suffering stems from the fact that her capacity for understanding what Lewes would have called the “Extra-sensible,” experience that does not appear to be empirically verifiable, is limited to a fear of what she does not understand—namely, anything beyond her own narrow perspective. She is, as one critic has described, “a would-be rebel who is paralyzed by her narrowness and conventionality.”<sup>200</sup> Much of her conventionality is socially inscribed by familial expectations, but Gwendolen is problematically complicit in those provincial desires. Her reading practices are limited to determining what others expect of her (particularly her doting mother and her well-

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<sup>200</sup> Bernard Paris, *Rereading George Eliot: Changing Responses to Her Experiments in Life* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 125.

intentioned, match-making uncle) as well as the casual perusal of romantic novels. Taken together, these serve to affirm her conventional expectations for the future. Even though Gwendolen's own ambitions seem (half-heartedly at least) to reach beyond what is available to a woman of her social status (or theatrical talent), she is inherently limited by her own experience and by her self-centered and materialistic desires. In response to her desire to take to the stage and earn enough money to support her family, the musician Herr Klesmer attempts to explain tactfully that she has "not been called upon to be anything but a charming young lady, whom it is an impoliteness to find fault with" (III.23.254).

Gwendolen's perception of her talent was far too optimistic: "For the first time since her consciousness began, she was having a vision of herself on the common level" (II.23.262).

Unable to bear the idea of being reduced in social status, Gwendolen is reduced to a shell of her former self when she makes what the novel sympathetically depicts as an impossible choice: marry Grandcourt or face a future of poverty and spinsterhood (or worse—employment as a governess). Gwendolen can rationalize her choice in material terms, but she cannot entirely ignore the nagging doubts she has about the moral repercussions of agreeing to marry Grandcourt even after she becomes acquainted with his former mistress and their illegitimate children.

Gwendolen's confidence in outward appearances suffers greatly after her marriage, when her appearance no longer indicates a hopeful future but instead operates as a mask in her charade of marital contentment. While others may read her beauty as indicative of success or happiness, Gwendolen at last recognizes the futility of trusting in the social currency of a presumptive title and wealth instead of any sort of moral value. Her mirrored reflection is no longer a source of hope or pride, but a sort of baffling denial of the misery she feels: "This beautiful, healthy young creature, with her two-and-twenty years and her

gratified ambition, no longer felt inclined to kiss her fortunate image in the glass; she looked at it with wonder that she could be so miserable” (V.35.423). Marrying Grandcourt out of financial desperation but against her better judgment was a hard bargain to strike. The surprise is not that he turned out to be more fearsome than he appeared; the surprise comes when the intuitive signs of danger that Gwendolen resolutely overlooked are amplified into supernatural presences she cannot ignore.

Gwendolen’s haunted existence actually began the moment she met Lydia Glasher, a woman who heard of Gwendolen’s engagement to Grandcourt and confronted her with startling information: “Mr. Grandcourt ought not to marry any one but me. I left my husband and child for him nine years ago. Those two children are his, and we have two others – girls – who are older. My husband is dead now, and Mr. Grandcourt ought to marry me. He ought to make that boy his heir” (II.14.152). Mrs. Glasher’s list of “oughts” have clearly been ignored by Grandcourt, but are taken quite seriously by Gwendolen. She is repulsed by this knowledge and fully intends to break off their engagement. Her family’s financial concerns complicate what seemed to be a simple and straightforward decision and when Gwendolen at last faces the choice between marriage and financial ruin, she chooses to marry Grandcourt. But that face to face encounter with Lydia Glasher holds powerful sway over her. Their conversation instills in Gwendolen a sense of social responsibility to the other woman, an understanding that she must break off her engagement and that there will be moral repercussion if she fails to do so. The relationship that began in that moment between the two women puts Gwendolen in an ethical bind that she will find inescapable.

After her marriage, Gwendolen becomes nervous, anxious, and full of dread about what the future will bring. The accomplishment she once felt in securing a husband has become a gnawing fear that her knowledge of his mistress will be revealed. Her husband’s

presence repulses her and she worries that their marriage will do further harm to Lydia Glasher and to her children by eventually disinherit them. Whatever sentiments she disregarded in her initial assessment of Grandcourt, Gwendolen can no longer dismiss her intuitive fear about what is yet to come.: "...was it some dim forecast, the insistent penetration of suppressed experience, mixing the expectation of triumph with the dread of a crisis?" (IV.31.357). In this question, Eliot mixes the language of trauma with second-sight. Gwendolen's prescient visions are legitimized by the plausible explanation of second-sight as a form of sensory experience, developing from an empirical assessment of her situation. Reading Gwendolen as hysterical or neurotic fails to fully account for the ways that the narrative justifies her visions—premonitions that are as prescient as they are ominous. Visions and dreams that could be explained away or pathologized as products of a repressed unconscious are recast in *Daniel Deronda* as inexplicable but true moral indicators.

Gwendolen shares this propensity for prescient visions with perhaps the most mysterious character in the novel, Mordecai Cohen. A devout Jew with mystical visions, the consumptive Mordecai has his heart set on a mission of Jewish nationalism. His passion for this idea is supported by his equally fervent certainty that he will soon meet a young man who will lead this project after Mordecai's death. Such notions are readily dismissed by other characters as the ravings of a man both physically sick and mentally confused. But his visions materialize in the form of Daniel Deronda. When the discovery of his previously unknown parentage reveals his Jewish ancestry, he suddenly becomes precisely the sort of individual ready and willing to take on Mordecai's mission. Without subscribing to the idea that he has fulfilled Mordecai's vision of a messianic hero, Deronda recognizes that his desire for a meaningful vocation is the secular version of Mordecai's spiritual mission. Thus,

Mordecai's intuition is confirmed by Deronda's physical presence and their encounters at last result in the fulfillment of mutual desires.

In its depiction of second-sight as a supernatural event with substantive results, *Daniel Deronda* links Gwendolen's fears with Mordecai's desires as it pursues a wider apprehension of the world and a way to comprehend the seemingly inexplicable:

'Second-sight' is a flag over disputed ground. But it is a matter of knowledge that there are persons whose yearnings, conceptions—nay, traveled conclusions—continually take the form of images which have a foreshadowing power: the deed they would do starts up before them in complete shape, making a coercive type; the event they hunger for or dread rises into visions with a seed-like growth, feeding itself on unnumbered impressions. (V.38.471)

Given as "a matter of knowledge" that visions of future events are known to manifest themselves in reality, Eliot insists here on having it both ways. "Second-sight" may be open to dispute, but evidence shows that passionate feelings—whether dread or desire—often foreshadow actual events. Where Gwendolen's "dim forecast" is a sense of dread that an unavoidable crisis looms, Mordecai's prophetic visions emerge from a spiritual desire. Their vatic power is unquestionable, even if the "unnumbered impressions" that are required to form such visions could be traced back to specific sensory experiences, were those experiences not so fleeting they failed to register in our consciousness. In this way, their visions are likened to the creative "sensibility of the artist" who "seizes combinations which science explains and justifies" (VI.46.514).

This theory is in keeping with Lewes's work in *Problems of Life and Mind*, which expands the work of science beyond the limitations of our five senses without spiraling out into the fantastic. Lewes explains in Volume One of *Problems* that the empirical or "Sensible" world "comprises but a small portion of that External Order which is believed to exist. There is therefore an Extra-sensible existence; and it is revealed through various

indications.”<sup>201</sup> “Extra-sensible” is an acceptable form of knowledge for Lewes with the important qualification that it must emerge from an individual’s own experience and correspond to empirical facts: “whenever the Extra-sensible is disengaged from conformity with the Sensible, it is no longer an object of Knowledge.”<sup>202</sup> In other words, metaphysical signs may be legitimate methods of reading the world as long as they are ultimately confirmed by empirical evidence. The ghosts and visions that seem to propel *Daniel Deronda* from realist fiction to fantastic sensation novel are actually an integral part of the “experiments in life” that we see in George Eliot’s fiction. These scenes speak to Eliot’s familiarity with Lewes’s scientific theories and to their common interest in exploring the essence of consciousness and the way moral and social truths can be accounted for in a scientific method.

This is not to say that Eliot embraced the approach to mysticism or spiritualism that was undertaken by nineteenth-century groups like the Society for Psychical Research, which purported to investigate supernatural phenomena through empirical methods. She was, however, aware of such trends, particularly those endorsed by her friend Frederic Myers. Myers wrote to Eliot about developments in psychical research that he believed justified his faith in personal immortality; but “[d]espite her regard for Myers, George Eliot stopped short of endorsing such sentiments.”<sup>203</sup> We can see, however, that spiritualists would have been sympathetic to Eliot’s desire to register the moral truth of non-empirical events within the empirical epistemology of the realist novel. Alex Owen explains in her study of late-nineteenth-century spiritualism that “believers hoped that a scientific epistemology would

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<sup>201</sup> Lewes, *Problems*, vol. I, 253.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>203</sup> John Beer, *Providence and Love: Studies in Wordsworth, Channing, Myers, George Eliot, and Ruskin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 216-17.

verify the materiality of the unseen world whilst at the same time exposing the paucity of a militant scientism which espoused a barren materialist philosophy.”<sup>204</sup> George Eliot, though, seems to take the alternative approach in *Daniel Deronda*, suggesting instead that science is capable of much more than a “barren materialist philosophy.”

