Victorian Tinder: Examining New Media Technologies in the Nineteenth-Century Marriage Plot

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Statement of Originality

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Abstract

This thesis argues that new media technologies' impact on real-life romantic relationships opened the door for authors to portray new modes of desire and intimacy in nineteenth-century fiction. While a variety of new media will be discussed, I primarily focus on photography, the reformed postal system, and electric telegraphy. These mediums all have the metonymic capacity to substitute an absent beloved, which enables amorous narratives to progress without the need for in-person scenes and raises the question of how presence is mediated through these new discourse systems. How—and why—are feelings affected when a sweetheart's presence is rendered small and possessable by the photographer's camera lens; when it is enclosed within a handwritten letter and passed through the public and impersonal postal network; and when heartfelt conversation is facilitated by an eavesdropping telegraphist? While extensive research has been done on new media technologies and romantic relationships in the Victorian era respectively, very little has been done on the intersection between the two fields. I address this scholarly gap by analysing a mix of canonical and non-canonical fictional texts, ranging from the Brontës to Thomas Hardy to Amy Levy, an informational source that allows for the inclusion of metaphorical depictions of technologies and which delineates contemporary reaction to a changing media ecology. Studying technological advancements' influence on courtship reveals that many of the concerns we have today on dating culture, like privacy leaks or long-distance-relationships or the potential insincerity of virtual bonds, similarly troubled Victorians and demonstrates that, regardless of time period, technology will be viewed as both a blessing and bane to love.

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Introduction

Detractors of modern dating apps like Tinder, who sigh that young people never meet the old-fashioned way anymore and dismiss online relationships for being less genuine since the individuals cannot meet in person, might be scandalized to learn that the Victorians had their own version of dating apps in the form of matrimonial advertisements, such as this 1871 'dating profile' from the *Manchester Examiner and Times*:

> Two young ladies of education (sisters), aged twenty and twenty-four, with small incomes, would correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. This being *bonâ fide*, answers must contain carte, with real address, to Blanche and Lily, Post-office, &c.[1]

It is uncontested fact that the Victorians witnessed huge technological bounds during their time, so it is only natural that relevant innovations were then applied towards romantic purposes—just like the advent of the internet and smartphones in our century led to the rise of dating apps, which enable us to seek love or sexual satisfaction more conveniently beyond our immediate social circle. Blanche and Lily's request for *cartes* (early photographs mounted on a two-by-four-inch cardboard backing) with replies was not uncommon. As photography became more affordable and accessible from the mid-nineteenth century onward, it offered an opportunity for ad-placers to prove that they were as attractive as their stated physical description and to assess respondents' appearance. A few advertisements even named photographs as a condition for respondents or stipulated that 'particular attention' would be given to letters that contained them.[2] The emphasis on photographs resembles the dating app procedure of viewing the photographs of potential matches before swiping right.

[1] 'Occasional Notes', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 Dec 1871, pp. 4-5 (p. 4).
[2] 'Advertisements', *Matrimonial News & Special Advertiser*, 26 August 1876, pp. 4-5.

Typically, dating apps prompt their users to upload photos of themselves and a short self-introduction. Matrimonial advertisements were not printed with the advertiser's photograph, but frequently offered to exchange cartes, which means both parties would have each other's likeness and profiles (since the photograph would presumably be sent with a self-introduction) before deciding whether to proceed further—akin to dating apps.

Matrimonial advertisements predate media advancements like penny postage and photography, but would not have become such a popular means of courtship without them. Cheap postal costs enabled daily conversation through letters and offered individuals the opportunity to answer multiple ads or multiple suitors; while cartes allowed individuals to evaluate the other's features and attached a face to the letters, the latter of which would facilitate romantic fantasies. Photographs could be doctored even in the nineteenth century, but provided a sense of reassurance with regard to the other's physical attractiveness, albeit a weak one. Trading photographs was considered a romantic act, or as Patrizia Di Bello puts it, an opportunity for 'flirting, playful courting and expressing sentimental bonds and affections'.[3] The importance and prevalence of photographs in relation to matrimonial advertisements was such that one 1910 issue of the *Penny Illustrated Paper* ran three ads for matchmaking periodicals on the same page as an ad for personal photo post cards—presumably for answering matrimonial advertisements.[4] In 1868, slightly before the boom of pure matchmaking periodicals, the *London Journal* was already featuring sections that listed 'Cartes de Visite Wanted' and 'Cartes de Visite Received' to facilitate photograph exchanges between personal advertisers.[5] Part of it can be attributed to *cardomania*, a term coined in 1859 to describe the phenomenon of collecting cartes.[6] However, given that matrimonial ads

[3] Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers, and Flirts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 130.
[4] 'Miscellaneous Advertisements', *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 4 June 1910, p. 727.
[5] Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage*, p. 83.
[6] Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage*, p. 83.

were already beginning to dominate personal ad sections by that time, it is safe to presume that a fair few in the *London Journal* were requesting and receiving photographs for romantic purposes.

