THE TENSION OF THE REAL: VISUALITY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITISH REALISM

by

AMANDA L. CORNWALL

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of Comparative Literature
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2015

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Amanda L. Cornwall

Title: The Tension of the Real: Visuality in Nineteenth Century British Realism

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Comparative Literature by:

Professor Forest Pyle	Chairperson
Professor Kenneth Calhoon	Core Member
Assistant Professor Heidi Kaufman	Core Member
Associate Professor Martin Klebes	Institutional Representative

and

Professor Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2015

© 2015 Amanda L. Cornwall

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Amanda L. Cornwall

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Comparative Literature

June 2015

Title: The Tension of the Real: Visuality in Nineteenth Century British Realism

This dissertation begins from the problem that is built into realism as a literary genre: its commitment to capturing the unfiltered circumstances of human life will always be at odds with the artifice of its representational constructs and its fiction. In this study, I consider visuality as a central, productive part of this problem and seek intensely visual moments within realist novels where realism wages its own struggle with itself as it attempts to navigate its limitations and push forward its possibilities. These moments pause the narrative as they prioritize picture over action. As descriptive moments work to render visual images through words on the printed page, they are fraught with realism's struggle to use the artifice of fiction as a means for approximating an ostensible reality. Facing this difficulty, realist practitioners take up vastly different strategies. In this project, I investigate why and how visuality is deployed so differently by those who chose to write in this mode.

I seek that which is piercing in the nineteenth-century realist novel by locating moments of crisis and tension, both within the plot and also within the strategies of the stories' delivery. These are moments where the novel becomes troubled by the visual, revealing the potential and limit of the image. In realism, visuality encompasses a broad and varied array of strategies, including instances of enargeia and ekphrasis, passages that

seek to evoke a sense of place or milieu through a rich catalog of visual detail, expressive self-renderings in the dialog and inner monologs of the characters, explorations of the embodied act of seeing, and moments where perception fails or visual description exposes itself as insufficient. I consider a small group of canonical authors: George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad, who are of critical importance to this genre and to nineteenth century realism, as it moves towards modernism. By examining moments in their novels where descriptive imagery is at its most acute, I seek to explain how moments of intense visuality are crucial nodes where each author, using unique and distinctive methods, negotiates the problem of realist representation.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Amanda L. Cornwall

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
Emerson College, Boston, MA
Rockport College, Rockport, ME
Willamette University, Salem, OR

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, Comparative Literature, 2015, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, Writing and Publishing, 2003, Emerson College
Bachelor of Fine Arts, English, 1997, Willamette University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Novel
Nineteenth-Century Fine Art
Visual studies
History of Photography

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of Comparative Literature, 2006-2015

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Tres Pyle, for his patience and invaluable guidance throughout this project. Professor Kenneth Calhoon has been an essential mentor to me throughout my years at the University of Oregon, and I feel extremely fortunate to be a part of the community that he leads, with great wisdom, equity, and foresight, in the Department of Comparative Literature. I am thankful for the gracious support of Professor Heidi Kaufman and Professor Martin Klebes, who I am very honored to have had as members of my dissertation committee. Professor Lisa Freinkel has provided unfailing encouragement and wisdom from the very first, and Professor Leah Middlebrook's generously shared perspectives, especially regarding pedagogy, influence every part of my professional identity. It has been a privilege to be guided by Professor Richard Stein and Professor Michael Allan. Cynthia Stockwell's impeccable attention to detail, far-sighted organizational maneuvers, deep kindness, and boundless enthusiasm are gifts that make so much possible; she is irreplaceable. Thanks are especially due to my extraordinary friends: Ying Xiong, Jenny Odintz, Monica Zikpi, Chet Liesecki, Baran Germen, Mona Tougas, Anna-Lisa Baumeister, Susi Gomez, Ahmad Nadalizadeh, Amy Leggette, Corey Borgman, Yelena Ablaeva, Ryan Hull, Dora Parys, Jennifer Faust, Katy Phillips, and Sándor Paulay. Craig Nicholas, Noemi Razso and Kristy (and Ray and Linda) Thompson are at this point not friends but family, and I thank them along with my wonderful family: J.C. Milne, Victoria Milne, Emily McCobb, and Cody and Fiona Byrne. I would like to thank the fairy godparents of this project, Kara Barnette and Andrew Grace, the Ninja and the Butterfly, who have helped me more than they know. Finally, I gratefully remember the faith and luminous positivity of

Lauren Shannon Cornwall, (1987-1997), who always believed that one day I would achieve this goal.

For my mother,
Vicki Howie Cornwall

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Visuality and the Problem of Realism 6

The Image in Context 8

II. "STRAINING TOWARDS THAT PICTURE": THE AGENCY OF THE IMAGE IN GEORGE ELIOT'S *MIDDLEMARCH* 21

III. THOMAS HARDY AND THE CONSTRAINT OF VISION 59

The Marygreen Well: Jude's Vision from the Depths 59

Marlott and the Vale of Blackmoor: Tess's Constrained Horizons 61

The Constraint of Vision 63

Tess's Blighted Star 65

Jude and "the Grind of Stern Reality" 90

IV. RENDERING ISABEL ARCHER: HENRY JAMES'S *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* 99

Enter Isabel 102

Henry James' Realism 105

Isabel Reconsidered 114

Literary Portraiture and Ekphrasis 123

Chapter Page

Isabel Rendered....................................132

Function and Form, Vision and Technique.................... 153

V. THE OPTIC TROPE IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*.............. 155

REFERENCES CITED.................................... 202

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. "Sunset in the Long Drawing Room at Chesney Wold," by Phiz (Hablot Knight Browne) 4

2. "Tom All-Alone's," by Phiz (Hablot Knight Browne) 5

3. J.M.W. Turner, *Sunset on Rouen*, 1830-40. 84

4. J.M.W. Turner, *Stonehenge*, 1827 89

5. Honoré Daumier, *The Third-Class Carriage*, 1862. 96

6. Gustave Courbet, *The Sleeping Sewer,* 1853 128

7. Gustave Courbet, *The Seer*, 1855 129

8. John Singer Sargent, *Mrs. Hugh Hammersley*, 1892 130

9. John Singer Sargent, *Madame X*, 1883-1884 131

10. Paul Cezanne *Monte Sainte-Victorie*, 1906 139

11. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres 147

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The passage that opens Chapter Sixteen of Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* establishes the fact of a woman's absence from home and simultaneously evokes her lingering presence there, through her representation in a portrait framed upon the wall. Lady Dedlock is away from her primary residence; driven by her characteristic restlessness, she has "flitted away" to the house in London. Her husband, Sir Leicester, remains at Chesney Wold, their estate in Lincolnshire. He lies in the great drawing-room, gazing across the room at the painting of his absent wife. Aristocratically disabled by an attack of hereditary gout, Sir Leicster considers his affliction an affirmation of his patrician status, an honor of sorts that he endures with surprisingly robust spirits for an invalid. The chamber in which he languishes makes for a remarkably regal sickroom, and there: "…a goodly show he makes, lying in a flush of crimson and gold in the midst of the great drawing-room before his favourite picture of my Lady, with broad strips of sunlight shining in, down the long perspective, through the long line of windows, and alternating with soft reliefs of shadow" (255) Here, the narration's discussion of Lady Dedlock's restless movements and Sir Leiscter's noble, restrictive malady pauses, allowing a word-image to communicate the milieu, status, and circumstance of these two characters. The details assigned to the imagistic passage emphasize color and light. The sickbed is a red-gold throne, and the blocks of sunlight illuminating the portrait of

Leiscter's queen fade and repeat down the length of the passage in rhythmic chiaroscuro alternations that emphasize the depth and orderly sprawl of this genteel space.

The descriptive narration continues, expanding the atmospheric image of Leicester's room to encompass the visual details that define the character of the estate's exterior: "Outside, the stately oaks, rooted for ages in the green ground which has never known ploughshare, but was still a chase when kings rode to battle with sword and shield and rode a-hunting with bow and arrow, bear witness to his greatness" (255). The passage describes trees and green expanses undisturbed since the days of feudal antiquity. When Sir Leicester looks beyond his windowpanes, he sees landscape that has not been subdued or forced into agricultural productivity, turf that remains free from any stain of vulgar utility. That the grounds remain lands for pleasure riding and hunting is, for Leicester, further confirmation of his aristocracy, his leisure, and, in his view, his "greatness." A doubled sense of the visual is at play in this chapter's opening—the narration offers ostensibly objective visual details of what Leicester looks at, while also indicating his subjective perception of it-- how he "sees" his home and surroundings, and how these imaged details confirm his comfortable vision of his own elevated and secure social position.

Suggestions of ekphrastic detail add another layer of visual texture to the chapter's opening vignette. After describing the view beyond Leicester's window, the narration returns to scan the walls and report upon the paintings that hang, articulately, upon them: "Inside, his forefathers, looking on him from the walls, say, 'Each of us was a passing **reality** here and left this coloured shadow of himself and melted into

remembrance as dreamy as the distant voices of the rooks now lulling you to rest,' and hear their testimony to his greatness too" (256, emphasis added). The portrait paintings of his ancestors radiate a gentle but pervasive aura, as the forefathers' trace lingers, however faintly, in the painted canvases. As in a photograph, something of the embodied subject remains bound to the portrait paintings. The presence and influence of the dead ancestors becomes less ephemeral in the form of these "colored shadows."

A primary narrative function of Chapter Sixteen is to create a sense of contrast and tension between the world of Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, and that of the unfortunate street urchin, Jo, who exists on the opposite end of the social spectrum. The narration muses briefly on the unlikeliness of any link between them:

> What connexion can there be between the place in Lincolnshire… and the whereabout of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world who from opposite sides of great gulfs have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together! (256)

The very improbability that these two worlds should meet adds drama to the story, and to heighten that drama, Dickens juxtaposes these two worlds through descriptive passages presented in close proximity in the pages of the text. The narration offers an establishing image of Jo's neighborhood:

> …a ruinous place known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people, where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants who after establishing their own possession took to letting them out in lodgings. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and

> goes, fetching and carrying fever and sowing more evil in its every footprint… (256-257)

Dark, decayed, crumbling, and ruined, Tom-All-Alone's is the antithesis of Chesney Wold. Rather than a stately patina of age and enduring nobility, this London slum is coated with disease and the damp of seeping elements. Tom-All-Alone's is unstable, sliding towards entropy and dissolution. As evidence of this, the narration reports: "twice lately there has been a crash and a cloud of dust, like the springing of a mine, in Tom-all-Alone's; and each time a house has fallen" (256). The two locales could not be more different, and Hablot K. Browne's (Phiz)'s illustrations of each corroborate their paring as antitheses of one another (See figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: "Sunset in the Long Drawing Room at Chesney Wold,"
by Phiz (Hablot Knight Browne)

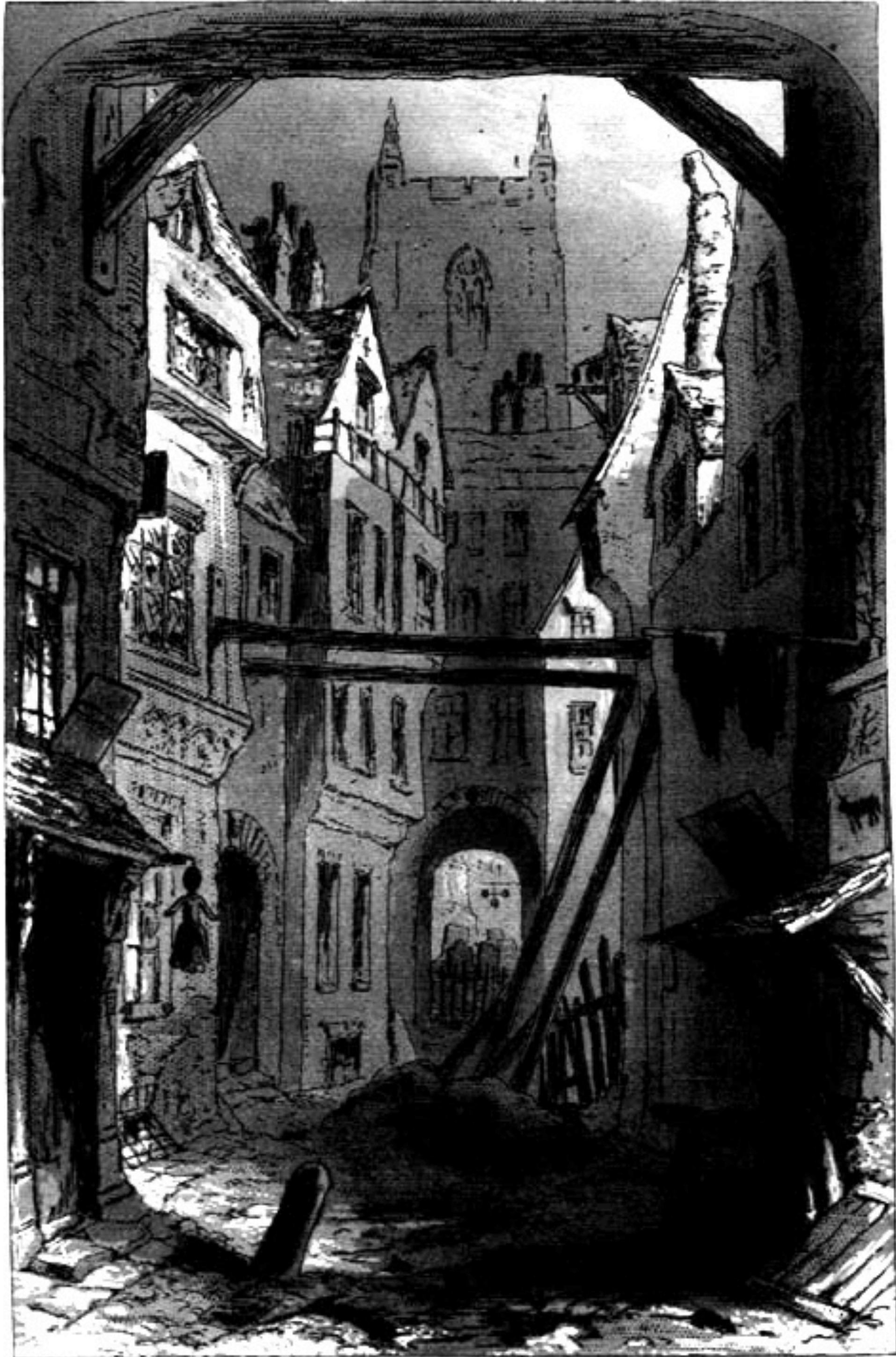

Figure 2: “Tom All-Alone’s,” by Phiz (Hablot Knight Browne)

Narrative tension rises from the sharp contrast between these two descriptive settings that lie so far from one another on the social and economic spectrum yet fall adjacently within the novel's pages. Both passages evoke heavy and specific atmosphere through a catalog of the visual qualities, strategically interwoven with statements of fact that cannot be represented through the appearance of an object or structure. The clash and disparity between the two places allows Dickens to address a traumatic and divisive tear in the social fabric; it is an exposure that is important not only to this novel but also to Dickens' concerns as a realist storyteller. The drama built through visual contrast quickens the pace of the narrative and intensifies the layers of the story as the descriptions conjure dissonance through these images of buildings, the architecture of interior space, illumination and darkness, painted artwork, furnishings, dirt. Through passages like these from Chapter Sixteen and many others, Charles Dickens demonstrates his method of grappling with problem of visuality within the context of literary realism. Through vivid and stark contrast conjured through descriptions of light and form, through parallelism and doubling, symbol and optical hyperbole, he harnesses the full force of the visual in his prose.

Visuality and the Problem of Realism

In the forward to *Adventures in Realism*, a collection of essays edited by Matthew Beaumont and published in 2007, Rachel Bowlby acknowledges that nineteenth-century realism has become an unfashionable topic in the eyes of literary critics. Bowlby claims that most contemporary references to realism are dismissive, and that the genre "comes

stuck with one of a set menu of regular adjectival accompaniments, and whether it's gritty, or vulgar, or kitchen-sink, or photographic, the standard formulations reinforce the way it is seen as itself formulaic, something we already know about and need have no interest in exploring: it is predictable and simple" (xi). More specifically, critics of realism express "scorn for realism's crudely 'linear' narratives, its naively 'omniscient' narrators, and—worst crime of all—its facile assumptions of linguistic 'transparency'" (xi). The problem with realism is that its interest in capturing the true, unfiltered circumstances of human life will always and inevitably seem at odds with the artifice of its representational constructs and its fiction. This problem with realism, its underlying existential paradox, is well understood and accepted in the critical conversation. While the authors that Beaumont assembles in *Adventures in Realism* endeavor, as we see in Bowlby's opening essay, to reclaim realism as a subject for inquiry, I am interested in pressing further at the difficulty and problem of realism.

Realism's investment in visuality and the important link between realist literature, realist painting, and photography has long been established within the critical tradition. I wish to examine visuality not as a given feature of realism but as a central and productive problem, and consider how intensely visual moments within realist novels are sites where realism wages its own struggle with itself as it attempts to navigate its limitations and push forward its possibilities. These moments pause the narrative as they prioritize picture over action. As descriptive moments work to render visual images through words on the printed page, they are fraught with realism's struggle to use the artifice of fiction

as a means for approximating an ostensible reality.[1] Facing this difficulty, realist practitioners take up vastly different strategies. In this project, I investigate why and how visuality is deployed so differently by those that chose to write in this mode. My method is to consider a small group of canonical authors: George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad, who are all are of critical importance to this genre and to nineteenth century realism, as it moves towards modernism. By examining moments in their novels where descriptive imagery is at its most acute, I seek to explain how moments of intense visuality are crucial nodes where each author, using unique and distinctive methods, negotiates the problem of realist representation.

The Image in Context

This project seeks to consider visuality and its role in the realist novel by entering into conversation with existing theoretical work on the image and engaging with a vein of criticism that applies visual studies to nineteenth century literature. One of the most influential texts in the field of visual studies is *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1990. In this book, Jonathan Crary contextualizes the importance that vision and spectatorship assumes during this time period. He identifies a "reorganization of vision" that took place in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and argues that:

[1] Daniel Novak asserts in *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth Century Fiction* that photography enters into this point of tension, in the sense that "the dilemma photography made acutely visible was the disjunction between 'realistic' representation and coherent artistic structure" (7).

> …the break with classical models of vision in the early nineteenth century was far more than simply a shift in the appearance of images and art works, or in systems of representational conventions. Instead, it was inseparable from a massive reorganization of knowledge and social practices that modified in myriad ways the productive, cognitive, and desiring capacities of the human subject. (3)

In *Techniques of the Observer*, Crary integrates multiple fields of inquiry in order to investigate this epistemological reorganization and understand the "social surface on which the modernization of vision had begun" (5). He identifies a number of revolutionary advancements in optical technology, specifically, several devices that enhance and manipulate vision, including the stereoscope, the phenakistiscope[2] and, of course, the camera (8). Crary demonstrates the impact that these devices had in the realm of scientific inquiry and, most significantly for his project, their resonance and influence upon multiple facets of culture[3].

---

[2] The phenakistiscope, invented in the early 1830's by Jospeh Plateau, is a proto-cinematic optical device that harnesses retinal afterimages in order to simulate movement (Crary 108). In *Techniques of the Observer,* Crary provides photographs and diagrams of the phenakistiscope, and explains how in detail how it works: "…it consisted of a single disc, divided into eight or sixteen equal segments, each of which contained a small slitted opening and a figure, representing one position in a sequence of movement… because of retinal persistence, a series of images results that appears to be in continuous motion before the eye" (109).

[3] In *Optical Impersonality: Science, Images, and Literary Modernism*, Christina Walter also identifies the nineteenth century as a time during which a major shift in the concept of vision took place, stating that prior to the nineteenth century, understandings of vision generally separated the organ of the eye from the rational mind "that reflected upon and even perfected those forms" (2) that the eye observed. She explains that a long-standing model that presented object, eye, and mind as a linear relay broke down in the nineteenth century, yielding to a new formulation, in which "the thinking subject, the perceiving body, the perceptual object, and the material world couldn't be so firmly separated" (2). Walter references the same scientific developments that are the subject of Wade's history of perception and illusion; like Crary, she emphasizes visuality's dual nestling within the domain of science and the realm of culture.

Nicholas Wade also investigates nineteenth century optical technologies in *Perception and Illusion.* Wade refers to these developments in optics as the "instrumental revolution" (108) and notes that these new optical technologies were transformational to science and culture because of their ability to enhance, measure, stimulate[4], or record visual experience.[5] Crary frames the inventions as Foucaultian, claiming that they become "sites of both knowledge and power that operate directly on the body of the individual" (7). They are useful to consider in terms of their derivation out of "new empirical knowledge of the physiological status of the observer and of vision" (14). As both Wade and Crary explore, many "philosophical toys" (110) as they were called, were used outside of a scientific context for entertainment and diversion, and were wildly popular in the Victorian drawing room. These toys and their power to extend, trick, and manipulate vision led to a fascination with illusion and magic, appealing to the Victorian appetite for spectacle and gothic titillation.

Crary argues that the invention of philosophical toys was one of many factors in the changing "organization of the visual," (2) during this time period, which "produced a new kind of observer" (3). He emphasizes the way in which "vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both historical

[4] Wade argues that "the senses were electrified in the nineteenth century" (180).

[5] Wade makes a distinction between the study of vision and the study of optics and ophthalmology, noting that advances in optics and ophthalmology took place much earlier than the advances (taking place during the 1830s and forward) in the science of vision. To clarify, optics is the study of the behavior and properties light (and the devices that manipulate light), ophthalmology is the study of the eye organ and its structures, and the study of vision considers the phenomenological experience of sight.

product *and* the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification" (5). The nineteenth-century subject is therefore a spectator, who operates in a time of "increasing rationalization and control… in terms of new institutional and economic requirements" (9). Crary's approach consciously avoids technological determinism, yet he demonstrates how optical devices are part of networked process in which the nineteenth century subject "is made adequate to a constellation of new events, forces, and institutions that together are loosely and perhaps tautologically definable as 'modernity'" (9). *Techniques of the Observer* explains the forces that contributed to the construction of this new kind of observer so central to and representative of the nineteenth century.[6]

In *Techniques of the Observer*, Crary aligns his claims about the nineteenth century's new mode of spectatorship with Michel Foucault's theoretical work on the panopticon as an instrument of surveillance essential to the administration of spaces of punitive confinement. The panopticion, Crary argues, is only one of a whole battery of optical devices that all "involved arrangements of bodies in space, regulations of activity, and the deployment of individual bodies, which codified and normalized the observer within rigidly defined systems of visual consumption… the organization of mass culture… was fully embedded within the same transformations Foucault outlines" (18).

---

[6] Linda Shires summarizes the impact of Crary's research upon nineteenth-century studies, noting that "many critics… have usefully adapted and corrected some of Crary's research, particularly in light of the increased speed of time and space and the transience of everyday life in the nineteenth century… others have taken a further look at the impact on the culture of realism of the new optical technologies" (9). According to Shires, one point of consensus in the discussion is that the nineteenth century observer is the product of multiple social forces acting upon and within the body of the individual subject.

For Crary, devices like the stereoscope and the camera interfaced with the nineteenth century observer in a way that was just as corporeal and profound in their impact as the panopticon.

Crary critiques Foucault's reluctance to consider spectacle as well as surveillance, and recognize the possibility of an aggregate structure of power that unifies them both (18). To explain what he sees an omission in Foucault's work, Crary conjectures that Foucault wished to differentiate and prioritize his notion of surveillance, distinguishing surveillance from the conceptualization of spectacle that Guy Debord put forth in his 1967 text *The Society of the Spectacle*. In this text, Debord implicates the image as he structures his indictment of the modern society of the spectacle, specifying that the spectacle "is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images… both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production" (12-13). In Crary's assessment, the "society of the spectacle" did not assume dominance until well into the twentieth century, only after the further development of media technologies and the imposition of certain strategies for their use. Crary claims that society of the spectacle is a phenomenon that entered into common experience in the late 1920's (18), and in *Techniques of the Observer*, he provides a "prehistory on the early background of the spectacle," emphasizing the ways in which "the autonomization of sight… was a historical condition for the rebuilding of an observer fitted for the task of 'spectacular' consumption" (19). Crary's ideas about the nature of the nineteenth century observer have deep influence throughout the field of visual studies, and much of

contemporary literary criticism focusing upon nineteenth century realism draws upon Crary's theories.

Significant work in literary criticism shares Crary's approach to nineteenth century culture, recognizing the influence that advancements in the understanding of optics and revolutionary inventions like the camera and the stereoscope had upon literature. In *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, Nancy Armstrong explains how the development of photographic technology and the vast proliferation of photographic images "reconstituted the world as image" (86), and as a result, the verisimilitude that literary realism aspired to "referred to something like a composite photograph" rather than documentarian mimesis of an unmediated world. In a passage informed by Walter Benjamin's essay "The World of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Armstrong establishes that "…alongside developments in the theory of optics that individuated human vision, improvements in photographic technology expanded the range of people and things whose images could be mechanically reproduced… in this new relation between eye and camera, most literate individuals saw most of the world as photographic images" (77). Armstrong reveals the complication of the relationship between fiction and photography, "…how photography authorized fiction as a truth-telling medium," and that "the reverse was true as well… in order to convince readers fiction was indeed offering them mastery of the world of objects, fiction had to authorize the transparent, reproducible image" (27). As readers became familiar with the form and

rhetoric[7] of the photographic image, the faith instilled in the photograph began to transfer to realist fiction's narrative descriptions, and "fiction's rendering of certain characters, settings, and objects within a truth-telling capability resembles the transparency attributed to the photograph" (28). Armstrong sees the tautological relationship between fiction and photography as both productive and necessary, clarifying that "if the process by which fiction and photography authorized each other in the name of realism appears to be a circular one, that is because realism could not have achieved its power to tell the truth in any other way" (28).

In *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth Century Fiction,* Daniel Novak expands on Armstrong's ideas and argues that photography and Victorian realism exist in a collaboration that has more to do with effacement than collaborative reinforcement. Novak elects to adopt a point of view committed to "reading realism as an aesthetic of abstraction," and connecting realism and photography by asserting that "…rather than a shared ideology of representing the particularity of the 'real' world, both photographic 'realism' and Victorian realist fiction produce and depend upon the effacement of

[7] Here I am employing Roland Barthes' construct from his essay "The Rhetoric of the Image." As he aligns the interpretation of the image (particularly advertising images utilized by the market system to communicate messages to the consumer) with the semiotic coding of linguistics, Barthes probes the "ontology of the process of signification" (152) by which an image articulates its meaning. He identifies thee messages embedded in the image, "a linguistic message, a coded iconic message, and a non-coded iconic message" (154) and differentiates between the denotation of the literal image and the connotation of the denoted image (155). The rhetoric of the image consists of a set of connotators that, within the image, are "*discontinuous* or better still *scattered traits*" (162). Barthes' essay breaks down the image to show that, like understanding speech, interpreting the image is a process complicated by the fluidity of image's constituting signifiers.

particularity" (30). Photographic realism, he argues, is paradoxically prone towards "sliding insensibly into its presumed opposite – distortion and the grotesque" (34). Photographic images "fragment the world into disconnected pieces, and also made those pieces interchangeable and abstract" (7). Novak locates photography's tendency towards abstraction in the way that photographs, despite their obvious capacity for capturing an infinite array visual information, are also able to render this multiplicity of details as uniform. Photography does the same to individual identities by "selecting, recombining, and creating new wholes" (7). Novak provides numerous examples of the techniques that photography employs in service of this reconstitution of the image, most notably the composite images of Henry Peach Robinson and Oscar Gustav Rejlander. Photography's literary counterparts, descriptive moments within the realist novel, often employ similar tropes of "anonymity, interchangeability, and abstraction" (29). In doing so, these novels come to rely upon a "form of forgetting," because the success of the form requires "the ability to forget both the text's composite history and the reader's role in constructing the text through an act of reading" (32). Novak's interventions are powerful because they concretely draw from a close analysis of photography's curious techniques and practices, rather than establishing a more removed set of ideas and theories about the potential of the photographic image as a sociopolitical force.

The force of a photograph, for Roland Barthes, lies not in the subject it represents, its *studium*, but rather in its *punctum*. In *Camera Lucida,* Barthes clarifies that while it may be the *studium*, the ostensible subject, that draws us to photographs, it is the *punctum* that makes the photograph take its hold on us. The *punctum* exists in the eye of the

viewer and often takes the form of an unexpected or uncomfortable detail. The text includes examples of photographs that for Barthes contain *punctum*. There is a photograph of developmentally disabled children, for example, that Barthes includes and comments upon. He writes that in looking at this photograph he, like "a primitive, a child—or a maniac" who sees only from his autonomous and personal eye, is pierced not by the presentation of the children but by the small detail of the girls' bandaged finger. Barthes describes the way that the *punctum* works on him: "…it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, pricks me" (26). Significantly, Barthes sees this piercing as a kind of punctuation: "the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points, these marks, these wounds…[punctum is] also a cast of the dice… that accident which pricks me) but also bruises me, is poignant to me" (27).

For Barthes, the *punctum* is an accident within the photograph. It is not placed there intentionally by the photographer, but is the result of photography's ability to capture an image that encompasses the totality of a scene, which the operator can never fully control. Logically, it would seem that there could be no correlative to the *punctum* in literature, as the existence of everything in the text implies the author's intentionality. Yet, there are moments in the novel that function as *punctuation*, providing pause and separation. Instances of intensified visuality create novelistic *punctum*, not merely because they pause the action and conjure images in the mind's eye, but because they are able to serve as productive intersections where the vocabulary of different artistic forms

collide. Ekphrastic passages are one example of this novelistic *punctum*. Through the visual, the text pierces the reader.

My methodology in this project is to seek that which is piercing in the nineteenth-century realist novel by closely reading several canonical nineteenth century writers working within the British tradition.[8] These are often moments of crisis and tension, both within the plot and also within the movements and strategies of the stories' delivery—in the narration itself. These are moments where the novel becomes troubled by the visual, revealing the potential and limit of the image as an expressive mechanism. In this sense, visuality encompasses a broad and varied array of strategies. These include instances of enargeia and ekphrasis, passages that seek to powerfully evoke a sense of place or milieu through a rich catalog of visual detail, expressive self-renderings in the dialog and inner monologues of the characters, explorations of the embodied act of seeing, and moments where perception fails or visual description exposes itself as insufficient.

I begin my inquiry into visuality the nineteenth century realist novel by examining George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, locating instances where visual description are nodes of affective impact and negotiation for Eliot's characters. While the narrative's description of objects and places are a means for representing the social conditions that Eliot is committed to exploring, the characters' own encounters with visual experience allow

[8] While Henry James was born in the United States and Joseph Conrad was a Ukranian-born Pole, both worked for extensive periods of time in England and are securely attached to British literary tradition; they are canonical figures of equitable stature to George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. James and Conrad both draw from and participate in the realist mode, through they reach into proto-modernist and even modernist territory via the experimentality and complexity of their prose.

them to press upon boundaries between self and other. The act of beholding, interpreting, and internalizing visual experience, especially exemplified in the case of Dorothea Brooke, becomes an opportunity to engage in ethical self-expression as she styles her response to what she sees. Dorothea and many of those connected to her in Middlemarch's web of place and circumstance are framed within these moments of narrative pause where the image comes to the fore, in sites that force aesthetic sensibilities into response. In *Middlemarch,* visual encounter has the potential to exert a real and measurable force upon the individual character, acting upon him or her in a way that is both difficult and generative.

As I examine two of Thomas Hardy's most widely read novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure,* I locate the ways in which Hardy's characters come up against the limits of seeing as a way of knowing. In each of these novels, richly descriptive passages establish a sense of place and setting that not only points towards the character's location within a specific geography, but also bind the character to a restrictive and compartmentalized milieu. Tess and Jude, in respective ways, are imprisoned by their geographic and socioeconomic realities, and visual description is at the heart of Hardy's presentation of these environments. In Hardy, descriptive writing delineates and restricts the characters' possibilities while the prose itself collides against the limitations of visuality, as the passages transcend their focus upon the image to become abstract ruminations that are no longer descriptively representational. Tess and Jude struggle to realize dreams always elude them, and they are each doomed by their respective failures to perceive. Both stories unfold within the confines of a low horizon,

where promising glimpses of far-off vistas prove illusory and disappointing. Hardy's novels employ richly detailed and saturated descriptions, but in the end the deepest impression left is of images in collapse where determinative realities preclude escape.

In the chapter on Henry James, I examine *The Portrait of a Lady* in order to understand how visual moments are sites of negotiation where James situates his highly aestheticized descriptive technique within the context of his intent to create a vivid literary portrait. The text that renders Isabel Archer clearly seeks to establish a resonant authenticity, but at the same time, Isabel Archer's depiction precludes any claim to naturalism because she is a vision created and prepared for consumption as an image. The demonstrations of Isabel's self-image within the narration reveal that she is aware of herself as an image and complicit in her own aesthetic styling. In the novel, descriptive passages assemble paintings, sculpture, and the surrounding architecture as components of the setting, when Isabel Archer steps into these places the narrative's gaze focuses steadily upon her and converts her countenance, form, and figure into an ekphrastic device. In *The Portrait of a Lady,* Henry James navigates contradictory aims, as his aestheticized construction of Isabel Archer as image troubles his stated investment in literary realism.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a text where the visuality of literary realism presses forward into the modernist mode. My final chapter closely attends to the novella's descriptive work and to the way that the narration speaks about light and vision. I examine passages demonstrate the text's reverential focus upon light and contrast, its chiaroscuro patterning that traces the ebb of civilization's influence. It is an

impressionistic text but also one in which mechanized vision and optical technologies overlay and mediate the descriptive frames that Conrad presents. *Heart of Darkness* illustrates the ways in which deployments of strategizing vision facilitate the colonial enterprise via hegemonic and appropriative acts of looking.

CHAPTER II

"STRAINING TOWARDS THAT PICTURE":

THE AGENCY OF THE IMAGE IN GEORGE ELIOT'S *MIDDLEMARCH*

In the opening pages of *Middlemarch,* Eliot introduces Dorothea and her sister Celia, and although she offers relatively few words of physical description in order to sketch the young ladies, a clear and distinct image of Dorothea forms in these few quick narrative brushstrokes. As an explanation of Dorothea's beauty, the text only offers that Dorothea dresses poorly and plainly, and that this causes her to be "thrown into relief" (5). Of her specific physical attributes and their appeal, we know only that she has finely formed wrists, and that her sister's approach to beauty is markedly different. Celia manages to appear more of the coquette, despite the fact that her dress is nearly as plain as Dorothea's. Later, the narrative reveals that Dorothea has strangely striking eyes, which make Celia, the younger sister, seem much more worldly in comparison. We receive no expansive visual tableaux or evocative close-ups; instead, the narrative offers plenty of information about the social position and economic circumstance of the sisters and some details of personal attitudes that differentiate them from one another. The purpose of these details is to establish psychology of each and the consequence of these psychologies upon their relations with their surrounding neighbors (and thus their marriage prospects).[9] Eliot evokes sense of place almost entirely from her suggestions of

[9] The opening pages frame Dorothea and Celia within the context of the social structure that surrounds them, in order to begin laying down what J. Hillis Miller describes as a

the social milieu rather than the physical environment, without employing visual detail or imagery in a substantial way.

A moment of heightened visuality does occur at the close of Chapter 1, as Dorothea and her sister Celia examine the jewels their mother left to him, at Celia's urging. In contrast to Celia's eagerness to see the jewelry, the practical and charitably minded Dorothea has left them entirely unexamined in the six months since they were given to her, seemingly with little or no curiosity about them. The details given about the jewels in the box are few in number but quite vivid:

> The casket was soon open before them, and the various jewels spread out, making a bright parterre on the table. It was no great collection, but a few of the ornaments were of remarkable beauty, the finest that was obvious at first being a necklace of purple amethysts set in exquisite gold work, and a pearl cross with five brilliants in it. Dorothea immediately took up the necklace and fastened it round her sister's neck, where it fitted almost as closely as a bracelet; but the circle suited the Henrietta-Maria style of Celia's head and neck, and she could see that it did, in the pier-glass opposite (8).