Mordecai’s visions in particular have prompted many readers to speculate about whether the novel’s inclusion of non-empirical phenomena encourages a spiritual or even religious reading. As John Beer suggests, Mordecai’s intense faith and belief in “the existence of a benevolent order” invites a “providential” reading of the novel.<sup>205</sup> Beer writes, “The most that can be said is that readers are left to make up their own minds, and that their interpretations of the novel will differ considerably according to the degree to which they sympathize, or do not sympathize, with Mordecai and his aspirations.”<sup>206</sup> It is true that his visions are radically non-empirical and function as remarkable premonitions, but their validity relies on an actor who will take such visions and make them actualities. Deronda is not convinced of Providence at work; his interpretation of Mordecai’s visions is cautious and skeptical. Ultimately, he is willing to act in accordance with the benevolent order in which Mordecai believes, but the novel consistently upholds Deronda as an individual moral agent rather than a passive participant in a providential system. Eliot’s balance of Providential guidance and individual agency recalls Braddon’s depiction of Robert Audley’s investigation, guided by a “beckoning hand” and yet credited with a newfound energy to solve the mystery of his friend’s disappearance. Eliot employs the tropes of sensation novels but she grounds them in a philosophy that can accommodate both modes of discovery within a single

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<sup>204</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), vii.

<sup>205</sup> John Beer, 211.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

theoretical system. Eliot's intellectual project seeks to clarify and account for the mysteries that Collins and Braddon leave obscure.

Although Mordecai essentially functions as a prophet, the novel quite carefully sidesteps the spirituality of his visions. Rather than evincing religious belief, *Daniel Deronda* instead acknowledges a value in Mordecai's visions that moves beyond empirical science without directly opposing it. Mordecai's premonitions are perhaps evidence of "that passionate belief which determines the consequences it believes in" (VI.41.513). This notion, the narrative insists, is not far-fetched or out of place in a scientific and empirical reality: "even strictly-measuring science could hardly have got on without that forecasting ardour which feels the agitations of discovery beforehand, and has a faith in its preconception that surmounts many failures of experiment" (VI.41.513). Mordecai's vision stems from his desire to find a young man whom he could teach and ultimately trust to carry on his spiritual and social mission of Jewish nationalism: "The yearning, which had panted upward from out of overwhelming discouragements, had grown into a hope—the hope into a confident belief, which, instead of being checked by the clear conception he had of his hastening decline, took rather the intensity of an expectant faith in a prophecy which has only brief space to get fulfilled in" (V.38.472). The optimistic desire of a dying man is distinctly different from Gwendolen's vague fears, but the two types of visions are clearly linked in the novel as premonitions that turn out to be true. Without fully ruling out supernatural or spiritual sources, the significance of these non-empirical visions lies in their empirical force in affecting actual events. Eliot attempts to represent different modes of reaching the same end, and that end—the connection of the mission and the man—is the important thing. These visions represent moral truths rooted in a social system of ethics that links human beings with one another through the simple form of face to face encounters.



While Mordecai's hope is dismissed by others, it eventually evolves from a vague sense of what is to come to the physical presence of Deronda, a "young ear into which [Mordecai] could pour his mind as a testament, some soul kindred enough to accept the spiritual product of his own brief, painful life, as a mission to be executed" (V.38.472). Although he doesn't witness visions himself, Deronda is the receiver of these messages. He is open to what the initial view does not reveal, allowing Mordecai's visions to shape his conduct even if their explanations remain mysterious. In this way, Deronda personifies the breadth of perception which had been the role of the narrator in Eliot's previous novels. In the character of Deronda, Eliot adds to the information that can be received: new avenues of knowledge. It is perhaps only within a novel that these forms of cognition can be fully explored and brought together rather than differentiated and dismissed. Without casting off the conventions of realism, Eliot takes advantage of the wider boundaries of fiction to explore the social and empirical implications of these sensations of moral certainty.

Gwendolen's moral certainty has been equivocal, but her marriage reduces her from a rebellious heroine to a kept woman, overwhelmed with guilt and remorse. By refusing to acknowledge her intuitive recognition of Grandcourt's moral failings, Gwendolen finds the moral truths of their marriage asserting themselves in sensational forms—gothic, haunting visions that transform her guilt into frightening ghosts. Her refusal to acknowledge or accommodate what she implicitly knows to be true about Grandcourt seems to bring her own guilt to life. It takes the form of a ghost with a material source—a frightening painting she once viewed. Gwendolen had been deeply affected when she unexpectedly discovered "the picture of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seems to be fleeing with outstretched arms" (I.3.27). Her reaction demonstrates the painting's lasting impression: "She looked like a statue into which a soul of Fear had entered" (I.6.61). As

Peter Garrett has argued, this apparition can be traced throughout the novel “in a sequence of events and images that spans Gwendolen’s development.”<sup>207</sup> The ghostly faces that haunt Gwendolen are protruded truths that she is unwilling to recognize, ironically “objectified” as visions she cannot ignore.

She becomes a twisted caricature of the heroines in the romance novels she read as a girl. In her study of *Daniel Deronda*, Ann Cvetkovich emphasizes the connections between Eliot’s novel and sensation novels that typically relax the conventions of realism: “Part rebel and part victim, Gwendolen resembles both the transgressive and the suffering heroines of the sensation genre.”<sup>208</sup> The connections to sensation novels are not found in Gwendolen’s character alone, but in the ghosts and specters that invade the text as materializations of her guilt and fear. But in a significant movement from the work of Braddon and Collins, whose novels either cover up the uncanny by producing circumstantial evidence to justify it or explaining it with a scientific experiment, the ghosts and visions in Eliot’s novel are presented as questions that remain relatively unanswered. Eliot appropriates sensation fiction as one method of explaining an otherwise unknowable experience. Instead of revealing obvious material explanations for what Gwendolen experiences, the empirical source is never identified. *Daniel Deronda* remains enigmatic, diverging from Eliot’s previous works with their painstakingly detailed analysis of character and motivation. Eliot seems to deliberately ask the questions rather than answer them, purposefully ensuring that second-sight remains a disputed territory.

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<sup>207</sup> Peter Garrett, *Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 170.

<sup>208</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 129.

The painting becomes what Garrett calls “an image of terror” for Gwendolen.<sup>209</sup> It reappears as a non-empirical force of truth. When she is newly-married and receives the “diamonds which Grandcourt had spoken of as being deposited somewhere and to be given to her on her marriage,” she quickly realizes that they had been sent by Lydia Glasher, Grandcourt’s former mistress and the mother of his illegitimate children. When Mrs. Glasher confronted her before the marriage, “it was as if some ghastly vision had come to her in a dream and said, ‘I am a woman’s life,’” (II.14.152). After marrying Grandcourt in spite of Mrs. Glasher’s pleas and threats, that haunting presence never disappears. The moral compromise that Gwendolen has made gets twisted into damning evidence that Grandcourt uses to control her. He has become “the husband to whom she had sold her truthfulness and sense of justice, so that he held them throttled into silence, collared and dragged behind him to witness what he would” (VII.54.669). Gwendolen has technically committed no crime; the “truthfulness and sense of justice” that Gwendolen sacrificed for material comforts are no more empirically verifiable than the visions she fears so much. But they are all equally real experiences. The “image of terror” continues to haunt Gwendolen in the form of fantasies that rise, panicky and strange, from the terror of her marriage:

Her vision of what she had to dread took more decidedly than ever the form of some fiercely impulsive deed, committed as in a dream that she would instantaneously wake from to find the effects real though the images had been false: to find dead under her hands, but instead of darkness, daylight; instead of satisfied hatred, the dismay of guilt; instead of freedom, the palsy of a new terror—a white dead face from which she was for ever trying to flee and for ever held back. (VII.54.674)

Gwendolen’s fear manifests itself in this fearful vision—an intuitive truth taking form. Her dread is a premonition of things to come. Gwendolen has been cast as one of those persons whose anxiety predicts their outcome: “the deed they would do starts up before them in

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 171.

complete shape” (V.38.471). There is no affirmation of supernatural force but it is not quite ruled out either. What is most significant is that Gwendolen will wake “to find the effects real though the images had been false.” In this passage, we see Eliot revising her empiricism through different avenues of thought. No matter how mysterious the visions, they have a real and measurable outcome. There is meaning, Eliot insists, in false images if they ultimately produce real effects—and that claim can be read as a justification for fiction as well as prophecy.