The explosive popularity of matrimonial ads from the mid-nineteenth century onward led to the rise of full-fledged matchmaking periodicals, which were essentially dating apps in paper form.[7] The most popular was the *Matrimonial News & Special Advertisement*, a London-based matrimonial newspaper that ran from 1870 to 1895, but there were numerous others like the *Matrimonial Chronicle* (1890-1893), the *Matrimonial Courier* (1891), the *Matrimonial Gazette*, renamed *Matrimonial Herald* (1884-1895), the *Matrimonial Intelligencer* (1876), the *Matrimonial Journal* (1885), the *Matrimonial Post* (1898-1905), the *Matrimonial Record* (1882-1890), the *Matrimonial Register* (1896), the *Matrimonial Times* (1891), and *Matrimony* (1883).[8] Matchmaking periodicals presented themselves as suppliers of a 'national want' and as a modern way of meeting love matches. In the 'address to the public' in each issue of *Matrimonial News & Special Advertisement*, the editor explained that the 'cold formalities of society and the rules of etiquette' impose 'such restrictions on the sexes that there are thousands of marriageable men and women, of all ages, capable of making each other happy, who never have a chance of meeting, either in town or country'. Therefore, a journal 'through which ladies and gentlemen aspiring to marriage can be honourably brought into communication, is too obvious to need demonstration'.[9] According to their list of services, each advertisement had to 'state the age, general appearance, and position of life of the sender, and also some description of the lady or gentleman (as the case may be), with whom a correspondence is desired'. A standard fee of '12 stamps per 40

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[7] Jennifer Phegley reports that in 1850 only a handful of matrimonial advertisements appeared in the *London Journal* for each issue, but by 1852, they had completely overrun the 'Notices to Correspondents' section and eventually spilled over into the journal's companion publication, the *Weekly Times*. See Jennifer Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara: Praegar, 2012), p. 80.
[8] Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage*, p. 84.
[9] 'Matrimonial Advertisements', *Examiner*, 13 November 1875.

words' was required to place the ad, or it could be inserted 'three times for 2s., or six times for 3s.' with the same price for replies. Ads were posted anonymously, but if an advertiser wanted to correspond with an interested party, the editor would put them in touch for a fee. Should a match be successful, the couple was expected to provide a further fee to the publication within a month after marriage. The editor also regularly answered questions and gave advice on matters relating to courtship and marriage in the paper columns, while personal consultations were available 'from one to five o' clock daily for a fee of five shillings'.[10]

Much like dating apps though, matrimonial advertisements were viewed as a dubious way of finding a partner—in part because searching for love among the paper columns was considered uncouth—but also because matrimonial advertisements' reliance on long-distance communication systems rather than in-person interactions in the matchmaking process made it easy to conceal one's identity. The authenticity of ads was frequently called into question. The *Examiner* noted the 'inconceivable' possibility of three Members of Parliament concurrently looking for marriage in a single issue of a matchmaking periodical and concludes that most of these ads were 'obviously of the kind known in American parlance as "Bogus"'.[11] Many reputable newspapers refused to print matrimonial ads at all and in the rare cases they did, like in an 1867 issue of *Reynolds's Miscellany*, it made sure to stress that it was a reprint 'from the New York *Waverley Magazine*, a very respectable literary periodical'.[12] *Bow Bells* frequently answered readers' questions about love and social propriety, but drew the line at placing ads, declaring them 'immoral and indelicate' and stating that 'no respectable young man would take unto himself a wife through such a

[10] 'Matrimonial Advertisements', *The Examiner*, 13 November 1875, p. 1274.
[11] 'Matrimonial Advertisements', *Examiner*, 13 November 1875.
[12] 'Matrimonial Advertisements', *Reynolds's Miscellany*, 18 May 1867, p. 350.

medium'.[13] *Matrimonial News & Special Advertisement*'s emphasis on 'honourably' bringing potential lovers into communication was likely a direct response to these barbs. Its paradoxical reproach of the 'cold formalities of society' preventing possible love matches while presenting itself as a respectable means of courtship can be read as an attempt to legitimize advertising for love, even as it criticized the very framework its argument is supported upon.

Concerns over matrimonial advertisements were not entirely unfounded. As with online dating, there were a fair share of horror stories ranging from identity fraud to murder. In 1853, a man known as Captain Johnson was trialled for defrauding a woman of several railway shares and evidence suggests that he intended to use his matrimonial advertisement to lure in more victims.[14] The murderer William Corder also used ads as bait. Shortly after killing and burying the body of his former lover in a Suffolk barn, Corder advertised for a wife in the *Morning Herald* and *Sunday Times*. He received forty-five replies, one of which was from Mary Moore who married him before the discovery of the mutilated corpse.[15] The Red Barn murder of 1827 was a large reason why many reputable newspapers refused to run matrimonial advertisements. A reporter covering Corder's murder trial described the case as an example of the dangers of matrimonial advertisements, which could be written by 'speculative, sensual, and sordid men, whose aim is to obtain a mistress, or a fortune, rather than a wife'.[16] Overwhelming publicity over the case prompted *The Times* to publish an editorial reassuring its readers that it rejected several hundred matrimonial ads each year to maintain the paper's suitability among family circles.[17] Corder's alleged last words cautioned

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[13] 'Notice to Correspondents', *Bow Bells*, 29 November 1865, p. 419.
[14] 'Matrimonial Advertisements', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 23 January 1853, p. 2.
[15] Matthew Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction after the Invention of the News* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 60.
[16] James Curtis, *The Mysterious Murder of Maria Marten, in Suffolk* (London: Thomas Kelly, 1828; repr, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 255.
[17] Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers*, p. 61.

his wife against seeking a new husband via advertisement because it was 'a most dangerous way of getting a husband'.[18]

However, as evident by the emergence of multiple matchmaking periodicals in the late nineteenth century, the public was not to be deterred from this novel courtship medium. In fact, when the editor of the *London Journal* removed matrimonial advertisements from its 'Notices to Correspondents' section between September 1857 to July 1859, the magazine's circulation plummeted and he was made to resign.[19] Matrimonial advertisements, thanks to improvements in discourse systems such as photography and the postal network, were here to stay.