In the above passage, Eliot relies upon a spare selection of adjectives to create the picture of the "bright parterre" of jewels spread upon the table. Quietly luminous, remarkable, and exquisite; the collection is characterized as small and not too showy, but with a few

---

web of inclusivity deployed in service of an "enterprise of totalization" (125). Miller sees this project as one shared by other important Victorian realist authors, including Thackeray, Dickens, and Trollope (125). He declares that "George Eliot is more straightforwardly 'realistic' in her procedure" in that she works with a large group of characters (126), but he reframes her project of totalization as one that "presents individual character or event in the context of that wider medium and to affirm universal laws of human behavior in terms of characters whose specificity and even uniqueness is indicated by the completeness of the psychological portratis of each… [making this novel perhaps the masterwork of Victorian realism" (126-127). I agree with Miller that "the unique life of each of the characters is presented as a part of a single system of complex interaction of time and space" (128), and I wish to focus upon specific interactions between Eliot's characters and their most forcefully visual experiences.

outstanding pieces that attract the eye. Celia is rapturous over the jewels and eager to wear them, whereas Dorothea, to her sister's dismay, at first declares that she will take none at all. "If I were to put on such a necklace as that, I should feel as if I had been pirouetting. The world would go round with me, and I should not know how to walk" (9). From the sight of their color and sparkle, Dorothea decides that to wear them would be a dizzying thing that would interfere with her ability to move and navigate her world.

Celia's reaction to the jewelry is entirely different. She innocently delights in them and cannot wait to show them off, and she realizes that her sister's initial renouncement of the jewelry contains a large measure of censure towards this enthusiasm. "But how can I wear ornaments if you, who are the elder sister, will never wear them?" bemoans Celia. In this moment of the novel, which centers upon a brief though vivid description of tangible objects, intangible elements of the girls' personalities are emphasized and clarified. Celia is a girl who doesn't always know to hide her vanity, wishing to enjoy the jewelry and wear it to enhance her beauty. In contrast Dorothea stoically and ascetically denies herself that pleasure, at least at first. After the girls' discussion, Eliot uses another visual moment to highlight Dorothea's change of mind about the jewelry and suggest what this reveals about the complexity of her nature.

Just a few moments after Dorothea and Celia have debated who should have which jewels, and Dorothea declares that she will take none at all, the narrative relates the way that Dorothea begins to change in her perception of their mother's jewelry collection:

> She was opening some ring-boxes, which disclosed a fine emerald with diamonds, and just then the sun passing beyond a cloud sent a bright gleam over the table. "How very beautiful these gems are!" said Dorothea, under a new current of feeling, as sudden as the gleam. "It is strange how deeply colours seem to penetrate one, like scent. I suppose that is the reason why gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St. John. They look like fragments of heaven. I think that emerald is more beautiful than any of them... All the while her thought was to justify her delight in the colours by merging them in her mystic religious joy. " (9)

As the sun gleams out to ignite the jewels, Dorothea responds to the image before them with a "new current of feeling," struggling to align her aesthetic appreciation of the jewels with her religious aspiration towards austerity. In this instance, the visual image of the gems spread out in the casket and then gleaming in the sunshine exists in order to illustrate something far more abstract than the concrete visual image of the jewels. The image is there to reveal the contrasting personalities of the Brooke sisters through the reactions and choices that the image provokes, and yet, Dorothea's vision of the jewels seems to act upon her and change both her perspective and her decision. Dorothea's aesthetic apprehension of the sight of the jewelry is at first not something that she can separate from her commitment to her moral principles. She filters the visual experience through her value system, and tries to reconcile their worldly appeal with the beliefs that she wishes to be ruled by, in a way that will enable her to act as she wishes without guilt. At the conclusion of this episode, Dorothea returns to her charity work, taking up her pencil once again, "without removing the jewels, and still looking at them. She though of having them by her, to feed her eye at all these little fountains of pure color" (10). Meanwhile, Celia thinks to herself: "Dorothea is not always consistent" (10). Celia indicts Dorothea for her inconsistency, yet the narrative suggests that Dorothea is acting

under the power of the image, still looking at the jewels that begin to hold her in thrall as they "feed" her eye.

For the Brooke girls, seeing their mother's jewelry sparkling in the sunlight is a powerful experience that causes them both to consider themselves more consciously. The jewelry functions, according to Jean Arnold, as a "focal point for aesthetic thought" (Arnold 266). Arnold argues that in *Middlemarch,* jewelry is the site of "textual confrontation between aesthetics and political economy in gender formation," particularly because of "its nearly exclusive use by women in the Victorian age" (266). For Dorothea, who has always been the more serious of the two girls, admiring the jewelry creates conflicting feelings, especially because the rings, bracelets, necklaces, and brooches are so visually captivating. The jewelry is "transporting her into an aesthetic reverie of sensual and spiritual free play, their beauty functions as a source of affective power" (267). Dorothea is very aware of all of the ways that jewelry, conceptually, is fraught with political and economic weight. The rings and necklaces are, of course, signs of class privilege, and the process of the discovery of gems and their manufacture into jewelry is abhorrent to her: "…yet what miserable men find such things, and work at them, and sell them!" (Eliot 10), she says. Despite her understanding of jewelry's function as political and social signs, she decides to wear them and so enhance her own visual appeal. Arnold notes that throughout *Middlemarch*, Dorothea "will consistently embrace belief systems grounded in aesthetic values" (267). When Dorothea looks at these objects and places, the moment of their deep visual resonance become sites where her aesthetic sensibilities respond, allowing her to clarify her beliefs and resolve her actions within the context of

her circumstances. These visual encounters, then, possess a subject-making force that precipitates her responses—certain images act upon her.

Understanding descriptive moments of *Middlemarch* in this way aligns with a materialist reading of the novel. To consider the novel in terms of moments of visual perception is also to move the focus onto the material objects that the characters encounter. In "The Materiality of *Middlemarch,*" Kate Flint explains:

> my concern here will be primarily with the world of things that the novel represents: with the potential of material objects to bear witness to the processes of social history that underpin the world of the text… and the ways in which [the objects] are made to relate to the perceptual and emotional habits and responses of those who own, wear, desire, observe, or dispose of them. (66)

Flint recognizes the way that in this novel, material things have an animate ability to "bear witness" to an individual character's perceptions, within their social worlds, as they bend in response to ongoing collisions between expectation and unchangeable circumstance. The attitudes of a character towards an object, which are communicated through dialog, internal monologue, or quasi-omniscient third person narration, evidence moments of growth or resistance. According to Flint, Eliot not only deploys "the social connotations embedded in household objects," she also demonstrates a "rhetorical habit of analogy" through which she is "continually turning the conceptual into the material" (67). Turning the conceptual into the material must always evoke the visual, and in Eliot's case, these evocations are much more than (mere) metaphorical constructions, because the visions themselves are forceful, provocative, and active.

The material encounters in *Middlemarch*, in one way or another, must happen through visual experience and the characters' aesthetic responses to them. Flint notes that

in Eliot's novel, it is not only that "the material world is always going to be perceived by an individual with a uniquely constructed subjectivity" (85). Going further, Flint's intervention establishes the way in which the characters in *Middlemarch* form these subjective perceptions, which are determined by many compound forces stemming from each subject's gendered, socio-economic position.[10] An understanding of objects as representations of social forces is a critical framing that deepens upon reconsidering visuality. Jeremy Hawthorne connects these forces directly to visual experience, broadening the consideration outward to consider more than things alone: "our looking activities are saturated with the residues of our social and cultural existence" (180). The visual forms a broad component of the narrative, encompassing material objects while extending far beyond them to incorporate the entirety of the physical environment and all the seen world as it is posited in the novel.

Without the connection that seeing provides, there would be no material phenomenology working to create meaningful realizations as subjects perceptually link to objects. This emphasis upon the materiality of the world and the way this materiality is described is an essential feature of most conventional interpretations of Eliot's work as a realist writer.[11] In *Middlemarch*, for example, the heirloom jewelry pieces are meaningful

---

[10] Henry Auster notes in "George Eliot and the Modern Temper" that for many characters in *Middlemarch,* an "incomplete apprehension of reality carries the seeds of their destruction… whatever in the outside world is ignored, neglected, or left out… has a tendency sooner or later to assert its claims in such a way as to bring down the flawed construction of reality" (93).

[11] Auster presents an understanding of Eliot's work that foregrounds her modernity while locating this very quality squarely within her agenda and method as a realist writer.

objects placed in the narrative in order to demonstrate significant aspects of Dorothea's sober personality, virtuous, self-denying, and motivated by conservative and Christian values. However, there is something much more forceful about these material objects that Dorothea handles in these opening pages. Their force does not stem from any alchemical aura or power they possess as mineral substance, rather, their influence stems from their visual impact as image. Dorothea's later experiences in Rome, as she takes in the architecture, the sculptures, and all of its visual pageantry, became a similar vision, one that would remain with her throughout her life. In *Middlemarch*, the moments where

---

Auster describes the progressive arc of Eliot's oeuvre, and claims that it should be seen as a body of work that "represent[s] the continuity between Romantic, Victorian, and modern literature that is more and more insisted upon in our critical and historical discussions" (76). Although Auster sees *Middlemarch* as a book that represents a modern take on realism, particularly in the ways through which Eliot demonstrates her "concern with the plight of the individual in a world of changing and decaying values, her acute sense of the erosion in society of long-established traditions, her realism—the insistence on presenting life as it really is in its fullness and complexity, its mystery as well as commonness" (77). Auster recognizes that Eliot's late novels work within "George Eliot's sense of the actual" yet also "carry an impression of interiority" (78). Auster acknowledges that the modernity of these novels is located firmly within a "Victorian atmosphere" (79). The essay describes the relationships within Eliot's fiction between the "individual psyche" and the "exterior world," claiming that "the vitality of that relationship stems from its realism: it is based on a respect for the 'hard, unaccommodating Actual'" (86). I build upon Auster's claims to show how Eliot's realism, as it explores the relationship between the self and exterior world, does so primarily through moments of sharp visuality in which image and spectacle act with a kind of agency, forcefully shaping the response, understanding, and subsequent decisions of the described characters. While Auster states that the characters in *Middlemarch* turn towards " 'the largeness of the world' " in order to "check the pull of self-centered recrimination and anguish by contact with external reality," I argue that interface with the real world occur most significantly in the form of provocative visual encounters that are rarely soothing, and are more often unsettlingly capable of freezing the narrative and pressuring the observer into a reaction or realization. Auster argues that Eliot's characters reach towards an "imaginative shaping of life" (101), but I counter that the influential force of certain encounters with image-experiences overshadows these frail attempts to shape their own lives.

characters are struck by powerful images become places of negotiation between the self and the other, in which the character-subject is given an opportunity to formulate and express her selfhood as she interprets and internalizes what she sees.

Chapter 19 of the novel is an encapsulation of the function of visual experience within this novel. The chapter opens by highlighting the posited historical context of the fictional moment according to an obstensibly hierarchical narrowing: “When George the Fourth was still reigning over the privacies of Windsor, when the Duke of Wellington was Prime Minister, and Mr. Vincy was mayor of the old corporation in Middlemarch, Mrs. Casaubon, born Dorothea Brooke, had taken her wedding journey to Rome” (120). At the same time that this launch into the chapter seems to move in quickly diminishing progression from the very powerful to the relatively insignificant, the emphasis upon the simultaneity of each figure’s reign over his or her relative domain suggests a sense of parallel and equanimity.[12] The implication is that the grand dramas of the nation’s most powerful hold comparable significance to those dramas that occupy each small world within the broader realm. Having pointed to Dorothea’s presence in Rome, the narration next delivers an image of another character who is concurrently enjoying a visit to Rome: the passionate yet dilettantish Will Ladislaw. Ladislaw is a young man thoroughly English in his countenance, apart from his hair, which was “not immoderately long, but abundant and curly” (120). In the passage, the details of Ladislaw’s physical appearance are limited to this reference to his hair, and of his surroundings all we know is that he is

[12] This equanimity is in keeping with Eliot’s concept of society as a single, connected entity, “an organism in a continuous state of flux,” as Robert Kiely describes in “The Limits of Dialogue in *Middlemarch*.”

in the Vatican museum, near a statue, not taking in the art but instead facing a window. Ladislaw and his un-English hair, (his locks signify, in the abandonment of their abundance, the strong influence that the German Romantics have upon him), turned away from the Belvedere Torso, willingly trading a view of the famed, ancient sculpture for a vista of a different sort, looking "…out on the magnificent view of the mountains from the adjoining round vestibule" (121). At that moment an eccentric and animated German artist dashes up, interrupting Ladislaw's contemplation of this panoramic landscape, and directs his attention towards a young woman standing in graceful repose next to the statue of Ariadne.

Adolf Naumann's intervention forces a link to become forged between Ladislaw and Dorothea Casaubon (née Brooke), a link that is facilitated by a rare aesthetic moment, a crafted happenstance of composition and contrast. Naumann's summons, leads Ladislaw directly into a visual experience that proves to be of profound consequence to him and to the unfolding plot of the novel. As Ladislaw takes in the surprising sight of his second cousin's new young wife, arranged by the side of the classical sculpture, his perception of Dorothea alters in its context and depth. Seeing her in this pose and place, juxtaposed and aligned with a monumental piece of art, changes his idea of her and her relationship to his life and desires. His spoken words and the commentary of the narration both reveal awareness, albeit limited, of this change. Ladislaw's ability to perceive and act upon his feelings and intentions is restricted, like all of Eliot's characters, within his social and environmental circumstances, yet he remains free within those boundaries to

exercise his will. The aesthetic experience he encounters here functions to waken him to his choices and provide the impetus for his actions.

The image of Dorothea that Naumann has framed for Ladislaw remains the focus of this brief chapter, even the object of their appraising gaze departs from the gallery. As she leaves, Naumann draws Ladislaw into a philosophic discussion of art, beauty, and the best means for capturing the essence of female beauty. Their conversation, unfolding immediately after the encounter with Dorothea, circles around two places of tension and difficulty provoked by the experience of seeing her beside the statue. On one level, the two men take up opposite sides of a theoretical debate over aesthetic representation, and on another plane, they clash over their personal, interpretative response to what they have just seen. Naumann remains provocatively and singularly insistent upon his role as artist, prioritizing his own professional agenda as he assesses Dorothea and sets his designs upon her as a potential portrait subject. He sees her as a possible avenue to her new husband's wealth, exclaiming: "Only think! He is perhaps rich, and would like to have her portrait taken" (121). Finding Naumann's attitude brazen, Ladislaw cannot be so quick to commodify Dorothea, and he disparages Naumann's inference that such a painting would serve to elevate her worth or value.

Ladislaw objects to the implications of his friend's assumption that "…your painting her [would be] the chief outcome of her existence—the divinity passing into higher completeness and all but exhausted in the act of covering your bit of canvass. I am amateurish if you like: I do *not* think that all the universe is straining towards the obscure significance of your pictures" (122). Ladislaw is annoyed and offended by Naumann's

placement of artistic aims above all other considerations. He couches his objections primarily on the level of his theory of aesthetics, but he cannot fully conceal that he has a personal motivation for rejecting Naumann's appropriative conception of Dorothea, which the German artist has emphatically exhibited through look, language, and expressions of artistic design. As Ladislaw explains and justifies his response, he draws out reasons grounded in his sense of ethics and his philosophy of art, yet simultaneously he begins to realize his dawning affection for Dorothea. The intensely visual encounter in the gallery sparks a debate that highlights the differing natures and beliefs of the two men. Further, the encounter finds another level of resonance within Will Ladislaw, who experiences the image of Dorothea much more deeply and personally, as a catalyzing moment. Chapter 19 presents the image-event as an exploration of an essential question: does Ladislaw summon the visual experience as a way to render his inner struggle into something concrete, or does the spectacle itself act upon him with a power of its own? The text's presentation of this question contains ambiguity and contradiction, marking this distinction between the location of agency *within the viewer* or *within the thing viewed* as a place of meaningful tension.[13]

---

[13] This tension over the location of agency, the fight between the primacy of the viewer or the thing viewed, is a generative tension, very similar in its productivity to the tension that Fredric Jameson identifies as central to the problem of realism itself. For Jameson, the contradiction built into realism—(how the novel, which is always and unavoidably an artifice, could presume to an any way approximate the real)—is "a contradiction which can… be reformulated in a productive way, as a tension to be solved and resolved over again, in a series of fresh innovations" (261). I argue that Eliot's charged deployment of active image-sites within her narrative is one of these innovations.

As if to defend against the intensity that the event has had for him, Ladislaw makes an attempt at deflection. “In a contemptuous undertone, [he] intended to dismiss the subject” of Dorothea and Naumann’s desire to paint her (123). But, in his own mind, the subject of Dorothea was far from dismissed: “He was conscious of being irritated by ridiculously small causes, which were half of his own creation. Why was he making any fuss about Mrs. Casaubon? And yet he felt as if something had happened to him with regards to her” (123). As the chapter concludes, Eliot’s narration frames the incident as an example of how some human natures are prone to operate, for “…there are characters which are continually creating collisions and nodes for themselves in dramas which nobody is prepared to act with them. Their susceptibilities will clash against *objects* that remain innocently quiet” (123, emphasis mine). Here, the object against which Ladislaw has clashed is the image of Dorothea standing next to the statue of Ariadne. In another interpretive or semiotic sense, the “object” is the abstract phenomenon of his changing awareness of his feelings for Dorothea, which begin to become clear as he suddenly encounters her by the statue. He begins to become aware of his disdain for and resentment of his cousin Casaubon, who has, despite his age, stiffness, and stale rigidity, managed to capture Dorothea. Although the narrative suggests that Ladislaw is one of those individuals who “creates collisions and nodes for themselves in dramas,” the powerful description of Dorothea and the statue as an amalgamated, viewed object contains an equally convincing suggestion that it is the image that acts upon him.

Dorothea and the statue function actively as an object: together they form a “node” of meaningful revelation in the isolated drama of Ladislaw’s life and consciousness. She

and the Ariadne together are “objects that remain innocently quiet,” unified as a still and location within which Will Ladislaw’s course and consciousness become clear. In several key moments of the novel similar to the episode in the Vatican gallery, Eliot creates visual encounters that function as activating sites of change and realization, in which the image itself has an active power that forces a response. The recurrence of sites such as this throughout *Middlemarch* has social implications that contribute to the governance of the world of the novel, and carries with them valences of her ethical and political value system. Eliot's commitment to depicting an external reality that is subject-making and yet also in every case subject to the individual perception of each character underscores her ethical commitment to the idea that individuals are both active within and constrained by their circumstances.[14] According to K.M. Newton, there is in Eliot an “apparent contradiction between her theoretical determinism and the emphasis she places on exercising the will and choosing” (444). Newton’s essay works to reconcile this contradiction in Eliot’s writing by employing Kantian philosophy, his moral theory in particular. Although Newton offers qualified agreement with George Levine, and allows that “there seems little doubt hat Eliot accepted the theoretical validity of determinism” (422), his article draws out the contradictions in Eliot’s novels and her letters in order to argue that she struggled with implications of determinism upon individual human lives. Newton explains that Eliot’s letters show that “…she herself accepted the validity of

[14] Robert Kiely depicts the marked determinism of the world of *Middlemarch* as a losing battle between will and circumstance, arguing that “…her characters may have choices to make and wills to govern, but their choices and wills are hemmed in by inherited attributes and circumstances for which they are not responsible and which they have little or no power to change” (121).

determinism… but continued to live as if she possessed free will. This is an unusual approach to the problem, especially in the nineteenth-century rationalist context within which Eliot is normally placed She is not concerned with the truth or falsehood of a determinist philosophy, but only with the possible effects of believing it" (443). Newton's article contributes a useful reconciliation of Eliot's belief in determinism with her deep investment in morality and the value she places in the expressive choices, ethical actions, and even artistic creations that are the manifest potential of every individual.

Close attention to *Middlemarch* provides another opportunity to observe how Eliot works towards finding reconciliation between oppositional philosophies of determinism and free will. Moments of visuality within the novel are, for several of the characters, aesthetic experiences that prompt self-awareness and reflection, which are necessary in order for conscripted subjects to make choices that, ethical or not, align with their desires. Following the established understanding of Eliot as the quintessential realist writer[15], visual description in this novel represents the determinative reality of the external world outside ourselves, which is objective and absolute in its power over us

[15] In *Literary Realism and the Ekphrastic Tradition*, Mack Smith offers the following definition of a realist novel: "…a novelistic text that incorporates devices of rhetorical appeal that serve to make claims of verisimilitude and that thematizes the representational accuracy of its paradigm of linguistic meaning" (2-3). To a certain extent, Smith's definition does describe what Middlemarch does and is, but his definition if applied as an absolute measure would fail to allow for a significant part of Eliot's project in the novel. Not only does she work towards capturing a true picture and cross-section of this part of England at a specific time in all its intricacies and interconnections, she also works towards capturing the subjectivity and mutability of human feeling and response, particularly in reaction to intense visual experience.

because it is the environment that dictates our circumstance. The interpretive difficulty for the reader lies in the debate that Eliot embeds into many of these visual moments between vision and response: do these characters act in response to what they see, or do the visions act upon them? There is a tension that stems from the demonstrated ability of the visual experiences within this novel to contain their own causality, which exists in opposition to the individual's willful response to such encounters. The moment between Ladislaw and Dorothea in the Vatican is an ekphrastic event that momentarily freezes the narrative and interrupts the broader project of Eliot' novel. The novel's extended representation of the complex network of destinies, choices and relationships within this cross-section of English life requires that the narrative be always in motion, as Eliot demonstrates the simultaneity and interconnection of each of her characters. This motion halts in brief but meaningful pauses through moments of visual description, which function as sites of realization and response, and are also nodes of philosophical and phenomenological inquiry into the potential power of visions to act determinatively upon us.

Ladislaw's moment in the Vatican Museum deserves further investigation in this light, because it provides a representative example of the way in which the novel posits visual experience as the location where personal belief, aesthetic experience, and ideological conclusions collide, to such a powerful extent where the object/vision has control over the perceiving subject. The episode in the Vatican begins with several acts of deliberate, meditative looking. As Ladislaw chooses to ignore the Belvedere Torso and instead gazes out at the scenery, Naumann intrudes on his absorbed meditations and

insists there is a better sight that he must miss: "He was sufficiently absorbed not to notice the approach of a dark-eyed, animated German who came up to him and, placing a hand on his shoulder, said with a strong accent, 'come here, quick! Else she will have changed her pose!'" (121). Responsively, Laidslaw hurries after Naumann, and together they take in the sight of Dorothea standing in repose next to the statue of Ariadne. Their communal contemplation underlines Dorothea's positioning as a figure viewed under a specific, aesthetic, and critical gaze, as if she herself were a work of art. Naumann stresses his desire that Laidslaw shouldn't miss seeing Dorothea in her "pose." Dorothea stands as if she were preparing to be painting or sculpted, or as if she were already so arranged by an artist. Her arrangement as an art object adds charge to the moment, as it becomes not only visual but ekphrastic.

As Eliot describes the statue of the reclining Ariadne she highlights several qualities of the sculpture in the following ekphrastic passage: "the reclining Ariadne… lies in the marble voluptuousness of her beauty, the drapery folding around her with a petal-like ease and tenderness" (121). In this passage, Eliot calls attention to the achievement of the sculptor, who has managed not only to evoke the likeness of folding drapery, but who has done so in such a way as to capture a delicate kind of ease, even a "petal-like" tenderness that belies the hardness of the marble. In the description of Dorothea that follows, Eliot directly equates Dorothea to a work of art, subject to the critical gaze of Laidslaw and Naumann, and viewed as an aesthetic object:

> They were just in time to see another figure standing against a pedestal near the reclining marble: a breathing blooming girl, whose form, not shamed by the Ariadne, was clad in Quakerish grey drapery; her long cloak, fastened at the neck,

> was thrown backward from her arms, and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face around the simply braided dark-brown hair. She was not looking at the sculpture, probably not thinking of it: her large eyes were fixed dreamily on a streak of sunlight which fell across the floor." (121)

This ekphrastic moment freezes the forward motion of the narrative and stills the action of the story—nobody moves, and for an extended moment nothing seems to happen. Ladislaw and Naumann read Dorothea as an object beautifully luminous and illuminated, yet also heavy with aesthetic weight, the reader of the novel is implicated in this reading. The image of Dorothea arrests Naumann and Ladislaw and seduces them both into still contemplation, and the the reader must remain in this stillness along with them.[16] As the vision acts upon them, the reader can begin to feel this action upon herself as well. A relationship take seed between Ladislaw and Dorothea, and the active force of the image deepens the relationship between the text and the reader because of its vivid animation, even within this stillness. Although the description of Dorothea's pose in the sculpture gallery positions her as a work of art, particularly in the emphasis upon her as "standing against a pedestal," and clad in "drapery" (the same term used to describe the Ariadne's garb), she is also differentiated from it. Dorothea is a "breathing blooming girl," not of marble but alive, whose thoughts do not focus upon the sculpture but rather on

[16] J. Hillis Miller makes a claim about the way the narrator of *Middlemarch* becomes embroiled within his/her own narrative structure, showing how "the web of interpretive figures cast by the narrator over the characters of the story becomes a net in which the narrator himself is entangled and trapped, his sovereign vision blinded" (144). My suggestion about the connection between the text and the reader has a similar formal structure, but rather than a web of interpretation ensnaring the narrator, I would like to claim that the visual impact of the novel closes the space between reader and text through the power of Eliot's ekphrastic and enargeaic passages.

unknown musings as she gazes at the sunlight on the floor. Naumann's subsequent comments highlight the contrast between girl and sculpture:

> "What do you think of that for a fine bit of antithesis?" said the German, searching in his friend's face for responding admiration, but going on volubly without waiting for any other answer. "There lies antique beauty, not corpse-like even in death, but arrested in the complete contentment of its sensuous perfection: and here stands beauty in its breathing life, with the consciousness of Christian centuries in its bosom. But she should be dressed as a nun; I think she looks almost what you call a Quaker; I would dress her as a nun in my picture." (121)

Here, Naumann points to the arrested beauty of the sculpture while highlighting the contrast that Dorothea presents, because though she is also still, strong qualities of vitality and animation distinguish her repose from that of the sculpture. At the same time, he continues to subject her to aesthetic criticism, even suggesting how he would style her in a work of art, in nun's clothing. The description of Dorothea in the sculpture gallery, posed next to the Ariadne, is an example of the layering of different forms of representation within this realist novel. In this description, Eliot layers two visual modes and plays with the tension that arises from their juxtaposition and simultaneous deployment. One is the ekphrastic mode, (the description of the statue), and the other layer employs enargeia-- the description of the living girl. This tension plays out in the debate between Naumann and Ladislaw that arises just as Dorothea leaves the gallery. Although Naumann had called attention to Dorothea's vivacity, he wishes to convert her into a frozen thing like the statue—when his words describe how he would like to paint her, he transforms her into an ekphrastic representation. Ladislaw refuses to see this desire as a potential elevation of Dorothea, because he has begun to be invested in her as a living woman, and when he describes her it is with the force of enargeia, not ekphrasis:

"Language gives a fuller image… after all, true seeing is within; and painting stares at you with an insistent imperfection. I feel that especially about representations of women. As if a woman were a mere colored superficies! You must wait for movement and tone. There is a difference in their very breathing: they change from moment to moment" (122). Ladislaw insists upon movement and breath over color and composition. Although both enargeia and ekphrasis are certainly within the domain of language, ekphrasis relies upon an already processed, composed visual experience while enargeia, Ladislaw implies is a purer marriage of vision and word. In this small episode in the Vatican gallery, a visual moment stills the progression and rhythm of the narrative, allowing the reader to contemplate philosophical questions of experience, vision, and representation as the two men respond to what they have seen. The novel layers the aesthetic debate over Ladislaw's emotional experience, and as he works to process it all, it is clear that the image has acted upon him in a significant way.

According to Lilian Furst, the two fundamental features that characterize literary realism are "referentiality and textuality" (Furst X). The referentiality of literary realism depends on a conviction that the life portrayed in a realist novel is directly modeled after a solid, exterior world that consists of some measure of objective certainty and actual existence. Textuality, conversely, is the admission that literary realism cannot escape the subjective process of its verbal creation. For Furst, accepting that both referentiality and textuality are essential parts of realism "is to acknowledge the innate paradoxicality of the realist novel" (6). Within Eliot's novels, referentiality and texuality are not mutually exclusive qualities. *Middlemarch* employs the techniques of ekphrasis and enargeia, as

techniques of textuality and in service of referentiality. The interactions of ekphrasis and enargeia, in service of these dual purposes, create visual moments that act in powerful ways upon the characters, and, by extension, influence the perception and response of the reader. In the richly descriptive moment where Ladislaw sees Dorothea in the Vatican, for example, the text frames an element of the referenced world and showcases this element's visual power. In other descriptions in the novel, this occurs through a painting, an interior space, a landscape, or even a fleeting expression flashing over a person's features.

Middlemarch, a novel often regarded as an exemplary achievement in literary realism, poses ekphrasis an enargeia as a point of tension and struggle, between the image and the character who perceives it. Not only does Eliot enlist both enargeia and ekphrasis effectively in service of characterization and narrative, the visual descriptions that she embeds in the novel compete with the agency of the characters. While the visual and descriptive details in the novel are fewer in comparison with those created by the other novelists I am considering, the places of descriptive content are essential sites of tension and development. They enable interaction between character and environment, and enable the possibility of interplay between the reader and the text. Descriptions of objects, physiognomies, landscapes, and habitations possess provocative agency that, through their visual force, catalyze the moments of subjective perception and ethical response that constitute Eliot's literary construction of the real.

Eliot's realism in *Middlemarch* does more than assemble a sense of the real through a proliferation of descriptive moments, mostly of everyday objects and settings.

Roland Barthes establishes this characteristic of realist narrative in “The Reality Effect” as he describes the strategies that Flaubert and Michelet employ as they work within “a kind of narrative *luxury*, lavish to the point of offering many ‘futile’ details and thereby increasing the cost of narrative information” (142). Barthes emphasizes the proliferation of detail, showing the impact that the sheer volume of the catalog can have. In *Middlemarch*, the cataloged details are not particularly numerous, but their image-impact is powerful. For Barthes, the detail of realist literature contrasts with other narrative structures that contain predictive value, and are directed towards the goal of “schematizing” rather than “taking into account numerous detours, delays, reversals, and disappointments,” (142) which do not serve to direct the development of the plot. As Barthes works to consider the role of apparently insignificant description, and so uncover “the significance of this insignificance” (143), he argues the presence of this type of description, the appearance of these objects ostensibly devoid of meaning, is a characteristic that distinguishes modern (as opposed to classical) realism, and allows it to function. Objects, in particular, that seem to have no symbolic or meaningful place in the novel, and the examples he draws up in the essay—the barometer in Flaubert’s *Three Tales* or a plain, unassuming door that Michelet describes in one of his works (through which no one exits or enters), do have an essential function because they:

> say nothing but this: *we are the real*; it is the category of “the real” (and not its contingent contents) which is then signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism: the *reality effect* is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity. (148)

Barthes' way of understanding "insignificant" visual detail addresses the realism of the nineteenth-century French novel, and argues that later variations and expansions of this strategy will become central to modernist challenges of "the age-old aesthetic of 'representation'" (148). Eliot's realism, however, does not function in this way. Her reality effect does not stem from drawing a stage set filled with meaningless objects whose random presence serves only to signify (rather than denote) reality. In fact, in *Middlemarch*, Eliot includes relatively few descriptive passages and virtually no scattered images that lack clear significance. The sites of visual immediacy and concentration in *Middlemarch* are more complicated in their purpose because they serve as forceful explorations of the power that images have upon the subject who perceives them. Neither empty placeholders serving to replicate the disordered, crowded real world[17] nor merely aesthetic screens on upon which the subjective perceptions of character project, visual moments instead take on agency and intentionality, changing people as they demand response even as they temporarily arrest the progression of the novel, as when Naumann and Ladislaw behold Dorothea and her Ariadne double.

To return to this episode from Chapter 19, though Dorothea stands at the precise center of the visual node that focuses the chapter, her own response to the art objects preserved and displayed in the Vatican Museum are withheld by the narration. The image

[17] Eliot's restraint in her use of visual detail is all the more surprising, when her "apparent aim," as J. Hillis Miller describes it, "is to present a total picture of provincial society in England at the period jut before the Reform Bill of 1832" (125). Perhaps because Eliot desires not only to render this picture but also to "interpret this picture totally… to show what is there and how it works," she must be efficient and strategic in her deployment of visual detail.

she forms there relies upon her placement as an object that is simultaneously the subject of delighted aesthetic appreciation for the two men and the trigger of an emotional awakening for Ladislaw. Only a few pages later, however, it is clear that Dorothea is also undergoing a profound response to the visual stimuli that is all around her. The visual phenomena take hold and serve not only to reveal but more so to force changes in her. A mere two hours after her visit to the Vatican Museum, she "was seated in an inner room or boudoir of a handsome apartment in the Via Sistina" (123). The narrative voice asserts its presence next, to report with sympathy upon Dorothea's emotional state, "I am sorry to add that she was sobbing bitterly, with such abandonment to this relief of an oppressed heart as a woman habitually controlled by pride on her own account and thoughtfulness for others will sometimes allow herself when she feels securely alone" (123). Her sensitive perception understood Rome as a collective assembly "moving in funeral procession with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar" (123). A young woman of deeply religious conviction would be expected to find much to inspire her in Rome, but to Dorothea the avalanche of visual stimuli shakes her only into a heightened awareness of her misery in contrast to the beauties all around her. Her exposure to Rome served to amplify her feelings and to frame them:

> Dorothea had now been five weeks in Rome… she had been led through the best galleries, had been taken to the chief points of view, and had been shown the grandest ruins and the most glorious churches, and she had ended by oftenest choosing to drive out to the Campagna where she could feel alone with the earth and sky, away from the oppressive masquerade of ages, in which her own life too seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes. (123)

The grandeur and glory of the famed Roman setting, which offers one of the most enveloping and overpowering visual experiences available in Western or European culture, is something Dorothea seeks to escape. She understands Rome as an ongoing masquerade, and in consequence she saw her own situation as one fraught with artificiality and constraints.

In Rome, the barrage of visual stimuli that envelops Dorothea creates an aesthetic experience that contrasts with everything she has known at home. Because of her ability to recognize this contrast and see her surroundings as a screen that reflects her own interior state, she has a way to conceptualize her situation as patterned according to the visual pageantry that is everywhere around her. A further passage underscores the agency of the city's structures, which "thrust" themselves disruptively upon Dorothea:

> The gigantic broken revelations of that Imperial and Papal city thrust abruptly on the notions of a girl who had been brought up in English and Swiss Puritanism, fed on meager Protestant histories and on art chiefly of the handscreen sort; a girl whose ardent nature turned all her small allowance of knowledge into principles, fusing her actions into their mould, and whose quick emotions gave the most abstract things the quality of a pleasure or a pain; a girl who had lately become a wife… plunged into tumultuous preoccupation with her personal lot. (124)

The sights of Rome become the site of a profound ideological challenge and change for Dorothea. Away from her provincial home, she is plunged into a new phase of her life that shocks her with its disappointments, restrictions, and distasteful realities. For a girl who, through her "quick emotions" transforms even abstract things into psychic or even bodily pain, the tangible forms of the city and its art become monoliths representing her despair, and she is wakened to unavoidable consciousness of he despair through her exposure to them.

Eliot's narration quickly clarifies that Dorothea's experience in Rome is entirely subjective and unique to her. Other visitors would not share this perception of the city:

> The weight of unintelligible Rome might lie easily on bright nymphs… but Dorothea had no such defence against deep impressions. Ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid preset, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence; the dimmer but yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings; the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world: all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion. (124)

This passage communicates a strong sense that the city's many features, its staring white statues, its basilicas no longer reverent but sunk in the degenerate present, its wrecked palaces, all possess a very real power of agency that touches Dorothea deeply. These environs jar her like a shock, urge themselves on her, gaze at her, and disturb her with the anachronism and contrast that they embody. To be touched by the visions around her is not something that Dorothea wants or seeks out, rather, the visions seek her and impose themselves upon her, creating an effect that she cannot escape.

Chapter 20 continues to explain the effect of Rome upon Dorothea in order to show how its forms actively shape her feelings and thoughts, and the narrative reiterates its insistence that images act upon not only Dorothea, but upon all of us, as active mediators of consciousness:

> Forms both pale and glowing *took possession* of her young sense, and *fixed themselves* in her memory, even when she was not thinking of them, preparing strange associations which remained through her after-years. Our moods are apt to bring with them images which succeed each other like the magic-lantern pictures of a doze; and in certain states of dull forlornness Dorothea all her life continued

> to see the vastness of St. Peter's, the huge bronze canopy, *the excited intention* in the attitudes and garments of the prophets and evangelists in the mosaics above, and the red drapery which was being hung for Christmas *spreading itself everywhere* like a disease of the retina. (124, emphasis added)

Here it is not the subject who looks, but rather the forms that take possession and fix themselves upon the subject and force their effect as they captivate the gaze. Contrary to and remote from most understandings of Eliot's realism, the event of this description is not simply an occasion for the reader to learn more about Dorothea and her morality. The image is malevolent, acting like a disease upon her. As she moves through Rome, figures in mosaics and paintings thus have "excited intention," descending with deliberate excitement upon Dorothea's mind. Even abstract shapes like the Christmas drapery have lives and reach out in a way that not only creates impact, but also expresses *intentionality*. In this passage, and in many other moments in *Middlemarch*, inanimate objects—paintings, jewel boxes, miniatures, landscapes, structures, and physiognomies—can act with powerful force. In the narrative, the image connects to the self as the sparks that kindle dawning and subjective perceptions. In some cases the visual facilitates a happy or beneficial realization, but in many others an image is in fact a pathology, like the spreading eye-disease of the red drapery that Dorothea cannot forget.