The explanation of neurosis or madness seems an easy way to account for this experience and its inclusion in a novel that is in many ways dedicated to the principles of realism in its focus on commonplace events and details of daily life. For Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley*, madness is an expedient explanation for behavior that is threatening and inappropriate. But the argument that Gwendolen is simply neurotic fails to account for the uncanny accuracy of her dread as a predictor of things to come:

The thought of his dying would not subsist: it turned as with a dream-change into the terror that she should die with his throttling fingers on her neck avenging that thought. Fantasies moved within her like ghosts, making no break in her acknowledged consciousness and finding no obstruction in it: dark rays doing their work invisibly in the broad light. (VI.48.606)

Sally Shuttleworth persuasively argues that the “terminology from the Romantic and Gothic tradition” that Eliot employs in the descriptions of Gwendolen’s terror corresponds with “an interpretation of the mind’s process that accords with Lewes’s psychological theory.”<sup>210</sup> In keeping with Lewes’s theories in *The Physical Basis of Mind*, Shuttleworth suggests, Eliot is working with the notion of the conscious and unconscious minds as separated not by a distinct divide but merely a gradation like light and dark. In this case, Gwendolen’s attempt to repress her guilt is thwarted by her unconscious mind intruding into her consciousness.

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<sup>210</sup> Shuttleworth, “Science and Psychology in *Daniel Deronda*,” 290.

Lydia Glasher's curse on Gwendolen's marriage is one example of the way an intuitive perception becomes an empirical reality. It may be that only Gwendolen's fear of the curse makes it real, but because of that face to face encounter with Mrs. Glasher, the curse's metaphysical properties have real influence and its force becomes undeniable. Mrs. Glasher's desire that "the marriage might make two others wretched besides herself" is destined to come true in a way that affirms not the power of wishful thinking but the deeply emotional and intuitive response we have to other human beings. When she is forced to send the diamonds to Gwendolen, Mrs. Glasher writes:

These diamonds, which were once given with ardent love to Lydia Glasher, she passes on to you. ... Perhaps you think of being happy, as she once was, and of having beautiful children such as hers, who will thrust hers aside. God is too just for that. The man you have married has a withered heart. His best young love was mine; you could not take that from me when you took the rest. It is dead; but I am the grave in which your chance of happiness is buried as well as mine. You had your warning. ... You will have your punishment. I desire it with all my soul. ... You took him with your eyes open. The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse.  
(IV.31.358-9)

Lydia Glasher becomes, effectively, both grave and ghost when Gwendolen is deeply and irredeemably affected by this letter. The curse has an immediate effect on her, as she "read[s] the horrible words of the letter over and over again as a doom of penance" before destroying "accusation and proof at once" (IV.31.359). The physical and emotional realms are significantly mixed in this note, which sets Grandcourt's "withered heart" against his "best young love" and insists that the actions Gwendolen took "with [her] eyes open," focused on the material and social outcome, will now have supernatural consequences. The interplay of the physical and metaphysical implies the mutual influence of these realms and gives equal authority to both perspectives of what Lewes might call "sensible" and "Supra-sensible" reality.

The narrative also gives agency to Mrs. Glasher's words; after Gwendolen has read them and destroyed the letter, "those written words kept repeating themselves in her" (VI.31.359). The diamonds are material evidence that represent Gwendolen taking Grandcourt from Lydia Glasher and potentially disinheriting her children in the process. Alexander Welsh argues in *George Eliot and Blackmail* that Gwendolen's anxiety is mainly a fear of public humiliation: "but the fear that is natural to her is fear of shame or exposure and her sense of guilt has to be enlarged."<sup>211</sup> The ethical force of her connection with Lydia Glasher, however, suggests otherwise. It is not the content of the letter, but her sense of a meaningful curse that represents the interaction of the two women: "Truly here were poisoned gems, and the poison had entered into this poor young creature" (VI.31.359). "Truly" is not the same as "verifiable empirically" but it is nonetheless real in Gwendolen's experience, in her perverse connection with this woman with whom she unwillingly shares so much.

Nothing about the diamonds could physically harm Gwendolen and yet her reaction to them illustrates how a metaphorical poison causes a physical reaction. Her first response recalls the way she froze in terror when she saw the frightening painting, she became "like so many women petrified white; but coming near herself you might have seen the tremor in her lips and hands" (VI.31.359). By the time Grandcourt enters the room, she is beside herself: "He saw her pallid, shrieking as it seemed with terror, the jewels scattered around her on the floor. Was it a fit of madness?" (VI.31.359). We see here another moment of interrogation rather than analysis as the novel poses questions about the source of a character's feelings instead of than explaining them. The narrator's question presumably evokes Grandcourt's dismissive response, swiftly pathologizing Gwendolen as hysterical. Gwendolen's frantic

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<sup>211</sup> Alexander Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 293.

response to the gift of the jewels is an ironic twist on the nineteenth-century assumption that unrequited love may be a source of female maladies. Thomas John Graham's domestic manual *On the Management and Disorders of Infancy and Childhood* reinforces the popular notion that sexual desire can lead to hysteria: "The appetite for love is seated in the cerebellum, at the base of the brain; and when excited by any cause, it does, under certain circumstances, if not indulged, become greater and greater, until it induces derangement of various functions, and hence hypochondriasis, convulsions, hysteria, and even insanity may be the result."<sup>212</sup> As the language of terror and curses echoes against the expedient explanation of madness, the scene becomes suspended between metaphysical forces and empirical facts, each operating with equal intensity.

This ambiguity is perhaps part of the terror for Gwendolen, who finds herself increasingly unable to distinguish her fears from her reality—not because she is going mad, but because her fear is grounded in a metaphysical reality that empiricism does not fully represent. The chapter closes with a declaration: "In some form or other the Furies had crossed his threshold" (IV.31.359). Without fully legitimizing curses, Furies, or other supernatural forces, Eliot's novel quietly allows for an extra-sensible presence that feels out of place in the empirical world. In doing so, she resists a contemporary psychology that attempts to pathologize the female psyche and locate the male psyche in the rational realm of empiricism.<sup>213</sup> Gwendolen's awareness of supra-sensible elements is not depicted as a

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<sup>212</sup> Thomas John Graham, *On the Management and Disorders of Infancy and Childhood*, 1853, in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, eds. Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 188.

<sup>213</sup> In her recent biography of George Eliot, *George Eliot, Novelist, Lover, Wife* (London: Harper Press, 2009), Brenda Maddox relates an incident in Eliot's own life that accords with the novel's refusal to psychologize women who resist social or cultural expectations. Maddox writes that when news of George Eliot's elopement with Lewes reached England, phrenologist George Combe was one of many who wondered whether there could be hereditary insanity to blame for Eliot's behavior: "her conduct, with her brain, seems to me like morbid mental aberration." Combe saw no other explanation for "an educated woman who, in the face of the

form of insanity, but as an increasing awareness of moral truths she cannot ignore. This experience is terrifying for her in part because it is so unfamiliar to a spoiled, self-absorbed girl: “this fountain of awe within her had not found its way into connection with the religion taught her or with any human relations” (I.6.63). Religion and spirituality in *Daniel Deronda* are significant to the extent to which they affect social relationships. The metaphysical forces that Gwendolen experiences are manifestations of a system of ethics that is created through human relationships and cannot be reduced to an empirical epistemology.

Grandcourt is startlingly separated from this system of ethics; troubled by neither guilt nor remorse, his world is limited to the material realities of daily life, without a sense of compassion or fellow-feeling. His stunted moral development is the result of an utter lack of sympathetic imagination:

[Grandcourt] had all his life had reason to take a flattering view of his own attractiveness, and to place himself in fine antithesis to men who, he saw at once, must be revolting to a woman of taste. He had no idea of a moral repulsion, and could not have believed, if he had been told it, that there may be a resentment and disgust which will gradually make beauty more detestable than ugliness, through exasperation at that outward virtue in which hateful things can flaunt themselves or find a supercilious advantage. (VII.54.671)

Like Gwendolen, Grandcourt has always had a certain advantage based on his physical appearance, but his sense of self scarcely expands beyond this outward appraisal. His moral failing is, in part, the belief that an empirical assessment of others is not only accurate but complete. Lacking the imagination that allows Gwendolen to comprehend the enormity of her moral dilemma, Grandcourt’s moral development is simply nonexistent.