New Media and Romantic Relationships

Matrimonial advertisements are only one example of how technological innovations drastically altered courtship in the Victoria period. The post was not a new invention, but penny postage's impact on nineteenth-century communication methods was so revolutionary, it deserves to be classified as an innovation. All of a sudden, anyone could afford to send letters to a distant sweetheart instead of being parted by silence in addition to distance. The average person could carry around a carte of their beloved whereas in the past, only the rich had the funds to commission a portrait. Later in the century, the advent of the electric telegraph would enable lovers to hold a typewritten conversation in real time as a predecessor to modern-day texting. The phonograph offered the possibility of recording a paramour's voice to replay it over and over again—akin to our instant messaging apps' voice messages. The telephone picks up where the telegraph left off and offered the ability for far-flung lovers to hold a verbal conversation in real time. Each advance in communicative technologies

[18] 'Execution of William Corder', *The Scotsman*, 16 August 1828, p. 3.
[19] Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage*, p. 83.

enriched and complicated the courtship process, in addition to making long-distance dating more feasible and accessible to the masses.

This thesis argues that new media technologies' impact on real-life romantic relationships opened the door for authors to portray new modes of desire and intimacy in nineteenth-century fiction. While a variety of new media will be discussed, I will be primarily focusing on transmission systems that are related to, or adapt, writing and printing, namely photography, the post, and electric telegraphy.[20] Paper and the printing press were obviously precursors to some of these developments, but will not be examined at length due to word constraints. Photographs, letters, and telegrams share a common denominator in their capacity to substitute an absent beloved, which enables amorous connections to develop or intensify without the need for in-person scenes. An individual's presence is not confined to a physical body, but can be transferred and embodied by an inanimate object. The metonymic ability of new discourse systems can be used to obstruct relationships as well. To use a colloquial example, photographic nudes can be used to facilitate sexual intimacy between partners, but they can simultaneously be used for revenge pornography. Increased access to information, by courtesy of a changing media landscape, is a double-edged sword, capable of both propelling and disrupting romantic pursuits.

A central aspect within my investigation is mediation, specifically how presence, feelings, and interpersonal relationships are mediated by new media. The term mediation typically refers to the process in which a neutral third party tries to resolve a conflict between disputing parties. My argument defines the term in a metaphorical manner and characterizes mediation as the process in which a media form acts as a go-between between two parties. I look at how a sweetheart's presence is generated *through* the medium, how communication passes

[20] I interpret daguerreotypes (early photographs) as a form of printing in that an image is replicated onto a copper sheet, not unlike the printing press process.

through the medium, how feelings are stoked or dulled *through* the medium, and how personal connections are forged *through* the medium. The traditional meaning of the word mediation evokes an in-betweenness that fits well with my argument on new discourse systems' influence on interpersonal relationships, and its association with conflict resolution complements my selected media's polarizing reputation with both improving and complicating communication. While certain transmission mediums like letters can feel as unmediated as in-person conversation (with Elizabeth Barrett Browning claiming, 'thanks warmest & truest, my dearest Miss Mitford, for your delightful letter, which is certainly delightful, as it made me feel just as if I were sitting face to face to you, hearing you talk'), I contend that all communications and connections facilitated by media technologies are mediated to a certain extent, whether due to the medium's physical shape, means of usage, human operators, or cultural associations.[21] Conflicting connotations also mean that media forms are not easily exchangeable with each other in amorous narratives. One of my upcoming chapters, for instance, argues that although photographic portraits and painted portraits can visually depict the same individual, they are portrayed and viewed as very different mediums due to their social connotations. In line with my attention to emergent media technologies' cultural associations, I do not intend to merely examine the implications of media-mediated romantic relationships, but rather expand my scope to include broader considerations about gender, legislation, institutions, labour and professions, and socio-economic conditions. Any technological innovation inevitably makes ripples across different elements of society and in order to accurately analyse why new media are represented or perceived the way they are, we must simultaneously examine the link between personal relationships and new discourse systems within the context of larger societal concerns, such

[21] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Letter 1715, EBB to Mary Russell Mitford', in *The Brownings' Correspondence*, ed. by Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson, 28 vols (Winfield: Wedgestone Press, 1984), IX, 136-139 (p. 138).

as the proto-feminist New Woman figure or surveillance techniques by the reformed Post Office.

Metonymic substitution on the part of media technologies is not a wholly new phenomenon since handwritten letters and painted miniatures have long been mooned over as metonymic objects; and theoretically, it could work with any item of sentimental value, like a store-bought teapot gifted on Valentine's Day. I maintain, however, that my selected media innovations influenced courtship in ways their predecessors did not, because they have a stronger metonymic capacity yet are considered less personal at the same time.[22] Photographs can provide an accurate representation of the subject that is free from the bias of an artist's brush, but their sentimental value is challenged by the fact that photographs could be replicated and distributed to multiple suitors. Even before the arrival of technology that could lift multiple copies from one photographic negative, photography had connotations as coldly objective, which affects the meaning of using photographs as romantic gifts. Postal letters are usually handwritten and carry an identifiable trace of the flesh-and-blood hand that once passed over its pages, but the postal reform that brought about penny potage and improved mail circulation also created a highly efficient postal network that threatened to leech the personal letter of its privacy and sentimentality. Telegrams resemble a conversation in real time due to their speed, but the invasive necessity of a middleman telegraphist to receive messages made the process less intimate and might deter conversing parties from unabashedly expressing their feelings. Photographs and letters likewise have middlemen (photographers and postal personnel respectively), which may weaken or disrupt their ability to stand in for a loved one. Given that these new media are paradoxically considered highly