Visual moments in *Middlemarch* take an active role in the progression of the characters' individual stories because Eliot's narrative style is crafted through an amalgamation of narrative approaches. Just as her characters' lives are intertwined, Eliot never considers one philosophical aspect of the story in isolation from the rest. Recognizing the layered simultaneity of her narrative approach the and juxtaposition of

techniques calls forward a certain tension, because Eliot's ideology is complex as she remains torn between the idea of a deterministic universe and her belief in the importance of individual free will. George Levine explains that Eliot's novels demonstrate a "refusal to disentangle representational precision, psychological states, formal coherence, and moral significance" (Levine 125). In the text, descriptive passages are evocative and exact, yet they are bound within a structure that compounds every image together with the overarching ethical ramifications of the moment, all contextualized within the scope of the subjective, personal interiority of the characters. Her method could be said to align with her intention, which, like many realist novelists of her period, is to represent a "total picture of provincial society," as J. Hillis Miller writes. He argues further that Eliot "wants both to show what is there and to show how it works" (Hillis Miller 125). In Hillis Miller's understanding, Eliot's novel presents Middlemarch as an integrated web, and in order to create a sense of that totality, she crafts characters that are capable of constituting and supporting several metaphorical constructions. These characters are individuated, though "presented as a part of a single system of complex interactions in time and space" (Hillis Miller 128). As figures operating within the web, the stream, the patch of fabric of the novel (to use Hillis Miller's words for categorizing Eliot's metaphors), her characters are closely knit with one another. Further, the characters' responsive connections to their individual experiences of the visual couples with their personal values and interpretations of the business of life as they struggle to reconcile the powerful influence of the visual.[18]

---

[18] My recognition of the struggle between the characters' moral intentions and their

In Chapter 33 of *Middlemarch*, Eliot binds "representational precision" and "psychological states" together with questions of ethics and values, in the way that George Levine has identified. This scene parallels the incident in Rome, when Will Ladislaw observed Dorothea without her awareness. In Rome, Ladislaw observed Dorothea as she stood next to the statue of Ariadne, and he awakened to a new vision of her as a result of the contrasts and similarities between the woman and the sculpture. After everyone's return from Rome, Ladislaw finds himself before another opportunity to view Dorothea in comparison with another female form. Dorothea has gone to visit Lydgate at home, in order to consult with the doctor about her husband's health and determine if Casaubon was keeping information from her about his condition. At the doctor's home, Mrs. Rosamond Lydgate (née Vincy) informed her that the doctor was away at the hospital. As Dorothea entered the Lydgate's drawing room, "there was a sort of contrast not infrequent in country life when the habits of different ranks were less blent than now" (268). The passage goes on to draw and detail the source of this sense of contrast, which lay in the style and attire of Dorothea in comparison to that of Rosamond Lydgate. As Dorothea spoke to Rosamond, she "looked admiringly at Lydgate's lovely bride" (268), generously appreciating Rosamond's beauty while unaware that to a male

---

response to visual experience constitutes a different kind of tension than that which is typically recognized as characteristic of Victorian realism. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams defines the archetypal struggle in the realist novel as one that stems from "an ambivalent relationship… how the separated individual, with a divided consciousness of belonging and not belonging, makes his own moral history" (174). Williams does note, significantly, that *Middlemarch* doesn't fit within this general pattern, because it is "a novel of a single community… a small town just before the decisive historical changes" (174).

observer in the room, the fineness of her own qualities cast the showy charms of the merchant's daughter into unflattering relief. Dorothea was vaguely "aware that there was a gentleman standing at a distance, but seeing him merely as a coated figure at a wide angle" (268), but she had not yet perceived that the gentleman was Ladislaw. Again, Dorothea is placed in a position where she can be observed while remaining unaware of her own image and the effect that it creates.

The narration takes care to draw a certain distinction as it offers up contrasting images of the two women, laying down the visual evidence of their difference while simultaneously making it very clear that in social rank they are not equals. Each woman has her appeal, but Dorothea is capable of carrying a simplicity of style that Rosamond could never accomplish. The narrative voice asks "those who know" to "tell us exactly what stuff it was that Dorothea wore in those days of mild autumn—that thin white woolen stuff soft to the touch and soft to the eye. It always seemed to have been lately washed, and to smell of the sweet hedges" (268). Dorothea's clothes are neither new nor fashionable; she wore "a pelisse with sleeves hanging all out of the fashion." The fine strength of her inner qualities couple with the natural grace of a woman of class to create a picture that is compellingly attractive, while clearly effortless: "the grace and dignity were in her limbs and neck; and about her simply parted hair and candid eyes the large round poke which was then in the fate of women, seemed no more odd as a head-dress than the gold trencher we call a halo" (268). According to this description, Dorothea's pure and earnest self emanate forth so strongly as to transform her ordinary clothes into something resembling the raiment of an angel.

Rosamond, in this moment, is eager to have this chance for Dorothea to evaluate her appearance, as she relishes the opportunity to "be seen by [one of] the best judges." She is "confident of the impression she must make on people of good birth" (268). Yet, Dorothea does not think to judge Rosamond, she only moves to "put out her hand with her usual simple kindness." Dorothea doesn't take heed of any difference between them, but the narration certainly does, noting with surety that the "contrast would certainly have been striking to a calm observer." The passage then lays down the details of Rosamond's dress and adornments, first framing her in direct, frontal opposition with Dorothea:

> They were both tall, and their eyes were on a level; but imagine Rosamond's infantine blondness and wondrous crown of hair-plaits, with her pale-blue dress of a fit and fashion so perfect that no dressmaker could look at it without emotion, a large embroidered collar which it was to be hoped all beholders would know the price of, her small hands duly set off with rings, and that controlled self-consciousness of manner which is the expensive substitute for simplicity. (268)

Rosamond's strenuous efforts towards perfect dress here are explained as the tawdry, sad compensation of the nouveau riche. She cannot present herself with simplicity, and the only genuine quality she has is the ability to convey that which she has bought at a high price. Next to Dorothea, Rosamond appears gauche and overdone. The visual details that the narrative lists in order to communicate this combine with a telling description of Rosamond's mannerisms, which are artificially restrained in an "expensive" imitation of Dorothea's subtle grace.

Although the narrative emphasizes the remarkable contrast between the two women, it also posits that the observer in the room "was much too occupied with the presence of the one woman to reflect on the contrast between the two" (268). This is an

instance where the narrative reveals its own perceptive limitations. Ladislaw clearly fixed his gaze upon Dorothea from the moment of her arrival in the drawing-room, and seemingly ceases his awareness of Rosamond entirely. However, his actions and feelings prove that he is keenly aware of the way that the two women contrast. The visual impression that Dorothea makes upon him is so strong that it entirely eclipses Rosamond. Although Rosamond's appeal was strong enough to draw Ladislaw there in order to chat and play music with her, her charm dissipates entirely when Dorothea's form is introduced.

Ladislaw's vision of Dorothea, made all the more intense by means of the "unnoticed" contrast with Rosamond, catapults him into a point of crisis. For him, it was a "situation in which Diana had descended too unexpectedly upon her worshipper. It was mortifying." He was "vexed and miserable," (269) and very irritated with Rosamond, because he is afraid that his standing in Dorothea's eyes will be far reduced simply because she has discovered him there at the Lydgates' home. When Rosamond asks him what he thinks of Dorothea, he replies, "…when one sees a perfect woman, one never thinks of her attributes—one is conscious of her presence… Mrs. Casaubon is too unlike other women for them to be compared with her" (270). Despite the fact that Ladislaw attempts to deny the possibility that Dorothea could ever be compared with a woman like Rosamond, the fact remains that such a comparison, unavoidable and marked with emphasis within the narrative, has certainly occurred. Just as in Rome, Ladislaw's vision of Dorothea has a deep effect upon him. The circumstances of this vision—not merely that he sees her, but where and how he sees her, result in the vision's power to animate

and provoke his feelings, his awareness of his feelings, and his consequent actions. Will Ladislaw realizes that Dorothea and everything that she represents to him drive the primary motivations of his life, as he "was conscious that he should not have been at Middlemarch but for Dorothea" (269). Although Dorothea's inner qualities occupy the majority of Ladislaw's thoughts about her, it is the visual experience of encountering her physical presence that catalyzes his awareness of their importance to him.

A variety of small moments of a more domestic kind of enargeia take place in the novel. When Dorothea and Casaubon return to Lowick Manor after their wedding trip to Rome, Dorothea receives a visit from her sister. Chapter 28, in which this visit occurs, is strikingly well stocked with visual detail. As Dorothea moves through the house, from her dressing room to the boudoir where Celia will meet her. The narrative shows that she is almost mesmerized by the things that she sees around her, both the snowy vistas outside the windows in the manor as well as the furniture that populates the room, the decorations, and even the fireplace: "She saw the long avenue of limes lifting their trunks from a white earth, and spreading white branches against the dun and motionless sky. The distant flat shrank in uniform whiteness and low-hanging uniformity of cloud" (172). The white and frozen landscape she glimpses through the windows is, in her eyes, motionless, low, and cloistering as well as rigid with cold. Her perception of the interior space is also filtered through her mood and entirely colored by the dawning understanding she is then forming about her new life with Casaubon:

> The very furniture in the room seemed to have shrunk since she saw it before: the stag in the tapestry looked more like a ghost in his ghostly blue-green world; the volumes of polite literature in the bookcase looked more like immovable imitations of books. The bright fire of dry oak-boughs burning on the dogs seemed an incongruous renewal of life and glow, like the figure of Dorothea herself as she entered carrying the red-leather cases containing the cameos for Celia. (172)

Dorothea's vision of the room around her is the means through which she expresses, or the narrative represents, her changing self. The place has become a dollhouse filled with shrinking furniture, a stage set where false books cannot even be lifted from their shelves, where living, animated things seem incongruous and Dorothea feels only restriction and entrapment.

Dorothea's own appearance offers a fragile resistance that reinforces the fineness of her youth, her body visible evidence of her matchless interior qualities while suggesting that all of these things about her are at risk as a consequence of her marriage and her resulting placement in this environment:

> She was glowing from her morning toilette as only healthful youth can glow: there was gem-like brightness on her coiled hair and in her hazel eyes; there was warm red life in her lips; her throat had a breathing whiteness above the differing white of the fur which itself seemed to wind about her neck and cling down her blue-grey pelisse with a tenderness gathered from her own, a sentient commingled innocence which kept its loveliness against the crystalline purity of the out-door snow. (172)

Here, the narration offers far more detail than it did when first introducing Dorothea. Typically, narrative description seizes the first mention of a character as the prime opportunity to lay down meaningful details of physiognomy and countenance. Eliot, by contrast, mentions only fine wrists and plain dress when first introducing Dorothea at the novel's beginning. This restraint gives way here in this later passage, as the narration

steps back to couple how Dorothea looks herself with the circumstances that threaten the delicate qualities that distinguish her, "…Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colourless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be vanishing from the daylight" (173). She is "made one" with the landscape and the objects around her because she *sees* them in this way, and finds expression for her emotional struggle *by* seeing them in this way.

Dorothea's gaze grasps on to the things that she sees all around her, and while her vision takes in everything both within her chamber and outside, her thoughts range over the new circumstances of her life. She forms connections that allow her to locate what she thinks and feels in terms of what she sees in her surroundings. Her observation that "…meanwhile there was the snow and the low arch of dun vapour" (173) is immediately followed with the miserable interior landscape that her thoughts range over: "there was the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman's world, where everything was done for her and none asked for her aid—where the sense of connection with a manifold pregnant existence had to be kept up painfully as an inward vision, instead of coming from without in claims that would have shaped her energies" (173). The way that Dorothea sees everything, now, is the means through which we see how much her understanding and perceptions have changed. She cannot separate her internal life and hold it apart, and so it colors everything that she sees:

> the ideas and hopes which were living in her mind when she first saw this room nearly three months before were present now only as memories: she judged them as we judge transient and departed things. All existence seemed to beat with a

> lower pulse than her own, and her religious faith was a solitary cry, the struggle out of a nightmare in which every object was withering and shrinking away from her. Each remembered thing in the room was disenchanted, was deadened as an unlit transparency… (173)

The drama of her life comes to the fore, and the act of looking is compounded with acts of judgment, comparison, and mourning. It is not only that her struggle colors the way that the things around her appear; her looking is both active and actualizing. The way she experiences and constructs her visual world allows her to make her changing inner reality concrete, to come to an understanding of the circumstances that limit her, and to make resolution in response to where she finds herself.

As Dorothea's eyes come to rest upon the miniature of Will Ladislaw's grandmother, "at last she saw something which had gathered new breath and meaning" (173). Because she knows that the woman depicted in the miniature had also made an unhappy marriage, "she felt a new companionship with it, as if it had an ear for her and could see how she was looking at it" (174). As Dorothea visually communes with the piece, the tiny painting itself begins to change as though animated by the intensity of her searching gaze: "…Nay, the colours deepened, the lips and chin seemed to get larger, the hair and eyes seemed to be sending out light, the face was masculine and beamed on her with that full gaze which tells her on whom it falls that she is too interesting for the slightest movement of her eyelid to pass unnoticed and uninterpreted" (174). Through her own gaze, searching, perhaps desperate, yearning for some sort of hope or escape, Dorothea transforms the grandmother into the grandson, so powerfully that the "masculine" face looks back at her with attentive and loving appreciation.

The narrative quickly moves from this moment between Dorothea and the miniature to a time several weeks later. Thus far in her marriage, Dorothea has stifled her feelings and acted compliantly towards her husband, feeling it "easier…to quell emotion than to incur the consequence of venting it" (178). But when Casaubon orders Dorothea to refuse Will Ladislaw's request to visit them, Dorothea counters him: "…with her first words, uttered in a tone that shook him, she startles Mr. Casaubon into looking at her, and meeting the flash of her eyes" (178). Her words are sharp, defensive, and unexpected, and their utterance brings his eyes to meet hers. Significantly, the conflict peaks with this moment of looking, in the flash of her eyes. Only half an hour later, Dorothea discovers "Mr. Casaubon on the library-steps clinging forward as if he were in some bodily distress" (179). His death, in the end, is what will free her.

As with most realist novels, the realism of *Middlemarch* forms through its visual moments. However, Eliot's novel is not made real through narrative that assembles realistic objects in the random, cluttered way that they litter real places. In this novel, visual moments not only reveal that multiple perspectives are at play in the interpretation of reality, they function as sites where these perspectives form. Further, as pivotal nodes within the novel, passages that describe the most vivid experiences show how the things and places viewed possess an ability to animate their own perceivers. These descriptive moments show how material objects, faces, settings, artworks, and more are places of contrast and questioning, enabling the characters' most significant realizations as they notice their self changing in response. The descriptive moments in *Middlemarch* seem fewer in number than in other realist novels, but their role in the narrative is far deeper.

As Dorothea and her fellow denizens express their consciousness through the exercise of their visual perception, they show how visual phenomena are not merely shaped by the subjectivity of their beholders, they are in themselves animating forces with an agency of their own.

CHAPTER III

THOMAS HARDY AND THE CONSTRAINT OF VISION

Before presenting my primary argument regarding Thomas Hardy's visual sensibility and the role that imagistic description and visual experience play in his fiction, I would like to consider two passages from two of his most widely read novels. In the first passage, from *Jude the Obscure,* the young Jude Fawley bids his teacher farewell and, returning to his work, seems to see faint but certain glimmerings of his unhappy fate as he gazes despondently down into the depths of his village's well. The second passage, from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles,* contains a lush and suggestive description of the title character's home valley, the Vale of Blackmoor—a particular corner of Hardy's literary version of Wessex. Although neither of these descriptive passages falls directly in the opening lines of their respective novels, both appear just after the introductory anecdote that serves as an entry dive into the story. Both of these descriptions form a seminal point of focus and a thematic, concentrated visual node from which the narrative launches forth. Taken together, these two scenes begin to demonstrate the deep stake that Hardy's fiction places in the visual.

The Marygreen Well: Jude's Vision from the Depths

After his beloved schoolteacher leaves their village in order to pursue further study at the nearby university town of Christchurch, eleven-year-old Jude Fawley grieves over the loss of his mentor. As the cart bearing the Mr. Philloston and all of his

belongings (save the piano) creaks and lumbers away, Jude returns to the town well, "where he had left his buckets when he went to help his patron and teacher in the loading" (5). Struggling to contain his tears, he looks down into the well, casting his gaze down to the very bottom of this deep hole in the earth. "There was a quiver in his lip now, and after opening the well-cover to begin lowering the bucket he paused and leant with his forehead and arms against the frame-work, his face wearing the fixity of a thoughtful child's who has felt the pricks of life somewhat before his time" (5). Jude, a too-solemn, already careworn young boy, is stricken by his teacher's abandonment, which is only first of the many great losses and disappointments he will encounter as the ill-fated title character of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*.

This passage, which comes very near the opening of the novel, presents an image of the young Jude that establishes character and milieu, while offering a foretaste of the tragic trajectory of his fate. It is a rustic and evocative little vignette—a forlorn child pausing to drop a tear into the depths of the well where he has been sent to draw water. Unaware of the sad but charmingly sentimental figure that he presents, Jude strives to create meaning by aligning the vision of the well that he sees before him with the experience of loss that he has just endured. As he looks down into the water, his vision is veiled over by this loss. What Jude sees becomes an expressive interpretation of his despair, and the sense of constraint and grim inevitability that is already forming within him. He looks down into the well, which is a functioning relic, "as ancient as the village itself" (5). The well is a long passage to nowhere, appearing "as a long circular perspective ending in a shining disk of quivering water at a distance of a hundred feet

down" (5). Looking down into the well offers neither purification nor the release that a watery oblivion might promise—it is only a reminder of the friend that Jude has lost and a sadly resigned explanation for this leave-taking. The well is located at the heart of the village of Marygreen, which is a place too small and backward to offer any opportunities or reasons for a talented and ambitious person to remain. Jude says to himself,

> …in the melodramatic tones of a whimsical boy, that the schoolmaster had drawn at that well scores of times on a morning like this, and would never draw there any more. 'I've seen him look down into it, when we was tired with his drawing, just as I do now, and when he rested a bit before carrying the buckets home! But he was too clever to bide here any longer—a small sleepy place like this!' (5).

The boy aligns his body and perspective with that of his teacher, and comes to see his home through his teacher's eyes. Through this vision, he realizes the limitations of the situation of his birth. Gazing down into the quivering water a hundred feet below enables these reflections, and: "a tear rolled from his eye into the depths of the well. The morning was a little foggy, and the boy's breathing unfurled itself as a thicker fog upon the still and heavy air" (5). For Jude, looking into the well from this perspective causes him to see that his home will never be a source from which he can draw upon to find his dreams.

Marlott and the Vale of Blackmoor: Tess's Constrained Horizons

In the pages following the novel's opening, the narrative gaze of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* catalogs the qualities of the setting--the village of Marlott, which "lay amid the north-eastern undulations of the beautiful Vale of Blackmoor" (5). While establishing that the region is "for the most part untrodden as yet by tourist or landscape-painter," the narrative details its picturesque qualities, using language that in fact does

evoke the qualities of a landscape painting done in oils on canvas. The view is composed of little fields, paddocks, farms, and hedges that seem “constructed upon a smaller and more delicate scale;” (5). A traveller moving northward from the coast would find the place to be a delightful surprise, spreading before him in welcoming accessibility like an unfolding map. The vista is colored ultramarine near the horizon and azure in both its middle-distance and the “languorous” atmosphere that extends throughout. This is a valley that is “fertile” and “sheltered,” yet it possesses recesses with threateningly “narrow, tortuous, and miry ways” (5). Paradoxically, the descriptive passages that establish the setting emphasize the fertility of the land and the “rich mass of grass and trees,” while also stating that here, “arable lands are few and limited” (5). The town and the vale are unspoiled places, offering a simple compilation of basic features that would appeal to the period’s aesthetic tastes.[19] It is ready to be discovered and ripe for consumption; it will be irrevocably changed in consequence of its discovery, and yet the region lacks the complexity and fertile depth that would secure it any lasting appeal or importance.

The Vale of Blackmoor, with all its fecundity and contradiction, and its many limitations, does offer genuine, simple attractions. At the same time, it is undiscovered and underdeveloped, “the atmosphere colourless” (5). The promise of the land

[19] Writing in 1792, William Gilpin laid down a fundamental distinction between the beautiful and the picturesque, building upon earlier philosophical discussions by Edmund Burke distinguishing the sublime from the beautiful. In his “Essay on Picturesque Beauty,” Gilpin explained that the “smoothness” of the beautiful does not fascinate the landscape painter or the portraitist—rather, it is a quality of unpolished roughness that makes a face or scene picturesque and best suited to be the subject of the painter’s art.

incongruously exists simultaneously with the confining characteristics that consign it to marginality. The folded nature of the landscape, with its natural gifts bestowed potentiality that is not realized within its own tight boundaries, extends into Tess Durbeyfield's character and her circumstances. She is only "a fine and picturesque country girl, and no more" (8). Her advantages in body and character bring her more trouble than redemption, and she is never able to capitalize on these advantages in a way that would allow her to pull away from her blighted lot. Like the Vale of Blackmoor that is her home, the space of Tess's life is a contradictory simultaneity of resource and restriction.

The Constraint of Vision

In their opening pages, both *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* offer descriptive passages that establish a connection between the title character and his or her surrounding place of origin. Further, these descriptions bind character and setting together in a way that demonstrates the former will be imprisoned by the geographic and socioeconomic realities of the latter. It is significant that both of these passages establish these connections through saturations of evocative visual detail. These passages are part of a category of narrative moments in Thomas Hardy's novels. In many of these moments, descriptive writing transitions into flights of much more abstract prose. These are passages that, independent of materiality or metaphor, consider relationships, histories, futures, dreams, and expectations using language that is not tied to the tangible world.

There are small crises of representation in these novels where visual description fails, and the only way to express what is at stake is through means other than details of the "seen."

Visual moments, for the characters that dwell within the diegesis of Hardy's fiction, are potent yet incomplete opportunities for expression and for identity formation.[20] This is possible because, in the processing and interpretation of sensory details, phenomenological experience couples with the ethical framework of the subject, allowing knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics to combine in one site. In Hardy's novels, these sites locate within the descriptive passages that characterize his writing. The visual reaches its limits, though, in terms of narrative function, for not everything can be explained via imagery and description. Accordingly, visual experiences both demonstrate and generate restrictions for the characters within Hardy's novels. Through their encounters with the visual, protagonists like Tess Durbeyfield and Jude Fawley come to understand the constricting boundaries of limited possibility that dictate their lives. The way they come to see the world around them, and the provocative visions that touch them, become causally charged expressions of their conscription to the merciless forces of fate.

Pushing at the limits of description cements the hopelessness of the characters' situations and the extent that their choices are extremely constrained—constrained even

---

[20] In *Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures,* Sheila Berger discusses the relationship between the phenomenology of visual experience and character development in Hardy's fiction, showing how Hardy presents characters like Tess Durbeyfield and Jude Fawley by demonstrating the ways that they employ the visual in order to know and create their individual sense of reality. She argues that in Hardy, "we come to know the characters and they come to know each other and reality through what they see, how they see it, and how they say it" (xii). Berger's argument places emphasis upon the movement from the moment visual perception to each character's articulation of that personal vision.

through the visual experiences that they collect. Just as Providence fails to provide the characters with just options leading to fulfillment or release, the material world, too, is limited in its ability to provide meaningful choices. Many critics have noted that free will doesn't exist in Hardy's novels. The determinism of Hardy's world is an old discussion; the characters clearly have only the illusion of free will because they are imprisoned within their cold and uncaring social, economic, or even evolutionary circumstances.[21]

The lure of the visible is another way to understand this constraint, because in Hardy the visual offers only another kind of illusion, as each protagonist's will comes against the spectacle/specter of the visible. Visual experiences function as possibilities that seem to offer the release of aesthetic pleasure, new understanding, or a measure of escape, but these are always foreclosed and none are realized. Thus, examining the nature and function of visual representation in Hardy's novels deepens an understanding of the way that this representation works to construct a social reality that is grimly deterministic, not only in terms of the practical confinements of place, class, and circumstance, but also the certain sense that aesthetic possibility will always end in bitter disappointment.

Tess's Blighted Star

In *Tess of the d'Ubervilles,* descriptive passages located early in the novel paint first the landscape of Tess's home country and then depict the heroine herself. There are several essential, parallel qualities shared between the girl and her homeland, which are

[21] For example, Gillian Beer explains that "plot in Hardy is almost always tragic or malign: it involves the overthrow of the individual either by the inevitability of death or by the machinations (or disregard) of 'crass casualty'" (452).

communicated through the passages' visual detail. Tess Durbeyfield's home district was once "densely wooded," and had been known as "The Forest of White Hart," a name referencing a courtly legend from another era. In the legend, according to details offered by the narrative voice, a hunter was heavily fined after killing "a beautiful white hart which the king had run down and spared" (5). The unfolding plot of Tess's story reveals some echoes of this legend of temptation followed, of regret, and of painful consequence—she begins her story as an innocent who tumbles into a tragedy that seems just as pointless and contrary to good intent as the slaying of the hart. Tess enters into this landscape at a time when little of "The Forest of White Hart" remains. There are "hollow trunk trees that shade many of its pastures," and although "…the forests have departed… some old customs of their shades remain" (6). The doubled reference here to ghostly tree shadows and the shades of lingering folk traditions frames the setting as a scaffold composed of ponderous history and the stripped, thinly veiled desolation of the place.

Within this milieu, Tess first appears only as an undifferentiated body helping to people a crowd. She is one of a sunlit and white-clad company of women performing the Cerealia, the May-Day dance. Hardy's description passes quickly over "the elderly women in the train, their silver-wiry hair and wrinkled faces, scourged by time and trouble, having almost a grotesque, certainly a pathetic, appearance" (6). These women, made "almost grotesque" under the weight of years of hard living, are like memento mori that make a cameo appearance at the festival, providing a bit of contrast and a foreboding reminder of the inevitable end of youth. More worthy of voluptuous detail are the

younger women, “under whose bodices the life throbbed quick and warm… their heads of luxuriant hair reflected in the sunshine every tone of gold, and black, and brown” (6-7). These are “genuine country girls, unaccustomed to many eyes” (7), and “few, if any,” are thoroughly beautiful. The women described in this passage are luminous figures, lit by the sun against a verdant background. The image is impressionistic, suggesting a collection of white tints of varying degrees of purity dramatically backlit by the bold afternoon sunlight.[22] At this point in the description of the scene, Hardy focuses on the amalgamation or composite of features of the young women, a feature of beauty here, another there, rather than a sharply delineated, individuated portrait of one.

Hardy’s words next shift from descriptors that sketch the rough, uneven, and picturesque appeal of the young women to an entirely non-visual mediation upon their inner lives. This paragraph shifts in method from the visual towards a description of that which cannot be seen by the eye or imagined in the mind’s eye. Through the image-metaphor of the sun, Hardy seamlessly moves away from exterior, observed details into a more abstract rumination. The girls’ bodies are warmed by the sun, while meanwhile within them each they possess a private sun-- their secret hopes and desires, which warm their spiritual lives.

Hardy writes of their private selves not by visiting the hope within the specific heart of any one girl, instead transitioning the narrative into a commentary on their

---

[22] Numerous critics have recognized the visual qualities of Hardy’s writing, exemplified in this descriptive passage. Jane Thomas observes: “Thomas Hardy is a highly visual author. His novels and stories are enriched with passages of stunning description which interrupt the plot to provide moments of aesthetic stasis” (436).

collective limitations. The prose moves away from the description of the pretty, sun-soaked springtime picture to a generalization about how they, each, hold on to hopes that are almost certain to remain unrealized:

> …And as each and all of them were warmed without by the sun, so each had a private little sun for her soul to bask in; some dream, some affection, some hobby, at least some remote and distant hope which, although perhaps starving to nothing, still lived on, as hopes will.

This movement of the narrative into a generalized, assertive conjecture into these unseen private motives, loves, interests, and dreams is gentle in tone, but at the same time, it assumes a position of certainty and superiority. The narrative voice doesn't take the time to know each girl's own motivation, but it understands them categorically, and knows these treasures are only token gestures. The suggestion is that, although these dreams are usually "starving to nothing," the girls hold to them in order to feel a sense of identity, helping each to endure the relative hopelessness of her circumstance. A visually rich description of merry country girls circling and dancing in a train becomes an opportunity to forge a connection between this pastoral scene and the more difficult reality that lies beneath its picturesque surface.

The gentle touch of this passage does little to soften the sense of grim prediction that it implies, and it is a fitting prelude to the moment of Tess's individuation from the crowd. She comes into focus as her fellow revelers notice her father passing by, drunk in a rented carriage. They teasingly call out his rollicking, luxuriating, and wholly embarrassing comportment, allowing the narration an opportunity to point Tess out from among the collection of assembled young women by detailing her mortification and her

simple efforts to make excuses for him. She, the narration notes, is the only one of the dancers who wore any sort of "pronounced adornment," a red ribbon in her hair. As Tess emerges as the description's focal point, the things that mark her as special are noticeable and briefly cataloged, but they are small, nearly inconsequential things. They do not (and could not) constitute the physiognomic foreshadowing of a heroine who will rise above to find a happier realization through the unique gift of an exceptional potential. Her beauty is solid but not transcendent: "…she was a fine and handsome girl—not handsomer than some others, possibly," and her most outstanding features suggest a perilous combination of sensuality and naïveté, as "her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to color and shape" (7).

For Hardy, clearly establishing the dangerous mismatch between Tess's lack of experience and her precocious, unpolished sexual allure is essential to laying the foundation of her tragic history, and he achieves this through the construction of her physical appearance. The early passages that describe her emphasize her mouth, making this organ into a tripled signifier: Tess Durbeyfield

> …was a mere vessel of emotion untinctured by experience. The dialect was on her tongue to some extent, despite the village school… the pouted-up deep red mouth… had hardly as yet settled into its definite shape, and her lower lip had a way of thrusting the middle of her top one upward, when they closed together after a word. (8)

The image painted here of Tess's lips points clearly to her sensuality ("pouted-up," "deep red,"), and at the same time reminds the reader that the girl described here is precariously poised at a very specific and fleeting moment in her development, her mouth's shape just now settling into the form that will shape her womanly smiles and sighs. Further, through

the physiology of her articulation and the rustic intonation and accent of her speech, her mouth reveals her connection to her geographic place and the socioeconomic status she is born and bound to.

Tess's body and her movements, as Hardy describes them, also show a fluid inconsistency: "…phases of her childhood lurked in her aspect still. As she walked along to-day, for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then" (8). Significantly, in this passage Tess's mouth again is the site that most poignantly reveals her deep vulnerability; it is the place where her most childlike expressions play. The catalog of details that comprise the text's earliest image of Tess, partly aural but primarily visual, align with the earlier rendering of her specific geographic locale. Like her home country, Tess is "fine and picturesque," but she is a "country girl, and no more" (8). Through these descriptions of her person and her environs, Hardy quickly sketches Tess's rustic appeal without idealization, using metaphors that provide symbolic foreshadowing.

Tess's attractive qualities do, in short order, prove to be a liability, for they unfortunately capture the attention of Alec d'Urberville, a man who is the first agent of her undoing. Even more unfortunately, before she meets Alec d'Urberville, the right man encounters her but only notices her beauty when it is too late for the two to connect. Angel Clare, walking through the region with his brothers, joins in the May-dance but doesn't choose Tess as a partner. The church clock strikes and Angel begins to take his leave, and only as "he fell out of the dance his eyes lighted on Tess Durbeyfield, whose

own large orbs wore, to tell the truth, the faintest aspect of reproach that he had not chosen her. He too was sorry then that, owing to her backwardness, he had not observed her" (10). As a descriptor, "backwardness" contains a doubled connotation—he didn't notice her, because she wasn't facing him; she didn't stand out to him, because of her unsophistication. As Angel and his brothers leave, he looks back and sees that the other girls have forgotten him in their continued dance. He notices that Tess, however, is no longer dancing: "…this white shape stood apart by the hedge alone… he instinctively felt that she was hurt by his oversight… he wished that he had asked her… she was so modest, so expressive, she had looked so soft in her thin white gown that he felt he had acted stupidly" (10). Angel Clare will not see Tess again until after another man, Alec d'Urberville, has stolen her innocence away. Angel's failure to single out Tess on that May Day is the first sad misfortune in the story of her fall, and Hardy renders this moment through descriptions that are lush in their visuality yet deeply, troublingly nuanced. Tess, in her white dress and red hair-ribbon, is a poignant figure—vulnerable at the center of the passage's aesthetic project. The visuality of the novel's opening sequences sets forth picturesque and realist description with the design of establishing Tess's character, her milieu, and the foreshadowed consequences of her circumstances as they converge.

The incident, though, results in such serious consequence for Tess that not all of its import can be communicated through visual detail, despite all of its vivid suggestion. In another layer of the narration, Hardy also includes a more philosophical assessment of what has occurred, offered through speculative commentary that is wholly abstract and

untied to color, body, object, or anything that could be expressed through concrete representation:

> Thus the thing began. Had she perceived this meeting's import she might have asked why she was doomed to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man, and not by some other man, the right and desired one in all respects—as nearly as humanity can supply the right and desired; yet to him who amongst her acquaintance might have approximated to this kind, she was but a transient impression half-forgotten" (30)

Here, knowing and seeing again conflate, as Tess could not yet know or understand what damage will come from Angel Clare's failure to see or recognize her value.

The narrative returns to cataloging the visual qualities of Tess's environment as it works to situate her constricted position inside a grim and stifling place. The atmosphere within the Durbeyfield's cottage home profoundly contrasts with the springtime freshness of the May-dance, where "ideal and real [had] clashed slightly as the sun lit up the figures against the green hedges and creeper-laced house fronts" (6). No idealization enters into the text's description of Tess's home; there is only gritty reality within. The narrative offers a condensed catalog of the impressions of the mayday celebration in order to convey a sense bald contrast with the Durbeyfield's home: "…the interior… struck upon the girl's senses with an unspeakable dreariness. From the holiday gaieties of the field—the white gowns, the nosegays, the willow-wands, the whirling movements on the green… to the yellow melancholy of this one-candled spectacle, what a step!" (11). To paint the cottage interior, Hardy deploys a small cluster of visual detail with economy and precision. A wash-tub filled with laundry that has been lingering dirtily for days, a basinet so worn down by the weight of scores of babies that it flings rather than rocks the

babe within, and a single candle-flame stretching tall complete the description of the cottage's interior and atmosphere.

Images of Tess's home couple with less concrete descriptions her attitude towards her surroundings in order to demonstrate the nearly inescapable, limiting weight of Tess's position. She is born into a family with too many children and resources that are far too few, and no opportunities of any promise are likely to open to her. There is little chance that either she or her family will find a way to rise out of squalor, and in fact moments later in the narrative, their situation suddenly deteriorates to depths more dire still. On another level, in this passage, the language of visual description comes against its own limitation.[23] Tess looks around her at the connected images that build this atmosphere of "unspeakable dreariness" and compares them to the bright, fresh images of the day's earlier hours: the field, white gowns, flowers, willow-wands, whirling dancers. Yet, the picture of her despondence cannot be complete without mention of something more abstract than an image. It is a wistful sense of disappointment and yearning that has no visual representation: the "flash of gentle sentiment towards the stranger" (11). For Tess, her domestic surroundings offer no comfort and no pleasure, aesthetic or otherwise; instead, what she sees becomes a steely reinforcement of the grim limits of her life.[24]

[23] In "Thomas Hardy and Realism," Frances O'Gorman notes that "…at the most extreme point, the real did not seem, sometimes, to inhere for Hardy in the observed, tangible world at all". These are the moments where Hardy, through a change in the mode of his writing, transistions away from his work as "a describer of the empirical world" (117) into a more abstract, cerebral kind of language.

[24] Jane Thomas, in *Thomas Hardy and Desire,* takes her analysis of this moment further, situating it as the point at which a desire in Tess is born. This desire, unfulfilled, propels

What she sees as she gazes around the interior of her home promises no release and no escape, and her silent, private yearning, this flash of gentle sentiment, can find no visual correlative.

In Tess's story, there is a tense interplay between the seen environment and the interior, personal landscape of emotions and ideas. This tension takes Tess for its primary conduit, playing across her body and mind as she responds to the trying, varying circumstances of her life. In her family's cottage, when her mother tells her, firstly that her father has been informed that he is of noble stock and "pedigree" (13), and secondly that he's gone off to Rolliver's Pub to "get up his strength," the force of Tess's shame, chagrin, and dismay actively cast out over the interior that surrounds her. There is no physical change, only a change and charge in the atmosphere that is only a fraction shy of tangible: "...her rebuke and her mood seemed to fill the whole room, and to impart a cowed look to the furniture, and candle, and children playing about, and her mother's face" (13).