It follows, then, that Grandcourt has a particularly limited capacity for understanding, with no sense of ethical responsibility nor notion of the “invisible fibres” that

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world, volunteers to live as a wife, with a man who already has a living wife and children.” Her actions, he declared, were “calculated only to degrade herself and her sex, if she be sane.” (qtd. in Maddox 78).



link human beings with one another (VI.46.572). And yet, where his own interests lie, his understanding is remarkably shrewd. Although Gwendolen had initially subscribed to similarly superficial values, the genuine terror that her visions bring distinguishes her moral development from Grandcourt's impervious stasis. It also prevents Grandcourt from fully understanding her, although he has an uncanny insight into Gwendolen's unspoken desires as they relate to him: "he had no imagination of anything in her but what affected the gratification of his own will; but on this point he had the sensibility which seems like divination" (VI.44.555). "Seems like divination," but isn't—Grandcourt's self-absorption makes him perceptive in this particular area, but his calculated assumptions about what Gwendolen might do to displease him are nothing like the prescience that she and Mordecai experience. In fact, this particular sensibility functions to make him less human: "in dog fashion, Grandcourt discerned the signs of Gwendolen's expectation, interpreting them with the narrow correctness which leaves a world of unknown feeling behind" (VII.54.678). Without any concept of his own place within a system of ethical feeling, Grandcourt cannot imagine things being anything other than their empirical definition—that "narrow correctness" that limits his perspective to such an extent it omits the most crucial knowledge—a sympathetic understanding. This naïve interpretation of appearances as accurate signifiers explains why Grandcourt simply cannot fathom "a resentment and disgust which will gradually make beauty more detestable than ugliness" (VII.54.671). He has no real concept of himself in relation to other people. He has no access to the "world of unknown feeling" in which *Daniel Deronda* locates its moral authority—a place where the empirical truth of material facts merges with the metaphysical forces of a sympathetic imagination. Unlike characters in other Eliot novels, whose limited imaginations may be character flaws without being moral failings, Grandcourt's lack of sympathetic imagination

makes him a monster. The stakes are higher than ever in *Daniel Deronda*: an unwillingness to open one's mind to different avenues of understanding has dire consequences.

As the master of his narrow and close-minded universe, Grandcourt experiences nothing like Mordecai's spiritual fervor or Gwendolen's guilt-stricken ghosts. But he also fails to read the world with Deronda's diffusive sympathy, and that is his fatal mistake. It is partly a symptom of the patriarchal system in which he has been assigned a part with no consideration of individual merit. He is the quintessential example of a system that is no longer sufficiently or appropriately selective and yet seems to sustain itself by perpetuating its material values to the exclusion of all else. The narrator condemns Grandcourt as representative of a malicious kind of ignorance: "There is no escaping the fact that want of sympathy condemns us to a corresponding stupidity" (VI.48.556). As an enthusiastic participant in a system that dismisses compassion and sympathy in order to take full advantage of material realities of wealth, land, and title, Grandcourt is utterly blind to the moral truths that *Daniel Deronda* insists shape our lives:

Grandcourt lacked the only organ of thinking that could have saved him from mistake—namely, some experience of mixed passions concerned. He had correctly divined one half of Gwendolen's dread—all that related to her personal pride, and her perception that his will must conquer hers; but the remorseful half, even if he had known of her broken promise, was as much out of his imagination as the other side of the moon" (VI.48.555)

This passage illustrates Gwendolen's widened comprehension of the world beyond her own self-interested desires. But it also underscores the novel's continual assertion that non-empirical modes of understanding are often privileged avenues to social ethics. Moving beyond a sympathetic understanding, premonitions in this novel demand (or create) action. Grandcourt sets himself apart from a system of social ethics but the very force of Gwendolen's vision insists that such distance is impossible.

Grandcourt's death, a boating accident to which Gwendolen was the only witness, is the moment in which Gwendolen's frightening vision of a haunting white face moves with startling clarity into the empirical world. Gwendolen's awe of the metaphysical forces that she senses around her leaves her uncertain as to whether her dreadful desire to escape from Grandcourt could have actually compelled his death. In her study of Victorian criminality, Lisa Rodensky writes, "Criminal law was itself asking whether knowledge and intentions could be presumed from the natural consequences of acts or whether evidence of *actual* knowledge and intention needed to be introduced."<sup>214</sup> This is the legal framework of Gwendolen's particular struggle to delineate the relationship between her intuitive awareness of the horror that would have to occur for her to be free of Grandcourt, the reality of her physical actions, and the extent of her responsibility for his death: "I only know that I saw my wish outside me" (VII.56.696). Gillian Beer notes that Eliot's novel emphasizes "how through dread even more than through desire we seize the future into present action."<sup>215</sup> Intuition is complicated in *Daniel Deronda*—more than just a certainty of explanations or a glimpse of what is to be, it seems to be a subtle but powerful force in its own right, influencing behavior and motivation in ways that can only be belatedly verified by measurable facts.

In a confession to Deronda that ultimately acquits her of having an active role in Grandcourt's death, Gwendolen's new appreciation for ethical responsibility as a guide to conduct has caused her to fear that her most private wish could be verified as a cause for Grandcourt's drowning. She explains that it was the idea of his return rather than in his loss that prompted her to leap into the water after him: "I was leaping from my crime, and there

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<sup>214</sup> Lisa Rodensky, *The Crime in Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2003), 89.

<sup>215</sup> Beer, 203.

it was—close to me as I fell—there was the dead face—dead, dead. It can never be altered” (VII.56.696). Grandcourt’s “dead face” echoes of course the dead white face in the painting that had initially caused her such a fright. Gwendolen is consumed by guilt and yet not actually guilty of this crime. Deronda cautions her accordingly: “Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you. Try to take hold of your sensibility and use it as if it were a faculty like vision” (V.36.452). The likening of Gwendolen’s fearful intuition to a sixth-sense draws it firmly into the empirical world and makes space within that world for experiences that seem inexplicable and yet are rooted in a sensory experience (or a Supra-sensible experience, as Lewes would say). Premonitions and ghostly visions are meaningless if they are simply the neurological dysfunction of an individual. Instead, they must “feed upon unnumbered impressions” so as to both proceed and propel action, causing real effects and making measurable changes. Such visions are powerless unless they are acted upon in meaningful social encounters. In this way, they underscore the sympathetic bonds of humanity or highlight fractures and fissures in those bonds that must be remedied.

Deronda is consistently the sympathetic reader that Grandcourt fails to be. His perception of metaphysical truths is not as witness to ghosts and visions but as a sympathetic individual conscious of his role within a network of human connections. The narrative description of his appearance moves beyond the empirical to a moral assessment, assuring the reader that he is not only beautiful, but also good: “you could have hardly seen his face thoroughly meeting yours without believing that human creatures had done nobly in times past, and might do more nobly in times to come” (II.16.166). Unlike Gwendolen in the opening scene, Deronda’s face and his character are coherent and fully legible, hinting at the potential for correspondence between empirical fact and non-empirical truths. Deronda’s

parentage has been kept secret from him, and he wrongly presumes himself to be the illegitimate son of his guardian, Grandcourt's uncle Sir Hugo Mallinger. The corresponding "sense of an entailed disadvantage" shaped Deronda into an imaginative and sympathetic reader. His perspective seems to be aligned with George Eliot's work as a novelist; rather than becoming absorbed in self-pity, he comes to realize his "frustrated claim as one among a myriad, the inexorable sorrow takes the form of fellowship and makes the imagination tender" (II.16.175). By turning outward where others might turn inward, Deronda exemplifies the novel's moral code of sympathy and fellow-feeling as characteristics that emerge from his particular circumstances but could be cultivated in anyone.

Deronda's initial encounter with Mirah Cohen is evidence of his open-minded world-view and establishes the mysterious connection he seems to have with Mirah and her long-lost brother Mordecai even before his Jewish heritage is revealed. When Deronda encounters Mirah, he is in his boat and she is at the riverside, contemplating suicide by drowning. Her countenance so clearly communicates her sorrow that she strikes Deronda as "a figure which might have been an impersonation of the misery he was unconsciously giving voice to" (II.17.187). Deronda's misery stems from the "unproductive labour" of questioning his vocation (II.17.185). The idea that one's vocational choice might be a moral dilemma is a puzzle to Deronda's guardian, Sir Hugo Mallinger. Sir Hugo serves as a benign embodiment of the ineffectual aristocratic system and thinks Deronda should study law, effectively replacing philosophical thought with systematic analysis and suggesting that Deronda's more imaginative ideas about his future "could be no better than spectral illusions" (II.17.185). Deronda is not a visionary the way Mordecai seems to be, but the language that places his unconventional ambition in the realm of "spectral illusions" is telling. Nearly all longings, desire, and presentiments in this novel are associated with the

spectral. These specters, for Deronda, are ideas about what his moral responsibilities are and how he can best uphold them. Thus, Eliot moves beyond the sympathetic imagination to deeper ethical implications and responsibilities. Such ideas are not separate from the empirical world but they are perhaps typically overlooked by many—even the well-meaning Sir Hugo. Deronda's indecision about his future is clearly related to the uncertainty of his past and he is troubled enough at the moment of his boat ride to wonder “whether it were worth while to take part in the battle of the world” (II.17.187). At that moment, the figure of a young girl on the verge of taking her own life is a manifestation of Deronda's own inner turmoil—in a reversal of the other drowning scene, Deronda, too, sees his wish outside himself.