[22] Lindsay Smith specifically points out that photographs work differently from keepsakes like a ribbon or a lock of hair, because the former functions more in a metonymic relation to the original while the keepsakes operate more as a synecdoche (a part standing in for a whole). A photograph 'is a whole standing for a whole'. Lindsay Smith, *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children and Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), p. 60.

metonymic yet less personal, they can be used to strengthen long-distance romantic relationships, while simultaneously enabling flirting from a safe distance or more emotionally guarded forms of courtship. The protagonist of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), for instance, prefers engaging in epistolary romances because the physical distance provides reassuring detachment alongside emotional fulfilment. Photographs, letters, and telegrams allow lovers to be close from a distance, which is multifaceted in itself due to each medium's usage and associations, or to forge a new form of romantic connection in which physical distance is pertinent to their closeness.

While I mentioned the marriage plot in my thesis title since it is one of the most common romantic frameworks in Victorian fiction, I do not intend to limit myself to examining relationships that conclude—or aim to conclude—in marriage, but instead broaden my scope to include how media innovations facilitated or enhanced relationships that do not necessarily prioritize a wedding as the end goal. To focus exclusively on happy conjugal endings, as Galvan and Michie point out, ignores the vast array of unhappy marriages in fiction and also oversimplifies the narrative and structural intricacies that are abound within Victorian literature.[23] Matrimonial advertisements prove how emergent media technologies enable amorous relationships that go against the traditional grain. Despite their name, these adverts were not always posted by individuals looking for serious courtship; some simply wanted 'fun, fact, and fancy' or 'to while away the dull hours of business life'.[24] Romantic dalliances that do not aim for marriage have existed long before the nineteenth century, but I contend that new discourse systems like photography, the reformed postal network, and electric telegraphy made it easier, safer, and more enticing for individuals to engage in these non-

[23] Galvan and Michie, *Replotting Marriage*, pp. 4-5.
[24] 'Matrimonial Advertisements', *Reynolds's Miscellany*, 18 May 1867.

conventional connections. I also intend to look at already wedded couples to further bolster my argument on new media's impact on amorous relationships beyond the marital milestone.

Fiction does not always portray emergent media innovations in an accurate light (either due to creative licence or technical misunderstandings), and analysing their representations and re-imaginings reveals contemporary opinions on new media's benefits and detriments in addition to what Victorians wanted or expected from advancements in discourse systems. Telegraphy's shortcomings were often emphasized in fiction in glaring contrast to the flood of positive commentary that downplayed its privacy concerns, which not only shows how imaginative writing can be an equally valid source of information as historical documents, but also demonstrates the strong desire for private instantaneous communication that likely led to the telegraph's disappearance from public use. To that end, I will additionally point out ways in which fiction anticipated certain technologies and helped shape larger cultural understandings of them before they even entered the public mind. I treat fictional texts as an information system in itself, one that evolved alongside other communication methods of the era in a reciprocal chain of influence—fiction inspiring new technological realities and vice versa. One of my chapters reads Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) as an early, far-flung fantasy of what electric telegraphy could be, that being a telepathic meeting of the minds between lovers. I view the link between literature and social commentary as especially potent in the nineteenth century, which reinforces why the former was chosen as my source material. As Pauline Nestor argues in *Female Friendships and Communities*, the repeated focus on public morality in literary reviews, in addition to the mingling of fact and fiction with novels drawing on blue-books for inspiration, all confirm fiction's relevance regarding contemporary debates.[25]

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[25] Pauline Nestor, *Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 3.

My thesis is a response to the lingering stigma against online relationships (romantic and platonic) that paints them as less genuine or emotionally intimate because of the lack of physical contact. People have become more open-minded towards virtual connections in recent years, but it is still a controversial topic and discussion is reignited whenever romance scams occur. 'How can you fall in love with someone you've never met?' some articles implore and shake their heads at the foolishness of the victims. The writers of those articles would also be the type to tut that people never meet the old-fashioned way anymore, such as through friends or school—methods where physical interaction is guaranteed. I hope that my project will demonstrate the naivety of romanticizing the past and that the Victorians were more tech-savvy in relation to courtship than we commonly believe. A historical approach to social media can dispel modern misunderstandings regarding dating apps. Texting, selfies, voice messages, phone calls, and video chats are viewed as an ordinary aspect of dating these days, and this type of romantic engagement began in the nineteenth century when media innovations made it possible. The controversy of matrimonial advertisements and contemporary contrasting opinions on various emergent media technologies demonstrate that, no matter what century we live in, people will always complain about technology destroying the personal aspect of human relationships. The truth is relationships adapt to and evolve alongside new media technologies, and vice versa. My intervention in the field is particularly timely due to the coronavirus pandemic, which drastically altered the way humans interact with each other and relevant social norms. Weddings and funerals can now be held via video conference, whereas in the past, such a 'venue' would be considered odd or disrespectful. We already acknowledge that there are multiple genders, sexualities, and relationship models (i.e. polyamory), and I hope that my project will convince a few more minds that there is more than one way to express intimacy.