Images and visual impressions are also key to Hardy's presentation of Tess's mother. When she leaves the house to collect her husband, the perceptions, expressed through concrete mental images, that comprise Joan Durbeyfield's reality immediately shift. The freedom she feels after escaping the "muck and muddle of rearing children" and walking the short way to Rolliver's (14) offers her a rare happiness. These changing

---

her tragedy: "…she becomes newly constituted by her desire [for Angel] and what he represents, which results in her dissatisfaction with her home and community and incites within her new and compelling which, in the absence of their primary object—Angel himself—will seek fulfillment in the available but unsatisfactory form of Alec d'Urberville" (62).

impressions intensify once she joins her husband: "…a sort of halo, an occidental glow, came over life then. Troubles and other realities took on themselves a metaphysical impalpability, sinking to mere mental phenomena for serene contemplation, and no longer stood as pressing concretions which chafed body and soul" (14). Although in fact the difficulties and grim, unchangeable limits of her life remain, her mood (and her intoxication) change the way she sees her lot, and "the youngsters, not immediately within sight, seemed rather bright and desirable appurtenances than otherwise; the incidents of daily life were not without humorousness and jollity in their aspect there" (14).

Remembering the time of their courtship before they were wed, Tess's mother once again sees her husband as an ideal lover. The shabby atmosphere of the pub, strange and limited though it was, enables Joan Durbeyfield to "shut her eyes to the defects of her husband's character" despite how well she knows that these defects themselves determine the boundaries of her own life's horizon. In the same moment that the narrative establishes the unreliable, precarious, and "shiftless house of Durbeyfield," it simultaneously explains how the illusion of relative luxury, spun by the cheap and dim-lit mise-en-scène of Rolliver's pub, casts the circumstances and inevitabilities of life to Joan Durbeyfield in a softer light. Because the pub isn't licensed to legally serve alcohol, the proprietress ushers her thirsty guests upstairs to a bedroom, where they all perch, a motley dozen, on "a gaunt four-post bedstead," a chest of drawers, an "oak-carved 'coffer,'" the washstand, or a nightstool, "all somehow seated at their ease" (16). As the drinkers relax and jovially converse,

> …their souls expanded beyond their skins, and spread their personalities warmly through the room. In this process the chamber and its furniture grew more and more dignified and luxurious, the shawl hanging at the window took upon itself the richness of tapestry, the brass handles of the chest of drawers were as golden knockers, and the carved bedposts seemed to have some kinship with the magnificent pillars of Solomon's temple. (16)

There is, in this passage, an interplay and exchange between inner states of the assembled subjects and their perception of the physical surroundings, and this reciprocity is not benign. Tess's mother enjoys being part of this milieu, and she is made happy by its illusions, though it is arguably a dangerous way for Joan and her husband to cope and forget the hardness of their lives. On this evening, in particular, John Durbeyfield's dalliance there has disastrous consequences, which then sets in motion the cascade of Tess's unraveling. Perhaps Hardy's offered lesson here is that holding to illusory and flimsily crafted pictures like this shabby pub tableau results in destruction, because all the problematic realities that they conceal will only continue, unchecked and ruinous. That night, and presumably many nights, the shabby mystique of the pub's atmosphere allowed Joan Durbeyfield to see her life other than it was, and to imagine a security and sense of contentment that never did exist for her that night, or any night.

Hardy presents the visually organized understanding of secondary characters, as well, such as Tess's small brother, Abraham. During their calamitous journey together, Abraham, still half-asleep, sees the night landscape all around as full of wonder and possibility: "…as he more fully awoke… began to talk of the strange shapes assumed by the various dark objects against the sky; of this tree that looked like a raging tiger springing from a lair; of that which resembled a giant's head" (20). Abraham's

imaginative interpretation of the night's shapes continues until he "grew reflective," and questions his sister about the discovery of his family's noble lineage and wealthy kin. Watching the fascinating stars in the dark sky above them, he wonders how far away they are, and if God dwells beyond them. His dreamy contemplation of the firmament meets with his young pragmatism, and he asks, "…if Tess were made rich by marrying a gentleman, would she have money enough to buy a spy-glass so large that it would draw the stars as near to her as Nettlecomb-Tout?" (21). The visions that fascinate Abraham and inspire his imagination are inseparable from his conception of the real world and his reconciliation of his own possibilities within it. He yearns to touch the stars and hopes that if Tess marries into wealth, she can at least provide an apparatus that would make such a vision his to behold. Abraham places great stake in this possibility, but Tess tells him that all the stars are worlds, "most of them splendid and sound—a few blighted," and that theirs, alas, is one of those blighted. "Is it like that *really*, Tess?" her brother sadly asks.

Tess's own imaginings merge with the "mute procession past her shoulders of trees and hedges" (21). The forms she passes by "became attached to fantastic scenes outside reality, and the occasional heave of the wind became the sigh of some immense sad soul, conterminous with the universe in space, and with history in time" Like her dreamy brother, Tess's visions blur the boundary between the real and concrete, and the forms around her merge with her personal projections, her fears, and her understanding of her limited opportunities within this world. Tess will, repeatedly, use her imagination to extend the possibilities of her life, as she transforms what she sees around her through her

mind and her fancy. In another point in the story, just before she once again meets Angel Clare, she articulates her method for freeing her soul from the confines of her body. She describes her method for doing so—a method that is dreamily charming while at the same time offering an alarming suggestion of psychological disassociation: "…a very easy way to feel 'em go," …is to lie on the grass at night, and look straight up at some big bright star; and by fixing your mind upon it you will soon find that you are hundreds and hundreds o'miles away from your body, which you don't seem to want at all" (94). Tess seizes upon her view of distant stars as a way offer herself a sense of freedom, but this sensation holds only the diaphanous promise of a ghostly dream, offering no real escape through its illusion. Throughout the novel, visual moments such as these that seem to suggest opportunity or release prove to be just as illusory. Tess's perception, double flawed because of its naiveté and its imaginative powers, ensures her inconsistent understanding. She will perceive in people and places a hope and possibility that will never realize, while at the same time she will fail to see the real dangers before her.

Tess's gloomy view, that night with her brother, of her and her family's fate upon a blighted star soon proves its truth. In this moment, her particular perspective, articulated through these thought-pictures, accurately assesses her life's chances. As the Durbeyfield's wagon and the mail-cart collide in the night. The sharp point of the mail cart spears Prince's breast, delivering to him a mortal wound. To communicate the full calamity of this event, Hardy lays down a vivid, traumatically visual description of what has come to pass. Tess's own lantern has gone out, but the postman's light shows her "…the dreadful truth…the pointed shaft of the cart had entered the breast of the unhappy

Prince like a sword; and from the wound his life's blood was spurting in a stream, and falling with a hiss into the road" (22). Tess reacts, and "in her despair… sprang forward and put her hand upon the hole, with the only result that she became splashed from face to skirt with the crimson drops. Then she stood hopelessly looking on. Prince also stood firm and motionless as long as he could; till he suddenly sank down in a heap" (22).

The shock of this disaster freezes Tess to the spot and halts the narrative for a long, extended moment. In the immediate aftermath of the accident, Tess and the tableau that surrounds her remain shocked and still. Only the birds move while the light slowly changes, "…the atmosphere turned pale, the birds shook themselves in the hedges, arose, and twittered: the lane showed all its white features, and Tess showed hers, still whiter" (22). Here, the descriptive passage is searing and unforgettable, the image serving to weld the trauma of the emergency together with Tess's realization of the depth of the calamity and the doom it will bring to her and to her family. In this moment, the traumatic resonance of the injury is expressed through the indelibility of the vision: "…the huge pool of blood in front of her was already assuming the iridescence of coagulation; and when the sun rose a hundred prismatic hues reflected from it. Prince lay alongside still and stark; his eyes half open, the hole in his chest looking scarcely large enough to have let out all that animated him" (22). Tess stares at this horrifying display, which is grotesquely beautiful, iridescent, prismatic, and shimmering. Beholding the huge pool of Prince's blood, nearly sublime in its awful radiance, is surely the most profoundly affecting visual experience thus far in Tess's young life. Waking, her little brother sees it too, and "the furrows of fifty years were extemporized on his face" (23). The pool of

horse's blood on the highway forms a spectacle that cannot be unseen or forgotten, and it changes them both, just as the accident secures the family's financial ruin and thus the certainty of Tess's tragic fate.

Another key moment, the event of her leaving home, allows the narrative an opportunity to reemphasize Tess's inexperience, highlighting the tiny scope and range of her life thus far. After Prince's carcass is dragged home and buried, Tess sets out to rescue her destitute family by setting out to "claim kin" amongst the family's newfound, wealthy relations. She had never been away from home, "only a small tract even of the Vale and its environs being known to her by close inspection." What lay beyond is just as mysterious to her on that day as it had been "in the wondering days of infancy," and in its mystery she imagined potential, seeing glamour in what she has only glimpsed: "…she had seen daily from her chamber-window towers, villages, faint white mansions; above all the town of Shaston standing majestically on its height; its windows shining like lamps in the evening sun" (25). Tess perceives the near but unknown places as shining towers and white manors, reading into them an alluring goodness and sense of opportunity. However, the reality she finds fails to match the glimmering promise of the places viewed from a distance. When she arrives at the estate of the d'Urbervilles, even Tess's untrained eye notices the gauche, nouveau-riche quality of the place, where "everything looked like money—like the last coin issued from the Mint" (27). It is a "bright and thriving" place, but it is ornamental and false, clashing with the "truly venerable tract of forest land" and the "sylvan antiquity" of the surrounding landscape. Looking around at what she believes to be her ancestor's point of origin, Tess observes

that "…now all was contrary to her expectation. 'I thought we were an old family; but this is all new!' she said in her artlessness" (27). The newly built property lacks restraint and gravitas, as false in its nobility as its owners themselves, despite all of the assumed titles and the appropriated aristocracy Simon Stoke attempted to graft on through his annexation of the "Urberville" name.

Alec d'Urberville, the son of new-fashioned, lately deceased nobleman who built that estate, enters into Tess's story the very day that she leaves home to try to win fortune for her struggling family. Within a few minutes of their meeting, Tess's mobile peony mouth is enough to entice the young rake (in a thinly-veiled metaphor of forced seduction) to insist upon hand-feeding her a strawberry. She attempts to resist the obtrusively proffered berry, "putting her fingers between his hand and her lips." But Alec easily overcomes her: " 'Nonsense!' he insisted; and in slight distress she parted her lips and took it in" (29). Next, Alec ushers Tess into a garden tent and offers her more sustenance, giving his picnic luncheon to her and smoking while he watches her eat. He hides her in the tent and serves her himself, "…it was evidently the gentleman's wish not to be disturbed in this pleasant *tête-à-tête* by the servantry." That the impropriety of Alec's treatment of the young women would be clear to the servants is noted by the narration, yet the innocent Tess, thought she feels some unease, is unaware of the depth of his suggestive behavior and its danger to her. As she eats, Alec:

> …watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfiled did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the "tragic mischief" of her drama—one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life. She had an attribute which

> amounted to a disadvantage just now; and it was this that caused Alec d'Urberville's eyes to rivet themselves upon her. It was a luxuriance of aspect, a fullness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was. (30)

This passage is rendered through a multiplicity of gazes. The omniscient narrative voice regards Tess with sympathy and recognizes this moment as one that crystalizes her tragedy, while it simultaneously presents her in the predatory eyes of the man who will destroy her. Through his vision blurred through the smoky, "narcotic haze," Alec pushes aside any awareness of Tess's unconscious innocence, (which the narrative eye so clearly recognizes), and instead his lascivious gaze rivets upon her burgeoning and voluptuous appeal. The virtue and sweetness of her innocence is, for Alec, merely an easily exploited vulnerability that he swiftly commutes into opportunity. Alec's shallow character is of course unable to recognize the "blood-red" truth that Tess's allure will be her tragedy, and Tess's very naiveté undermines her ability to see the truth about herself and her precarious position. Had Alec the capacity to perceive Tess with the sensitivity and insight clearly present in the narrative voice, or had Tess enough experience and self-awareness to realize the dangerous dynamic that she has stumbled into, her story would have to explore another avenue than that of her fall. In this moment of building drama, tension rises out of misaligned perspectives—each character bound and limited by a failure, inability, or unwillingness to see through to a clearer truth.

Opacity of atmosphere, coupled with Tess's inability to clearly perceive her own danger, continue to mark the crises in her story. Not long after Tess meets Alec d'Uberville and becomes employed by his family, she makes the short, ill-fated journey

one Saturday after work to a “decayed market town two or three miles distant,” to attend the weekly fair and market there and enjoy a dance later in the evening. Hardy describes her walk through “a fine September evening, just before sunset, when yellow lights struggle with blue shades in hairlike lines, and the atmosphere itself forms a prospect, without aid from more solid objects, except the innumerable winged insects that dance in it. Through this low-lit mistiness Tess walked leisurely along” (47). Hardy’s image here focuses entirely upon quality of the light present on that September evening—a scrim of Turneresque[25] yellow light and blue shade rendering everything into intangible, impressionistic forms entirely lacking in reliable solidity (see Figure 3). The passage creates a suggestive, ephemeral atmosphere that sets the stage for an evening of blurred boundaries and hazy misjudgment.

---

[25] As J.B. Bullen writes in *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy,* “…Turner’s depiction of ‘light modified by objects’, is surely the source of so many of the brilliant scenes in Tess of the d’Urbervilles in which the landscape dissolves in the glow of light and sunlight... an effect by which physical objects are replaced entirely by the aerial play of light and color” (197-198). Hardy draws upon proto-Impressionistic techniques inspired by Turner in the service of creating vivid and realistic images to “illustrate” his fiction. Bullen argues that the relationship between Hardy’s techniques in Tess of the d’Urbervilles and Turner’s paintings is “analogous rather than imitative.” Thus, the method Hardy employs in Tess is intended not merely to recreate images reminiscent of Turner paintings, but to create a parallel effect. According to Bullen, “…from Turner, Hardy learned that light cold be more than an external influence upon landscape: it could be used as the single most potent force, shaping landscape from within...Hardy also realized that Turner used light to endow his paintings with meaning...Turner managed to communicate the ‘tragical mysteries of life,’ and this, too, was achieved by manipulating the source of illumination. In Tess of the d’Urbervilles Hardy creates a literary equivalent for this technique” (198).

Figure 3: J.M.W. Turner, *Sunset on Rouen* (also titled *The Scarlet Sunset*), 1830-40.

The misty, insubstantial quality of this evening's ambiguous atmosphere continues to intensify. Tess, waiting for her companions to accompany her back to Tantridge from Chaseborough, lingers near a "private little jig" (47) held the home of a hay-trusser and peat-dealer. The passage that describes the dance is heavy with fecund light—the air Hardy describes is drenched with light and also with a fertile dust:

> ...from the open door there floated into the obscurity a mist of yellow radiance, which at first Tess thought to be illuminated smoke. But on drawing near she perceived that it was a cloud of dust, lit by candles within the outhouse, whose beams upon the haze carried forward the outline of the doorway into the wide night of the garden. (48)

The description is richly evocative on the level of its specificity and naturalism, as it summons a clear vision of this bucolic scene set amongst the peasantry who labored and farmed in this part of the country during this time period. However, it is not a naturalism spun for naturalism's own sake, without direct implications for Tess and her narrative. Tess becomes drenched in the atmosphere of the place, virtually sodden with its flush and fevered air of heady metamorphosis. She can hardly see through the barn at all,

> …When she came close and looked in she beheld indistinct forms racing up and down to the figure of the dance, the silence of their footfalls arising from their being overshoe in "scoff"—that is to say the powdery residuum from the storage of peat and other products, the stirring of which by their turbulent feet created the nebulosity that involved the scene. Through this floating fusty 85ebris of peat and hay, mixed with the perspirations and warmth of the dancers, and forming together a sort of vegeto-human pollen, the muted fiddles feebly pushed their notes, in marked contrast to the spirit with which the measure was trodden out… Of the rushing couples there could barely be discerned more than the high lights—the indistinctness shaping them to satyrs clasping nymphs—a multiplicity of Pans whirling a multiplicity of Syrinxes, Lotis attempting to elude Priapus, and always failing. (48)

Here, as in the description of the May Day dancers, Hardy creates compound amalgamation of figures, a "multiplicity," as opposed to an individuated portrait. In this passage the heaviness of the light and air is palpable, as dust and glow combine to create what Hardy calls in a marvelously suggestive phrase—a "vegeto-human pollen." Although she doesn't join in the dancing, Tess's exposure to such bacchanalian revels, which kick up veritable clouds of heavy, inescapably fertile dust is foreboding. It is as if Tess is at this moment already impregnated by this pollen. Her imminent fate as the victim of Alec D'Urberville's forced advances is foreshadowed to the point of inevitability.

Following the picture painted of the dancers whirling in the heavy dust, Hardy again interjects into the visual image a more abstract consideration. He writes that at this point in the dance, few couples changed partners, for:

> …changing partners simply meant that a satisfactory choice had not as yet been arrived at by one or other of the pair, and by this time every couple had been suitably matched. It was then that the ecstasy and the dream began, in which emotion was the matter of the universe, and matter but an adventitious intrusion likely to hinder you from spinning where you wanted to spin." (49)

Here, Hardy exchanges emotion with physical substance, suggesting that emotion is that which is substantial in the world and that tangible "matter" is only an intrusion. In this passage, visual description and abstract commentary upon intangible thoughts and conditions, exchanging places in fluid alternation.

In a climatic scene towards the end of the novel, the qualities of the natural world and the surrounding physical environment, as they are experienced visually by the characters and by the narrative's eye, become the conduit through which Hardy generates the drama and intense feeling of Tess's final hours. Hardy's prose mixes imagery with the characters' dialog, rendering the scene through a chiaroscuro juxtaposition of light and dark. As Angel and Tess leave the town of Melchester and begin to travel across the plain, the weak light of the moon fails them: "Though the sky was dense with cloud a diffused light from some fragment of a moon had hitherto helped them a little. But the moon had now sunk, the clouds seemed to settle almost on their heads, and the night grew dark as a cave... All around was open loneliness and black solitude, over which a stiff breeze blew" (309). According to this description, the night that surrounds them

seems to know of their plight and understand that Tess's troubles are inescapable, and accordingly the night begins to surround them like the dark walls of a cavern.

In deep blackness the couple walks until they encounter the ruins of Stonehenge. "'What monstrous place is this?'", declares Angel as they first encounter the monolithic pillars. The horizontal stones "at an indefinite height overhead... made the black sky blacker" (310). Within the setting of Tess's capture the ominous, obstructing stones meld with the unforgiving atmosphere of the night. Angel and Tess encounter the monument at the blackest part of the night, but the exposure of dawn arrives all too soon. Angel first notices the coming sunrise as Tess rests upon the sacrificial altar:

> In the far north-east sky, he could see between the pillars a level streak of light. The uniform concavity of black cloud was lifting bodily like the lid of a pot, letting in at the earth's edge the coming day, against which the towering monoliths and trilithons began to began to be blackly defined" (311).

Here, Hardy contrasts the light and dark using a concrete metaphor of stifling enclosure—the shadow of the black clouds like the lid of a pot, letting in a single, level streak of light.

As Tess sleeps, Hardy devotes more detailed description to the light that arrives to illuminate the scene:

> ...The band of silver paleness along the east horizon made even the distant parts of the Great Plain appear dark and near; and the whole enormous landscape bore that impress of reserve, taciturnity, and hesitation which is usual just before day. The eastward pillar sand their architraves stood up blackly against the light, and the great flame-shaped sun-stone beyond them, and the stone of sacrifice midway." (312)

Hardy deepens the image with another layer of meaning, as he describes the landscape as reserved, taciturn, and hesitant. This anthropomorphosis of the landscape which,

according to this description, is once again reminiscent in both vision and atmosphere of a specific Turner painting,[26] (see Figure 4) suggests that the natural world, which had been so inhospitable and dark throughout the long night, feels some remorse as it yields Tess up to her captors. Yet, inevitably, the soldiers and law-men arrive to capture the sleeping Tess, who is laying like a sacrificial lamb on the alter at Stonehenge, and Angel begs them to allow her to finish her sleep:

> All waited in the growing light, their faces and hands as if they were silvered, the remainder of their figures dark, the stones glistening green-grey, the Plain still a mass of shade. Soon the light was strong, and a ray shone upon her unconscious form, peering under her eyelids and waking her" (312)

In this passage, the light itself holds agency, individuating the faces of the men and highlighting the hands that have arrived with the intention of seizing Tess. The light acts upon Tess with deliberation and intention, "peering under her eyelids" and ending her slumber. Here, this climactic moment in the text is driven by the absence or presence of sunlight, yet a complete understanding of Tess's own conceptualization of her place within her tragedy arrives only through her spoken words. As she wakes, she asks, "'…have the come for me? …it is as it should be!' she murmered. 'Angel—I am amost glad—yes, glad! The happiness could not have lasted—it was too much—I have had enough; and now I shall not live for you to despise me… I am ready,' she said quietly" (312-313). Throughout this final section of the novel, Tess's fate is clearly visible in all

[26] According to J.B. Bullen, Hardy may have been influenced not only by Turner's painting of Stonehenge, but also by critic John Ruskin's assessment of the painting: "…What links Hardy's use of Stonehenge with Ruskin's account of Turner's painting is that Ruskin interprets the painting as a Druidical emblem of vengeance and retribution" (220).

that she sees around her and in every look that the narrative voice takes as it describes her. In partnership with the feeling imbued through the visual details that anticipate this dawning morning, Tess's words give voice what she now sees and understands. She sees how happiness, for someone of her station and circumstance is unsustainable. Her chances in this "blighted star" of a world are as limited as they were when the mail-cart killed her family's only breadwinner. Throughout the novel, her visual experiences, reinforced for the reader by the perceptions and descriptions issuing from the narrative voice, consistently confirm the imprisonment, in this time and place, which accompanies the unfortunate combination of womanhood and poverty.

Figure 4: J.M.W. Turner, *Stonehenge*, 1827.

Jude and "the Grind of Stern Reality"

Visual experiences and moments of interpretive perception convey the "stern reality" of Thomas Hardy's final novel, *Jude the Obscure*. Pivotal moments of Jude's story are marked out through images that impress themselves upon his mind and memory, and his reaction to these images is often what drives his decisions. For example, rather than hearing about his cousin Sue through word of mouth or through the written word, Jude first encounters her through a visual representation. As Sheila Berger observes, "Jude first gazes at Sue in a photograph" (28), before he hears of her through a conversational reference or meets her in a live encounter. When he notices a photograph in his aunt's home, he questions his aunt about its subject:

> One day while in lodgings at Alfredston he had gone to Marygreen to see his old aunt, and had observed between the brass candlesticks on her mantlepiece the photograph of a pretty girlish face, in a broad hat with radiating folds under the brim like the rays of a halo. He had asked who she was. His grand-aunt had gruffly replied that she was his cousin Sue Bridehead..." (80)

Jude's first experience of his soulmate happens through this luminous, angelic photograph, and he continues to pursue her as a spectator, viewing her in his mind's eye, and through windows, always from a distance.[27] Before Jude speaks with Sue, before he comes to know her through their abstract, philosophical conversations, and before they

[27] Shiela Berger writes that Jude "...proceeds to watch her in his imagination, and--for some time after he sees her in person-- seeks her out not only to meet her but to watch her secretly" (28).

embark on their unconventional life together, Jude experiences her only as a vision. His first and primary way of knowing her is through seeing her, imagining her and dreaming about her, even spying on her: "…thus he kept watch over her, and liked to feel she was there. The consciousness of her living presence stimulated him. But she remained more or less an ideal character, about whose form he began to weave curious and fantastic day-dreams." (93).

Once Jude's vision of Sue shimmers from what he sees in a framed photograph into reality, she continues to appear in the text through a number of framing devices. He often sees her framed in windows, first glimpsing her in the flesh through a shop window where she worked behind the barrier of a desk. Windows provide Jude with visual access to Sue, while for Sue, they often serve as a means of escape. According to Berger,

> Sue's response to entrapping situations is depicted with the help of windows. She escapes through a casement window from the Melchester Normal school and escapes through a window again, in terror, from the in fact harmless Philloston: 'In a moment he heard her flinging up the sash... she had mounted upon the sill and leapt out.'[28] (67)

Berger explains that in *Jude,* the palpable intensity of visual images enriches the text and, further, these images also claim their own existence as referents, with agency, within the posited reality of the novel. The numerous framing devices in the novel are "concrete forms" that function as "the most explicit visual signs of Hardy's empiricism and the persistent human tendency to frame others and/or oneself in meaning" (72). The

[28] Berger further comments that Sue uses windows defensively as she is getting to know Jude, distancing herself and "showing her emotions only when she has a windowsill between them... windows can frame complex feeling and emotion". Berger explains that these "settings, doorways, windows, stages, mirrors, pictures-- all call attention unrelentingly to the framed nature of reality and of language" (72).

narrative's pattern of framing becomes a way for Hardy to emphasize how seeing takes an essential part the organization of knowledge. Framing and interpretation represent a process of negotiation between the subject and the surrounding world. Sue's use of windows as routes of escape only emphasizes the extent to which her life's circumstance entraps her.

Jude's passionately reads Sue's face and countenance, transforming her into the object of all the hopes and desires he has ever had about a woman. He sees her through the scrim of his longing, reading in her expression a tenderness that he has never known from anyone in his life:

> All of a sudden… his cousin stood close to his elbow, pausing a moment… she looked right into his face with liquid, untranslatable eyes, that combined, or seemed to him to combine, keenness with tenderness, and mystery with both, their expression, as well as that of her lips, taking its life from some words just spoken to a companion, and being carried on into his face quite unconsciously. She no more observed his presence than that of the dust-motes which his manipulations raised into the sunbeams. (93)

Jude's surreptitious observation of Sue creates a separation between them that allows him to continue to idealize her and to frame her as an irresistible representation of his hope for a softer experience of life.

When Jude's dream of Sue becomes, in its limited way, a reality, the pair becomes a spectacle to be interpreted by the little society that surrounds them. As Jude and Sue work together to restore a large, ornamental engraving of the Ten Commandments inscribed upon a church wall, their neighbors assemble to stare at them and gather information to justify their judgment. The passage opens describing the

enormous stone inscription that serves as the dramatic set-piece providing a backdrop for the scene:

> The tables of the Jewish law towered sternly over the utensils of Christian grace, as the chief ornament of the chancel end, in the fine dry style of the last century. And as their framework was constructed of ornamental plaster, they could not be taken down for repair. A portion, crumbled by damp, required renewal, and when this had been done, and the whole cleansed, he began to renew the lettering. (329-330)

In front of this background Sue and Jude work side by side, she “painting in the letters of the first Table while he set about mending a portion of the second. She was quite pleased at her powers; she had acquired them in the days she painted illuminated texts for the church-fitting shop at Christminster” (330). The two companionable figures laboring together in the church, working to restore the gilt to the large, engraved text of the Ten Commandments forms a striking tableau. Unfortunately, the charge of this image does not go unnoticed by the people of the town, who gather to behold the spectacle of the unmarried couple working to restore the very scripture that would condemn them. The villagers’ scrutiny disturbs Sue’s usually calm and collect composure:

> The church-cleaner looked at Sue, gaped, and lifted her hands; she had evidently recognized Jude’s companion as the later had recognized her. Next came two ladies, and after talking to the charwoman they also moved forward, and as Sue stood reaching upward, watched her hand tracing the letters, and critically regarded her person in relief against the white wall, till she grew so nervous that she trembled visibly. (331)

Sue and Jude, framed against the large gilded letters engraved in the white wall, create a bold and graphic spectacle irresistible to the town gossips. Soon enough a superstitious story was recounted, in which a team of heathen workers hired to repair a similar wall were said to have left out all of the “nots” in the Ten Commandments. By the end of the

day, Jude and Sue were asked to leave off their work, which would presumably be finished by a less morally objectionable set of laborers.

Through this scene before the engraved church wall, Hardy has created a graphic, highly visual moment in which Jude and Sue are held up against and come into very literal conflict with the norms and values of their society. Because they are not legally married, despite their mutual commitment to one another, their society sees them as rebels, outcasts, and reprobates. Two honest and loving citizens struggling to make a living, Jude and Sue are framed here in a dramatic contrast against the words of scripture that condemn their choices and way of life. "Sue and Jude think they have rid themselves of idols, that they are to some degree free, but that is put in question visually as they stand so small before the huge letters," writes Berger (146).

The assembled crowd does not reflect or comment upon the text inscribed upon the wall in these huge letters, rather, they respond and react to the spectacle of Jude and Sue (who is expecting another child), laboring before it. This moment is emblematic of the restrictive society that Jude and Sue rail against through their choice to be together, and it is significant that this emblematic apotheosis is also a highly visual moment that one can easily conjure in the mind's eye or that could easily be depicted in a painting or drawing. The charwoman's symbolically white apron, the white walls of the church, the gilt lettering, and the couple framed before them are just a few of the strong details that combine to create this vivid image. The couple's exposure here ensures their ostracism and perpetuates their social and economic oppression.

Made a spectacle through his morose countenance and prematurely wizened features, Jude's young son, (the issue of his marriage to Arabella), is an emblem embodying the despair that comes from the poverty endemic to this family and their social class. Called "Little Father Time," Jude's son has already witnessed too many of the indignities and injustices of life, and the weight of this is evidenced in all that he sees, does, and says. In the passage that introduces Little Father Time, Hardy conjures a vignette strikingly reminiscent of an oil by the French Realist artist Honoré Daumier, specifically, his work entitled The Third Class Carriage[29] (see Figure 5). This painting depicts, among other figures, a young boy sleeping in a train compartment, his articles and parcels piled on the seat next to him. Unlike Daumier's sleeping boy, however, Little Father Time is, in this passage, wide awake. Hardy describes "the gloom of a third class carriage" and young Jude's "large, frightened eyes," and his "small, pale child's face." The boy:

> …wore a white woolen cravat, over which a key was suspended round his neck by a piece of common string: the key attracting attention by its occasional shine in the lamplight…In the band of his hat his half-ticket was stuck. His eyes remained mostly fixed on the back of the seat opposite, and never turned to the window even when a station was reached and called." (302)

The description emphasizes the child's rigidity and seriousness-- two characteristics clearly visible here that foreshadow the devastating consequences they will precipitate later in the narrative.

---

[29] It is quite possible that Hardy was familiar with this painting by Daumier. As Sheila Berger notes, he frequently visited museums, and was "one of the most knowledgable British novelists in the visual arts. Often his works make reference to particular paintings or artists or painting techniques" (Berger 68).

Figure 5: Honoré Daumier, *The Third-Class Carriage*, 1862.

After introducing Little Father Time, the passage indicates that the boy's efforts to present himself as figure, who is wise beyond his years sometimes fails:

> …He was Age masquerading as Juvenility, and doing it so badly that his real self showed through crevices. A ground swell from ancient years of night seemed now and then to lift the child in this his morning-life, when his face took a back view over some great Atlantic of Time, and appeared not to care about what it saw (303).

The child's attitude towards and understanding of life's truths is something that is represented as a "view" of what he "saw," and at the same time, his attitude and

perception visibly play upon him through the expressions of his face. Hardy explains this child's difference from others his age, noting that:

> …Children begin with detail, and learn up to the general; they begin with the contiguous, and gradually comprehend the universal. The boy seemed to have begun with the generals of life, and never to have concerned himself with the particulars. To him the houses, the willows, the obscure fields beyond, were apparently regarded not as brick residences, pollards, meadows; but as human dwellings in the abstract, vegetation, and the wide dark world. (304)

Although the child is observing visual objects-- houses, willows, fields—these concrete visions of the passing scenery are for him abstractions, representations, and generic placeholders. In passage introducing Little Father Time, Hardy oscillates between different modes of description—beginning with visual detail about how the boy looks and what he sees, then moving through a presentation of the child as an allegory and concluding with a philosophical commentary upon this little character's perceptions and worldview. Later the unhappy promise of Little Father Time's appearance is fulfilled through his suicide and the murder of his half-siblings. The doctor who examines the children's corpses explains to Jude that the way Little Father Time saw the world was to blame for the boy's tragic actions. Jude relays this opinion to Sue, stating, "…it was in his nature to do it. The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us—boys of a sort unknown to the last generation—the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them" (371). Little Father Time, then, serves as a representational figure of his zeitgeist—a time period where industry and convention are conspiring to snatch comfort and opportunity away from the most disadvantaged of the citizenry.

As Jude's story unfolds, moments of tragedy grow more numerous, but diminish in the scope and intensity of the visual description that presents them. The passage depicting the morning when Sue and Jude discover their dead children is only a cold catalog of items and facts: the closed eyes, the hooks, box-cords, and overturned chair. Each hard blow dealt by fate leaves Jude's story more and more bare. As a child, he looked towards the twinkling lights of Christchurch and imagined his future unfolding there in through his vision of hope and possibility. But when he dies in that very city, the text offers virtually no imagery in the pages that tells of his passing. We only know that "his face was now so thin that his friends would hardly have known him." Before Arabella leaves him on his deathbed and goes to meet another man, she looks down on Jude impassively, as she "critically gauged his ebbing life, as she had done so many times during the late months, and glancing at his watch, which was hung up by way of timepiece, rose impatiently" (445). In Hardy's fiction, image and idea generally work in tandem, and at certain times an abstraction or idea extends beyond the image, entering territory that is perhaps impossible for an image alone to express. By the end of Jude's story the image seems emptied of its potentiality: there are no more possibilities for rescue, and even imagined visions can offer no escape.

Chapter IV

Rendering Isabel Archer:

Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*

The opening passage of Henry James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady* carefully arranges and harmoniously stages several primary compositional elements: human figures, the material objects that they casually use, the stately mansion behind them, the ideal conditions of the day's weather and atmosphere, and the softly framing natural features of the surrounding landscape. Long, velvety and luxuriously lengthening shadows tinge the story space to create a specific, evocative mood and milieu. These growing shadows and the lowering light quietly compile together with a building collection of images that suggest with subtle precision the aesthetic of a particular social class.

The three figures sitting, strolling, smoking, and casually conversing on the lawn at Gardencourt are gentlemen whose repose is as authentic and calm as the surety and abundance of their wealth. The gaze of the narrative surveys the architecture of the country home in order to catalog its features, then returns to delineate and describe the figures on the lawn before the house and the things that surround them. An oversized teacup, a deep wicker chair, the low tea table brought outdoors-- these are the props the narrative lists, and their inclusion signals a melding and blending of exterior and interior space. It is as if the uncontainable grandeur of Gardencourt quietly brims over the

boundaries of the house, for there in front of the residence: "…privacy here reigned supreme, and the wide carpet of turf that covered the level hill-top seemed the extension of a luxurious interior. The great still oaks and beeches flung down a shade as dense as that of velvet curtains; and the place was furnished, like a room, with cushioned seats, with rich-colored rugs, with the books and papers that lay upon the grass" (18). Here, the narrative sketches an image of a landscape that metaphorically performs the functions of interior space and juxtaposes this backdrop with objects that are posited as literal and material—the tea things, the rugs, the cushions, the scattered books. The resulting image offers the precision of a realistic description, yet frames these tangible and material details within a highly picturesque and idealized arrangement.

This moment is analgous to a passage in *Madame Bovary,* explicated by Roland Barthes in his essay "The Reality Effect." Barthes explains that Flaubert labors to describe the city of Rouen in order to create a painterly backdrop to frame the narrative moment. The Gardencourt setting of the opening of *The Portrait of a Lady* is akin to Flaubert's image of Rouen—a "whole description *constructed* so as to connect… to a painting: it is a painted scene which the language takes up" (Barthes 144). Like Flaubert, James "imitates what is already the simulation of an essence" (144). Yet, also like Flaubert, James is a realist writer, and his prose reflects an allegiance to this representational mode. In the opening pages of the novel, a tension begins to build—a struggle between two priorities and methods in the rendering of narrative: the painterly and the realistic.

The world of Gardencourt, and indeed the larger world of this "realist" novel, is constructed through a series of picturesque, painterly, and descriptively rendered settings in the vein of this *al fresco* tea hour that sets the stage at the opening of the book. In the novel, arrangements of detail create an evocative mise-en-scène that is always suffused in the light of very specific atmosphere. Throughout, these vivid and evocatively described spaces form the backdrop before which Henry James sketches his portrait of Isabel Archer.