Mirah Cohen seems to appear as Deronda's intuitive desire, dramatically manifested in physical form. But this time the drowning scene ends with a rescue. As he approaches her, Deronda studies Mirah's appearance carefully, considering her within a particular context much as he did Gwendolen. His immediate assessment of Mirah examines the material facts of her appearance: “a girl hardly more than eighteen, of low slim figure, with a most delicate little face, her dark curls pushed behind her ears under a large black hat, a long woollen cloak over her shoulders” (II.17.187). He categorizes her as one of the “poorly-dressed, melancholy women” who are “common sights” (II.17.188). And yet his interest moves beyond this empirical reading: “He fell again and again to speculating on the probable romance that lay behind that loneliness and look of desolation” (II.17.188). Deronda's sympathetic imagination is reading the scene not just for its facts, but for its “romance”—he imagines her story, seeking to understand the desires and motivations that impel her to act. Like a novelist who considers the empirical reality of social and historical circumstances and non-empirical phenomena of intuition and emotional feeling, Deronda

seeks to understand and to construct Mirah's narrative: "To say that Deronda was a romantic would be to misrepresent him; but under his calm and somewhat self-repressed exterior there was a fervour which made him easily find poetry and romance among the events of daily life" (III.19.205). Deronda is not leaping to conclusions that are wildly misplaced; he is inclined to see what Dickens might call "the romantic side of familiar things"—not the melodrama of sensation novels, but the intuited truths of everyday life.

Deronda's perspective is perhaps most remarkable because of its self-less quality. Unlike Gwendolen, who limited her understanding by only reading others in relation to herself, Deronda places those he meets within the much larger context of his imagination. Although he initially sees Mirah as an extension of his own angst, he quickly corrects that impression by placing her in a different context, seeing her as just one instance of the "girl-tragedies that are going on in the world, hidden, unheeded, as if they were but tragedies of the copse or hedgerow" (II.17.188). In this sympathetic understanding, Eliot seems not only to position Deronda as an ideal reader, but also to present her theory of fiction. Deronda does not dismiss the tragedy of Mirah's sorrow as beneath his notice simply because it is likely to have a commonplace or ordinary cause. He considers Mirah a symbol of the epic role of women everywhere, women who typically remain anonymous and yet whose choices and sacrifices render them not an "insignificant thread of human history" but instead one of the "delicate vessels" in whom "is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affections" (II.11.124). This echoes the conclusion of *Middlemarch*, in which the diffusive effects of one individual's actions cannot be discounted: "for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in

unvisited tombs.”<sup>216</sup> Deronda is an ideal reader because he can see Mirah individually, socially, and universally. Without exaggerating her significance, he finds something sacred and meaningful in their encounter because she embodies his own fears and desires.

When he realizes this girl intends to drown herself, Deronda moves immediately to save her. It seems to be an instinctive response, and the action will have enormous consequences: “Deronda felt himself growing older this evening and entering on a new phase in finding a life to which his own had come—perhaps as a rescue; but how to make sure that snatching from death was rescue? The moment of finding a fellow-creature is often as full of mingled doubt and exultation as the moment of finding an idea” (II.17.195). In these parallel drowning scenes, Deronda is a rescuer and Gwendolen is not a killer. These are matters of *fact*, but matters of feeling are quite different and allow for multiplicities for which empiricism cannot account:

Macbeth’s rhetoric about the impossibility of being many opposite things in the same moment, referred to the clumsy necessities of action and not to the subtler possibilities of feeling...a moment is room wide enough for the loyal and mean desire, for the out-lash of a murderous thought and the sharp backward stroke of repentance. (I.IV.42)

The complex ethical questions in *Daniel Deronda* are always about the relationship of the self to other individuals. Metaphysical truths—like the capacity of conflicting feeling and the capacity to identify with another person—are as relevant as the material circumstances that influence behavior. In fact, Eliot’s work suggests that metaphysical and empirical realities are distinct and yet are constantly informing one another to such an extent that neither can exist without the other.

In spite of its foray into sensational moments of premonitions and haunting spirits, *Daniel Deronda* is not interested in dismissing material facts to dwell entirely in intangible

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<sup>216</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 1872 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 785.



truths of ethical systems and moral responsibilities. Eliot's fiction seems to find its purpose in forging and affirming connections between the material and the moral—connections that begin, as I have indicated earlier, in encounters between human beings. It is no accident that Deronda's careful assessment of those he meets begins with an objective appraisal of empirical details; we cannot learn everything we need to know from "attempts at description" but we are certain to learn something—and that knowledge holds a particular value. It is significant, however, that the one quality Deronda is not able to read in Mirah's features is the very one that will ultimately define their relationship to one another: her Jewishness. Although Deronda has no inkling of his own Jewish heritage at the moment he rescues Mirah, their shared spiritual and cultural heritage seems to be an invisible element that brings them together. When Deronda saves Mirah, she becomes a vision of his own salvation, the discovery of his hidden past and future purpose.

Deronda's sympathies were not simply an accident of goodwill and fellow-feeling. Eliot depicts them as a natural development, stemming from his own sense of difference and his desire to know his parents and know his past: "His own face in the glass had during many years been associated for him with thoughts of some one whom he must be like—about one whose character and lot he continually wondered, and never dared ask" (II.17.186). His handsome physical appearance is guileless and a secret-keeper at the same time, and it is undoubtedly part of the reason he is so well-liked: "Certainly his face had a great deal to do with that favourable interpretation; but in this instance the beauty of the closed lips told no falsehood" (II.16.174). The irony of making Deronda's visage seem so transparent, making his outward appearance reflect his inner good nature, is that only Mordecai's second-sight can read the truth of his hidden past and reveal his religious and

cultural heritage.<sup>217</sup> Deronda is not altered by Mordecai's vision but instead his inner desires at last are revealed to match an outward identity. The empirical facts of Deronda's appearance do not change; they merely find a new reader. In this case, as it was when Deronda rescued Mirah, Mordecai Cohen's desire for a meaningful and fulfilling connection with a like-minded human being enables him to see a metaphysical connection between himself and Deronda that is invisible to others. The narrative confirms this truth with empirical evidence that has puzzled Deronda all his life. In other words, Deronda's "emotional intellect" has offered him "some truth of what will be."

In one of the most dramatic scenes of premonition in the novel, Mordecai is standing on a bridge and Deronda is once again in a boat in the river. Before he recognizes the figure in the boat, Mordecai finds himself strangely drawn to it, "at first simply because it was advancing, then with a recovery of impressions that made him quiver as with a presentiment, till at last the nearing figure lifted up its face towards him—the face of his visions—and then immediately, the white uplifted hand, beckoned again and again" (V.40.492-3). Like the upturned white face that haunts Gwendolen, Mordecai's view of Deronda is not an apparition but "a recovery of impressions"—again, those "unnumbered impressions" that "ris[e] into visions with a seed-like growth (V.38.471). Deronda may be an ideal reader, but Eliot is careful to differentiate him from Mordecai: "Deronda's was not one of those quivering-posed natures that lend themselves to second-sight" (V.37.470). Mordecai has already imagined an encounter with Deronda, has seen in his face the promise of a pupil who will eventually take over his teacher's mission. The beckoning white hand seems to be a metaphysical force that draws them together and the implausibility of this

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<sup>217</sup> For discussion of Deronda's unknown Jewish identity and the issue of circumcision, see Cynthia Chase's article, "The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-Reading *Daniel Deronda*" in *Deconstruction: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. II, ed. Jonathan Culler (London: Routledge, 2003).

scenario is moot because Mordecai's presentiment is accurate—he, too, has seen his wish outside him. He tells Deronda, "They said, 'He feeds himself on visions,' and I denied not; for visions are the creators and feeders of the world" (V.40.497). Mordecai echoes the narrative's own definition of second sight: "yearnings [...] which have a foreshadowing power" (V.38.471). This crucial admission brings the beckoning hand of Mordecai's vision back to the material reality of Deronda's world. There remains that paradox of premonition and self-fulfilling prophecy that *Daniel Deronda* never quite resolves. Mordecai's prophecy seems to have no empirical explanation, but it is ultimately validated in the way it changes history. The material facts of the end result become proof of the visions that might otherwise be dismissed. Eliot deliberately leaves the source of these visions open-ended and questionable. In doing so, she tacitly insists that the meaning of the vision is not dependent on whether it is supernatural or empirically explicable, but that it contains a moral value that cannot be empirically explained and yet receives empirical validation for its efficacy.