Representing Presence Through Absence

At the risk of sounding like a sceptic, how do new media technologies like letters, telegrams, and photographs enable couples to fall in love or experience passionate feelings with minimum physical contact? All of them seem to substitute and manifest an individual's presence to varying degree, which allows intimacy to blossom and romantic relationships to form across long distances, but this does not adequately explain the metonymic association. As Jacques Derrida claims, presence relies on and is the result of complex organization of assumptions and strategies.[26]

I am hardly the first to ponder the question of media technologies' illusionary presence. There is an abundant scholarship on digital presence and many of its concepts can be applied to the nineteenth-century communication systems within my research scope. Ron Tamborini and Paul Skalski claim that 'presence can be understood as a psychological state in which the person's subjective experience is created by some form of media technology with little awareness of the manner in which technology shapes this perception'.[27] Matthew Lombard and Teresa Ditton offer six conceptualisations of the term presence: 1) social richness (which measures the degree in which a media form is considered sociable or intimate when used to interact with other people), 2) realism (which asks whether a medium produces a lifelike representation of a person), 3) transportation (which refers to the user's perception of being transported to another realm, like reading an engaging book or occupying a shared virtual space with other netizens), 4) immersion (which is produced by media technologies that plunge us into a virtual landscape, like a VR headset, and blocks out the real world), 5) social

[26] Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 3-27 (p. 26).
[27] Ron Tamborini and Paul Skalski, 'The Role of Presence in Electronic Games', *in Playing Video Games: Motives, Responses, and Consequences*, ed. by Peter Vorderer and Jennings Bryant (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), p. 226.

actor within medium (which refers to the extent to which media users view a celebrity's media presence as real and able to impact the spectator's actual social environment), and 6) medium as social actor (which occurs when media users respond to a medium as if it were a social entity, like Siri from Apple products or Amazon's Alexa devices).[28]

For written mediums specifically, Esther Milne's aptly named book *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence* comes to mind. She defines presence as an effect achieved through communication, not necessarily what is material and corporeal. It can be evoked by eclipsing or disembodying the material medium through which one communicates, so that transmission appears unmediated. This creates a 'psychological closeness' and aligns presence with intimacy and disembodiment.[29] Milne adds that readers construct an 'imaginary, incorporeal body' for their correspondents and this imagined body is sometimes considered 'more real, more expressive of the writer's emotions and soul' as opposed to the actual body encountered in face-to-face communication.[30] Ruth Perry similarly argues that lovers in epistolary relationships 'summon up images of each other, without need for the visible presence of the other, and then react joyfully to their own creations'.[31]

Although I will not be examining any epistolary novels in my project, the topic warrants some mention here of the genre's role in establishing the letter as a media format that can represent a seemingly lifelike individual. As Joe Bray demonstrates, the epistolary genre has largely been treated as an isolated episode in the history of the novel, limited to the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, but it is fundamental to the novel's development in

[28] Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton, 'At the Heart of It All: The Concept of Presence', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3 (1997) <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue2/lombard.html> [accessed 27 April 2022].
[29] Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), p. 2.
[30] Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email*, p. 2.
[31] Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS, 1980), p. 101.

representing consciousness and interiority.[32] The marriage plot in one of the most famous epistolary novels, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), flourishes due to Pamela's employer Mr. B discovering and reading her letters and realizing Pamela's psychological depth. His access to her transcribed thoughts on paper allow him to recognize her as an individual, creating a bond between the two-dimensional letter with the three-dimensional writer. The letter is Pamela, and Mr. B sees her in a new light as a result. Ian Watt, on Richardson, contends that the epistolary form provides 'a short-cut, as it were, to the heart', creating a richer and more realistic portrayal of his characters' inner lives. [33] He adds that 'there are many equally probable and perhaps more interesting characters in literature before Pamela, but there are none whose daily thoughts and feelings we know so intimately'.[34] Speaking more generally on the genre's ability to represent consciousness, Perry states that 'the reader was meant to believe that the characters in such epistolary fictions were transcribing uncensored streams of consciousness. Thoughts are seemingly written down as they come, without any effort to control their logic or structure. Characters talk to themselves, reflect, think out loud—on paper'.[35] Mary Favret complicates the letter form, arguing that 'we accept too readily the notion that the letter allows us a window into the intimate, and usually feminine, self'.[36] To echo Bray again, simply viewing letters as uncensored stream-of-consciousness ignores the subtlety with which epistolary novelists can probe characters' minds and locate tensions within the subjectivity of the self that they can reveal.[37]

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[32] Joe Bray, 'Introduction: Consciousness, the Novel and the Letter', in *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness*, ed. by Joe Bray (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-28 (p. 1).
[33] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 195.
[34] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 176.
[35] Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, p. 128.
[36] Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 10.
[37] Bray, 'Introduction', p. 10.

As for the photographic medium, Susan Sontag's influential *On Photography* illustrates that a photograph is both a 'pseudo-presence and a token of absence'.[38] John Tagg argues that in order to understand what make photographs meaningful, we must look towards the 'unconscious processes… through which the photograph can incite a phantasy, take on a meaning, and exercise an effect'.[39] In a similar vein to Sontag, Christian Metz reads the photograph as a fetish object due to its small size, possibility of a lingering look, and symbolic protection against loss.[40] The fetish means both loss (symbolic castration) and insurance against loss, just like the photograph preserves a moment in time but also acts as a reminder of the ceaseless march of time.[41] Metz also cites Charles Sanders Pierce's definition of the index to explain photography's sense of nearness. Pierce defines indexical as the 'process of signification (semiosis) in which the signifier is bound to the referent not by a social convention (= 'symbol'), not necessarily by some similarity (= 'icon'), but by an actual contiguity or connection in the world: the lighting is the index of the storm'.[42] Photographs are prints of real objects and hence closer to the pure index. Meanwhile, Di Bello likens flirtation with the act of exchanging photographs: 'I am giving you of myself, in the form of a photograph, and you can do what you like with it; but it is not me'.[43] It draws attention to the self (look at me) while hiding (look at the photograph). Giving a miniature would have the same effect, but Di Bello contends that a photograph, as an 'emanation from the photographed body', makes the exchange more 'poignant'.[44] She concludes that gazing at a

[38] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 16.
[39] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 4.
[40] Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', *October*, 34 (Autumn 1985), 81-90 (pp. 81, 84).
[41] Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', p. 84.
[42] Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', p. 82.
[43] Patrizia Di Bello, 'Seductions and Flirtations: Photographs, Histories, Theories', *Photographies*, 1 (2008), 143-55, (p. 150).
[44] Di Bello, 'Seductions and Flirtations', p. 150.

photograph in the absence of its pictured subject achieves simultaneously having and not having the subject.