Isabel is a character drawn with great depth and ever-growing complexity, always presented in a highly aestheticized manner that powerfully epitomizes James' aesthetic process. She is the styled figure in the foreground of the novel, the protagonist at the center of the story, and of course the concern of the novel's troubling conclusion. She is nearly always the focus of every character's gaze as well as the omniscient gaze of the narration. Isabel, as James frames her, becomes the art object ekphrastically described. James's project in rendering this portrait of Isabel Archer is fraught with tension that stems from the contradiction between its ideological underpinnings on the one hand and its technical execution on the other. The novel that describes her must negotiate between its realist aims as a work committed to strive towards establishing truth through faithful and detailed representation, and its fascination with Isabel as the highly aesthetized subject of an overarching project of portraiture. In *The Portrait of a* Lady, James displays Isabel to the reader already modeled, styled, and ready to be visually appreciated and digested by the reader and by the spectators, connoisseurs, and collectors (diegetic to the narrative) who eagerly absorb her image. Understanding Isabel as the tense surface

upon which realism spars with the pictorial creates an opportunity for a meaningful intervention into the current critical conversation about this novel, particularly in response to the scholarship about *The Portrait of a Lady* that is concerned with Isabel's subjecthood and the question of her agency.

Enter Isabel

Though composed of "warm, weary brickwork," (18) Gardencourt is as stately and historic a residence as any visiting American heroine could hope to find. Forming the backdrop that frames her entrance into a new world of wealth, culture, and society, the grand, mellow mansion and the intimate scene on the lawn before it couple to create a setting that throws the striking figure of Isabel Archer into relief and through sharp and contrasting focus. It is Ralph that first encounters Isabel that afternoon when she first arrives at Gardencourt. Significantly, their introduction to one another takes the form of an exchange of perceptive moments. At the moment that Isabel makes her appearance, the narrative's focus is centered upon Ralph: "His face was turned toward the house, but his eyes were bent musingly on the lawn; so that he had been an object of observation to a person who had just made her appearance in the ample doorway for some moments before he perceived her" (25). Isabel appears, framed in the ample doorway and in every way ready to be seen, but before she herself is the recipient of notice, she perceives and for some moments allows her gaze to linger in observation of her cousin.

This is an important and pivotal moment for Isabel, the "tall girl in a black dress, who at first sight looked pretty" (25). The moment of her arrival at this country home in

England is the beginning of what will be an extended realization of an earlier premonition, (described in the narrative as a flashback), which formed in her consciousness after her aunt's visit to her in New York. In the aftermath of her aunt's visit, after the lady had declared her intention to take her abroad, Isabel "felt different… felt as if something had happened to her" (39). Feeling this unsettled, vague excitement, Isabel, (according to the narration), feels that "the importance of what had happened was out of proportion to its appearance; there had really been a change in her life. What it would bring with it was as yet extremely indefinite, but Isabel was in a situation that gave a value to any change" (39). As Isabel enters into her awareness of the ramifications of this opportunity and how it cannot help but change her, she reflects upon her past circumstances and experiences, conjuring them not as un-embodied, scattered details, but rather as *images* remembered: "…these things now, as memory played over them, resolved themselves into a multitude of scenes and figures. Forgotten things came back to her, many others, which she had lately though of great moment, dropped out of sight. The result was kaleidoscopic" (42). Isabel conceptualizes her past as a shifting, spinning kaleidoscope of images. She enters into her future conscious too of her own figuration as an image whose apparition rather subtly, yet firmly and certainly, changes the theme and tenor of the tableau before her.

As the novel introduces and showcases Isabel, her image changes from that of a precocious orphan, shining with undiscovered brilliance within a moldering white elephant of a house in Albany, New York, to a figure of heightened contrast, framed in the doorway of Gardencourt at the literal and figurative threshold of her new life.

Shortly after Isabel's arrival, Ralph hospitably offers to show her Gardencourt's gallery of pictures and portraits. As Ralph escorts Isabel through the picture halls of Gardencourt, the narrative and descriptive emphasis lies upon Isabel and her actions within this environment, rather than upon the paintings themselves. James writes:

> …She asked Ralph to show her the pictures; there were a great many in the house, most of them of his own choosing. The best were arranged in an oaken gallery, of charming proportions, which had a sitting room at either end of it and which in the evening was usually lighted. The light was insufficient to show the pictures to advantage, and the visit might have stood over to the morrow. This suggestion Ralph had ventured to make; but Isabel looked disappointed-- smiling still, however, and said: 'If you please I should like to see them now just a little.' (49-50)

In this passage, the pictures are only part of the setting, revealing the wealth and taste of Ralph and his family, serving as a point of reference against which Isabel's character and her precocious curiosity are emphasized. They are not the focus of the scene. The passage continues:

> The lamps were on brackets, at intervals, and if the light was imperfect, it was genial. It fell upon the vague squares of rich colour and on the faded gilding of heavy frames; it made a sheen on the polished floor of the gallery. Ralph took a candlestick and moved about, pointing out the things he liked; Isabel, inclining to one picture after another, indulged in little exclamations and murmurs. She was evidently a judge; she had a natural taste; he was struck with that. She took a candlestick herself and held it slowly here and there; she lifted it high, and as he did so he found himself pausing in the middle of the place and bending his eyes much less upon the pictures than on her presence. (50)

James employs this scene before the pictures *not* to, through an exercise of ekphrasis, render an image of the artworks in the gallery at Gardencourt, but rather use the pictures in order to sketch out a setting against which Isabel and Ralph stand out in relief.

The reader learns through this passage that Isabel possesses a natural sense of taste that Ralph finds to be both charming and endearing. He "bends his eyes" much more upon Isabel than he does upon the works that the pair ostensibly came to the gallery to examine. We have an impression of shining gilt frames and "vague squares of rich colour," as if we too only glanced at the pictures on the walls while focusing our attention upon Isabel and her responses to the art, her "little exclamations and murmurs." The ekphrastic device at work in this passage has very little to do with the paintings in the gallery themselves, but rather has everything to do with the image that we see of Isabel and Ralph together, which further is an image of Ralph observing Isabel. The focus is entirely upon the pair, who are dramatically illuminated by candlesticks lifted high. For Ralph, the art itself holds little of his interest, and the reader too is directed to be captivated by this portrait of Isabel, who is, after all "better worth looking at than most works of art" (50). This passage provides a significant and representative example of James' artistic priorities in this novel and the painterly method he employs while rendering for the reader an elaborate, extended word-image. The parts and elements of the novel are crafted explicitly to portray a powerful, complex, and psychologically nuanced image of Isabel Archer.

Henry James's Realism

In the 1884 essay "The Art of Fiction," published first in that year's September edition of *Longman's Magazine*, Henry James underscores his belief that the primary undertaking involved in writing a novel should be the crafting of realistic illusion. He

wrote in this artistic manifesto of "the truth of detail," and stated famously "that the air of reality... seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel--the merit on which all its other merits... helplessly and submissively depend." In this statement, James implies that a novel will earn success through the very qualities that make it a realist novel. For if the air of reality is absent, James writes:

> ...If it be not there, (all other merits) are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process, form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist. They are his inspiration, his despair, his reward, his torment, his delight. It is here, in very truth, that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the color, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle. All life solicits him, and to "render" the simplest surface, to produce the most momentary illusion, is a very complicated business.

In this essay, James locates the artistry of the novelist firmly in the ability to craft the "illusion of life." Creating this illusion, according to James, drives the full cycle of artistic creation for the writer, from the inspiration that sparks the generative, creative process through to the agonies that must be overcome in the composition.[30] In the process

[30] The relationship between James's commitment to realism and the visuality of his novels is an established line of inquiry within the critical discourse. Critics of James who explore the visual qualities of his fiction consider his descriptive work in light of his statement that the writer should compete with "his brother the painter." In her book published in 1970, *Henry James and the Visual Arts*, Viola Hopkins Winner discusses James' pictorialism and the integral relationship between "his visual responses and creative impulse" (vii). She emphasizes that James believed that "the arts were after all essentially one" (59). Winner declares that James believed deeply in "the aesthetic dignity and possibilities of fiction," and in the novel's "kinship with the visual arts" (58). Winner allows that the visual arts were deeply important to James, and she provides an elegant example of how his literary technique seems to parallel that of a fine painting, explaining that because James strove for integration in his novels, "thoughts, gestures,

of creation, the novelist positions himself in competition with real life, and with the representational powers wielded by painters. True representation of life, not escapist fantasy, humorous parody, or hyperbolic romance, is in fiction what matters to James. Although the novel is a construct, it must be a construct that captures with authenticity "the substance of the human spectacle." Realism's project, powerfully articulated here by one of its most celebrated masters, is not only to capture reality but to do so in a visual way, to "render the look of things," to make out of the flat printed word an image. James's employment of the term *render* is a rich choice, given the myriad ways one may deploy or interpret this word. To render is not only to represent, but also to both translate and to decipher. Rendering can be achieved through narration, but also through reproduction or performance. An artistic rendering is a creation that is concerned with the portrayal of a subject, functioning as a demonstration and delivery of essential qualities

---

speech and décor... (are) fused just as color and line, detail and mass, and figures and background are made inseparable in the greatest paintings" (67). However, Winner argues that James' conceptualization of novel writing as akin to painting stops at being an "analogy," and that the only shared points of tangency between the two mediums of expression are "inspiration... process... and success" (59). She does acknowledge that for James, description was never "an end in itself," but rather must be governed by a "larger literary purpose" (61). My understanding of the function of visual description in James' writing differs from Winner's, and my intervention begins with the assertion that James' understanding of the novel's kinship with painting is more than simply an analogy. James, as Winner herself acknowledges, conceived of his own life as a process of aestheticization; "only by converting his experience of it into a work of art did he consider it used and his" (vii). The same process of aestheticization is a part of his work as a novelist, and Winner allows that his writing asserted "a new awareness of the aesthetic possibilities of fiction" (69).

of that subject. Further, to render a thing is not only to creatively issue or give birth to it, but also to relinquish and surrender it to another.[31]

In the above passage from "the Art of Fiction," James compares the novelist's work to that of the painter, describing how both novelist and painter create renderings out of a desire to craft an image that captures life. For James, aligning the artistry of the novelist with the aims and techniques of a painter is a deeply significant move, one that resonates not only with his fundamental ideas about the nature of realism but also becomes the guiding principle for his literary strategy.

A painted portrait presents detail and form in a way that a novel can never approximate. In viewing a conventional painting, the spectator typically consumes the subject framed within her background in one totalizing moment of apprehension. Perhaps the spectator will step back from the painting, or lean closer to inspect its fine texture, but the experience of the painting comes over the viewer in one coherent instant. In a novel, of course, the narrative conventionally unfolds over time, and descriptions build upon one another to impart an understanding that is abstract as well as concrete. The reader knows the catalog of details that compose the heroine's face, the color of her dress, the formality of her surrounding milieu. Further, the reader after several chapters understands the protagonist's context and her history, the nuances of her relationships, her motivations, and the consequences of her choices. While the format of portraiture makes descriptive precision achievable in a way the written word could never match, a novel has the

[31]The *Oxford English Dictionary* contains no less than 1,554 possible definitions for the word "render," as well as 257 separate etymologies of the term.

potential to offer a stratified accumulation of illustrative moments that together suggest convergence of physical qualities with psychic intuitions and other intangibles.

In "The Art of Fiction," James states that in the creation of realistic illusion, the writer "competes" with "his brother the painter." James' statement here references the sister arts debate, which considers writing and painting to be in competition with one another in the pursuit of art and truth. In James' novels, visual moments are a priority and a trademark. Like many realist novels of the period, *The Portrait of a Lady* contains rich descriptive passages and pronounced visual moments. The title of the novel, of course, is suggestive and revealing, as James foretells his intention to present his character within a frame that centers her. As F.O. Matthiessen wrote in his essay "The Painter's Sponge and Varnish Bottle," in this novel "…the center of attention is always Isabel" (583). In *The Portrait of a Lady,* James constructs a story, a background and setting, a cast of supporting characters, dialog and interchange, narrative commentary, summary, and reflection all for the purpose of offering the reader an image of Isabel Archer. It is a literary portrait, and in the crafting of this portrait James borrows from and experiments with the qualities, conventions, and techniques of visual art. A novel can never perform before our eyes exactly as a painting can, nor can the instant of viewing a painting contain the sweeping arc of passing time and the psychological nuance of a novel's unfolding narrative. In the creation of his novel *The Portrait of a Lady*, James wishes to adopt the mode of a painter, and in doing so, takes as his model something other than the rough, unpolished contours of "real" life. Instead, he fashions his novel around a figure that is always poised and always posing. Isabel Archer, the novel's subject, is not a

natural woman but an artistic product. The novel never displays her unguarded, unframed, or unconscious of her own image. Through the rendering of Isabel, James' commitment to realism comes into conflict with his "painterly" method.[32]

In *Portrait of a Lady*, James fills the novel with word-images that together form semiologically complete representations through their simultaneous and complimentary precision. For example, in Chapter 16, as Isabel's rejection of Caspar Goodwood results in moment that she finds particularly satisfying, expressed through a word-image in which James combines a purely abstract and linguistic concept through a distinctly visual moment. After she speaks, Caspar reacts: "…[he] bent his eyes again and gazed a while into the crown of his hat. A deep flush overspread his face; she could see her sharpness had at last penetrated. This immediately had a value—classic, romantic, redeeming… for her; 'the strong man in pain' was one of the categories of the human appeal" (138). Here, the abstract meaning of the words could not be clear without the visual image. It is a moment much more complex than metaphor, because no single object in the scene forms a substitution or simple equation. As Caspar's blush and his dejected, downcast gaze

[32] Kendall Johnson's book *Henry James and the Visual* is concerned with the presence, both structurally and formally, of the visual within James' novels, and takes on the task of "probing how developing notions of cultural type structured the meaning of visual experience in the nineteenth century" (6). Although my concern in addressing the visual does not extend to considerations of cultural distinctions and divisions between England, the continent, and America, Johnson's study is useful. His work clarifies the notion of the picturesque in literature, and the way in which "the written word motivates the imagination to realize impressions, thus attaining an associative dynamism that exceeds literal pictures" (7). Here, Johnson suggests that literature, when it is visual, can achieve even more in terms of an associative cognitive processes than that which occurs when the eye alone perceives an object, a painting, or a sculpture. In literature, as this quoted passage from Johnson argues, more "dynamism" become possible as wordy abstractions and concrete pictures combine and associate.

express the poignant moment, the text clarifies that he becomes a visual representation of a specific concept, the "strong man in pain." For Isabel, Caspar transforms into a trope that she enjoys beholding, a fact which is deeply indicative of her character. The sharpness and penetration of her speech becomes visualized in Caspar's blush and posture, an incident of powerful and immediate causality that Isabel enjoys provoking and then observing. This incidence of a word-image exemplifies the particular quality and force of James' realist style, and it entirely depends upon Isabel's sensitivity to appearances and to her own ability to provocatively couple her visual aspect and her speech. In this scene and in many others, Isabel's consciousness of her appearance as an image is the source of her impact, and the artificiality of this troubles the notion of the realism of the moment and of the novel.

In the novel, James's word-images are neither naturalistic nor are they always ekphrastic in the precise sense of the term. These moments, particularly those involving of Isabel Archer and her surroundings, are distinct from the kind of imagistic passages that typically adorn realist novels. *The Portrait of a Lady* functions differently, in that the showcases careful assembly of visual detail, studied and deliberate placement of elements with close attention to aesthetic effect, yielding images that possess a quality of stilled repose, almost as if James were using words to describe pictures already rendered by the painter's hand. Isabel and the people and places that surround her are framed and composed, arranged in a style analogous to compositional elements arranged in a painting. In *The Continuum of Consciousness: Aesthetic Experience and Visual Art in Henry James's Novels,* Jennifer Eimers confirms this stylistic quality and links it to the

problem that Isabel faces as a person who is not only always the subject of others' evaluative observation, but also the focus of their efforts towards aesthetic design . Eimers writes:

> …as its title suggests, this novel contains many frames, such as the physical frames of paintings and the imaginary frames around Isabel Archer… even Isabel, as the title frames her, does not escape this aestheticization. Her male observers, especially Ralph Touchett, Lord Warbuton, and Gilbert Osmond… view her as a work of art that they either observe from a distance or actively attempt to shape." (17)

As a result of this stylistic intention, *The Portrait of a Lady* is neither naturalistic nor realistic, and in this the novel differs from the larger corpus of nineteenth century literary realism. A Hardy novel, for example, might be pictorial, but its pictorial moments ostensibly describe a person, vista, or interior space with a fidelity and suggestion of truth that implies reference to something that could very well be real. This is not the case in *The Portrait of a Lady*, therefore the novel operates—*productively*, in a way that counters the convictions James later laid down in the 1884 essay "The Art of Fiction."

In preface to the New York edition (1908) of *The Portrait of a Lady*, James declares that he endeavored to craft the novel simply to serve as the scaffolding around "a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a 'subject,' certainly of a setting, were to need to be super-added." (James 4). But what readers of this novel encounter is not at all a representation of what it is like to carefully observe a fascinating person. It is akin to the experience of standing before a masterwork in a portrait gallery. What James creates in *The Portrait of a Lady* is a realistic representation of an aestheticized subject who seems

as though she has already been posed and framed, before James's prose summons her forward. James has committed to a specific philosophy and methodology, accordingly employing a technique that is concerned with rendering painterly and aestheticized images. Though this method seems to contradict his declarations in "The Art of Fiction," it serves to summon forth a character so vital and "real" that she all but breathes.

In "The Art of Fiction," James declares he wants to create the illusion of reality in his novels, but the entire project of *The Portrait of a Lady* is very self-consciously a rendering of Isabel in a way that frames her as if she were already herself a painted subject, "rendering" her into an art object, not "realistic" at all. Not only does she appear as such, she behaves and thinks in images, and she is always conscious of how she appears within the frames that confine her. Throughout the novel, Isabel styles herself in terms of her presentation as an art object to be looked at and in all senses appreciated aesthetically, and accordingly she makes (often unfortunate) choices that reflect this aesthetic drive. James's own choice is to use the approach of a painter in order to create a powerfully authentic, essential, and *realistic* portrait of Isabel Archer. Yet, as a result of this artistic decision, Isabel cannot be a naturalistic creation. Instead, she is a subject already seen, arranged, and rendered according to a very specific aesthetic vision. Further, she is very aware of this central fact of her existence, and always conscious of herself as an image prepared for others' consumption. The consequences of this have not gone unnoticed by scholars who are concerned with the question of Isabel's agency and power within the narrative.

Isabel Reconsidered

Numerous studies of Henry James's oeuvre, dating from the middle part of the 20th century forward, address his use of visual imagery and the relationship of his ideas and prose to the practice of painting. Much of the recent scholarship about *Portrait of a Lady*, however, is now concerned with the question of Isabel Archer's agency and subjectivity. In her essay "Isabel Archer's Body", Sarah Blackwood addresses this question by arguing that a consideration of Isabel's consciousness must not ignore the connection of that consciousness to her physical body (271). Blackwood notes, "…critics have missed the extent to which James' rendering of Isabel Archer's consciousness was not at all bodiless" (271). As if to reclaim the idea of Isabel as an active subject, she claims that Isabel's body is "a cognitive system that reflects, theorizes, and makes decisions," and therefore the novel "reimagines consciousness as corporeal" (272). Blackwood rightly argues that understanding the novel in this way "opens up new ground for feminist readings of the novel" (273). Blackwood's project is to rediscover the nineteenth century's idea of the "embodied mind" in order to locate "Jamesian consciousness" in terms of "living, breathing, sexed, and gendered bodies" (273). As she explores the connection between Isabel's thoughts, actions, and her embodied feelings, Blackwood lays aside the question of Isabel as image, shifting the focus to claim that Isabel's cognitive, introspective abilities make a kind of escape possible for her. She writes, "Isabel's facility at *doing* one thing while *thinking* another initially appears to confirm that the mind may wander, easily dislodging itself from the entrapping and restricted body," yet, "the corporeal dimension of consciousness no longer allows us to

think of minds apart from the leaky, fallible, sickly, powerful, gendered, and vibrating bodies that constitute them" (278). Blackwood's inquiry into the strength of Isabel's fluctuating mind/body connection brings current concerns about embodiment and gender to bear on the novel, as this scholar works to critique "ideologically determined, masculinist fiction of disembodied subjectivity" (273). Yet, in this effort to locate a genuine subjectivity for Isabel, Blackwood sidesteps what I see as an unavoidable (though, in terms of a feminist reading of the novel, certainly lamentable) fact: Isabel Archer exists as an aestheticized image that is always objectified by both the male characters that view her and indeed by the author who styles and writes her. Perhaps Isabel does have a subjecthood existing alongside and/or in resistance to this objectification, but arguing for her embodied consciousness cannot negate the binds of her painterly existence as an aesthetic image.

In "Freedom, Self-Obligation, and Selfhood in Henry James," Patrick Fessenbecker also works to reconsider the question of Isabel's agency within the larger context of James's oeuvre. Through this line of inquiry, Fessenbecker wishes to reveal "a new way of understanding the Jamesian depiction of selfhood throughout several of his novels," and this bring into focus "a new dimension of James's analysis of subjectivity" (70). Reflecting upon many critics' explorations of the question of why Isabel acts as she does at the conclusion of the novel, (and in doing so consider the extent to which she exercises free will), Fessenbecker lays down three categories of critical responses to Isabel and her story. He explains that that some scholars think she simply ends up as she does due to her mistakes and fallible decisions, while others believe that she is limited by

understandable constraints largely due to her status as a woman of the nineteenth century. Finally, Fessenbecker states that a third group maintains that Isabel's decisions, particularly the decision to issue Caspar Goodwood a final denial and return to her life with her Osmond, are justifiable and are issued directly from her own free will. In the essay, Fessenbecker allows that "something obliges Isabel to act as she does," and then asserts that "this obligation does not seem… to arise from the social world around her, the aesthetic form of the story she is in, the unconscious self that underlies her understanding, or whatever other force one might cite" (72). Fessenbecker argues that Isabel does follow a self-controlled path, and that by telling her story "James wants to point out the possibility that one might become ensared by a volitional necessity that compels one into a life of pain" (85). This ensnarement, paradoxically, renders Isabel into "an agent who, at the end of the day, is a wanton" (89). Fessenbecker carefully builds his argument through comparing his perspective with those of numerous other critics, and also links his inquiry closely to continental philosophies of ethics. Throughout the article, particularly as he declares that Isabel's agency operates in a way that is exterior to the "aesthetic form of the story," Fessenbecker confines his line of thought completely within the diegesis of the story, basing his assessment of Isabel's agency entirely upon what she does and why she choses to do what she does. Though he believes her decisions are her own, Fessenbecker concludes by stating that *The Portrait of a Lady*, and other Jamesian novels, show us "the tragedy inherent in [the] statement" that "our wills are not up to us." (95). Although Fessenbecker sets aside the question of the novel's form and aesthetic, linking the notion of Isabel as a rendered aesthetic subject at the center of a painterly

novel would both bolster and complicate his argument. Arguably, confining the question to the choices Isabel makes within the story is reductive, and a mode of thought that considers aesthetic form as well as story and plot would yield a more complete or nuanced conclusion. The idea that within the narrative Isabel is exercising free will, but that her free will is not of her own design, would become much fuller if the fact of Isabels' visualization were brought to bear.

Fessenbecker's essay responds to Paul B. Armstrong's contribution to the critical conversation regarding Isabel's motivations and decisions, and the question of her agency. In *The Phenomenology of Henry James,* Armstrong summarizes Isabel's situation in terms of her "bondage… as she undergoes the trails of guilt and despair" (103), concluding that she "seems to break through to the integrity of the twice-born in the liberating act of acknowledging her limits freely, fully, and resolutely" (103). Explaining Isabel's decision to marry Osmond as her paradoxical effort to find a way to remain independent and free. Both Armstrong and Fessenbender, in these two articles, confine their exploration of Isabel's behavior in terms of motivation and ethics. While these debates about Isabel's agency do not take the formal or aesthetic priorities of the novel as their subject, I suggest that a consideration of Isabel's construction/rendering as image is relevant and would deepen the discussion.

Laura Bollinger's study "The Ethics of Reading: The Struggle for Subjectivity in *The Portrait of a Lady*" addresses the question of subjectivity (not only Isabel's), in terms of James's investment in "…reading—as metaphor and as practice" (139). In the article, Bollinger connects the idea of reading with the question of agency by understanding

subjectivity as a necessary condition of agency and free will, and presenting the position that both agency and subjectivity are intimately connected with the experience of being read by another, and by reading others. She writes, "...whether one begins as subject or as object, James imagines that the identity's trajectory circles into its opposite. This vision renders subjectivity itself unstable, vulnerable to slippage—so that being a subject is always equally an invitation to objectification" (143). Furthermore, Bollinger explains that this vulnerability "increases for the more replete artistic subject—that is, either the 'subject' of the artist's fiction, or the subject who is in fact an artist" (143). In her argument, Bollinger asserts that building an analogy between "subjectivity and textuality" will allow for the possibility of a revised subjectivity, and that this relation invests the act of "one person reading another" with "urgent moral importance" (144). For Bollinger, Isabel is a text that is decoded not only by the reader but also by the other characters that she encounters within the narrative. By breaking down "the language of textuality" (147) and the "metaphor of textuality" (155), Bollinger seeks to understand "James's elaborate figuration of language and text" and in doing so arrive at a solution to the puzzle of Isabel's decision to return to Osmond at the novel's close. One of Osmond's cruelest actions is to fail to read Isabel well, as he "interests himself only in the exterior, the binding, of Isabel's text, thus transforming Isabel into an aesthetic object with no textuality of her own" (158). Though the deep cruelty of Osmond's shallow character is an unquestioned truth, and I have no stake in mitigating his indictment, it is also true that Isabel's entire creation and presentation is that of an aesthetic object. I would not state that Isabel's aestheticization renders her without a text of her own, but rather that her

text, or her essence, is determined and filtered through her presentation as an aesthetic word/image.

In "A Future for Isabel Archer: Jamesian Feminism, Leo Bersani, and Aesthetic Subjectivity," Kimberly Lamm highlights the historical parallel between James's literary career and first-wave American feminism. She also brings to light the possibility of James' allegiance to the ideals of feminism, stating that "…in his commitment to the act of composing female characters that struggle to shape the world rather than to be shaped by it, James expresses an 'intelligent empathy with the situation of women who seek to outwit their cultural fates'" (249). For Lamm, the fact that many of James's female characters strive to find agency in their lives reveals James's ideological agreement with the projects and aims of early feminism. She argues that James found parallels between women's struggles and his own position as an artist, stating: "…no doubt James saw his own fate bound up with 'the situation of women,' and many have argued that James's portraits of ladies reflect his work as a male artist, an identity increasingly untenable in the cultural climate of the late-nineteenth century, which split men and women of the upper classes along strict spatial and occupational lines" (249). In other words, James's novels sympathetically depict women who struggle for freedom and agency in part because he himself struggled along the same lines as an artist of the period. Lamm's argument falls within several compelling questions—the fate of women within a society that aims to confine them, and the limited social and economic possibilities offered by the artist's life (even the male artist's life). For Lamm, the way that James creates aesthetic experiences posits the existence of a special possibility for those that must engage in the

“erasure and exposure” (249) of the self, in which one might find “a pleasurable introduction to less rigorous and dominating ways of encountering the world” (249). Lamm declares that James’s consideration and creation of “aesthetic experiences that undo rather than consolidate the self is part of his tracing the impact of the women’s movement on American culture” (249).

In the article, Lamm discusses Isabel’s appearance as an art object. Lamm points to Osmond’s aestheticization of Isabel as a sweetly veiled means of control, stating that “crucial to Osmond’s manipulation of Isabel is the gracious image he creates of her as a work of art” (253). Lamm suggests that Osmond’s way of encouraging Isabel to “make one’s life a work of art” (James 261) is central to the way that he trains her to seek a “narcissistic and triumphant acquisition of a self” (254). Thus, Lamm binds the idea of a person understood to be aesthetic project together with the idea of agency, subjectivity, and selfhood. However, the implication is that this sort of art-based conduit to selfhood is flawed, shallow, and doomed to failure. Lamm shows that Isabel’s considerations of the world of art fail to extend to beyond herself, in that when she does encounter the chance to come close to “expansive aesthetic experiences” that would serve to reinforce a genuine selfhood (such as her experience exploring the ancient ruins of Rome), she fails to embrace them. Instead, Isabel “ends up incorporating objects into her own concerns” (255). Lamm’s consideration of the way that Osmond and other characters value Isabel only as art, (and that Isabel herself wishes to fashion herself as aesthetic object and is thus limited in her ability to fully realize her authentic self) would gain another facet were the argument to include the fundamental and formal reality of Isabel’s preexisting

condition as an artificially styled subject of portraiture. Although one might certainly make the point that simply by definition, every literary character is artificially styled, Isabel is much more dramatically so, and this is evident in nearly every description of her in the narrative.

David Lubin's interart study, *Act of Portrayal*: *Eakins, Sargent, James,* locates the question of James' portrait of Isabel Archer and her aestheticization alongside an inquiry into two notable oil paintings that were contemporaries of *Portrait of a Lady.* In this text, Lubin groups the novel and the canvasses together as he explores the construction of three psychological character portraits of the late 19th century: Eakins' *The Agnew Clinic*, Sargent's *The Boit Children*, and James' *The Portrait of a Lady.* Lubin sets aside the distinction between painting and writing, considering each work as he reflects upon a portrait's ability to "instill in us the desire to stop and look" (11). Intending to investigate differences between visual and verbal portrayals of masculine and feminine character represented both as past and as present constructions, the book seeks to determine "when the verbal ceases to be visual and the visual verbal" (1). Lubin argues that the implicit purpose or goal of a portrait, specifically regarding the type of portraiture that evolved in the 1880's, is to reveal and interpret "a specific, delimited human identity," (3) and the traits and social relationships of that identity. A portrait that is psychological must necessarily render their subject into "an aesthetic object, a *thing*, [that gets reified] in order to convey the subjectivity of that thing." (13). Objectification, paradoxically, honors the subject, for this objectification is only an unavoidable consequence of the scrutiny that must take place in order to yield deep and meaningful revelations regarding

the psychology and character of the subject/object. Lubin maintains that James not only creates a portrait of Isabel by "putting her through narrative paces... verbally manufacturing the physical, social and ideological universe in which she is centered and made manifest" (123). Lubin declares that this novel is "about the act of perceiving and depicting character… the act of portrayal" (140). Lubin's understanding of both painted and literary portraiture as a method ideally suited for the expression of psychological complexity is of particular note in a consideration of the tension between this kind of representation and the ideals of realism as a movement and genre.

The (often ekphrastic) portrayal of Isabel Archer James's *The Portrait of a Lady* contains a tension that pulses between James's aesthetic choices in depicting her and his stated commitment to realism. Particularly in rendering Isabel Archer, *The Portrait of a Lady* certainly conforms to many of the same kinds of expectations and demands a viewer would make of a visual piece of art. James' novel is not as expansive in its visual landscape as are Hardy's *Tess of the D'Ubervilles* or his *Jude the Obscure,* nor does this novel fall towards the other extreme of pointed, economic and targeted visual detail, as I argue of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Rather, through a number of strategies not limited to literal employments of ekprahstic description, James evokes the visual in *The Portrait of a Lady* using innovative techniques that differ from those used by his contemporaries and from writers who preceded him[33].

---

[33] Alexander Holder-Barrell, in his 1966 book *The Development of Imagery and its Functional Significance in Henry James' Novels*, declares that while there was of course imagery in the English novel before James, it was James who first formed imagery into "an organic and significant part" of his art (5). Imagery before James, argues Holder-

Literary Portraiture and Ekphrasis

In "The Problem of Ekphrasis," Murray Krieger defines ekphrasis in a way that enriches the term by making it more inclusive. Ekphrasis, by his definition, not limited to imitations in words of art objects, such as paintings or sculptures. He writes "I can broaden my use of *ekprhasis* by seeing it (as many in its history have seen it) as *any* sought-for equivalent in words of any visual image, inside or outside art; in effect, the use of language to function as a substitute natural sign"[34] (3). Much is at stake in this expansion of the definition of the term. It is essential to recognize that one's understanding of the special literary concern that is ekphrasis deepens and becomes enriched when this understanding is not limited to the notion of ekphrasis only as the representation of works of plastic art in a novel or poem. While works of art such as paintings, sculptures, or Grecian urns are certainly very singular objects that are worthy of inspired treatment within the piece that describes them, *all* visual phenomena-- a sublime landscape, a sparkling detail of a twinkling brooch, a fleeting expression conveyed through physiognomy, or merely a glance darting from one set of eyes to

---

Barrell, was primarily decorative in its purpose, used "in order to color and enrich the prose" (5). What came as a result of James' contribution to the English novel is the possibility for imagery to be more than decoration, for it to be something essential to the communication and expression of "eternal values... widening... themes [into] a statement of universal and lasting truths" (5). Holder-Barrell catalogs particular groups of imagery that he considers to be of importance throughout James' oeuvre, discussing each type of image according to its concrete signifier-- images of keys, for example, paths, games, water, architecture, and more.

[34] Here, Krieger refers to a "natural sign" as "one that can be taken as a visual substitute for its referent" (3). Krieger contrasts the natural sign to the "arbitrary sign"-- which are, quite simply, words (3).

another, are ekphrastic because they are representations of things we usually experience through our vision, presented instead through words in a literary form.

As Kreiger powerfully states, "Ekphrastic ambition gives to the language art the extraordinary assignment of seeking to represent the literally unrepresentable," (4) as words struggle to contain space and visual phenomena *"within their temporal sequence*" (emphasis mine) (4). Here, in the mention of temporal sequence, Krieger refers to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's famous discussion in his work *Laocoön,* involving a much-debated maxim that dates back to Horace, of "ut pictura poesis," (or, "as is painting, so is poetry"). In the *Laocoön,* Lessing stresses that poetry, or the written text, depends on unfolding time for its effect, and therefore is not as suited for the representation of visual phenomena, which can be grasped in a totality through looking at a painting or sculpture. In his expansion of the definition of ekphrasis to include all visual phenomena as represented in a literary text, Krieger claims that there is no distinction between a novel's work in describing a piece of art like a painting or sculpture, and its work in representing some other visual experience-- such as a sprawling landscape, or the territory of a face, or the beam of a glance from one set of eyes to another.

The expanding of the term and the collapsing of many varied types of description under the rubric of the term "ekphrasis" allows for the application of the theoretical work that has been done around this important literary term and technique to a much broader spectrum of literary representation. When Krieger writes about ekphrastic aspiration, then, describing it as the "dream-- and the pursuit-- of a language that can, in spite of its limits, recover the immediacy of a sightless vision," (5) he extends this aspiration to

capture a "pre-fallen language of corporeal presence" in such a way as to include not only representative descriptions of paintings and sculpture but in fact all of the visual phenomena that the sighted embrace with their eyes and imagine as they read.