Deronda, in spite of his generous nature and open-minded perspective, is rather skeptical about what he initially considers Mordecai's "hallucinations of thought" (V.40.494). His response to Mordecai's insistence that they are spiritually connected, that Deronda is the answer to his "spiritual destiny" (V.40.498), the one who "shall take the inheritance" (V.40.500) is understandably cynical at first. In keeping with his careful empirical assessment of those he meets, Deronda concludes that the consumptive man "might have become a monomaniac on some subject which had given too severe a strain to his diseased organism" (V.40.494). Deronda is willing to pathologize Mordecai's strange visions in order to find a legitimate explanation for them. In 1835, James Cowles Prichard defined monomania in his *Treatise on Insanity* as "partial insanity, in which the understanding is partially disordered or under the influence of some particular illusion, referring to one subject, and involving one

train of ideas, while the intellectual powers appear, when exercised on other subjects, to be in great measure unimpaired.”<sup>218</sup> The correspondence between Prichard’s definition and Mordecai’s behavior is striking, and *Deronda* offers a possibility for psychologizing the visions and keeping them firmly within the realm of an empirical epistemology.

As a reiteration of his own skepticism, *Deronda* imagines Sir Hugo’s response, and the ease with which Mordecai’s beliefs could be dismissed: “A consumptive Jew, possessed by a fanaticism which obstacles and hastening death intensified, had fixed on *Deronda* as the antitype of some visionary image, the offspring of wedded hope and despair: despair of his own life, irrepressible hope in the propagation of his fanatical beliefs” (V.41.510). The painful truth is that there is nothing incorrect about this reductive explanation; technically, it is quite true. But reducing him to this empirical summary “leaves a world of unknown feeling behind” (VII.54.678). In spite of his inclination to agree with Sir Hugo, “[*Deronda*’s] nature was too large, too ready to conceive regions beyond his own experience, to rest at once in the easy explanation, ‘madness,’ whenever a consciousness showed some fullness and conviction where his own was blank” (V.40.494). In the contrast between a conventional interpretation of Mordecai and *Deronda*’s greater sympathies, Eliot reveals the impoverishment of a secular psychology that dismisses metaphysical forces instead of seeking their factual basis.

*Deronda*’s rational point of view has no inclination to believe Mordecai, but he responds sympathetically, and that makes all the difference:

He felt nothing that could be called belief in the validity of Mordecai’s impressions concerning him or in the probability of any greatly effective issue: what he felt was a profound sensibility to a cry from the depths of another soul; and accompanying that, the summons to be receptive instead

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<sup>218</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*, 1835, *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, eds. Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 252.

of superciliously prejudging. (V.40.496)

More than affirming the possibility of second-sight, Eliot is invested in affirming connections among people. Deronda accepts the ethical responsibility that comes from his encounter with Mordecai, as he did with Mirah. Mordecai's vision ultimately will be "explained and justified" by science—Deronda's biological origins. This discovery of origins becomes another instance of false images leading to real effects. When Deronda discovers that his Jewish heritage reveals the uncanny accuracy of Mordecai's visions, Mordecai can no longer be fully pathologized or marginalized. Deronda's willingness to be moved by Mordecai's vision, even when he doesn't understand or experience it himself opens him up to new modes of understanding. He allows Mordecai's premonition to shape his conduct; the real effect, then, is Deronda's ultimate satisfaction in taking on Mordecai's cultural mission. The premonition is confirmed by the consequences that dramatically alter Deronda's future. In seeking a moral truth for his own life, Deronda is willing to look for it in unexpected places and accept it in its most mysterious forms; his reading of the situation becomes a contemplation of Eliot's own aesthetic.

As this chapter has demonstrated, in parallel moments that conflate madness with moral significance, Gwendolen and Mordecai are linked as the novel's visionaries. Because of the social and historical import associated with Mordecai's premonition and Deronda's acceptance of his project of Jewish nationalism, the association of Mordecai's presentiment with Gwendolen's ghostly visions is an uncomfortable one. Where Mordecai's devout faith seems answered in the form of Daniel Deronda, Gwendolen's ghostly visions are more easily attributed to a "streak of superstition...which attached itself both to her confidence and her terror—a superstition which lingers in an intense personality even in spite of theory and science; any dread or hope for self being stronger than all reasons for or against it"

(III.24.276). This is a problematic pairing of faith and superstition in which neither has a clearly defined basis in empirical fact and both are eerily correct. Linking Mordecai with Gwendolen in his dramatic scene of prophecy threatens to reduce the effect of their second-sight, and perhaps to diminish the significance of Deronda's cultural inheritance. As Athena Vrettos argues, the "common psychic experience" that Mordecai and Gwendolen share "carr[ies] a potential challenge to Mordecai's prophetic authority because, like medical correlations between saints and hysterics, Eliot's rhetoric encodes the possibility that all visionary powers are a function of nervous disease."<sup>219</sup> But this interpretation deliberately reads against the grain in *Daniel Deronda* and, like Sir Hugo, only accounts for the facts without careful consideration of the metaphysical forces that are part of our sensory experience even if they appear to defy empirical explanation.

In *Daniel Deronda*, we see Eliot's search for a scientific understanding of the world that does not simply use science as a framework for unlikely hypothetical leaps, but seeks to comprehend and account for metaphysical forces of various kinds, in so far as each has a real and measurable effect on human life. Although this is framed as a scientific endeavor, it is only through the work of fiction that she can demonstrate the significance of intuition in ordinary life. As she wrote in *The Mill on the Floss*, "In natural science, I have understood, there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of human life."<sup>220</sup> In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot accounts for those conditions that seem inexplicable. She reaches beyond realism not to leave it behind, but to pull those mysterious elements that

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<sup>219</sup> Vrettos, 75.

<sup>220</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 1860 (London: Penguin, 2003), 284.

influence human behavior back into the material and emotional world of the novel, creating fact from feeling by giving predictive validation to non-empirical perceptions.

In her article on second-sight in *Daniel Deronda* Pamela Thurschwell notes the equivalence that exists between “the fearful English woman and the powerful Jewish mystic.”<sup>221</sup> But distinguishing between a fearful woman and a powerful mystic downplays the full import of their similarity. Instead of deliberately making a distinction between a prophetic visionary and a hysterical female, or a monomaniacal extremist and a haunted girl, Eliot presents Mordecai and Gwendolen as two human beings who are alternatively comforted and tormented by inexplicable visions. As a literary form, the novel puts into play the tension between logical and imaginative modes of cognition, and that tension becomes generative of the kinds of moral truths with which George Eliot’s fiction is so preoccupied.

These moral truths, as we have seen, are always linked to a sense of community. This ethical system does not rest on universal maxims, but is experienced in a sense of vulnerability and responsibility to one another. It creates demands that are unavoidable, even if they are not always achievable. These irrepressible demands are precisely what drove Deronda’s mother to keep his birthright a secret, and what compels her at last to tell him the truth about his Jewish heritage. She found herself in an impossible position, unable to answer to both patriarchal and personal mandates: “Every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else to be a monster. I am not a monster, but I have not felt exactly what other women feel” (VII.51.628). Deronda discovers that his mother is the Princess Leonora Halm-Ebserstein, who, thought the daughter of a rabbi, pursued a successful career

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<sup>221</sup> Pamela Thurschwell, “George Eliot’s Prophecies: Coercive Second Sight and Everyday Thought Reading,” *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds. Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91.

as an actress and singer under the name Leonora Alcharisi. She did so against her father's express wishes and secured what she thought was a better life for Deronda by entrusting him with Sir Hugo to be raised as an English gentleman, "relieved from the bondage of having been born a Jew" (VII.51.627). Leonora chose to separate herself and her son from the cultural community that was his birthright; she stands by her decision and yet she feels compelled to share her secret with her son: "I will not deny anything I have done. . . . But shadows are rising round me. Sickness makes them" (VII.51.628). Driven by these shadows, Leonora tries to explain herself to Deronda, to justify what seems like a moral failing.

Leonora's true mistake lies not in choosing her own path, but in denying Deronda that choice, in extricating him from the Jewish community and traditions in which he should have had a part. Still, Leonora asks for his sympathy: "you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl" (VI.51.631). The "slavery of being a girl" recalls Gwendolen's suffering under Grandcourt's tyrannical "empire of fear," Mirah's intense suffering, and Eliot's own experiences as well. Each of these women is in some way representative of those "girl-tragedies" that go unheeded. In spite of Leonora's conviction that she was right to resist a patriarchal mandate, she now finds herself tormented by metaphysical forces, her father's patriarchal power seems to emerge in shadowy visions that have compelled her to confess her secret to Deronda. The individual sacrifices that this system of ethics seems to require raise serious questions about a person's moral responsibility to herself as well as others, especially as a woman and a mother. It's a question for which the novel does not provide a clear answer, though it reframes Eliot's insistence on relationships over solitary self-expression. The narrative instead depicts the ideal scenario for a male character, when Deronda's vocation aligns itself



with his sense of social responsibility, and leaves unresolved the far more complicated consequences for women who find themselves both victims and perpetrators of unethical choices.