Derrida's 'metaphysics of presence' is also applicable in considering the link between a subject and its depiction through a media form. The concept deconstructs the hierarchal system of binary opposites where one term is dominant and the second is subordinate, like good/evil, light/dark, masculine/feminine, presence/absence, or signified/signifier. Derrida challenges hierarchical binary pairings and instead argues that neither term is primary; oppositions play off each other. For Derrida, the most pervasive example of this is the privileging of speech over writing. Supposedly, speech is more authentic and 'present' because the speaker immediately verbalizes thoughts as they materialize, whereas writing is more remote and 'absent'. However, Derrida points out that spoken words are mediated by language just like writing. In addition, since he suggests that linguistic meaning is determined by an infinite 'play' of differences between words, the meaning of a word is never completely present; it is constantly deferred.[45] In the context of my argument, this means everything is mediated to a certain degree because there is no transcendental signified. Even a living, breathing human cannot escape representation, either through self-perception or through others' eyes. This unsettles the dichotomy between subject/media depiction. To paraphrase Amanda Bell, 'representational absence' like a photograph 'becomes a form of presence'.[46]

My research addresses an unexplored area of presence scholarship, that being romantic relationships. The prevalence of the internet in our lives means that critics tend to gravitate towards examining digital presence and de-emphasize the physical medium through which

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[45] Derrida, 'Différance', pp. 3-27; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Spivak (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email*, p. 13; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Deconstruction', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/deconstruction#ref222928> [accessed 28 April 2022], (Deconstruction in philosophy); Amanda Bell, 'absence/presence', *The Chicago School of Media Theory* <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/absence-presence/> [accessed 28 April 2022].
[46] Bell, 'absence/presence'.

communication occurs, as Milne, Tamborini, or Skalski do. To paraphrase Elizabeth Edwards's observation on photography studies, the dominant trend in presence scholarship often prioritizes what the medium shows rather than what the medium is.[47] While this approach is suitable for generic social connections, it is inadequate for analysing romantic relationships that are conducted through media technologies due to the importance of physicality to non-platonic love. Physical intimacy is not necessary in friendship but is considered indispensable in romantic love, which is why a waning sex life is often viewed as a sign of a dying relationship and why long-distance relationships rarely last. I argue that physicality, in courtships conducted through discourse systems, is instead *relocated* or *negotiated*. By relocation, I mean rather than stroking the face of one's beloved, one instead would stroke their photograph, their letter, or their telegram. Some may contend that this framework is outdated or even contradictory since I likened Victorian media innovations to dating apps earlier. My approach is still applicable to digital media though; physicality is simply relocated to the relevant device: imagine someone clutching their phone to their chest in happiness when their crush texts or touching their partner's image on a glowing computer monitor. There are critics that do highlight materiality when discussing presence like Metz who brings up photographs' small size, but my approach is more sophisticated because I concurrently consider the media technology's cultural connotations which affect the mental process of relocating physicality from the beloved's body to the representative object. One of my chapters, for instance, examines the transformation of the private and sentimental letter into a public, impersonal item due to the postal reform. As for negotiating physicality, I mean that a sweetheart's metonymic presence can eclipse the physical medium to create the illusion of seamless interaction, but their presence is still mediated by the media format to some

[47] Elizabeth Edwards, 'Thinking Photography Beyond the Visual?', in *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, ed. by J. J. Long, Andrea Noble and Edward Welch (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 31-48 (p. 36).

extent. As mentioned earlier, I will be paying attention to how presence is mediated through photography, the reformed postal system, and telegraphy in addition to their respective middlemen (photographers, postal workers, telegraphists). All these media are capable of producing metonymic presence, but do so in dissimilar ways (due to its material form or its connotations) and serve different romantic functions. A discourse system's connotations can also be influenced by its physical shape—or lack thereof like the telegraph's promise of bodiless information versus its middleman telegraphist that is required to transmit said bodiless information. Relocation and negotiation work in tandem to create situations in which romantic bonding can occur 'non-physically' through my selected transmission systems.

My project also applies Sontag, Metz, and Di Bello's observations on the photograph as a paradoxical metonymic object (the image is simultaneously the depicted and not the depicted) to the postal letter and telegram, but I develop their argument further through my contention that media innovations led to new ways of expressing desire and intimacy. Mentioned earlier, the metonymic presence generated by new discourse systems enable individuals to engage in more casual or guarded models of courtship. For the latter, the absence of in-person interactions and relocation of physicality from the beloved to the media format brings emotional closeness because the individual prefers a level of detachment in their relationships. This bolsters my point on how emergent media technologies were not merely used to combat distance for parted lovers, but their non-physical factor was considered advantageous for some people.