This extension has particular payoff for those that study the realist novels of the 19th century such as *The Portrait of a Lady*. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, James achieves an ekphrastic effect in which reality is conjured for the reader in his or her mind's eye through the process of reading the words that constitute the novel, not merely by describing works of painting or sculpture in his text, not only, even, through the inclusion of various and copious visual detail.[35] However, the "reality" that the novel works to capture is the reality of Isabel Archer's physical form, her character, and the complexities

[35] James does this, as Lawrence Bedwell Holland notes, not by means of using language to achieve imitation or to make reference, but rather to extend language through strategies of *representation* (43). Laurence Bedwell Holland's 1964 work *The Expense of Vision, Essays on the Craft of Henry James* is the earliest useful source on *The Portrait of a Lady*. Holland argues that in this novel, James achieves what Holland calls "representational form" (43), through the rendering of setting, of character's actions, and of character experience in "visual terms" (43). Holland describes the novel as a work that has a "painterly objective" (43), and argues that although the plot of the novel involves a forward-moving trajectory and linear development, this movement is merged with "patterns of vision." More deeply, Holland explains that in this novel James moves beyond conventional rhetorical strategies of referentiality that combine reportage with reflective comment. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, writes Holland, James achieves a kind of reconstruction of reality in which he is able to both assess and describe his material "in an act of visual representation" (43). Not merely record or replica, the text is illusionistic; projecting form, rendering a world not through reference, imitation or allusion but rather by means of a vividly revealing representation (43). Significantly, Holland identifies James' stance as "not that of a direct observer divorced from his medium," not as "a watcher standing outside," but as a painter, rendering a " 'peculiarly English picture' " (44). Overall, Holland's study makes the case that James' fiction not only *shows* readers a visual image, but the text itself "*acts upon* them, enjoining them to negotiate the intersecting imaginations and idealizations of a shared world" (Johnson 6).

of her psyche.[36] Because the Isabel that James renders is entirely non-naturalistic, the ekphrastic project of her representation operates firmly outside of the methods and feel of

---

[36] Not all critics of Henry James and *The Portrait of a Lady* would agree with the idea that the novel functions in a uniquely visual way, or that James' work should be understood as an effort to combine visual art and the written word in service of this representational project. In an article entitled "The Art of Friction: Henry James' Evasion of the Pictorial," Mark Desiderio calls into question the notion that the "world of visual art" can provide metaphors which can be used to explain and understand Henry James' writing, particularly his "idiosyncrasies of style, innovations in narrative technique, and principles of composition" (273). Desiderio critiques the "convenience" of this way of reading James. He asserts that the approach stems out of an anxiety in readers over "all there is in James... that is elaborately, aggressively discursive and abstract; it is a defense against the perceptual distress...that comes of the mind's eye having no object to fix upon, no place of repose" (273). Desiderio emphasizes the rivalry that has long and still existed between the visual and the literary, as the pictorial and linguistic signs "struggle for dominance" over one another (273). The question at issue, for Desiderio in this article, is how James undoes his "declaration of identity with the painter" (274). Desiderio suggests that though the sister arts are like twins, the affinity between them "only intensifies the desire for individuation, for staking a claim on a unique identity" (274). The stated intent of the article is an "unfastening of the ties that bind novelist and painter, word and picture" (274). Desiderio stakes his argument around the notion that James' employment of the various versions of the metaphor of the *"textus*-- web, tapestry, carpet" are made with ambivalence and ambiguity, and that this ambiguity indicates that James himself is uncertain about the "entwined, intertwined natures of words and pictures" (274). Desiderio's article is founded, therefore, on shaky ground, as he begins by first making a connection, or perhaps better said, a leap, between the image of the woven fiber and the idea of the interweaving of the identities of the image and of the word. The fact that James employs the figure of the *textus* ambiguously does not, I believe, in fact indicate that James was uncertain about the interrelation of image and text. The final section of Desiderio's article attends to James *The Portrait of a Lady*, specifically, the moment in Chapter 42 where Isabel holds a "vigil," to use the term Desiderio identifies as James'. Interestingly, Desiderio states as he writes about *The Portrait of a Lady* that the novel is "intensely engaged in the problem of perception" (279). This admission may not be entirely counter to his argument that we should not think of James' writing in terms of metaphors drawn from the visual arts, but it certainly could be understood to support *my* arguments about the novel. Desiderio further allows that the scene that provokes Isabel's vigil, where Osmond and Madame Merle are found gazing at one another, is "strikingly pictorial, one of those 'capital scenes [which] are treated and literally described, as pictures to be varnished and hung'" (279). Desiderio's point in referencing the image that leads to the vigil is that the image

realist art. Instead, the portrait of Isabel is formal, picturesque, stylized, and posed with great intentionality—all qualities that function together to yield an effect that is quite specific in its aesthetic design. To link this argument to concrete examples from portraiture, the portrait of Isabel resembles a work of John Singer Sargent much more closely than it resembles anything by painters firmly located within the realist genre, such as Gustave Courbet (see Figures 6-9).

---

itself is meaningless and "requires the thousand words of the meditation in order to begin to signify" (280). He then goes on to call the image of Madame Merle and Osmond "a *representative* representation of representation," which is therefore, he concludes, ekphrastic. Desiderio believes that the image embedded in the scene, that of Pansy Osmond's tapestry, "suggests the incompleteness of all representation" (281). Ultimately according to Desiderio, Isabel returns to her narrative, "resisting the more definite grammar of the pictorial" (281). Desiderio's thesis, perhaps in a contradictory formulation, argues against the pictorial in James while reemphasizing the ekphrastic qualities of the text.

Figure 6: Gustave Courbet, *The Sleeping Sewer,* 1853[37]

[37] Though certainly a portrait exhibiting a strong and specific aesthetic sensibility, Courbet's *The Sleeping Sewer* depicts a naturalistic subject in a moment of unconscious release. The folds of her slack neck, her rough and reddened hands, the unprocessed fibers simply piled upon her lap—these are details that establish the subject's social class and milieu, while emphasizing her utter unawareness of her own appearance or the fact of her observation. She is meant to appear as a natural subject who is completely unposed, unguarded, and unprepared to be the subject of spectatorship.

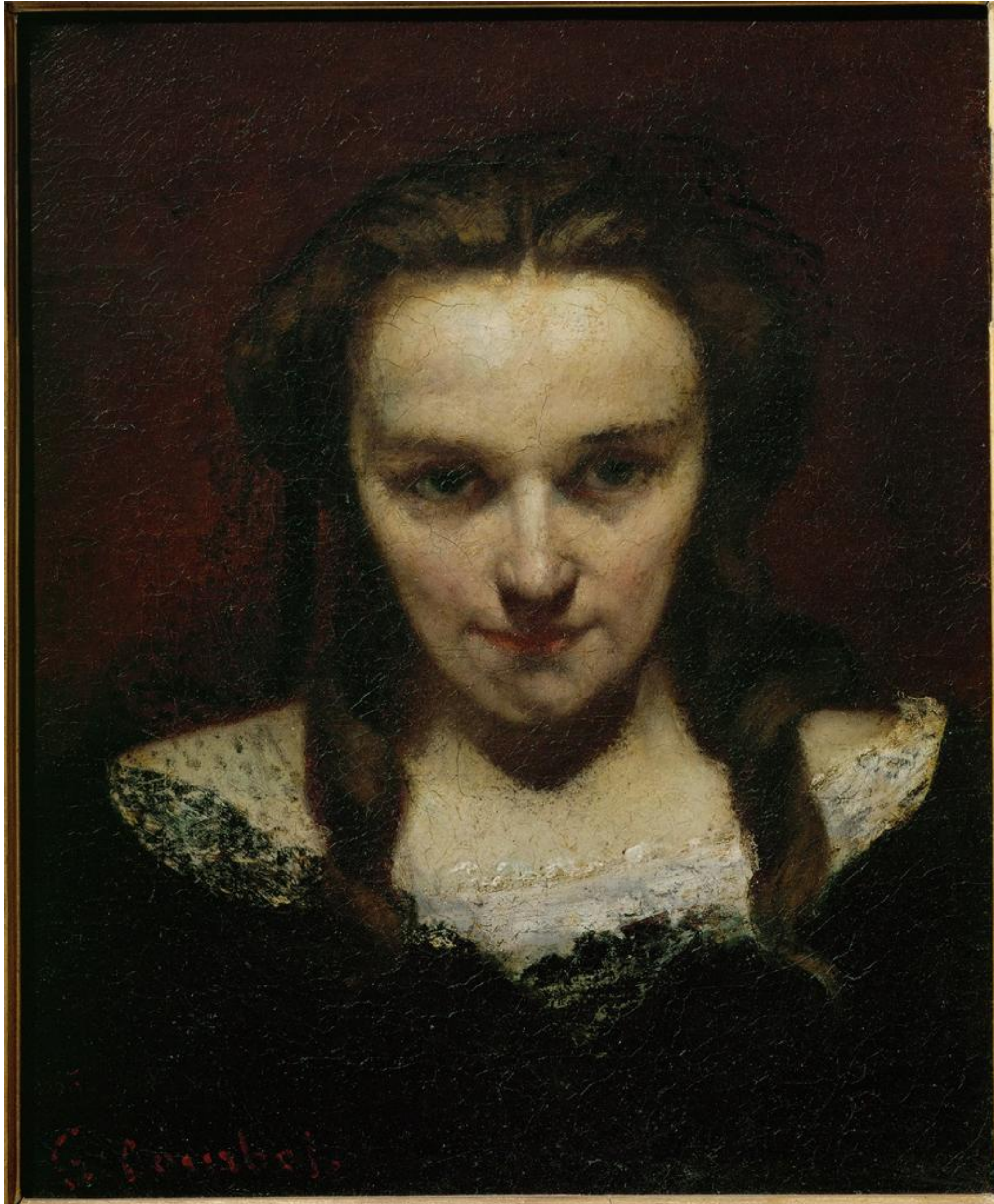

Figure 7: Gustave Courbet, *The Seer*, 1855[38]

[38] Courbet's later painting, *The Seer*, is deeply psychological in its portrayal of a young person apparently gifted with supernatural vision. While the portrait is focused upon the extraordinary intensity of the subject's penetrating gaze, both her expression and the arrangement of her unbalanced physiognomy demonstrate that neither the subject nor her painter are concerned with achieving polish or refinement in terms of her appearance as a

Figure 8: John Singer Sargent, *Mrs. Hugh Hammersley*, 1892[39]

subject of formal portraiture. Instead, the emphasis is upon her dramatically high and even bulging forehead, her shrewdly pointed chin, and her severely parted hair; the only nod to conventional feminine beauty is the glowing luminosity of her pale skin. The interest of the painting is entirely contained within the presentation of the subject as a person of special power—the power not only to grasp at visions, but also to arrest the viewer with her strange and otherworldly visage. The intent is to convey the truth of a subject who simply appears in a starkly frontal, ungarded and therefore naturalistic manner, in communication of the most essential, unintended, and uncontrollable aspects of her being.

[39] Sargent's portrait of Mrs. Hugh Hammersley presents a subject who is, in every element of her costume, environment, pose, and expressive countenance, carefully styled as an object to behold. The pose, in particular, suggests that the subject is very aware of this role and is willingly contributing to the many efforts made to transform her into an

Figure 9: John Singer Sargent, *Madame X*, 1883-1884

---

aesthetic piece. Her body is twisted a way that emphasizes the dramatic narrowing of her waist while implying a coy and artificial reluctance to reveal her entire figure to frontal view. The little feet in pointed satin slippers are mincingly set one over the other, as if arranged in a tiny flutter of staged resistance coupled with dainty compliance. Around her, the divan, the lush carpeting, and voluptuous and gilded drapery form an environment that reinforces her social status and obvious wealth, while also providing evidence that both painter and sitter possess elevated taste and a refined sense of aesthetics. The painting revels in the smooth harmonies of the opalescent and creamy hues and the manner in which they contrast with the lush, crushed-raspberry color of the sitter's opulent, velvet dress. The key distinction here between Sargent's portraits and Courbet's lies *not* in the contrast between the subject's social class, (although this is certainly clear), or even in the difference of subject matter in terms of the kind of personality depicted. The significant difference lies in the very manner of each subject's representation—Sargent's women embrace with eager knowing the fact of their role as a part and product of art. Mrs. Hammersley and Madame X are utterly self-conscious of the way that they appear to others, and they willingly conspire with the painter towards the creation of their aestheticized image.

Isabel Rendered

Throughout *The Portrait of a Lady,* James does more than simply refer to something when he wishes to call that thing to mind, particularly as he works to render Isabel. With language that strives to function as closely as possible in the way of a natural sign, even as a substitute for the natural sign, James in *The Portrait of a Lady* represents "the actual world from which it takes its materials" (Holland 45). Although most of the visual detail of the novel is not particularly elaborate, the details offered are evocative and representative rather than referential. Even in scenes or passages in which visual detail is sparingly (though pointedly and efficiently), presented, the cumulative effect of the description, however widely sketched, is ekphrastic, in the sense that it endeavors to represent specific visual phenomena to the reader in a concrete way. An example of this comes in Chapter 29, when Isabel waits in Rome to receive Gilbert Osmond before she sets off on her months of travel.

> ...Isabel sat alone in a wilderness of yellow upholstery. The chairs and sofas were orange; the walls and windows were draped in purple and gilt. The mirrors, the pictures had great flamboyant frames; the ceilings were deeply vaulted and painted over with naked muses and cherubs. For Osmond the place was ugly to distress; the false colors, the sham splendor were like vulgar, bragging, lying talk. Isabel had taken in hand a volume of Ampère, presented, on their arrival in Rome, by Ralph; but though she held it in her lap with her finger vaguely kept in the place where she was not impatient to pursue her study. A lamp covered with a drooping veil of pink tissue-paper burned on the table beside her and diffused a strange pale rosiness over the scene. (261)

The passage contains broad brushstrokes of evocative detail: in the garish colors, the gilt of the "flamboyant" picture frames, the gestural suggestion of Isabel's countenance, aspect, and attitude. Even the mention of the diffused and rose-colored light indicates the

tones that this painting would contain were it literally rendered upon a canvass. The mention of the offense to Osmond's elevated and refined aesthetic taste further places the image in the visual realm, for Osmond's distressed response is not to do with an intangible elements of atmosphere or feeling, but rather is an objection targeted towards the tawdry objects, colors, and shapes that comprise this specific mise-en-scène. In this scene, James has not merely referenced but has visually represented the milieu in which the reader and Osmond find Isabel, arranging before us in a carefully constructed and suggestive tableau objects and colors, gesture and light-- all the elements that compose and comprise a painting. Although Isabel, Osmond and their surrounding environment are not the actual subjects of a painted oil, the scene described is sketched in a painterly way, as James draws upon visual detail that suggests a potential psychological reading of the characters presented. It is, therefore, an ekphrastic moment in the novel and representative of James' overall technique as he creates his literary portrait of Isabel Archer.

Examples of this ekphrastic and painterly method continue throughout the narrative, as the story unfolds in a way that tests and reveals the depths of Isabel's character. In the opening of Chapter XXXI, as James describes Isabel's returns to Florence and her anticipation of her visit with Caspar Goodwood, he creates an image of his protagonist that is particularly psychologically evocative, illustrating her development in the time since she arrived to "take the measure of Europe on the lawn at Gardencourt a couple of years before" (270). James sketches in the setting, describing the room in which Isabel hovered as she expected her visitor. "The tall window was open, and though

its green shutters were partly drawn the bright air of the garden had come in through a broad interstice and filled the room with warmth and perfume" (270). In these passages the visual details are once again relatively spare-- we are prompted only to imagine the green-shuttered window, tall and open, and we are also offered the synesthetic collusion of both the warmth and perfume of the garden air. James begins to complicate the image of Isabel as she stands near the window, suggesting through her countenance and posture the underlying conditions of her mind and emotions. He writes: ...her hands clasped behind her, she gazed abroad with the vagueness of unrest. Too troubled for attention she moved in a vain circle" (270). James' description here moves to focus upon Isabel's introspective state of mind, and suggests much about that state of mind through the sketched yet evocative mention of her clasped hands and her gaze of vague unrest. These brief details, which themselves are visually imaginable in the mind's eye, are followed by insight into the thoughts that fill Isabel's conscious mind. "Grave she found herself, and positively more weighted, as by the experience of the lapse of the year she had spent in seeing the world. She had ranged, she would have said, through space and surveyed much of mankind, and was therefore now, in her own eyes, a very different person from the frivolous young woman from Albany" (270). Isabel is very conscious of the fact that she has "ranged" over the world, "seeing the world," and also allowing herself to be seen. She references her experiences traveling in terms of seeing, and now, after the journey, she sees herself differently. In describing her conscious thoughts, James suggests that Isabel's worldview and her self-concept revolve around the way she sees herself moving through the world.

As the passage continues, James further layers the notion of Isabel's mental state with the idea of concrete visual images:

> …If her thoughts just now had inclined themselves to retrospect, instead of fluttering their wings nervously about the present, they would have evoked a multitude of interesting **pictures.** These pictures would have been both landscapes and figure pieces; the later, however, would have been the more numerous. With several of the images that might have been projected on such a field we are already acquainted. (270-271, emphasis mine)

Here, James begins with a metaphor, of Isabel's thoughts nervously fluttering their wings like a butterfly or a small, agitated sparrow. This metaphor itself suggests something visual-- the reader can imagine the abstract idea of Isabel's scattered thoughts concretely, as fluttered wings. But the invocation of the visual does not stop at this point. It is, in my reading, fascinating that the conjecture that follows about what Isabel's thoughts would have been had she been a bit more focused takes the form not simply of *images,* but of **pictures,** that is to say, of ***paintings***-- both landscapes and figure pieces. Although the next sentence moves away again towards a suggestion of mental images "projected" upon the field of the mind, the initial reference is to landscapes and portraits, in the most literal sense. If Isabel were thinking more about her past experiences than the present dilemma before her, James suggests, her thoughts would have taken the form of paintings-- which we can imagine very concretely, as if they were already framed with elaborate gilding and arranged in a gallery. Even the thoughts that Isabel never manages to formulate would become mind-pictures were she to discipline her mind towards their conjuring, for this is how Isabel thinks, how she understands experience, and how she herself always appears—as a picture beheld by everyone that surrounds her.

It is significant that the number of portraits in Isabel's mind-gallery are so numerous, especially given that the young lady had by this point in the novel traveled extensively abroad—(all over Italy, and even as far as Greece and Turkey), because their proliferation demonstrates that Isabel is always a richly generative source of images. Although James is careful to emphasize here that the majority of Isabel's mind-paintings would be portraits, which is fitting for the protagonist of a novel whose sharp focus dwells mainly upon questions of character, interiority, and relationships, there are in her mind's eye some landscapes in addition to the portraits. One such landscape, if the vision of it could be extracted from Isabel's mimetic mind's eye, might depict the setting of her first visit to Gilbert Osmond's hilltop residence. Two descriptive passages represent to the viewer a picture of the scene: one offered as chapter twenty-four opens, and the other laid forth as Osmond, Madame Merle, the Countess Gemini, Isabel, and Osmond's daughter Pansy take an al fresco tea in the late afternoon light. I will examine each of these 'landscape pictures' in turn, in order to show how, on occasion, James executes his ekphrastic project in this novel. He represents, in these scenes, two highly visual moments; captured as pictures through words alone.

As chapter twenty-four begins, readers find spread before them a landscape picture, through which Isabel and Madame Merle move as they approach Gilbert Osmond's residence:

> Nothing could have been more charming than this occasion - a soft afternoon in the full maturity of the Tuscan spring. The companions drove out of the Roman Gate, beneath the enormous blank superstructure which crowns the fine clear arch of that portal and makes it nakedly impressive, and wound between high-walled lanes into which the wealth of blossoming orchards overdrooped and flung a

> fragrance, until they reached the small superurban piazza, of crooked shape, where the long brown wall of the villa occupied in part by Mr. Osmond formed a principal, or a least a very imposing, object. (217)

The landscape painting offered here is framed or anchored by architectural forms-- the "enormous blank superstructure" of the arching Roman Gate, the high-walled lanes, through which they wound their way, the crooked piazza, the imposing and long, brown wall of Osmond's villa. These bold architectural shapes are sketched out first and most noticeably in the passage, just as they might also be the first preliminary representational marks added to a landscape painter's developing canvass. Other details begin to fill in the spaces between the forms, such as the overdrooping, fragrance-flinging blossoming orchards:

> Isabel went with her friend through a wide, high court, where a clear shadow rested below and a pair of light-arched galleries, facing each other above, caught the upper sunshine upon their slim columns and the flowering pants in which they were dressed. There was something grave and strong in the place; it looked somehow as if, once you were in, you would need an act of energy to get out. (217)

Here, the landscape picture James creates through only a few phrases evokes an image of an enclosure that approaches the neoclassical, with its sunlit slim columns and light-arched galleries. Yet James adds something more to the ekphrastic image-- a feeling that is impossible to describe through a representation of objects or structures, alone. The allusion is to the structure's imprisoning quality, the fact that once in, you would need "an act of energy" to escape. The structure is one of many frames, reasserting again Isabel's position as a work of art.

Isabel's framing is often expansive and inclusive, drawing in those around her and extending out into the landscape. In chapter twenty-four, Isabel, Osmond, Madame Merle, the Countess Gemini, and Osmond's daughter Pansy take their afternoon tea, and the setting that James creates for this scene is also a linguistically crafted picture:

> ...and as the afternoon was lovely the Countess proposed that they should take their tea in the open air. Pansy therefore was sent to bid the servant bring out the preparations. The sun had got low, the golden light took a deeper tone, and on the mountains and the plain that stretched beneath them the masses of purple shadow glowed as richly as the places that were still exposed. The scene had an extraordinary charm. The air was almost solemnly still, and the large expanse of the landscape, with its gardenlike culture and nobleness of outline, its teeming valley and delicately fretted hills, its peculiarly human-looking touches of habitation, lay there in splendid harmony and classic grace. (226)

The golden light of the late afternoon hour, the "masses of purple shadow" glowing richly, the charm of the scene and its expansiveness, the valley and hills, the "splendid harmony and classic grace"-- all of the details which comprise this scene are visually evocative. James describes the tableau just as one might list the qualities of a landscape painting, perhaps such as this one by Cezanne from 1906, of Monte Sainte-Victorie, pictured in Figure 10, below.

Figure 10: Paul Cezanne, *Monte Sainte-Victorie*, 1906

In the above passage, as in most of James' descriptive moments in *The Portrait of a Lady,* the images created are representational of a specific convergence of visual effects. They are not merely referential allusions; they are endeavors in picture-making, and they are ekphrastic.

The Portrait of a Lady is a novel that is filled with art, from the galleries at Gardencourt, to the rich artistic treasures of Florentine and Roman museums that Isabel and her friends mingle through, to the collections of Gilbert Osmond himself. Notably, while James is careful to mention and include works of art as an important part of Isabel's milieu, his ekphrastic descriptions of these works are not expansive. Although, as I argue, this novel is an ekphrastic project filled with pictorial moments, James is more concerned with creating images of Isabel, her friends and associates (and the looks exchanged between them), and certain details of their environments, than he is with offering forth representations of other artists' work.

Instead, Isabel is reapeatedly likened to a piece of artwork, and found, at least by her cousin Ralph, to exceed the charms of the most exalted works of art. As Ralph considers the change that Isabel has brought to his and his family's life, James reminds the reader that to Ralph, Isabel was "an entertainment of a high order" (63). James describes Ralph's reflections to himself, his inner monologue, regarding Isabel:

> 'A character like that,' he said to himself-- 'a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It's finer than the finest work of art-- than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titan, than a Gothic cathedral. It's very pleasant to be so well treated where one had least looked for it. I had never been more blue, more bored, than for a week before she came; I had never expected less that anything pleasant would happen. Suddenly I receive a Titian, by the post, to hang

> on my wall-- Greek bas-relief to stick over my chimney piece. The key of a beautiful edifice is thrust into my hand, and I'm told to walk in and admire. (63)

In this moment in the novel, art again appears, not as an example of ekphrasis, but as a hyperbolic metaphor. Isabel is better than "the finest work of art," and she comes to Ralph as a delightful surprise, like a priceless treasure mailed to him out of the blue by an unknown benefactor. He likens her to a Titian, to a Greek bas-relief, to a beautiful edifice-- all things that he would value highly. The comparison here serves to highlight elements of both characters-- Ralph's elevated taste, which comes from a life of privilege, and the special, charming qualities which make Isabel so unique and draw so many eligible suitors to her (Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood, and, regrettably, Gilbert Osmond). In this passage, art represents an evocative part of the characters' milieu. Art is something that they all live amongst, something that they think about at certain moments, something that they may very often take for granted, yet something that they use to find meaning and make comparisons. Art in this novel is an element that comprises its structure; it is part of the furniture of the novel, and even characters with far less aesthetic sophistication or a more limited appreciative capacity walk among it.

When Isabel's friend and confidant, the enigmatic Henrietta Stackpole, arrives at Gardencourt, Ralph takes her, too, through the estate's picture gallery: "...the weather was bad, and in the afternoon the young man, by way of providing indoor amusement, offered to show her the pictures" (84). The scene, when compared to that quoted previously, in which Ralph and Isabel view the same gallery by candlelight, reveals some significant differences that in turn illustrate some incongruity between the personalities of

Isabel and Henreitta Stackpole, and also reveal something of Ralph's character. While Isabel responds to the artwork with a fresh sort of charmed wonder, Henrietta Stackpole is more reserved, not at all effusive, and, as James hints, perhaps not as naturally qualified in the realm of aesthetic pleasure and appreciation as her friend. Although Ralph appreciates that Henrietta doesn't feel obligated to utter the "little ready-made ejaculations of delight of which the visitors to Gardencourt were so frequently lavish" (84), she appears to be somewhat passive, unmoved, and uninspired, aesthetically. (Significantly, Ralph did not at all seem to mind Isabel's "little exclamations and murmurs,"-- (50) presumably, her comments were more original and less cliche than those of most visitors to the estate). Like Isabel, "Henrietta strolled through the long gallery in his society, while he pointed out its principal ornaments and mentioned the painters and subjects" (84). Very unlike Isabel,

> …Miss Stackpole looked at the pictures in perfect silence, committing herself to no opinion... (she) was but little addicted to the use of conventional terms; there was something earnest and inventive in her tone, which at times, in its strained deliberation, suggested a person of high culture speaking a foreign language. (84)

This last description of Henrietta's manner is particularly revealing, as it seems to admit that Henrietta does possess "high culture," yet when she speaks about the art, she is strained and deliberate, as if speaking in a foreign tongue. While Isabel is unstudied and fresh in her responses to the art, Henrietta is unmoved and apathetic. In her discussion of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Marianna Torgovnick notes that the visual arts "are abundantly present in the novel's early segments… the characters live amid art" (157). However, she makes the point that the inclusion of visual art in this novel does more to clarify the

character's "social class and level of culture" than it does to indicate "a vital element in their consciousness" (157). The characters in the novel do differentiate in their various abilities to appreciate art, and it is significant that those most intimately connected to Isabel, (for better or for worse), are the aesthetes. While Osmond and cousin Ralph appeal to Isabel through their appreciation of art, Henrietta (who ultimately sees clearly enough to critique Isabel's decision) becomes more distant from her. Henrietta's exposure as a character numb to the beauties of art begins in this moment. The narration asserts that despite the fact that Henrietta had been the art-critic for an American journal, she "appeared, in spite of this fact, to carry in her pocket none of the small change of admiration" (84).

Henrietta seems, at this moment in the text, much more interested in interpreting (and criticizing) Ralph than she is in appreciating the rare and valuable art before her: "Suddenly, just after he had called her attention to a charming Constable, she turned and looked at him as if he himself had been a picture" (84). Henrietta regards Ralph with the attention that she ostensibly should be giving to the Constable painting. She looks at him as if he had been a picture.

Later in the novel, Henrietta Stackpole will again be characterized as a person who is not interested in appreciating art. When Isabel, Ralph and Henrietta tour the cultural highlights of London, Henrietta, "had many disappointments... The truth was that, as she said to herself, she was not in her element. 'I've not a sympathy with inanimate objects,' she remarked to Isabel at the National Gallery; and she continued to suffer from the meagerness of the glimpse that had as yet been vouchsafed to her of the

inner life. Landscapes by Turner and Assyrian bulls were a poor substitute for the literary dinner-parties at which she had hoped to meet the genius and renown of Great Britain" (125). Henrietta Stackpole is perhaps a bit of a philistine, more interested in an opportunistic sort of social climbing than she is in the fine arts.

To return to the moment in portrait gallery, when Henrietta Stackpole queries if Ralph always spends his time "without any regular occupation" (84), Ralph, by way of explanation, calls her attention to a small painting by Lancret hanging near the ignored Constable. The painting "represented a gentleman in a pink doublet and hose and a ruff, leaning against the pedestal of the statue of a nymph in a garden and playing the guitar to two ladies seated on the grass. 'That's my idea of a regular occupation,' he said" (84). Here, an ekphrastic description, (though brief), functions as an indicator of Ralph's personality, or at least, the self-perception of the character that James wishes the reader to understand. Ralph likens himself and his metaphorical "occupation" to that of the dandy-like figure in the painting, who apparently spends all his days strumming pastoral hymns to well-dressed, cultured young ladies, surrounded by a picturesque garden landscape and marble statues of nymphs. The reference to the painting and its employment in illustrating Ralph's character is a moment of ekphrasis in this novel that serves to support the aim of the novel's larger project as an overall work of ekphrasis-- it an attempt to render, through words, these characters (particularly Isabel Archer) and the telling moments in their lives by means of visual, painterly gestures and techniques.

As Isabel Archer's travels take her to Florence and to Rome, as one might expect she frequently encounters works of art as a part of her daily life. In Florence, she:

> ...wandered with her cousin through the narrow and sombre Florentine streets, resting a while in the thicker dusk of some historic church or the vaulted chambers of some dispeopled convent. She went to the galleries and palaces; she looked at the pictures and statues that had hitherto been great names to her... she performed all those acts of mental prostration in which, on a first visit to Italy, youth and enthusiasm so freely indulge; she felt her heart beat in the presence of immortal genius and knew the sweetness of rising tears in eyes to which faded fresco and darkened marble grew dim. (212)

Here again, even in the rich Florentine setting the focus is upon Isabel, and her youthful, emotional response to the works she sees around her.

Isabel often appears in the novel as if she were an image, (only as an image, but as complete and complex as an image can be), as a word-image posed within particular settings and with certain attitudes expressly selected for the purpose of her representation. When Isabel receives Caspar Goodwood's letter-- just before she receives a proposal of marriage from Lord Warburton--, she is poised and positioned with a particular specificity and with great care. She "had seated herself on a garden-bench, within sight of the house, beneath a spreading beech, where, in a white dress ornamented with black ribbons. She formed among the flickering shadows a graceful and harmonious image" (92). Here, the reader is not only encouraged to, but cannot help other than to v*iew* Isabel in a pictorial way, as an image, there in her white dress accented with black ribbons (appropriate for her half-mourning), beneath a generously sprawling tree. Viola Hopkins Winner clarifies what it means for a novel to be considered pictorial. She uses the term pictorial to "designate the practice of describing people, places, scenes, or parts of scenes as if they were paintings of subjects for a painting" (70). Winner identifies the use of framing devices as key to James' pictorial approach.

Isabel Archer is always aware of her own standing as an image, as something that is often positioned and subsequently seen by others as an object to behold, just as one might behold a work of sculpture or painting. This character is aware of *herself as a character*, as James' description of her thought process indicates. This awareness of herself as a character extends beyond a meta-awareness of her literariness to cross over into the realm of the pictorial. Isabel seems to realize that she is, quite often, essentially presented for view as if within a frame. Just before Lord Warbuton's proposal, James writes of Isabel's thoughts, "She herself was a character-- she couldn't help being aware of that; and hitherto her visions of a completed consciousness had concerned themselves largely with moral images-- things as to which the question would be whether they pleased her sublime soul. Lord Warburton loomed up before her, largely and brightly..." (94-95). Though James is ostensibly presenting a summation of Isabel's self-awareness as someone not only who possesses character but who is herself a character; the emphasis is placed squarely on elements of her consciousness which could be seen or at least clearly imagined in the mind's eye. Isabel's thoughts here are concerned with moral *images,* with *visions* of a completed consciousness. While Isabel is occupied with these vision-centered musings, Lord Warburton flashes into the scene like an apparition, looming before her "largely and brightly." Isabel, both in her portrayal and in her inner thoughts, is infused with images. She is an image, and she thinks in images and in visions.

When Lord Warburton returns to Gardencourt following Isabel's refusal of his proposal of marriage, following a luncheon he and Isabel visit the picture gallery of Gardencourt, though "he had seen the pictures twenty times" (117). As he describes their

walk through the gallery, James creates another moment of ekphrasis, once again framing Isabel as though she were herself one of the subjects of the paintings in Gardencourt's gallery:

> Isabel walked to the other side of the gallery and stood there showing him her charming back, her light slim figure, the length of her white neck as she bent her head, and the density of her dark braids. She stopped in front of a small picture as if for the purpose of examining it; and there was something so young and free in her movement that her very pliancy seemed to mock at him. Her eyes, however, saw nothing; they had suddenly been suffused with tears. (118)

The subject of the ekphrasis in this passage is not the small painting that Isabel pretends to examine, but is Isabel herself. She appears, in this description, not unlike on of the subjects of the portraiture of Jean-Auguste-Dominque Ingres. Though I can make no claim that Ingres' painting was an influence for James' writing, his description of Isabel Archer in this moment, brings his oeuvre to mind. The image describes a charming young girl with her hair in dark, dense braids, her back, her long white neck, slim and young and pliant. The long neck, particularly, evokes thoughts of Ingres' portraits of women (see Figure 11, below). Here again, in the setting of the gallery at Gardencourt, James creates an image of Isabel that inspires thoughts of portraiture. Though the description is of Isabel and not of a work of art, I argue that this description is ekphrastic, for Isabel is described precisely as though she were someone depicted in a painted work.

Figure 11: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Comtesse d'Haussonville*, 1845

Jessica Forbes writes of Isabel's canny manipulation of Lord Warburton in this scene, declaring that here Isabel "positions her body and her gaze as to plead for his attention" (39). Isabel, who appears to Lord Warburton to be so innocent and vulnerable, is in truth very conscious of the effect that her body and self have upon him. Forbes arugues:

> ...This passage demonstrates Isabel's understanding of the male gaze as well as her own desire to be the object that is gazed upon. Ironically, Isabel positions herself as the focal point of this scene, in a space where the intended focus is on

> the art in Warburton's gallery. As Isabel seductively walks to the end of the gallery, 'she stops at a small picture as if for the purpose of examining it', all the while demanding the same attention as would be paid to a portrait on display. (39)

As Forbes notes, James reveals in this passage that Isabel both understands what it is to be looked at through the powerful gaze of a male subject, and not only desires, but demands, to be looked at in this way. James attends to Isabel's posturing and her concerted efforts to command and manipulate Lord Warburton's gaze, rendering her as an ekphrastic device in order to clearly communicate the essentials of her character.

Gazing at the Rendering, and the Rendered Object, Gazing

In *The Portrait of a Lady,* Henry James references, again and again, the process of looking-- the exchange of glances, shared looks, the light shining from a character's eyes in a moment of particularly significant or intense communication. Looking and gazing in this novel are constantly the subject of James attention, and are highlighted in nearly every exchange that occurs between his characters. At the novel's opening, when James introduces Ralph and his father, Mr. Touchett, to the reader, their relationship becomes clear through the communication that passes by means of their eyes. As Ralph paces and "shambles" across the lawn at Gardencourt, "whenever he passed the old man in the chair he rested his eyes upon him." Finally, "the father caught his son's eye at last and gave him a mild responsive smile." "You would easily have seen they were father and son," James writes (20). This exchange of glances, this meeting of the eyes, occurs in similar ways many times throughout this novel. These moments where glances and gazes are highlighted are significant because they remind the reader that even in moments where

the drama of the scene may lie in the interactions and often tense relations between the characters, this drama is relayed and communicated through visual means, visual descriptions, and visual references. This narrative method and approach begins with the rendering of Isabel, and extends outward to envelop everyone and everything else in the novel.

Because Isabel, the novel's protagonist and visual centerpiece, is rendered as an art object and is also entirely consumed with the activities of seeing and being seen, eyes and the way that they gaze and glance become a significant trope that constantly repeats throughout the narrative.[40] When Isabel Archer arrives at Gardencourt, she feasts her **eyes** upon the scene: "She was looking at everything, with an eye that denoted clear perception" (26). Key to Ralph, Lord Warburton, Mr. Touchett, and the reader's understanding of Isabel's character is the alert, piercing quality of her looking. She "rests her eyes upon her venerable host" (28), and "her flexible figure turned itself easily this way and that, in sympathy with the alertness with which she evidently caught impressions" (28). While Isabel looks about at everything around her, she too is the

[40] In her essay "*The Portrait of a Lady* and Modern Narrative," Donatella Izzo comments on what she calls James' "limited point of view technique," in which the narrative "is filtered through a character's gaze and consciousness so that external reality exists only as refracted in the mind of what James calls the 'vessel of consciousness' or 'reflector'" (Izzo 42). For Izzo, thematic patterning in this novel, such as repeated references to eyes and to the gaze, brings theme and technique together, so that "theme and technique…constantly refer to one another and, thereby, confirm that the text is self-enclosed, autonomous… an enclosed form, which the frame ostensibly isolates from the surrounding reality and which, in the novel, constitutes a completely formal principle of intrinsic unity" (43). This sense or feature of enclosure persists, despite the fact that in this novel, the protagonist's story comes to no neat or harmonious conclusion. *The Portrait of a Lady* is "centered on a character, and not a story" (43).

subject of the gaze. Lord Warburton, charmed at once, "kept an attentive eye upon Miss Archer" (28). After her departure from the scene, Lord Warburton remarks to Ralph, "you wished a while ago to *see* my idea of an interesting woman. There it is!" (30, emphasis mine).

Later, when Ralph and Isabel talk with one another during their trip to London, James describes how "Ralph only sat still and looked at her... they exchanged a gaze that was full on either side, but especially on Ralph's, of utterances too vague for words" (134). Such communication, made through the eyes, of things that are inexpressible, happens throughout the novel in moments of intense exchange, particularly between Isabel and Ralph or Isabel and Caspar Goodwood. Later in this same scene, Isabel's "silvery eyes shone a moment in the dusk" (134) as Ralph comments upon her passionate interest in the world around her.