Leonora does not speak of regret, but she has agonizing doubts about her responsibility to her son and her right to defy her father's mandates and to make a life for herself in defiance of his wishes:

Sometimes I am in an agony of pain ... Then it is as if all the life I have chosen to live, all thoughts, all will, forsook me and left me alone in spots of memory, and I can't get away ... Then a great horror comes over me: what do I know of life or death? And what my father called 'right' may be a power that is laying hold of me—that is clutching me now. (VI.51.636)

Leonora is horrified by a sense of her own fallibility. These “spots of memory” trap her and leave her second-guessing her decisions. In her moments of doubt, her father's firm sense of moral truth and social responsibility are affirmed—if not for her, then for her son. She experiences these visions as a victim, passive and helpless against forces “laying hold” of her and “clutching” her in spite of her efforts to escape. Leonora's torment is complicated because her story invites a sympathetic reading of a girl who escapes a tyrannical father—we might wonder what sort of responsibility he had toward her, and whether his deathbed scene was similarly haunted by a fear that he failed his daughter. Still, the force of community seems to overpower Leonora's individual claims and distancing Deronda from his cultural heritage figures as the action of a vindictive woman rather than a conscientious decision. In removing Deronda from this “bondage,” she has stolen his birthright.

The “spots of memory” that invade her consciousness demand that Leonora adhere to a sense of moral responsibility that she has previously resisted: “It was my nature to resist, and say, ‘I have a right to resist.’ Well I say so still when I have any strength in me. .. But when my strength goes, some other right forces itself upon me like iron in an inexorable

hand; and even when I am at ease, it is beginning to make ghosts upon the daylight” (VII.51.636). These “ghosts” are manifestations of a force that cannot be empirically verified and yet are real in their power to compel a confession. Leonora’s ghostly visions prompt the delivery of factual material—written documentation that had been carefully stored in a chest since her father’s death: “I was going to burn the chest. But it was difficult to burn; and burning a chest and papers looks like a shameful act. I have committed no shameful act—except what the Jews would call shameful” (VII.51.637). The chest and papers are verification of the non-empirical forces that haunt Leonora. Whether her ghostly visions are a symptom of her illness or a supernatural presence is not the issue; they function as her own intuitive understanding that her choice may not be the same as Deronda’s. Leonora’s decision to flee her history and remove her son from it remains morally equivocal. In it, we see the tension of two different systems of ethics but Leonora’s individual choice is finally defeated by her intuitive (if reluctant) understanding that Deronda must have the opportunity to take his place as part of a larger community. At last the “inexorable hand” of “some other right” trumps her individual right and the revelation of Deronda’s Jewish heritage allows for the fulfillment of Mordecai’s prophecy, Deronda’s marriage to Mirah, and a sense of purpose and meaningful vocation in his life.

The shadowy forces that compel Leonora’s confession give Deronda the empirical knowledge he needs to respond to Mordecai’s charge to take up his project. But the opportunity truly comes to pass only because of Deronda’s initially sympathetic reception to Mordecai’s prophetic visions. At the close of the novel, his sympathetic understanding has evolved into a passionate dedication to Mordecai’s spiritual mission, reformulated as a political project: “I am going to the East to become better acquainted with the condition of my race in various countries there. . . . The idea that I am possessed with is that of restoring a

political existence to my people, making them a nation again, giving them a national centre ... That is a task which presents itself to me as a duty” (VIII.69.803). Deronda responds to Mordecai’s messianic vision with a clear rationality. His practical approach affirms the validity of Mordecai’s prophecy by embodying it in an empirical reality. Mordecai’s death can be read as further assurance that Deronda is prepared to take his visions and turn them into reality. The plausibility of Mordecai’s presentiment is beside the point once Deronda has turned the premonition into a plan.

Gwendolen, who clung to Deronda as her moral compass after Grandcourt’s death, reacts to Deronda’s plans to journey east with a sensation of losing herself: “she was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving” (VIII.69.804). This “mysterious movement” is not quite like Mordecai’s spiritual conviction or Deronda’s vocational purpose, but it is similar in that Gwendolen truly experiences a sense of her relationship to other people, her place within a community, and her increasing capacity for fellow-feeling. Like Leonora’s tale, Gwendolen’s conclusion is in many ways unsettling; in order to get to this point, she had to survive tragedy and terror. At the close of the novel, it is almost as though Gwendolen gets left behind, still struggling to come to grips with the consequences of her decisions while Deronda and Mirah sail off together into the sunset. But if the purpose of her frightening visions was to instill a sense of her place within a system of ethics, then this belated recognition of her position in relation to a larger existence is essential to the conversion narrative that moves Gwendolen from a spoiled child to a woman with a newly discovered moral purpose: “I shall live. I shall be better” (VIII.69.807).

In representing the way these characters read their world, Eliot's novel insists that consciousness is rooted in sensory experience but that it also has access to a moral sensibility that results from the encounters we share with other people. The feelings that shape this system of ethics may find expression in inexplicable experiences, but those experiences are valid because they have the power to change human history in specific empirical ways. The presence of ghostly voices and startling visions is a narrative attempt to suture the breaks in human experience. The only way to begin to read the world properly is to read it sympathetically, "to be receptive instead of superciliously prejudging" (V.40.496). As Eliot explains, "There is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of our gusts and storms" (III.24.277). The ghostly visions that permeate *Daniel Deronda* are problematic not because they are unrealistic, but because the mysterious traumas they represent are unmapped.

Without renouncing the traditions of realism or the authority of empirical truths, *Daniel Deronda*'s conclusion resolutely maintains a position of inquiry rather than explanation: an investigation into human experiences. Rather than insisting, as Dickens did, that forms that defy evidentiary proof can in fact be proven, Eliot is content to rest her novel in "disputed ground." In Leonora's confession, Deronda's journey east, Mordecai's quiet death, and Gwendolen's final determination to live and be better, the conclusion remains preoccupied with the mystery of human experience and the difficulty of deciphering both material and metaphysical realities, particularly as human beings exist in relation to one another. David Shaw uses Foucault's term "crisis of representation" to describe "the extraordinary density and impediment to clarity that occur whenever a poet, novelist, or essayist, in boldly confronting mysteries within a subject, refuses to deny bewilderment or

pretend that matters are less puzzling or unsettling than they really are.”<sup>222</sup> Where Dickens, Braddon, and Collins seek solutions for this paradox (with varying levels of success), the shared necessity of empirical assessment and sympathetic understanding is both emphasized and problematized in *Daniel Deronda*, precisely because it does not shy away from a representation of metaphysical forces that test the limits of empiricism. The novel makes space for intuition, premonitions, and visions in its realist project because they are an integral part of the human experience as Eliot represents it in her “endeavor to see what thought and emotion may be capable of.”<sup>223</sup> This crisis of representation invites a multitude of explanations, but the real faith of the novel lies in the eventual possibility of discovery—not in what we already know, but in what we might imagine to be true.

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<sup>222</sup> David Shaw, *Victorians and Mystery: Crises of Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>223</sup> George Eliot, *Letters*, vol. VI, 216.

## Coda: Intuition and the Scientific Spirit of the Post-Victorian Age

Just two years after the publication of *Bleak House*, Frances Power Cobbe, an important figure in later nineteenth-century feminism and social reform, published *An Essay on Intuitive Morals*. Her 1855 essay echoes the tension between intuition and empiricism that I have argued is central to Dickens's novel and to the others considered in this study. Cobbe contends that physical sensation and intuition are equal participants in every perception and that intuition is a source of moral and ethical truth. In the preface to her collection of essays, Cobbe writes, "We want to ratify our Intuitions in the court of the Intellect, and to be convinced that there are other realities and a still surer knowledge than those which our strong senses can feel or teach."<sup>224</sup> As this study has been at pains to assert, this view is a central concern for many Victorian writers who seek a responsible and legitimate method of accounting for alternate modes of cognition and equally accurate avenues of discovering truth, particularly when definitive truth and physical evidence seem to oppose one another. Empiricism's apparent lack of bias becomes less appealing when it is depicted as a heartless and amoral amalgamation of facts. Victorian novels consistently suggest that "a still surer knowledge than [that] which our strong senses can feel or teach" is possible and nearly always preferable. Like Cobbe, the novelists I have discussed are committed to reconciling the perceived tension these modes of cognition. Reconciliation of these modes of understanding may never be quite fully achieved, but there is a persistent struggle to align moral truth with empirical evidence, much as Victorian religion sought to reconcile belief with scientific theory.