The nineteenth century is the prime time period for examining media-generated presence. As Richard Menke proclaims, the link between technology and literary imagination is 'headiest and most revealing when a technology is new and unfamiliar'.[48] Works like Standage's The

[48] Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 81.

Victorian Internet and Jay Clayton's *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace* have traced modern technological marvels back to the nineteenth century to show how that time period continues to shape the present, and I intend to build on their ideas with regard to dating apps and the media technologies that gave rise to that courtship model in the Victorian period.[49]

Technology, Gender, and Matters of the Heart

Similar to presence scholarship, research on emergent media technologies in relation to nineteenth-century literature is plentiful, but the connection between these advancements and romantic relationships is a field that has yet to be thoroughly studied. This is surprising given communication technologies' obvious influence on courtship in real life, like the trend of matrimonial advertisements and newspapers. Speaking on photography specifically, Geoffrey Batchen speculates that a general lack of academic attention regarding ordinary, commercial photographic practices might have been a contributing factor to this scholarly gap.[50] As for the post and electric telegraphy, their ability to connect distant lovers may be perceived as self-evident in the scholarly world, which is why there are few monographs devoted to investigating the ramifications of mediated communication in amorous relationships.

Most existing criticism discuss new media and romantic relationships separately, considering either new media and literature or frameworks like the marriage plot. Elizabeth Meadows and Jay Clayton's journal article '"You've Got Mail": Technologies of Communication in Victorian Literature' discusses what they call a 'technological imaginary'.[51] They advocate for a 'generative', rather than 'dehumanizing', view of communication technologies and

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[49] Jay Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 5.
[50] Geoffrey Batchen, 'Ere the Substance Fade: Photography and Hair Jewellery', in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 32-47 (p. 32).
[51] Elizabeth Meadows and Jay Clayton, '"You've Got Mail": Technologies of Communication in Victorian Literature', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. by Juliet John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 458-75 (p. 460).

contend that the human-technology intersection provided authors with new forms of representing interiority in Victorian literature.[52] Their argument coincides with Friedrich Kittler's ruminations on how new transmission systems created 'discourse networks' that shape the representation and consciousness of the subject.[53] Nicholas Daly too dabbles in this intersection in his book *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000*, arguing that the sensation novel acclimatizes readers to industrial modernity through its employment of suspense.[54] Alexander Welsh's *George Eliot and Blackmail* promotes a more paranoid perception of new media and its resultant information culture. He reports that the blackmail plot reveals Eliot's awareness of the danger faced by individuals in an era of rapid information circulation.[55]

As for romantic matters in literature, one only needs to look towards scholarship on the marriage plot to glimpse its vastness. The marriage plot, which often revolves around sexual intimacy and ardent feelings, has been looked at from a kaleidoscope of angles, including female friendship and homoeroticism (Sharon Marcus's *Between Women*), incest (Mary Jean Corbett's *Family Likeness*), male-male relations (Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men* and Holly Furneaux's *Queer Dickens*), capitalism (Elsie Michie's *The Vulgar Question of Money*), delayed sexual gratification (Claire Jarvis's *Exquisite Masochism*), and even non-romantic fulfilment (Talia Schaffer's *Romance's Rival*).[56] Marlene Tromp's *The Private Rod* and Lisa

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[52] Meadows and Clayton, 'You've Got Mail', p. 459.
[53] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. by Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).
[54] Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 7.
[55] Alexander Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. vi.
[56] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Mary Jean Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2008); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985; repr 2016); Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Elsie B. Michie, *The Vulgar Question of Money: Heiresses, Materialism, and the Novel of Manners from Jane Austen to Henry James* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Claire Jarvis, *Exquisite Masochism:*

Surridge's *Bleak Houses* do focus on the close ties regarding unhappy marriages and contemporary law and newspapers. Sensationalist journalism, with its focus on violence against working-class women, paved the way for middle-class realist representations.[57] However, they revolve entirely around newspapers and do not cover other forms of media that I plan to tackle in my research, like photography and telegraphy.

My project addresses the scholarly gap with regard to the relationship between new media and romantic relationships. Technology undeniably altered the lives of ordinary Victorians, but matters of the heart were an integral part of their society long before the first daguerreotype. Jill Galvan and Elsie Michie contend, for example, that marriage 'encompasses any number of emotional, sexual, and familial situations, adding up to much more than simply the union of one man with one woman'.[58] It is a 'discursive condition that cannot be lived or imagined from other conditions'.[59] Elizabeth Langland also convincingly argues that women and the domestic hearth were overwhelmingly associated with virtuous decorum and as codified behaviour became signifiers of higher society, this made women symbolic guardians of the class system.[60] Mary Poovey links the female domestic ideal to nationhood itself, claiming that the former 'helped legitimize both England's sense of moral superiority and the imperial ambitions this superiority underwrote'.[61] Romantic matters are irrefutably embroiled with other foundational aspects of Victorian life. Therefore, in order to

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Marriage, Sex, and the Novel Form (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016); Talia Schaffer, *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[57] Marlene Tromp, *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 2-3; Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 17.

[58] Jill Galvan and Elsie Michie, 'Introduction' in *Replotting Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, ed. by Jill Galvan and Elsie Michie (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2018), pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

[59] Galvan and Michie, *Replotting Marriage*, p. 4.

[60] Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 26.

[61] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 9.

adequately investigate emergent media technologies' impact on the Victorians, we must also shine a critical light on their influence on amorous relationships in contemporary fiction.