Caspar Goodwood's passion and love for Isabel is most powerfully denoted through his eyes. When Isabel thinks of him, she reflected upon his power and energy, musing that "it was a matter of the spirit that sat in his clear-burning eyes like some tireless watcher at a window" (105). When he follows Isabel to London and interviews her there, "Isabel looked at him" (136). He, in turn, "sat with his eyes fixed on hers while she spoke; then he lowered them and attached them to a spot in the carpet as if he were making a strong effort to say nothing but what he ought" (136). Then, "he raised her eyes to her own again; they seemed to shine through the vizard of a helmet" (136). Here, it is Goodwood's eyes that reveal his feeling for Isabel and his soul. When Isabel declares that she will not marry, will not marry him or anyone at all, "he saw a shining

candour in her eyes that helped him to believe her" (143). Her resolute rejection still hanging in the air, Isabel turns toward the open window "looking into the dusky void of the street," fixating upon "a turbid gaslight", which "alone represented social animation" (141). In a parallel yet painfully alien response, Caspar's eyes come to rest on the interior space of the room, and form a connection that seems to anthropomorphize the chimney, the grimmest of the apartment's furnishings. Caspar in his dejection "lingered near the chimney-piece with eyes gloomily attached" (141). As Goodwood at last departs, "there was still an immense unwillingness in his attitude and a sore remonstrance in his eyes" (144). This exchange between Isabel and Caspar Goodwood would lack much of its intensity, intimacy and power were these references to the expressions and communications of their eyes omitted.

Although their marriage would be doomed to a certain, special kind of tortuous failure, Isabel and Gilbert Osmond begin their relationship through meaningful looks. At the moment of his first declaration of love for her, Osmond "bent his eyes upon the floor. 'What I wish to say to you,' he went on at last, looking up, 'is that I find I'm in love with you" (263). Isabel responds by turning away, "but in the movement she had stopped herself and dropped her gaze upon him. The two remained a while in this situation, exchanging a long look-- the large, conscious look of the critical hours of life" (263). In this passage, the look exchanged between the two of them is much more powerful than the dialog that they utter.

Henreitta Stackpole, the ambitious and perceptive American journalist and close friend of Isabel, is totemically represented by her eyes. They are the most striking and

memorable aspect of her person each time James describes her in the novel. When Henrietta arrives near Gardencourt, thus making her entrée into Isabel's new European world, the introductory description of her physical person cursorily skims over her face, mouth, complexion and curly ringlets before coming to rest and focus upon her "pecuriarly open, surprised looking **eye**" (80, emphasis mine). The description, beginning strangely with its focus on the singular eye, continues, "…the most striking point in her appearance was the remarkable fixedness of this organ, which rested without impudence or defiance, but as if in conscientious exercise of a natural right, upon every object it happened to encounter" (80). This pointed restriction of the description to the singular eye cements emphasis on the function of the eye as an organ of observation, collecting data to be analyzed by the faculties of the mind. A description of Henrietta's eye underscores her literal and symbolic role as a journalist, a fresh observer and emissary from America capable of casting objective eye over Isabel and her new milieu, and thus able to serve as a foil against Isabel's idealistic framing of her circumstances.

References to eyes, Henrietta's and others', continue to repeat throughout the novel. In Chapter Ten, "Miss Stackpole's ocular surfaces unwinkingly caught the sun" (86). Mrs Touchett criticizes Henrietta, declaring not only that "everything about her displeases me;" but that Henrietta "looks at one as if one wanted to look at *her"* (89). Later, when Henrietta questions Isabel about Caspar Goodwood, Isabel "faltered before her friend's implacable glitter" (91). The incomparable, machinating Madame Merle is also characterized by her eyes in James' description: "her grey eyes were small but full

of light and incapable of stupidity-- incapable, according to some people, even of tears" (153).

Function and Form, Vision and Technique

The Portrait of a Lady is a text that works throughout its length towards a powerfully visual sensibility, because James, through "evoking 'the image' and painting 'the scene,'" effectively "delivers his fictive world right in front of our own eyes" (Tintner 1). Yet the visions that render Isabel are posed and stylized rather than naturalistic. As Izzo correctly points out, "a portrait is modeled on a real person, but the novel is modeled on the portrait, an artistic object in its own right, and within its own frame it *creates*—it does not imitate, the object of representation, thereby freeing itself completely from mimesis" (43). In this novel, James harnesses techniques of visual art in order to paint a heroine that had already appeared before his imagination, posed, as he declares in the preface, "in the germ of [his] idea" (James 4). Free from "any conceit of a 'plot,'" Isabel occurred to him. As James builds his novel, placing background, setting, and the rest in and around his subject, he remains focused upon Isabel, recreating for the reader a portrait of her in text that is as vivid, layered, and nuanced as it must have been within his mind's eye. His method is not realistic, yet the tension between his rendering of Isabel and the established methods of literary realism is a fruitful one. James's technique, harnessing painterly, mannered aesthetics in service of the portrayal of character challenges conventional interpretive distinctions between the real, the natural,

and the styled, while simultaneously complicating the generic limitations that delineate the boundaries of literary realism.

Chapter V:

The Optic Trope in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

Visions framed within the rounded field of a spyglass, filtered through the lens of memory, constitute the re-imagined scene that Marlow describes to his comrades aboard the *Nellie* as he recounts his first glimpses of Kurtz's degenerate dominion. He narrates to his shipmates his detailed recollections of this pivotal moment on the river, recalling that as "the Russian" warned him of Kurtz's illness and wasted condition, he used his spyglass to facilitate a closer, more intimate look at the scene before him: "I directed my glass to the house. There were no signs of life, but there were the ruined roof, the long mud wall peeping above the grass, with three little square window-holes no two of the same size, all this brought within reach of my hand, as it were" (Conrad 57). Here, Marlow offers details that he would never have been able to see from such a distance with his naked eye alone. He describes how his device bridges the expanse of space between himself and the object of his perception, bringing the dwelling seemingly within the reach of his hand. Although he sees no sign of life there, his mention of the variegated little square window-holes suggests a certain reciprocity of the gaze--someone may well have been looking directly back at Marlow from behind those window apertures, similarly sizing him up as his approaching boat drifts forward.

The next lines of this passage are striking. The visual event that Marlow describes is presciently cinematic, suggestive of a deliberate and obvious camera movement; so strongly does it focus upon his perspective and his individual experience gathering visual

information. “And then I made a brusque movement and one of the remaining posts of that vanished fence leaped up in the field of my glass” (57), he declares. What he describes vividly calls forward, in the mind of the modern viewer accustomed to a mode of seeing always mediated by cameras of all kinds, a specific cinematic move, a rack focus snapping from one subject to another in a sudden, crystal jump. Embedded in this scene is the latent potential promised with advances in optical technology, a potential already present in the focusing lenses of Marlow’s spyglass.

Conrad’s novella offers a narrative well stocked with references similar to this example, which repeatedly call attention to the process of seeing. Optical references in the text shift in scope and complexity, ranging from metaphorical evocations of a binary pattern of darkness and illumination to reportage of unfiltered or naïve visual impressions to narrative statements that conflate seeing with understanding. Further, the text descriptively presents fields of view in a way that is always conscious of the mediating overlay of mechanical devices capable of framing, focusing, or magnifying visual details. The novella presupposes the presence of these optical devices, which vary in type and sophistication from simple light sources and refracting lenses to binoculars and spyglasses. Although there are no descriptions of cameras or photographs in the novella, its language asserts the influence of a camera’s way of seeing, and, as the above example demonstrates, anticipates the methods and aesthetics of moving pictures.

The majority of the narration comes from Marlow, who casts for his listeners a detailed spell that draws them away from their place on the deck of the *Nellie* and into his story. Marlow’s distinctive narrative style lays down visual elements first, before

unfurling the meaning he has gleaned. In one incident, Marlow reminds his listeners of a bit of visual foreshadowing that he had carefully dropped earlier in his story. "You remember I told you I had been struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow" (57). Although Marlow isn't describing a photograph, the phenomenon he explains here as his spyglass transports him to deeper entry into the scene before him is photographic.

In a highly resolved photograph, whether digital or analog, the visual information contained within the frame is nearly limitless. Information and details that aren't initially visible become clear through zooming and enlargement. Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-Up* (a film based on a short story by Julio Cortázar), contains an incident analogous to the above example from *Heart of Darkness* in which a significant discovery is made possible through a process of magnification. In this film, David Hemmings' character, the suave and swinging mod London photographer, peers deep into a seemingly placid and innocent image of a scene in a quiet park. Enlarging the photograph again and again, he zeroes in, deciphering out of a blurred form the shape of a hand holding a revolver. As he burrows within the photograph, he discovers something sinister-- the evidence of a murder.

Antonioni's treatment of the idea of the photograph becomes a filmic meditation upon, and a kind of homage to, photography. In *Blow-Up*, photography functions not only as a means of producing images that become valuable commodities, it serves as the most authoritative way to record the evidence that people rely upon to arrive at a

consensus about the nature of experience and of reality itself. The film looks backward at the technology that its own medium takes as its foundation, in a way that reveals the enduring fascination with the photograph that cinema still holds. *Heart of Darkness*, in a similar way, contemplates the phenomenology of visual experience, as Marlow's narration ranges over the past, reframing remembered images to compose a story.

The optic trope is repeatedly embedded within the monologue that Marlow delivers to the sailors. Returning to the moment of his first approach to Kurtz's compound, Marlow recounts the encounter image by image, suturing these spectacles in a visual and temporal chain. There on the river, Marlow describes how he uses his spyglass to dive into the horrific tableau before him, as if he were enlarging a photograph to ascertain the truth contained within it. He tells of the moment when he realized that the "ornamentation" he noticed earlier is a grotesque decoration: shrunken heads on stakes, "food for thought and also for vultures" (Conrad 57). The optical technology of the spyglass creates another layer to the unfolding discoveries and realizations that Marlow lays out as he narrates the scene. First, Marlow looks with his naked eyes, which mislead him; next he uses technology to look further, and then he truly sees and understands.

In this instance of Marlow's employment of his spyglass, the optical device does more than perform its ostensible function: to assist him to see more closely. The intrusive layering of this mechanical way of seeing over Marlow's naked vision complicates the narrative, reminding Marlow, his listeners, and the reader that this story and the moment of its telling take place in a time of newly mediated perception. Along with the advent of photography in 1839 and the accompanying development of optical devices including but

not limited to microscopes, telescopes, and stereoscopes, the human experience of visual perception irrevocably changed.

In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary explicates this change and defines a new mode of spectatorship that emerged in the nineteenth century, taking his analysis beyond technological determinism (the idea that an invention such as photography first came to be and then changed society as a consequence of its creation). Crary examines how, in the nineteenth century, "a massive reorganization of social practices… modified in myriad ways the productive, cognitive, and desiring capacities of the human subject" (3). His analysis reframes the sudden explosion of developments in optical technology that occurred in the nineteenth century as one networked component within a broader reconstitution of the concerns and priorities of the individual human spectator as he responds to the pressures and opportunities of a changing society. For Crary, "the problem of the observer is the field on which vision in history can be said to materialize, to become itself visible. Vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product *and* the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification" (5). The spectator, as Crary defines him, is the observing subject and a bodily site upon which "social practices" intersect with a growing collection of knowledge accumulated as new fields, disciplines, and domains of inquiry emerge (7). Specifically, the optical technologies produced and utilized in service of a developing modern economy and infrastructure are apparatuses that serve as interfaces between the subject's physical body and the governing structures of power that desire to control him. Crary lists the

revolutionary technological developments of the nineteenth century that shaped this new kind of spectator, naming as particularly significant the development of the railroad, a mode of transportation that created both “perceptual and temporal dislocations” (11). Train travel catapulted passengers through the landscape at a speed that reshaped their expectations of time and space, while transforming the passing landscape into a blurred amalgamation of abstract forms glimpsed through an ever-changing veil of atmospheric conditions. The telegraph further closed distances and, as communication became easier, industry itself became more efficient and sophisticated. The mechanized production of goods assisted in continued redistribution of wealth and power, and what Crary calls “flows of typographic and visual information” (11) brought print culture, reproducible images, and commercial advertisements into a market that was no longer as limited by distance or by geographic and political boundaries.

Developments in transportation, industry, and the enhanced ability to communicate images and information took place as the industrial revolution churned forward. The evolution of the capitalist economy of exchange intersected with radical reformations of a broad range of institutions that are primary to the shaping of identity: family structure and ties of kinship, language, religion, and also notions of regional and national allegiance. Crary argues further that modernization has a vested interest in uprooting these institutions in order to encourage the mobility that would facilitate economic exchange (10). The rhythm and pace of industrial capitalism both required and enabled a consolidation of power through social and political mechanisms that were capable of “controlling, maintaining, and making useful new multiplicities of individuals” (15).

Optical technologies, able to enhance surveillance and make possible the recording of visual information, were intimately integrated into this as both producers and products of social and cultural change. It was a period characterized by these changes, by maturing capitalist economics, mechanized industrial production, more rigorous exercise of police surveillance and control, institutionalization in the form of prisons and sanitariums, and the establishment of rapid transportation and communication infrastructure such as the telegraph and the railway system (11). Such developments fostered experimentation in optical technologies because the citizen/observer "had to function within disjunct and defamiliarized urban spaces" as well as navigate "perceptual and temporal dislocations" (11). The observing subject, relying heavily upon images in an effort to order and understand the changing social landscape, becomes a screen upon which evolving processes of vision and perception is cast and made visible.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, science achieved great advances in understanding geometrical optics, in the mechanics that govern how lenses and prisms alter rays of light. In the nineteenth century, this knowledge expanded to incorporate the human body, as scientists came to understand how rays of light enter the eye and become perceptual information. Optical technologies, then, harness the principles of geometric optics in order to enhance human ability to perceive, examine, investigate and record images. Geometric optics and physiological optics unite in the development of optical technologies designed to serve the visual priorities of the new observer. Crary explains that the consequences of the complex network of changes taking place in the nineteenth century resonated through the realm of science and also through artistic practice. Mass

visual culture naturally came to reflect enhanced notions of optical possibilities and therefore expectations concerning realistic effects and the nature and priorities of realism required reassessment. Visual culture came to reflect a fascination with images that facilitate the accumulation, catalog, and proliferation of knowledge. Optical technologies act upon the body and enhance the capabilities of the eye. They are constructed of cold mechanics, but because of their function on and through the body, they become integrated into subjective human perception, and they are made possible by and linked to the changing economic and political landscape. As a result, "the distinction between internal sensation and external signs is irrevocably blurred" (24).

The socio-historical context of *Heart of Darkness*, as a text written in 1902, is situated within this broad process of economic and social reorganization that characterized the prior century. As Marlow recounts his use of optical technologies and grafts their existence and function to his language and to his metaphors, he does so as a part of the system that Crary identifies as the deep web of forces driving the nineteenth century and beyond. By "examining the significance of certain optical devices… [in order to] discuss them not for the models of representation they imply, but as sites of both knowledge and power that operate directly on the body of the individual," (7) Crary claims that recognizing the significance of these optical devices allows for a clearer understanding of the position of the observer within the realm of the social, the political, and the epistemological. Marlow and his compatriots not only have access to optical tools, they represent a new type of viewer—one who sees and observes a different set of "rules, codes, regulations, and practices" within the "possibilities… conventions and

limitations… of an irreducibly heterogeneous system of discursive, social, technological, and institutional relations" (6). In *Techniques of the Observer,* Crary writes from a vantage point that notices and incorporates multiple expressions of culture and many foci of power and social control. Analyzing the role of optical technology in a specific, discrete text provides a concrete example of the reach and ripple of the tide of nineteenth social and scientific change that Crary explicates in his work. I examine the evidence of optical devices in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the trace they leave in the language of the novella. I argue that the intrusion of optical apparatuses into the events of the story and the language that tells it replicate the structures of surveillance and control that organized nineteenth century British society while simultaneously radiating outward in service of the project of empire and its subjugation.

In *Heart of Darkness*, narrative moments assert the trope of optics through visual details that are essential to the philosophical and aesthetic construction of this novella. They remind us that Marlow and the empire he represents enter into their project of colonial enterprise armed not only with the weapons and tools of modernity that facilitate coercion and control of the physical world and its inhabitants, they view the landscape of the colony, and indeed the whole of the earth, through a different sort of gaze. It is a greedy gaze that takes as a given the reach and potential of optical technology, and harnesses this potential in the service of the colonial project, and in doing so work to control and appropriate all that the colonizers see before them. We can see in this novella moments that serve to illustrate how, in Crary's words, "problems of vision then, [in the latter half of the nineteenth century] as now, were fundamentally questions about the

body and the operation of social power" (3). Within the context of the setting of *Heart of Darkness*, which is located at the outer reaches of the empire, "questions about the body" are answered through incidents of aggression and struggle that aim for a physical domination of the native body and the landscape of the colonized territory. In this novella, "social power" is represented through the gaze of the colonizers. It is a gaze that is not only confidently bolstered by the authority of the metropolis, which claims cultural and linguistic superiority, but is further augmented by optic mechanisms that coldly view and reframe the space in question, rendering it more vulnerable, exposing the secrets of the terrain and its inhabitants.

Heart of Darkness contains significant examples of the way in which optical technology, in terms of the geometry and physics of light and lens, now intersects with the body, enhancing the capabilities human vision, the range of exploration and the fixing and framing of visual information. This intersection is legible through literal appearances of the optic trope, and further, the novella invokes an awareness of modern vision and visual understanding through its language and its metaphors. These textual examples place emphasis upon appropriation and domination, cataloging and categorization, eschewing human limitations yet always complicated by a changing understanding of the subjectivity of human perception. This subjectivity is troubled by an overlying layer of technologically mediated vision, which may or may not be objective, forming a complicating influence that is revealed within the text. The existing conversation among scholars regarding Conrad's literary impressionism misses the assertive presence of optical machinery, overlooking the text's awareness and inclusion of the devices that

form a significant part of modernity's complex apparatus. This is a text in which optical devices actively mediate vision, in a way that represents a forceful assertion of the driving apparatus of modernity.

Critics have shown that the modernized mode of seeing that permeates *Heart of Darkness* is a symptom of the trauma that comes along with the experience of modernity. In her article "Pathologies of the Imperial Metropolis: Impressionism as Traumatic Afterimage in Conrad and Ford," Christina Britzolakis discusses the traumatic and pathogenic consequences of the process of modernization. She links this trauma with the sense of rupture and fragmentation that results from the subjection of the consumer of culture and urban experience to an unavoidable barrage of images. She writes:

> …modernist scholars have embraced neurological readings of modernity, particularly in relation to the impact of visual technologies. Modernism, with its impressionistic sampling of the moment, is seen as decisively shaped by the advent of cinema. If mass urbanized existence was conceived, from the outset, in terms of a constant assault on the senses, the nascent cinematic technology of the 1890's, based on the sudden and incessant displacement of images, formalized this principle as the basis of its medium." (1)

The trauma of modernity, located within an individualized process of perception and neurological response, is caused in no small part by the proliferation of images then beginning to make assemblage within cultural experience. Modernity seized (or was seized by) a new visual field—a relentlessly generative and tidal montage of images, pouring yet through the film camera and continuing forward, proliferating endlessly, frozen still, looping, moving. Animated by film, made possible by photography and by lenses, delivered through silver nitrate and the long-overdue inventive syntheses of Talbot and Daguerre, the modern image was a harbinger of trauma laden with potentiality.

Heart of Darkness is already recognized as a text that ushers in the modern through its reformation of traditional narrative structure, particularly its use of a frame narrator, stream-of-consciousness storytelling, and the device of delayed decoding. Conrad scholars including Paul Armstrong, Bruce Johnson, and Kimberly Devlin build on the groundbreaking work of Ian Watt as they assess the relationship between Conrad's version of literary impressionism and impressionism as practiced by other writers of this mode, especially in light of the ideals expressed in the work and the manifestos of contemporary impressionist painters.

Armstrong's work calls out the ambiguity of the term "impressionism," noting that its philosophical origins vary in precise and important ways. David Hume's approach to its definition draws upon "skeptical empiricism," while Walter Pater espouses an "ethic of aesthetic cultivation" that emphasizes personal, subjective experience, defining an "impression" as both a building block of art and the thing that forms upon us as we experience art (447). For Hume, writing in the late eighteenth century, an *impression* is the direct product of sensory data emanating from immediate experience. Hume, in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, writes:

> …let us therefore use a little freedom, and call them IMPRESSIONS… by the term impression, then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will. And impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements above mentioned. (79-80)

Perceptions become impressions, pressed upon the body and mind through the sensory physiology we use to gather information about experience. These perceptions later become ideas as, through the passing of time, they shift into memory. Hume's

contribution to the idea of impressionism prioritizes the immediacy of these direct impressions of experience and frames the impression as a central key illuminating the general problem that epistemology, as a philosophical approach and project, endeavors to solve. Hume's conceptualization of the impression would later become integrated, significantly, in the philosophies underlying the practice of impressionism as a fine arts movement in the later half of the nineteenth century.

Walter Pater, whose ideas were also central to the development of a philosophy of impressionism that was practiced and expressed as movement in the fine arts, in his essays defined the impression in terms of its central role in criticism and aesthetics—framing the impression as essential to the understanding and appreciation of beauty. In *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Pater writes: "'To see the object as in itself it really is,' has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly." (vii) As with the impression as Hume understood it, Pater's concept of the impression has to do with the sensory perception of an object. For Pater, however, sensory impressions are entirely bound up with aesthetic concerns and with the individual's experience before a thing of beauty—essentially, Pater's *impression* has everything to do with a personal sense of *taste*. The thing perceived, be it a natural thing such as a landscape or a person's face, or a product of artistic creation such as a piece of music, a painting, or a sculpture, forms an impression that the individual must evaluate and determine to be either pleasurable or not pleasurable. In Pater's words, the individual's impression is a result of a personal

response, as the observer asks: "…what is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? And if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence and under its influence…?" (viii). Further, Pater underscores the interdependent relationship between exposure to impressions and the development of a sense of taste, which he calls "education." Pater writes: "The picture, the landscape, the engaging personality in life or in a book… are valuable for their virtues… for the property each has of affecting one with a special, unique impression of pleasure. Education grows in proportion as one's susceptibility to these impressions increases in depth and variety" (ix). Exposure results in subsequent susceptibility to the power of the impression, which cumulates in an enrichment of the person's education, and one crucial product of this education is the cultivation of taste.

Pater's articulation of the impression as an intersection between individual sensory perception and individual aesthetic taste is essential for a comprehensive understanding of both literary impressionism and impressionism in the visual arts, and further has much importance to the ongoing conversation regarding Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as it has been taking place for some decades within the context of literary criticism. Critical identification of the novella as an example of literary impressionism thus makes it essential to consider the visual elements of the text, in no small part because of the close and intersecting relationship between impressionism as practiced in literature and impressionism as articulated in the work of fine artists in the late nineteenth century. In other words, tracing the stated and tacit manifestos, philosophies, priorities, and technical

practices of the impressionist painters will necessarily yield insight to the methods of literary impressionism and, specifically, the philosophies crucial to its drive to employ visual qualities and enlist detail of this kind in service of the narrative.

Impressionism, though the term certainly carries with it many ambiguities, brings forward a consistent thread of similarities repeatedly evident throughout the various attempts to categorize and define it. The major impressionist painters of nineteenth century France, as I will show, generally adhere to a creed that integrates Hume's understanding of impressions as primitive sensory impressions with Pater's notion that impressions are filtered subjectively and stamped according to individual taste. Charles Baudelaire's essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, written in 1860, overtly treats the subject matter and techniques of painter and illustrator Constantin Guys, and influenced the philosophical discourse central to the ideals of impressionism as a general movement and as it came to be expressed in French painting. The essay, when it was published in 1863, coincided in a timely manner with the notorious exhibition of that year, the Salon des Réfusés. In it Baudelaire offers theories, now recognized as remarkably prescient, about the making of art, about technique, and about the most suitable content for capturing the specificity and nuance of the cultural and historical moment. The text, in its description and analysis of Guys and his work, presents a conceptualization of the way an artist attuned to the pace, priorities, and spirit of the day would operate and observe, and his ideas proved to be highly influential.

By means of introduction, in the essay Baudelaire asserts the foundational idea that beauty "is always and inevitably of a double composition, although the impression that it

produces is single… [it] is made up of an eternal, invariable element, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if you like… the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions" (3). For Baudelaire, it is the second element, the capturing of the *now*, that makes the "eternal" element of beauty palatable and so makes possible the appreciation of the entirety of its composition. The painter of modern life, writes Baudelaire, needs to embody a range of identities and facilities: "observer, philosopher, flâneur—call him what you will… sometimes a poet, more often he comes closer to the novelist or the moralist; he is the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains" (5). Baudelaire's lovely, oxymoronic coupling of eternal substance and its capture within a fleeting, ephemeral moment was later realized in the subjects and techniques that the French impressionists embraced. Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, and Camille Pisarro, to name just a handful from this group, painted *en plein aire*, and together shared a fascination with light and atmospheric conditions, which they rendered through compositional form, through color, and brushwork. The impressionists often chose as their subject matter shadowy members of the bohemian fringe or the demimonde: ballet dancers, prostitutes and street walkers, drinkers of absinthe. Possibly, these methods and priorities stemmed in no small part from Baudelaire's essay; perhaps he only presciently voiced the essential aesthetic attitude of the time. In either sense, *The Painter of Modern Life* cannot be separated from any understanding of impressionism in the fine arts or, correspondingly, an understanding of literary impressionism.

In the essay, Baudelaire presents the argument that artistic genius depends on the

intensity with which the individual has the capacity to form impressions—particularly visual impressions. Artistic genius responds to the world with freshness, forming impressions with the vigor and utterly unspoiled enthusiasm of a childlike observer. To explain this, Baudelaire invites us to "…go back, if we can, by a retrospective effort of the imagination, towards our most youthful, earliest impressions… brightly colored impressions… [for] the child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*. Nothing more resembles what we call inspiration than the delight with which a child absorbs form and color" (8). Here, Baudelaire traces back to the theoretical notion of the impression as a raw product of sensory encounters, as Hume defines it, and demonstrates how the ability to form vivid impressions is the characteristic most definitive of artistic genius. In this way, Baudelaire takes up Hume's conception of the impression as a primitively sensorial response to the world and links it to Pater's valuation of the impression as essential to aesthetic criticism, through the idea that the presence and expression of artistic genius heavily depends on an ability to indelibly form, or perhaps simply be profoundly struck by, visual impressions. Offering further detail, Baudelaire writes: "…genius is nothing more or less than *childhood recovered* at will—a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood's capacities and a power of analysis which enables it to order the mass of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated" (8). The creative mode of artistic genius, for Baudelaire, requires a combination of deeply powerful visual impressions, "raw material," with the filtering discernment that Pater calls educated taste. The artist must feel the "deep and joyful curiosity… the fixed and animally ecstatic gaze of a child confronted with something new, whatever it be, whether

a face or a landscape, gilding, colours, shimmering stuffs, or the magic of physical beauty assisted by the cosmetic art" (8). In this passage, it is significant that the sensations Baudelaire describes are all visual things that we see with our eyes: surfaces, shapes, visages, places and colors. Baudelaire articulates a definition of artistry and of the artist that foregrounds visual experience and invests it with a primacy that draws from the very "animally ecstatic" way with which the human eye can perceive. Further, he enlists this basic sensory ability in service of the artistic process and the creation of the artistic products that, subsequently and ultimately, ignite the bliss and sublimity of aesthetic pleasure.

Though a special attention to the visual is utterly logical and expected in an essay taking painting as its subject, Baudelaire does not in any way present a theory of the artist that identifies the source of art as something generated from a deeply interior place and then welling up from a spiritual source found fathoms down within the creative well of the artistic soul. On the contrary, the painter of modern life confronts what he *sees* in the world before him and responds "to each of of its movements… reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life… at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive" (9-10). The essay articulates a theoretical framework for a modality of art perfectly suited for the mid-nineteenth century, as if Baudelaire sensed with precision the very pulse of this moment and the burgeoning possibilities of modernity contained within it.

The Painter of Modern Life proved influential to French impressionist painters, not

because of Baudelaire's focus on the impression (and heightened sensitivity to the impression) as a precondition for artistic genius, but also through its imperative that painters must choose as subjects content that serves as "representation of the present" (2). According to art historian and theorist Michael Fried, "by 1860 if not earlier Baudelaire and Manet were close friends," (Fried 62). In *Impressionism and the Modern Landscape: Productivity, Technology, and Urbanization from Manet to Van* Gogh, James H. Rubin definitively states the importance that Baudelaire and his essay had to the Impressionist movement in painting. He writes:

> Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life" is essential to understanding the relationship of [the urban] experience to Impressionist art. Although Baudelaire died in 1967, just as Impressionism was developing its early group identity, and years before it was given its name, he was one of the first to argue cogently that modern life was the only worthy subject matter for the modern artist and that visual art could be its primary expressive medium… he saw how rapid execution and informal painterly technique expressed both personal vision and progressive efficiency. No one so deeply understood how the combination of naturalism and subjectivity now taken for granted in Impressionism was grounded in experiences of the modern city. (21)

Here, Rubin delineates Baudelaire's influence upon Impressionist painting in terms of the painterly technique that the poet/critics ideas suggest and contextualizes it within Baudelaire's designation of modern, urban life as the subject for art.

Though each painter of the impressionist school employed his or her own, signature approach to the ideals of the movement, art historians have found it possible to state several clear qualities that distinguish this mode of painting. Perhaps because of the fact that this school, as a group, espouses a distinct ideology, (coupled, of course, with a palate of shades and a collection of content that has, over the decades, been readily

digested and received with aesthetic delight), it is a movement that is generally well understood and beloved by many.

Impressionist paintings tend to convey “atmosphere and point of view… sharp juxtaposition of colors, innovative use of light, and the use of ‘empathetic and evocative brushwork’ [conveying] the fragment, or fleeing moment” (Peters 15). The ideals of the movement espoused a definitive rubric of innovation of technique, understood by art historian Stephen Eisenman as: “…1) the rejection of chiaroscuro; 2) the depiction of the interaction of light and color *en plein air*; and 3) the equalizing of brushstrokes across the surface of the canvas” (Eisenman 340). There were eight organized exhibitions of the Impressionist School, which took place in Paris between 1874 and 1886 (341). The majority of the canvases displayed in these exhibitions featured “coarse, irregular, and idiosyncratic surfaces [which were] notable… for the use of discrete patches (*taches*) of color” (341). The handling of the paint in terms of varied, sometimes quite heavy, brushstrokes is also a significant feature, and the pictures themselves possess a quality that is “agitated and immediate” (341). Michael Fried also offers an encapsulation of Impressionism, declaring that “the new painting was addressed to the sense of sight virtually to the exclusion of other faculties; that its basic assumptions were realist in that it sought to capture as directly and ‘naïvely’ as possible the truth of the painter’s instantaneous *impression*, and… that the illusionistic effect was astonishing” (408).

Stéphane Mallarmé declared in his essay “The Impressionists and Edouard Manet” that “the power of Impressionism is… the delight of having recreated nature touch by touch”. Yet this recreation of nature was not the same as the mimesis of earlier styles of

academic painting, which endeavored to create a "recreation in two dimensions of the three dimensional world… Impressionist art was first of all *optical*" (341, emphasis mine). This movement operated through "the flattened, optical screen which constitutes the artist's field of vision…the Impressionist world… cannot be manipulated, grasped, or even touched, except with the eyes" (341). The centrality of optics to Impressionist painting, though each of the members of the school expressed this value in different ways, comes to bear in important ways upon literary impressionism and a critical understanding of its priorities.

From Monet to Renoir, the French Impressionist painters explored the themes, philosophies, and techniques that unified and defined the movement. Michael Fried identifies two artists associated with the school, Gustave Manet and Gustave Caillebotte, who he believes notably diverge from the group. In his work, Fried culls both from the larger ranks of school and explains how their impressionist project differs. Fried's essay "Caillebotte's Impressionism" argues that Caillebotte's paintings strive to present "a certain realism of the body…while remaining faithful to the key premises of the ocular realism associated with Impressionism" (82). Further, Caillebotte's work "imagines a material or materialist Impressionism" (82), a materialist approach that Fried sees as less willing to commit to the Impressionist desire to abandon the solid matter of the scene in favor of the sensations it produces. Manet, too, (according to Fried), shows fundamental differences in his work that separate him from the Impressionist school, though he is so closely associated with it. Fried states that Manet's work possesses different qualities of "novelty, force, difficulty, and significance" (399). Fried's volume on Manet, *Manet's*

Modernism, is weightily complex in the arguments it presents. On a more universal level, art historians tend to agree that the painting of Manet possesses an "irony and guile" (Eisenman 338) that the other members of his school did not share.

Just as each Impressionist painter put the ideals of impressionism into practice in his or her own way, *intermedia* approaches to impressionism also differ. In particular, as John G. Peters argues in *Conrad and Impressionism*, literary impressionism, while certainly related and aligned to impressionism in painting, it does not correspond to it with perfect alignment. Peters writes, "because impressionism originated in the visual arts and because of the movement's importance in the history of the visual arts, most critics of impressionist literature have looked at it in the light of techniques of impressionist visual arts" (15). In Peter's view, while both Impressionist painters and literary impressionists strive to "represent an individual human consciousness interacting with phenomena at a fixed point in space and time" (16). While acknowledging this shared aim, and emphasizing that the individual rendering of consciousness is key to both, Peters warns that "the techniques of writing and painting are different and attempts to link them too closely often obscure the literature itself and oversimplify it as well" (31). Indeed, it is too simple to say that *Heart of Darkness*, as a work of literary impressionism, looks or feels like an Impressionist painting. However, the novella, in its prioritization of the visual impression and its clear focus on optical experience, is clearly linked to this movement in fine arts.

Paul Armstrong also notes that amalgamating different "impressionisms" together is unwise. He writes that the term "'impressionism' covers so much ground that one

might despair at discovering common properties which unite even the novelists it designates, let alone the philosophers and the painters" (477). Armstrong locates connection between the philosophers, writers, and painters who write about impressionism in their shared attention to the idea that the selection of representational technique should reflect an underlying set of assumptions about how best to "construe" the world we wish to render (478). Because *seeing* constitutes the primary method in which we perceive and thus construe the world, a consideration of how optical technology both enhances and interferes with visual perception will complete our understanding of the assumptions the underlie our constructed conception of the world and the techniques we choose to represent it.

Though Armstrong, Johnson, Devlin, and other critics work to situate their understandings of Conrad and his fellow literary impressionists using a variety of theoretical approaches including psychoanalysis and post-colonialism, they do so at the expense of careful attention to significant features of the novella and its narrative construction. They gloss over the precise moments in the text where Conrad's prose vividly aligns with the concerns and products of visual art; missing the ways that Conrad's text conjures forth and evokes the work of older painters such as Turner and contemporary artists like Monet. These allusions to paintings and painterly technique are noteworthy because they signal moments in the text that nostalgically summon the picturesque, as if to mourn our lost ability to view a landscape or a scene in this uncomplicated way. By attending to these elements of the novel, we can see what established and conventional critical understandings of Conrad's method overlook.

It is necessary to revisit *Heart of Darkness* using an approach that closely attends to the presence of optical apparatuses within it. This inquiry uncovers a mode of perception that is, following Crary, a significant feature of Conrad's social, cultural, and literary moment. Further, optical technologies and the particular gaze they facilitate are implicated in both Conrad's depiction of the practice of colonialism and his critical indictment of its cruelties.

Conrad's novella presupposes in its language that mediating, optical technology is always present, deepening the possibilities of seeing as it enhances detail, making both penetration and permanence possible. Optical, photographic, and proto-cinematic language foregrounds the idea of mechanistic vision, as the narrative yokes examples and metaphors of technologically mediated vision together with explorations of the subjectivity of human perception. If we miss the recurring optical trope that runs throughout the novella—failing to note its literal and figurative presence, we cannot realize the critical relationship that exists between the impressionistic moments of the novel and Conrad's method of invoking optical technologies as both a facilitation and mediation of visual experience.

The foundation of this system of optic reference and visual metaphor lies in a well-recognized tropic pattern of light and dark, which in *Heart of Darkness* are juxtaposed together in a chiaroscuro of opposition and contour. In the novella, Conrad draws upon a conventional symbolic representation conveyed through a contrasting pairing of light and dark in binary opposition. According to R. Brandon Kershner, Conrad's "fascination with light and darkness and their interplay, even at the expense of the representation of the

ostensible subject" (42), is the evidence that underlies the acknowledged and well-understood connection between his prose and Impressionist painting (42). Though this recognized alignment of the text with the techniques and philosophies of painterly impressionism is important, the light/dark symbolism, when taken at face value aside from its connection with impressionism, is both straightforward and powerful in the associations that it evokes. In this dichotomy, darkness usually represents savagery and danger, while the civilized world bathes in illumination.