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that part of the project of the large, three-

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<sup>224</sup> Frances Powell Cobbe, *An Essay on Intuitive Morals, Being an Attempt to Popularize Ethical Science*, 1855 (Boston: Crosby, Nichols and Company, 1859) xiv. Cobbe argues that the "Duty of Beneficence" is not one that could be learned empirically, but must be an intuitive understanding, therefore "morals are properly an intuitive, and not an inductive science" (106).

volume novels which dominated the publishing world in the Victorian era was to combine the rapid social and cultural shifts of the nineteenth-century with a sense of universal moral values in keeping with a realist tradition that allowed for a cohesive and balanced (if lengthy) narrative. In the words of Elizabeth Ermarth, “fictional realism is an aesthetic form of consensus.”<sup>225</sup> However, we should not overlook those moments that resist assimilation and the narrative questions that remain unresolved. This dissertation has suggested that the preoccupations of these novels are epistemological questions that resist easy categorization. Empiricism is both reliable and problematic, therefore suggesting a complementarity between scientific fact and imagination fails to account for the difficulty of achieving that balance. These novels seek a truth that is neither limited by subjective experience nor divorced from moral feeling, and the act of consensus is at the heart of the narratives. Like Cobbe, these novelists make a clear distinction between empirical evidence and intuitive certainty in their works. These texts seek consensus between a progressive rationality and more traditional modes of understanding, but they are fully aware that such compromise may not always be possible.

As Raymond Williams has argued, the world of Victorian novels was still a knowable place, although growing increasingly expansive and complex.<sup>226</sup> Empiricism’s collection of facts, even if they were open to interpretation, seemed to promise definite truths. Even individuals who were actively involved in decidedly non-empirical activities, like spiritualism, were eager to grant it legitimacy through empirical methodologies. Alex Owen claims that empirical science seemed to open a world of possibility, rather than rule out the existence of

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<sup>225</sup> Elizabeth Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) ix-x.

<sup>226</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 165.

non-empirical forces: “Positivistic science was confident that it could identify the laws by which the universe was regulated, and spiritualists saw no reason why their own experiences should not go to prove the existence of a new element and a new law.”<sup>227</sup> This bringing together of apparent oppositions was a desirable approach to handling difficult moments of transition and cultural change. In the novels I have examined here, we can clearly see that effort at compromise—as unwieldy and complicated as such reconciliation might be.

In the late nineteenth century, both the form and function of popular literature began to undergo extensive change. George Levine writes, “The Victorian realists had put their faith in the ‘fact’ and the fact had failed them.”<sup>228</sup> Empirical science no longer held the promise of a methodology that could account for individual interpretation and still attend to the discovery of objective truth. The anxiety about the inverse relationship between empirical analysis and imagination reached its peak. It was the same problem that Dickens had addressed in *Bleak House*, but such conciliatory efforts to make science fit with the imagination seemed less and less pertinent by the end of the century.

Frances Cobbe’s essay of 1888, *The Scientific Spirit of the Age*, reflects that shift, just as her first essay had thirty-three years earlier established the significance of connecting science with non-empirical modes of belief. Her later essay responds to the problems put forward by Charles Darwin in his autobiography published the previous year; namely, that instead of reaching a successful consensus through which empirical and non-empirical modes of cognition were equally influential, these methods of understanding were posited against one another, with an ever-widening gap between them. Dickens might have feared as much in *Bleak House* but his optimistic compromise was not workable three decades later. Empirical

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<sup>227</sup> Owen, *The Darkened Room*, vi.

<sup>228</sup> George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination*, 327.



science was no longer an expansive methodology that could finally account for creativity and finer feeling; it was a dark and intrusive force that reduced one's capacity for other modes of knowledge. Cobbe writes, "When Science—like Poverty—comes in at the door, Art—like Love—flies out the window."<sup>229</sup>

Cobbe protests against the encroachment of science; rather than seeking ways to incorporate new discoveries with cultural traditions, she views science to be limited to the most basic of facts which fail to account for all there is to know: "In our time, however, Science has repeatedly renounced all pretension to throw light in any direction beyond the sequence of physical causes and effects; and by doing so she has, I think, abandoned her claim to be man's guide to Truth."<sup>230</sup> Cobbe's essay indeed reflects the spirit of age and demonstrates that the grand mid-century project of reconciliation was coming to an end. Without the efforts of novelists intent on assimilating empirical facts with moral truths, the stark amorality of science seemed to lead toward a dangerous diminishment of feeling—like Tulkington in *Bleak House*, but without the promise of poetic justice. The factual analysis required by science would be the undoing of the student, who would ultimately lose the intuitive guidance of his conscience. With the end of the century looming, Frances Cobbe imagines just such a scenario:

The material (or, as our fathers would have called it, the *carnal*) fact will be uppermost in his mind, and the spiritual meaning thereof more or less out of sight. He will view his mother's tears not as expressions of her sorrow, but as solutions of muriates and carbonates of soda, and of phosphates of lime; and he will reflect that they were caused not by his heartlessness, but by cerebral pressure on her lachrymal glands.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Frances Power Cobbe, *The Scientific Spirit of the Age and Other Pleas and Discussions* (Boston: Geoffrey H. Ellis, 1888), 16.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>231</sup> Cobbe, *The Scientific Spirit*, 12.

Cobbe's anxiety about scientific progress reflects a general uneasiness about science's shift from a subject central to the public forum of political, social, and cultural debate, to an increasingly specialized and professionalized discipline. The philosophical approach to science espoused by public intellectuals like G. H. Lewes became obsolete simply because it was no longer possible—science was changing, branching off into specializations and subdividing into ever more specific areas of study. Protests and debates about practices like vivisection fueled the perception that science and morality were moving in opposite directions. Unlike G. H. Lewes and his contemporaries, scientists in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were less likely to communicate with the mass public about their work. No longer the vast philosophy of all creation, science was an increasingly narrow and professional discipline.

As science evolved and refigured its position in a cultural context, the novel also underwent a remarkable change in form and function. Perhaps this was partly because the reading public for whom such novels were written was no longer perceived as a coherent entity. The audience that Dickens and Collins so earnestly addressed in their Prefaces had diversified by the end of the century, and the increasing rate of literacy corresponded to a multifarious reading public whose interests were no longer encompassed by mainstream fiction. Where the big novel of the mid-century spoke to a broad and collective audience and operated as a means of shared experience for its readers, the bifurcation of high-brow and low-brow literature reflected the changing attitudes and aptitudes of the reading public. A corollary of this was the proliferation of new forms of fiction that were no longer preoccupied with the effort to restrain and incorporate cultural progress and social change into a familiar epistemology that would ultimately reinforce shared moral values. Once the questions and concerns of the mid-century three-volume novel were played out, the moral

imperative of fiction to account for methods of understanding the world lost its sense of urgency.

It was replaced by a multiplicity of genres: the return of the romance in cheap, short-story form, the explosion of the adventure novel, the detective novel, the spy novel, and science fiction tales that thrilled with the excitement of scientific progress, even in its grotesque and frightening possibilities.<sup>232</sup> Unburdened by the plight of the individual in relation to his community, liberated by the vast size and exotic stretches of the British Empire, and no longer preoccupied with the difficulty of making scientific progress morally compatible with shared ideals, these new forms of literature left behind the Victorian novel and its interest in reconciliation and comprehensions. George Saintsbury, preeminent man of letters and literary historian, acknowledged as much in an 1887 article in *The Fortnightly Review*, in which he asserted that “Stevenson and Haggard [...] have done a great deal to further that return to pure romance, as distinguished from the analytic novel, which was seen to be coming several years ago.”<sup>233</sup> Arguing that the mid-century analytic novel has run its course, he contends that the cyclical nature of literature compels a return to romance: “For the romance is of its nature eternal and preliminary to the novel.”<sup>234</sup> Romantic tales and adventure and empire have significantly different preoccupations than the “analytic novel” with its commentary on social conditions; the reconciliation of empirical and intuitive modes of understanding is not one of them. But if we acknowledge this desire for compromise to

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<sup>232</sup> The popularity of adventure novels like H. Ryder Haggard’s *She*, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, and George Alfred Henty’s *With Clive In India*, *The Beginnings of an Empire*—all written in the 1880s—speaks to the significance of this shift in literary form and interests. H. G. Wells’s dystopic science fiction, like *War of the Worlds* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, illustrates one form of fictional representations of science that gained ground at the start of the new century.

<sup>233</sup> George Saintsbury, “The Present State of the Novel,” *Fortnightly Review* vol. 48 (1887): 411.

<sup>234</sup> Saintsbury, 416.

be an inherent part of the realist novel's project, we can see that the relationship between science and literature in the nineteenth century remains significant for mid-Victorian novelists, although it is anything but simple. In its purest form, Frances Cobbe suggests, science "should widen the sympathies, dignify the character, inspire enthusiasm for noble actions."<sup>235</sup> At the height of their powers, and occasionally through remarkably similar means, both Victorian novelists and scientists seemed equally bent on achieving these same ends.

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<sup>235</sup> Cobbe, *The Scientific Spirit*, 11.

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