When the frame narrator who sets the scene before Marlow begins his story speaks of the early spread of Britain's version of civilization, rhapsodizing about the "great spirit of the past" during which England set forth "the great knights-errant of the sea" (4) in ships bent on the conquest of the world; he invokes the metaphor of light. As he tells of the "dreams of men" and "the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires," he equates the colonial project with the spreading of this light. In this associative, poetic description, not only were the "messengers of the might within the land" conquerors who set out "bearing the sword," they also carried torches in parallel fashion, "bearers of a spark from the sacred fire" (5). It is typical rhetoric in defense of colonialism, though much of what follows in the novella offers a more complicated and critical view of the practice. In this preamble to Marlow's tale, the frame narrator draws a clear connection and establishes a positive set of connotations that link the expansion of the civilized world to the idea spark, of fire, and the gift of light. The passage that immediately follows continues to reference light sources, as the sun goes down, "lights began to appear along the shore" (5). The lighthouse "shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway—a great stir of lights

going up and going down" (5). Conrad's multi-layered system of optical references begins here with this binary and builds outward, expanding (though not according to any clear order or temporality) towards other modes and epistemologies of seeing.

The associative meaning of light and darkness is a shared construct that is universal. The Judeo-Christian myth of creation, of course, begins with God's "fiat lux," and His separation of light from darkness. The resulting association of solar light with the reassurance of a centralized authority, be it God or king, thus construes darkness as the antithesis of safety and stability. *Heart of Darkness* draws upon the ancient understanding of dark places as spaces of threatening exteriority in the way that the text names and describes the savage jungle that forms the setting of the majority of Marlow's narration. The novella's title, of course, calls up the idea of darkness and all of its mythic resonance, and the subsequent text connects that darkness with the unknown. The first description of the African coastline in Marlow's monologue integrates the weight of the concept of darkness into its varied evocations:

> Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you—smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering—Come and find out. This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle so dark green as to be almost black… (13)

Marlow, an experienced sailor who has seen many shorelines, muses that a coastal vista may take one of many forms, and exude a personality that might be welcoming and grand or perhaps merely insipid. This coast is featureless, monotonous, and grim, and the vegetation, though green, is nearly black. Further, Marlow emphasizes that in this stage of his journey, the "oily and languid sea" in combination with the "uniform somberness

of the coast" formed an estrangement that "seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion" (13). This landscape, in all its murky darkness, keeps Marlow away from truth, understanding, clarity, and meaning.

Darkness and obfuscation feature in many of Marlow's visceral descriptions of his environs. The "formless coast bordered by dangerous surf" (14) gives way to the river, "streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair… the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares" (14). While the descriptive passages are textured and anything but monochromatic, allusions to opacity and suggestions of the threat posed by a dark unknown are their most characteristic features.

Powerfully, Marlow's words regarding the place he calls the "grove of death" (19) continue the construction of these associations. He recounts that within the "gloomy circle of some Inferno… the mournful stillness of the grove where not a breath stirred, not a leaf moved… Black shapes lay crouched… half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair… black shadows of disease and starvation [were] lying confusingly in the greenish gloom" (16-17). This Dantesque place, the horrors of which irrefutably indict colonial brutality, is dark in both its concrete reality and its grim materiality. Marlow mentions that even what small flickers of life do struggle to gleam in the dying natives' eyes are doomed to extinguish; they are but a "flicker in the depths of the orbs which died out slowly" (17). This passage

underscores not only Marlow's visual process, but also the eerie non-seeing of the eyes of the native at his side. One can imagine Marlow's pupils dilating to let in more light as he moves deeper into the grove of death, and there, in the eyes of the dying man, he sees and recognizes only a fading flicker of vision.

Marlow's story takes place in "the darkness of an impenetrable night" (62), in a land at "the heart of a conquering darkness… a moment of triumph for the wilderness" (73). The river he travels, though it glitters, is "the infernal stream, the stream of darkness" (76). At the conclusion of his narrative, Marlow tries to dispel the smothering darkness of the whole experience through the lie he tells to Kurtz's "intended." He confesses that he lies because the truth "would have been too dark—too dark altogether…" (77). When Marlow's narrative comes to a close, the shadowy mood of the time he recounted to his comrades seems to have spilled over into their own present reality there that night as they waited on a ship moored in the estuary of the Thames. In the words of the frame narrator, "The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness" (77). The novella's final words are a refrain, not only of its title but also of its most dominant theme, the inky black tint that stains nearly all of its pages.

Despite the heavy-handed way that the novella draws upon the archetypal strength contained within the binary of light and dark, both the frame narrator and Marlow complicate, in certain key points, a clear delineation between the bright metropolis and the darkness of the impenetrable jungle. Before Marlow has his chance to speak, the

frame narrator offers a series of descriptive passages that begin to undermine the delineations of the light/dark binary, as his words establish the mood and aesthetic of the novella's opening setting. The view that stretches before the motley crew that evening as they sit waiting upon the Nellie amid the quiet, changing currents of the "sea-reach of the Thames" (3) appears painterly and veiled with haze. Above Gravesend, the town on the shore of the estuary, some twenty-six miles from London, "the air was dark" (3). This small description contains two unexpected inversions, first as the words assemble a synesthesia of qualities that add tangible murk and tint to something as light as the air, weighting the epitome of ephemeral with a heavy foreboding. Second, as the transparent atmosphere becomes heavy and tainted, the idea of civilization as a place of light and clarity is also surprisingly subverted. "Farther back," the frame narrator traces, the deepening dusk above Gravesend "still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth" (3). Rather than a center of light and learning, in that moment the metropolis at the center of empire is obscured, shadowed over with dark portent.

As the sun sinks, the narrator describes what he sees of distant London once again, fixing emphasis to his depiction through another subtle inversion. "And further west," the narrator states, "on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars" (5). The city is not bright but cast over with brooding gloom in sunshine, while in scorn of restful darkness, the same city at nighttime exudes an unhealthy emanation. Perverse, London is not lit when it should shine in the daylight, managing to cast its lurid glare

only after the sun has set. Conrad complicates the light/dark binary in *Heart of Darkness* through the tendency of his narrators to describe civilized areas that aren't lit by the radiance of culture and understanding, but rather are as dark in feeling as the sun-drenched jungle landscape that dominates the latter part of the novella.

The frame narrator's treatment of the setting in the early pages of *Heart of Darkness* are echoed in the first, resounding words of Marlow's story, as he begins with the "sudden," yet ponderous, declaration: "And this also… has been one of the dark places of the earth" (5). Marlow grounds his story in the notion that England once was, and perhaps remains, as dark as the remote land that is the destination of his journey and the subject of his tale. Interestingly, though many of Marlow's descriptions of the African continent are overwhelmingly dark, he does recount several scenes that take place under glaring sunlight. The sunlight bearing down in these places, however, fails to alleviate the heaviness of the landscape and its atmosphere. Rather, the bright sunshine creates a strong sense of chiaroscuro and an intense sensation of dissonance and contrast. What light there is, is frustrated and veiled, such as the light on the sea near the coastline, "whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist" (13). Though Marlow remembers that "the sun was fierce" (13), it never penetrates nor facilitates a clear view of the jungle landscape. Once Marlow reaches the river, he finds the sunlight unreliable. When it is present, it drowns and overwhelms rather than functioning to make things more visible: "A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare" (15). As the journey upriver continues, Marlow notes: "There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine" (33). Often, the sun appears in concert with an element that cancels it, such as

when “the dusk came gliding” into a gulley, “long before the sun had set” (39). Shortly after, at the break of day “when the sun rose, there was a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night” (39). Sometimes it is a light too intense to illuminate, at other times it is a light that appears only in partnership with another force that snuffs it out. Most commonly, however, the world described in Marlow’s narration is characterized by “the darkness of an impenetrable night” (62). Though Marlow acknowledges that “light came out of this river,” (5) this light was only “a flash of lighting in the clouds. We live in the flicker... darkness was here yesterday” (6).

Conrad troubles the established symbolic associations of the light/dark binary, and further, his writing pushes upon the way language posits an equation between *seeing* and knowing. Light, of course, is necessary in order for the eye to see, and the information then perceived becomes processed into understanding. In her discussion of the work of Paul de Man within the context of Kantian transcendental aesthetics, Rei Terada considers: “…the physiological process of seeing—which might seem to be a transformation of material into cognition—and its metaphoric extension into the idea of ‘seeing what one means’ ” (163). Conrad’s language in *Heart of Darkness*, particularly within Marlow’s characteristic turns of phrase, repeatedly conflates seeing with knowing, yet the narrative structure itself (particularly in its use of what Ian Watt calls “delayed decoding”) suggests that the gap separating vision and comprehension is often substantial, and broadens in moments of trauma and duress.

As Marlow begins to tell the story of his time as a “fresh-water sailor,” (7) he opens by declaring that, in order for his listeners to “understand the effect” that his

experience had upon him, they must first know the details of how he reached this place on the map, this specific, significant moment of his personal history. He says that he wants his listeners to know that this place was simultaneously “the farthest point of navigation” in the geographical sense of his physical journey *and* “the culminating point of his experience” as a traveler and a man. The moment he wishes to share, he says, “…seemed to throw a kind of light on everything about me—and into my thoughts. It was somber enough too—and pitiful—not extraordinary in any way—not very clear, either. No. Not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light” (7).

Marlow is a narrator of dubious reliability. The doubt we as readers have in his veracity is exacerbated by our knowledge that his words, which often quote what others say, (particularly about Kurtz), are themselves quotations that are mediated by the frame narrator (Kershner 44). In an article addressing similarities between the framing structure presented in the double, (and in some places, triple or quadruple), narrative of *Heart of Darkness* and the tension and interplay between impressionist paintings and their physical frames, R. Brandon Kerschner underscores Marlow’s unreliability as a means of revealing the way that the novella uses framing as a way to articulate and trouble its own boundaries. The frame narrator embeds alterity and limitation into Marlow’s narration by including pointed details illustrating how Marlow “…presents himself strangely from the first, sitting cross-legged, with arms dropped and the palms outward, like an ‘idol,’ immediately warranting some measure of distrust from us, who have not signed up for any cult” (Kershcner 45). Yet, despite the undeniable (and, arguably, fascinating) unreliability of Marlow’s often rambling and inscrutable storytelling, the moment above

in which he describes the apex of his journey as both obscure and illuminating is strikingly honest and insightful. Here, Marlow acknowledges that there is contradiction and ambiguity in his story and in his understanding of his own experience. It is “not very clear.” Significantly, Marlow emphasizes twice over that his experience in the jungle is meaningful and significant because it does, to the extent that it is able, illuminate. Marlow sets a tone of veracity in this statement by drawing upon an equation deeply rooted in conventional expression, which connects the presence of light with the comforting assurance of understanding.

“‘Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?’” (Conrad 27), Marlow implores, before falling (as the frame narrator reports), “silent for a while” (27). Here, Marlow’s diction clearly establishes that for him, proof of the efficacy and potency of his storytelling lies in the minds of his listeners—if there is a coexisting presence there of image and of understanding. The impassioned series of questions that Marlow presses towards his listeners do not simply compare seeing to knowing; his questions insist that seeing *is* knowing. If Marlow’s listeners can “see” Kurtz, they will understand who Kurtz was and everything that he represents, hence they will grasp the enveloping haze surrounding the tale, which mistily contains “the meaning of [this] episode” (Conrad 5).

As Marlow recounts his first conversation with the agent/underling at the Central Station, he tells his listeners of a moment of small epiphany, utilizing a phrase to connect his cognitive realization with the image of light’s entry. He describes his gradual understanding that this Company man had conducted some research by surreptitiously reading confidential correspondence, (and therefore assuming from this foreknowledge

that Marlow was favored by the same powers that lend advantage to Kurtz), saying: “Light dawned upon me” (25). Later, Marlow overhears more details about Kurtz and how this enigma retreated into the “depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station” (32). As he assembles his catalog of details, Marlow declares: “I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse” (32). Here, Marlow defines his growing impression of Kurtz as a precise, though fleeting, image. In these lines, once again, seeing and the idea of knowing/understanding are equivalences—interchangeable concepts.

There are, however, moments in the novella where seeing and knowing do not neatly align. When Marlow tells of his time at the Central Station, repairing his river steamer and waiting in vain for rivets, he weaves several small philosophical statements into his descriptions—little maxims that mix his telling of the events with his ideas about what they might mean or what they have taught him. He makes the following epistemological musing about work, reality, and the solipsistic nature of personal experience: “I don’t like work—no man does—but I like what is in the work—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself, not for others—what no man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means” (29). Here, for Marlow, what others observe of his life and his actions can never represent with any fullness or veracity the nature of his own experience. Marlow’s statement expresses an ideological perspective that, while reflecting the values and philosophies of literary impressionism, diverges from the conviction (emphasized throughout the novella in the

steady repetition of phrases that employ the term "see" in order to suggest understanding), that to *see* is to *know*.

In this novella, dissonance between seeing and knowing often occurs when the intensity of the moment, due to the difficulty and urgency of trauma or crisis, prevents the seen from becoming understood. Ian Watt lays forth his theory of delayed decoding as a fundamental element of Conrad's writing in *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. For Watt, delayed decoding is the process through which individuals move from sense perception into an understanding and conceptualization of the information gleaned from those pieces of sensory data. According to Watt, in *Heart of Darkness* in particular, the movement from perception to understanding is in many cases not instantaneous. An individual must process the information that he or she has perceived before coming to understand its significance. The idea of delayed decoding has deep relevance to literary impressionism, because the phenomenon of delayed decoding, in a sense, proves that each individual's experience or impression of the outer world is subjective and must be filtered, sometimes for an extended period of time, through the inner world of consciousness and thought. Watt writes:

> …Conrad seems to have been trying to find ways of giving direct narrative expression to the way in which the consciousness elicits meaning from its perceptions. One of the devices that he hit on was to present a sense impression and to withhold naming it or explaining its meaning until later; as readers we witness every step by which the gap between the individual perception and its cause is belatedly closed within the consciousness of the protagonist. (175)

There is an interesting symmetry here between the delay between impression and understanding that Watt notices as an element of the narrative construction in Conrad's

fiction, and the optical delay of light's reflection that characterizes impressionist painting. Unlike the crystalizing, direct light that illuminates a realist painting by Courbet, for example, which implies an instantaneous experience of meaning occurring simultaneously with an images' apprehension, the light that we see in impressionist paintings is reflected and refracted light—we see not the thing itself but the light emanating and shimmering off of that thing through the atmosphere, in a way that suggests the passing of time.

Watt's conceptualization of delayed decoding links a narrative technique of Conrad with impressionism, both in terms of its philosophical underpinnings and its visual/optical techniques and effects. For Watt, Conrad's inclusion of moments of delayed decoding forms a narrative technique that is "the verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter's attempt to render visual sensation directly" (176-177) Watt insightfully integrates his masterful understanding of Conrad's unfurling narrative technique with his theory linking delayed decoding to literary impressionism. He writes:

> Conrad's main objective is to put us into intense sensory contact with the events… literary impressionism implies a field of vision… controlled by whatever conditions—internal and external—prevail at the moment of observation. In narration the main equivalents to atmospheric interference in painting are the various factors which normally distort human perception, or which delay its recognition of what is most relevant and important. (Watt 178)

In Conrad's literary impressionism, a corresponding distortion of reality occurs as, within the narration, a character's perception and cognitive processes stand as an intermediary between the purported real event and their presentation to the reader.

Despite the gaps that frequently exist between the moment of visual perception and

the arrival at comprehensive synthesis of visual information, *Heart of Darkness*, as does conventional language, routinely makes use of the word "see" to indicate knowledge and understanding. Marlow desires his listeners to "see" the places, events, and faces that he tells them about, so that they will be able to understand the meaning of his story. For readers of the novella, "seeing" is as much a part of the experience of the tale as it is for Marlow's listeners. In *Dreaming by the* Book, Elaine Scarry argues that, as we engage with the verbal arts, we "see" images in our minds that are more vivid and lively than those summoned through "nonliterary imaginings," because in the verbal arts, "images somehow *do* acquire the vivacity of perceptual objects… [although] they are almost wholly devoid of *actual* sensory content" (Scarry 4-5). As readers who experience a material interaction only with words on the page, in *Heart of Darkness*, we "see" mental images that surpass the vivacity of nonliterary imagining. In Terada's interpretation, "…in approximating the material conditions of perception, texts make readers feel as though they are having particular perceptions of objects and not just of letters" (Terada 168). This is possible because in texts "we are given procedures for reproducing the deep structure of perception" (Scarry 38). In the case of Conrad's novella, the recurrence of the optic trope compounds the power of the text's visual qualities in an effort to make the reader see.

The visuality of the novella takes its foundation from the primal associations that come with the presence or absence of light, and then extends that connection to conflate seeing (made possible, of course, by beams of light), with knowing. The nature, quality, and content of the images painted in the novella appear and function in various ways. In

several instances, particularly in the case of vistas described by the frame narrator, the visual image serves to evoke a feeling of painterly, picturesque nostalgia. One such example occurs early in the novella, in the frame narration, before the introduction of Marlow's voice. The frame narrator offers forth the setting for the reader, a setting that finds the *Nellie* "swung to her anchor," resting in "the Sea-reach of the Thames" (3). The description that Conrad offers through the frame narration contains a handful of visual details that quite openly evoke the touches placed by a painter on a canvass. The passage reads:

> …The Sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and father back seemed condensed into a mournful gloom brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth. (3)

Cataloging the words and phrases that this evocative passage employs in order to create the setting demonstrates an exchange with painting that is difficult to ignore or deny. For one, the passage opens with a description of a particular type of horizon, one in which "sea and sky were welded together without a joint" (3). This mention of the horizon line evocatively ties this literary description to the conventions of landscape painting, of seascapes in particular, yet also alludes to a certain skillful mastery of industrial technique, in the perfect welding of sea to sky. In a painting of a seascape, the horizon line is a very fundamental and key compositional element. If canted, it is a stormy sea, if straight and clear, it is a calm day at sea, and if, as above, the sea and sky blend, it is a

hazy day and the light is dimming. In a seascape, the horizon line is even more primary than it is in a landscape, for in most seascape paintings the reach of space is less interrupted by manmade or geographical features than a landscape. Conrad's depiction of the horizon as a weld without a joint aligns the opening passage with the formal compositional elements of an impressionist seascape painting—perhaps a Monet or even a proto-impressionistic work by Turner.

In this passage, other choice words and phrases evoke impressionist painting as well. The image of the Thames opening out into the sea, "stretching before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway" presupposes a specific perspective, a positioning of the observer from a vantage point (in this case, aboard and on the deck of a sailing ship), that offers an unobstructed, opening vista. The view offered is already packaged and framed, in pictorial and picturesque fashion. Further details of the passage also evoke a painted image. The "red clusters of canvas" gleam from this passage like carmine brushstrokes, and "canvas" comes to have a double meaning here. They are the canvas sails of the ships, but we cannot avoid the connotation of the materials of painting that this term always evokes. These red brushstrokes highlighting the literary canvas also shine with the "gleams of varnished sprits." This phrasing indicates reflected light, and the polished finish of a varnished oil painting. Encountering this passage is very like encountering a great impressionist seascape painting in a gallery or a museum, yet the description is visceral as well as visual. A reader can feel the settling of the ponderous air that Conrad describes as he lays down this setting: air that is heavy with "haze resting on the low shores," "vanishing flatness," it is dark air, "condensed into a mournful gloom

brooding motionless" (3).

This passage clearly demonstrates Conrad's technical allegiance with impressionist painting. It also can be read in light of Peters' argument about literary impressionism and philosophy, and the prioritization of ideas of apprehension, comprehension, and the subjectivity of perception. As Conrad's frame narration describes the setting where the *Nellie* has come to rest, the text speaks to the qualities that human perception will note and catalog as the subjective viewer forms sense impressions of a beheld scene. The luminosity of the scene, the colors, the stillness, the lowering haze, the flatness and the condensing gloom are key details that stand out in this description. It is as though Conrad is listing qualities that will objectively characterize the scene, while binding these measurable objects to the more subjective qualities of feeling and mood that they will likely evoke in the viewer/reader. The scene is not only crafted like a painting, it is also quite clearly filtered through human consciousness and therefore it is subjectively rendered. This passage represents a sensitive attunement to philosophical ideas about the representation of subjective perception, and also renders detail, using techniques that are unmistakably akin to those of impressionist painting.

As the frame narrator continues to describe the scene on the deck of *The Nellie*, which lay anchored and at rest in the mouth of the Thames, the narrator offers up another painterly scene or tableau. After describing his and his company's mood as "meditative and fit for nothing but placid staring," he describes the picture that they saw as they stared out over the decks and across the reach of the water:

The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone

> pacifically, the sky without a speck was a benign immensity of unrestrained light, the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric hung from the wooded rises inland and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west brooding over the upper reaches became more somber every minute as if angered by the approach of the sun. (4)

Here, Conrad's frame narrator paints an image of mist, gloomy haze, brilliant and shining water, and unrestrained light. There is a painterly contrast between the brilliance of the light and the water, and the somber "gloom to the west brooding over the upper reaches." One of the fundamental practices of impressionist painting is the idea that one paints not the buildings and haystacks, but rather the light that reflects off of them. Impressionist painters painted the surface of things by painting the light that contours them. The passage contains an idea of light or of its dimming in all of its turns and phrases, from the initial still and exquisite brilliance, to the shining of the water, the immense sky of unrestrained light, the more muted mists like gauzy fabric, and the brooding gloom of the western clouds. This passage, in which the frame narrator takes another moment to craft a painterly vision with his words, is moody, evocative, visual, and impressionistic.

As the sun sets upon the scene at the novella's opening, the dying of the natural light is followed by the appearance of many man-made lights. When the sun's light is extinguished, the lights and the lighthouse along the shore begin to glow. The passage that follows the phrase "The sun set…" (5), contains a cluster of references to artificial lights, references which are particularly noteworthy given the importance of optics as a metaphorical concept in this novel. The light references are the foundational underpinnings to the idea of optics—there could be no optical devices without light, and eyes—the primary optical devices-- of course need light in order to function. In the

passage,

> …*lights* began to appear along the shore. The Chapman *lighthouse*, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, *shone* strongly. *Lights* of ships moved in the fairway—a great stir of *lights* going up and down. And father west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a *lurid glare* under the stars. (Conrad 5, emphasis mine)

This passage takes light as its subject, from the light shining from the lighthouse standing on the mud-flats along the shore to the lights of the ships moving up and down, to the "lurid glare" of the London lights, brighter than the "brooding gloom" they cast on a sunny day. It is a passage about light, impressionistic and painterly, and also references the science of optics. The description of the beam of the lighthouse on the mud-flat calls to mind the anatomy of such a structure, and the Fresnel lens (invented in 1820), within it, which makes the brilliant light beam possible.[41] This passage is a description of artificial lights along the river, which call to the forefront the contrast of light against darkness. It is one of the first examples in the novella of the way Conrad combines images of light and the mechanics of optics with the individual, psychological perception of a scene or vista. The frame narrator's view is illuminated by the artificial lights, which he beholds as he surveys the land and waterscape before him. The light forms a contrast to the darkening night.

In "The Scopic Drive and Visual Projection in *Heart of Darkness*," Kimberly Devlin emphasizes that through Marlow's narrative pattern of descriptive reportage and the synthetic reflections that follow, the novella's development moves along a "rich

---

[41] The portion of a lighthouse that houses the light source and lens is called the "optic section."

scopic axis" (19). Marlow's storytelling centers around the way he recounts "explicitly… 'what I saw,'…the visuality of Africa is a lure for the constructed Conradian taleteller in his experiential narrated past and in his recollective narrative present" (19). Here, Devlin recounts the agreement in Conrad criticism that this novella is notable particularly in the way the narrative emphasizes viewing, observation, and reflection. Her intervention into this criticism involves reframing these visual observations and relationships as symptoms revealed through a psychoanalytic approach to the text, and her reading emphasizes a concern with placing these symptoms within their colonial/postcolonial contexts.

Devlin's identification of "the scopic axis" as integral to both the novella itself and to critical interpretations of it builds upon Bruce Johnson's assertion that Conrad's technique links towards the idea of impressionism as understood by its practitioners within the visual arts. For Johnson, "in meticulously recording these un-interpreted or minimally interpreted observations—and they are often visual—Conrad reflects on one of the original purposes of impressionism: to return to the most aboriginal sensation before concepts and rational categories are brought to bear" (53). Johnson is writing in response to Watt's explorations of the idea of delayed decoding, arguing that Watt's analysis misses a key connection linking Conrad, impressionism, and the broader "epistemological currents" that were influential in Conrad's time. Johnson maintains that Conrad's version of impressionism is ideologically linked to the philosophies of Locke and Hume, which emphasize that unprocessed sensory impressions are closer to true, original meaning than is the "operation of subsequent thought" (55).

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad's use of visual imagery frequently involves optical

devices and the mediated means of seeing that they provide. Mediated visions, tinged with the suggestion of a machine's cold objectivity, couple with a presentation of subjective consciousness in a way that showcases a significant feature of Conrad's historical and artistic moment. The collision of infinite personal perceptions within the context of an increasingly dehumanized and unfeeling modern world provides a texture and contrast made all the more vivid by the novella's exotic setting in the Congolese jungle.

In certain key moments of the narrative, the stratified distance between the purported reality of the story that ripples down from Marlow's perceptions as narrator to the frame narrator and his cohort's attentive comprehension of Marlow's narrative and through to the transference of meaning to the reader, is overlaid by the cold, glassy mechanism of a lens. Although there are no photographs in *Heart of Darkness*, there are moments in which the recording apparatus of a camera or the refracting curve of a lens seems at times metaphorically and at other times literally implied in the novella's descriptions and in its very language.

One such moment occurs as Marlow retells the moment of his approach to Kurtz's encampment. "I had taken up my binoculars while we talked and was looking at the shore" (Conrad 56), he declares, and with these words positions his audience and the reader with him behind the lenses of his optical device. Marlow surveys the picture before him, "sweeping the limit of the forest at each side and at the back of the house" (56). In this section of the narrative, Marlow piles the enhanced visual data made possible through the optics of the binoculars over his subjective, personal perspective and gradual

interpretation of what he sees through the lenses. His narration continues: "The consciousness of there being people in that bush, so silent, so quiet—as silent and quite as the ruined house on the hill—made me uneasy" (56). Marlow's awareness of his observers is layered over by the sensory data of what he is able to see. Layered like a scrim, the still forest he sees hovers over what he knows is there but cannot see. He says to his listeners:

> …There was no sign on the face of nature of this amazing tale that was not so much told as suggested to me in desolate exclamations, completed by shrugs, in interrupted phrases, in hints ending in deep sighs. The woods were unmoved like a mask—heavy like the closed door of a prison—they looked with their air of hidden knowledge, of patient expectation, of unapproachable silence. (56)

The passage is rich with sensory allusion and suggested connections. The nature Marlow sees through the binoculars and then describes to his audience gives no sign of the story he first experiences and next retells. The woods themselves possess a hidden knowledge, a meaning waiting to be un-coded. The amalgamation of jungle trees that Marlow here surveys is unwilling to speak, yet silently holding clues for him to discover. Like the sensory data that Marlow is slow to interpret, the guarded forest that he surveys suggests a meaning that is yet to unfurl. The conceit here is conceptually reminiscent of perhaps the most memorable metaphor that the frame narrator offers. The frame narrator describes the typical form of Marlow's yarns, in which the meaning doesn't lie inside like a kernel of a nut, but rather is located outside of the story, "enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that, sometimes, are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine" (5).

During Marlow's journey towards Kurtz, he and his steamship encounter a period

of dense fog. Marlow and his crew were transported into another place of blindness, where vision is blocked by the cataract of the fog: “When the sun rose there was a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night. It did not shift or drive, it was just there standing all round you like something solid. At eight or nine perhaps, it lifted, as a shutter lifts.” The reference to a camera’s mechanisms should not go unnoticed here. “We had a glimpse of the towering multitude of trees, of the immense matted jungle, with the blazing little ball of the sun hanging over it—all perfectly still—and then the white shutter came down again smoothly as if sliding in greased grooves.” (39). It is as if Marlow and his crew were encased within an immense camera or camera obscura, shielded from the jungle by not a bank, or a curtain, but a *shutter* of fog.

Heart of Darkness offers a steady stream of imagery throughout the narrative, but contains only one true incident of ekphrasis. Inside the first-class agent’s tent at Central Station, Marlow’s conversation with the agent comes to halt when Marlow notices a painting. In his words, “then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman draped and blindfolded carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber—almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister” (25). When Marlow asks who painted it, the agent confirms that its author is Mr. Kurtz. The painting, as Marlow describes it, is a chiaroscuro meditation, fixing within a frame the emblematic contrast between light and dark that permeates this novella. Its subject, a blindfolded woman, carries a torch that shines against the overwhelming darkness of the background. In the image, amidst the struggle between light and dark, seeing and blindness become contradictory symbols. The woman who

bears the light cannot herself see, and though she is the bringer of illumination, she looks profoundly threatening. She is sightless, but what kind of knowledge must she possess to make her appear so sinister? The painting arrests Marlow, and lingers in his memory. Fittingly, this instance of ekphrasis, singular in the novella, is one that offers a complex symbology of the idea of vision. Throughout *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad employs light, vision, and optics to explore the relationship between seeing and knowing in a consideration of the effect that the mechanism of vision, as influenced by optical technologies, has upon human faculties of perception and understanding.

REFERENCES CITED

Arnold, Jean. “Cameo Appearances: The Discourse of Jewelry in *Middlemarch*.” *Victorian Literature and Culture,* Vol. 30, No. 1 (2002), pp. 265-288. Print.

Armstrong, Paul B. *The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding and Representation in James, Conrad, and Ford.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. Print.

Armstrong, Paul B. “The Hermeneutics of Literary Impressionism: Interpretation and Reality in James, Conrad, and Ford.” Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa, Ed. *Poetics of the Elements in the Human Condition*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985. Print.

Armstrong, Paul. B. *The Phenomenology of Henry James*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

Auster, Henry. “George Eliot and the Modern Temper.” *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*. Jerome H. Buckley, Ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Barthes, Roland. *Image Music Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. Print.

Barthes, Roland. “The Reality Effect”. *The Rustle of Language*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. Print.

Beer, Gillian. *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-century Fiction*. 3rd ed. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

Berger, Sheila,. *Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures: Framing, Disruption, Process*. New York: New York UP, 1990. Print.

Blackwood, Sarah. “Isabel Archer’s Body.” *The Henry James Review*, Volume 31, Number 3, Fall 2010. Print.

Bollinger, Laurel. “The Ethics of Reading: The Struggle for Subjectivity in *The Portrait of a Lady*.” *Criticism*, Vol. 44, No. 2., Spring 2002. Print.

Bowlby, Rachel. “Forward.” *Adventures in Realism*. Matthew Beaumont, Ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2007. Print.

Britzolakis, Christina. “Pathologis of the Imperial Metropolis: Impressionism as Traumatic Afterimage in Conrad and Ford.” *Journal of Modern Literature*, Volume 29, Number 1, Fall 2005, pp. 1-20. Print.

Bullen, J.B. *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986. Print.

Campbell, Joseph. *Myths of Light: Eastern Metaphors of the Eternal*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2003.

Claybaugh, Amanda. *The Novel of Purpose*. Ithaca and London: Cornell Univeristy Press, 2007. Print.

Cohen, William. *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006. Print.

Conrad, Joseph, “Henry James: An Appreciation,” *Conrad on Fiction*, 1905. Print.

Conrad, Joseph. *Letters from Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, 1890-1920*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940. Print.

Crary, Jonathan. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Cambridge, MA: October Books, 2001. Print.

Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. Print.

Dames, Nicholas. “Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies: The Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories.” *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2. (Winter, 2004). Print.

Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books, 1967.

Devlin, Kimberly J. “The Scopic Drive and Visual Projection in *Heart of Darkness*.” *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 52, Number 1, Spring 2006, pp. 19-41. Print.

Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.

Eimers, Jennifer. *The Continuum of Consciousness: Aesthetic Experience and Visual Art in Henry James' Novels*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2013.

Eisenman, Stephen F. *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2007. Print.

Eliot, George. *Middlemarch*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000. Print.

Epstein, James. "Victorian Subjects: Introduction." *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3. July 1995. Print.

Fessenbecker, Patrick. "Freedom, Self-Obligation, and Selfhood in Henry James." *Nineteenth Century Literature*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (June 2011). Print.

Flint, Kate. "The Materiality of *Middlemarch*." *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*. Karen Chase, Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.

Forbes, Jessica. "The Power of Looking: The Gaze in *The Portrait of a Lady*." *Henry James and the Visual Culture of Modernity*. University of Aarhus Department of English, 2013. Print.

Fried, Michael. "Caillebotte's Impressionism." Norma Broude, ed., *Gustave Caillebotte and the Fashioning of Identity in Impressionist Paris*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002. Print.

Fried, Michael. *Manet's Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860's*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. Print.

Furst, Lilian. *All is True: The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995. Print.

Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. New York: The Modern Library, 2001. Print.

Hardy, Thomas. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991. Print.

Hawthorn, Jeremy. "Theories of the Gaze," in Patricia Waugh, ed., *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Holder-Barell, Alexander. *The Development of Imagery and its Functional Significance in Henry James' Novels*. New York: Haskell House, 1966. Print.

Holland, Laurence Bedwell. *The Expense of Vision*: *Essays on the Craft of Henry James*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964. 43-54. Print.

Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.

Izzo, Donatella. "*The Portrait of a Lady* and Modern Narrative." Porte, Joel, ed. *New Essays on The Portrait of a Lady*, 1990. Print.

James, Henry. *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1948. Print.

James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995. Print.

James, Henry. *Twenty Letters ... to Joseph Conrad*. London: Curwen Press, 1926. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. "A Note on Literary Realism in Conclusion." *Adventures in Realism*. Matthew Beaumont, Ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Johnson, Bruce. "Conrad's Impressionism and Watt's 'Delayed Decoding.'" Murfin, Ross. *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties.* Birmingham: The University of Alabama Press, 1985. Print.

Johnson, Kendall. *Henry James and the Visual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.

Kiely, Robert. "The Limits of Dialogue in *Middlemarch*." *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*. Jerome H. Buckley, Ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975. Print.

Kirschner, R. Brandon. "The Reader, The Frame, and Impressionism in *Heart of Darkness." Conradiana*, Vol. 35, No. 1-2, (2003), p. 41-47. Print.

Knapp Hay, Eloise. "Joseph Conrad and Impressionism." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Winter 1975), p. 137-144. Print.

Knowles, Owen. "Conrad's Life." *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*. Ed. J.H. Stape. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print.

Krieger, Murray. "The Problem of *Ekphrasis:* Image and Words, Space and Time-- and the Literary Work." *Pictures into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis*. Ed. Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1998. 3-20. Print.

Lamm, Kimberly. “A Future for Isabel Archer: Jamesian Feminism, Leo Bersani, and Aesthetic Subjectivity.” *The Henry James Review*, Volume 32, Number 3, Fall 2011. Print.

Levine, Caroline. “Victorian Realism.” Dierdre David, Ed: *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel.* 2nd Edition. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012. Print.

Levine, George. “Introduction: George Eliot and the Art of Realism” in George Levine, Ed., *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

Lubin, David M. *Act of Portrayal: Eakins, Sargent, James*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. Print.

Matthiessen, F.O. “The Painter’s Sponge and Varnish Bottle.” *The Portrait of a Lady: A Norton Critical Edition*, Robert D. Bamberg, Ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.

Miller, J. Hillis. “Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*.” *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*. Jerome H. Buckley, Ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975. Print.

Newton, K.M. “George Eliot, Kant, and Free Will.” *Philosophy and Literature*, Volume 36, Number 2, October 2012, pp. 441-456. Print.

Novak, Daniel. *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Cambridge, Cambridge Unviersity Press, 2008.

O’Gorman, Frances. “Thomas Hardy and Realism.” Mallett, Phillip: *Thomas Hardy in Context.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Print.

Pater, Walter. *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1873. Print.

Peters, John G. *Conrad and Impressionism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

Scarry, Elaine. *Dreaming by the Book*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Print.

Shires, Linda M. *Persepctives: Modes of Viewing and Knowing in Nineteenth Century England*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009.

Smith, Mack. *Literary Realism and the Ekphrastic Tradition*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

Star, Summer J. "Feeling Real in Middlemarch." *ELH: English Literary History*, Volume 3 (2013): 839-869. Print.

Terada, Rei. “Seeing is Reading.” *Legacies of Paul de Man*. Ed. Marc Redfield. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007. Print.

Thomas, Jane. *Thomas Hardy and Desire*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 20013. Print.

Thomas, Jane. “Thomas Hardy and the Visual Arts.” Mallett, Phillip: *Thomas Hardy in Context.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Print.

Tintner, Adeline R. *Henry James and the Lust of the Eyes*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993.

Torgovnick, Marianna. *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence and Woolf*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. Print.

Wade, Nicholas J. *Perception and Illusion: Historical Perspectives*. New York: Springer Science, 2005. Print.

Walter, Christina. *Optical Impersonality: Science, Images, and Literary Modernism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2014. Print.

Watt, Ian. *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. Print.

Watt, Ian. *Essays on Conrad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.

Winner, Viola Hopkins. *Henry James and the Visual Arts*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1970. Print.