Though all the aforementioned works on presence, marriage, and media technologies played a role in shaping this project, Menke's *Telegraphic Realism* and Kate Thomas's *Postal Pleasures* were the most influential. Menke suggests that literature responds to new discourse mediums through literary realism and that imaginative writing represents, mimics, and reimagines reality, such as the famous 'celestial telegram' in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847).[62] His work heavily influenced my own project's relationship to realism. My selected fictional texts (which will be detailed in the next section) contain both literal depictions of new media technologies, like the doctored photograph in Thomas Hardy's *A Laodicean* (1881), and metaphorical representations, like Catherine and Heathcliff's 'telegraphic' bond in *Wuthering Heights*. However, even the more realistic representations of emergent discourse systems do not always follow the rules of orthodox realism; the altered photograph in *A Laodicean* is used to trick someone, which is generally a sensationalist plotline rather than a realist one. This 'imagined reality' (I borrow this term from Menke) reflects concerns Victorians had about photography in the real world, that being photographic fraud and loss of control over one's image.[63] Analysing the gap between imagined realities and realist possibilities of transmission mediums illuminates how Victorians considered media innovations or what they anticipated from improvements in communicative technologies. As for *Postal Pleasures*, Thomas's monograph on postal fiction in connection to sexual relations touches close to what I want to accomplish and helped me conceptualize the impact of institutions, like the reformed Post Office, and the cultural imagination on literary

[62] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, pp. 3, 80.
[63] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 7.

representations of the postal letter as well as amorous epistolary connections.[64] My work differs from hers through my examination of different types of media (photography, postal letters, and electric telegraphy) and wider scope of amorous connections: while her work is centred around the queer perspective, my project looks at both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships. My wider scope allows me to pay closer attention to the gender politics that plague heterosexual relationships. Gender issues also appear in gay and lesbian relationships, but are more pronounced in male-female romantic pairings due to the contemporary social environment that places more restrictions on women as opposed to men.

The junction between gender and technology is a priority in my research. While Victorian gender ideologies undoubtably affected men alongside women, I largely focus on issues related to the latter because marriage as a social institution disproportionately impacted women over their male counterparts. The 1851 census revealed a surplus of half a million women over the male population, which sparked concern and commentary like W.R. Greg's 1862 essay titled 'Why Are Women Redundant?'.[65] He found the increasing number of single women 'quite abnormal' and expressed concern over these women 'who, not having the natural duties and labours of wives and mothers … are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own'.[66] Greg further identified unmarried women as a 'problem to be solved, the evil and anomaly to be cured'.[67] His solution was to ship them abroad to the colonies where there was a corresponding excess of men.[68] The very word 'redundant' in the title derides unattached women as superfluous and unnecessary. For middle-class women especially, pressure to get married was both social and economic for they were not raised to

[64] Kate Thomas, *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[65] Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage*, p. 151.
[66] W.R. Greg, 'Why Are Women Redundant?', *National Review*, 28 (1862), 434-60 (p. 436).
[67] Greg, 'Why Are Women Redundant?', p. 440.
[68] Greg, 'Why Are Women Redundant?', p. 443.

anticipate labour.[69] Financial necessity did often drive middle-class women to work for a living, but they were expected to quit their jobs following marriage. To use female telegraphists as an example, they were highly sought after by the Post Office in no small part due to the assumption that they would retire once married, so they would not accrue pay raises from stacked years of service.[70]

I explore the ways in which technological advancements gave women authorship over their lives. My use of the term 'authorship' is deliberate. New communication technologies granted women more control over their lives in terms of employment and personal fulfilment. To use photography as an example, the invention offered women opportunities for 'artistic and scientific expression' in areas such as botany when most scientific organizations were closed to them.[71] In a few of my examined texts like Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), this newfound power is further expressed through a female character aspiring to the role of narrator or author. The heroine starts a photography business with her sisters after falling onto hard times and her photographic gaze is pitted against a misogynist artist's in—what I interpret as—a war of narrative control. Narration has always been a form of both control and communication, so it is unsurprising that it has become a method of representing female agency in the technological imaginary. Advancements in technology was not only a democratizing force for the masses but, as I aim to demonstrate throughout my thesis, helped level gender inequalities as well.

Chapter Outline

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[69] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 126.
[70] Hilda Martindale, *Women Servants of the State 1870–1938: A History of Women in the Civil Service* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938), pp. 17-18.
[71] Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 29.

As I plan to focus on various media's effect on romantic relationships, my thesis will be structured thematically as opposed to chronologically or by novelist or genre. It will be divided into two sections. The first, 'Uploading Your Dating Profile Picture', focuses on photography and spans three chapters. The second, 'Messaging Your Matches', revolves around textual communication mediums (letters and telegrams) and totals two chapters. This sequence deliberately imitates modern dating apps, where a user picks potential love matches via photographs before texting the other party. Through this structure, I hope to illustrate that while dating apps appear to be a modern invention made possible through advanced technology, their core components can be traced back to the nineteenth century.

The following chapter, 'When Old Meets New', looks at photographic portraits in relation to their predecessor, painted portraits. Both mediums have similar romantic uses by depicting the likeness of a loved one and/or acting as a temporary substitute for the absent subject. In spite of these similarities though, texts that feature both photography and portraiture tend to portray them as completely different mediums with contrasting associations. Portraiture is utilized to represent the old and traditional, while photography represents the new and modernity. As such, the two cannot be readily supplanted for the other. Thomas Hardy's *A Laodicean* and Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* are examined in this chapter, novels that not only prominently feature portraiture and photography, but also thematically revolve around the clash between tradition and modernity. Regarding the first text, I argue that the novel's thematic conflict between old and new primarily plays out through its marriage plot, which sees romantic interests being furthered by events related to portraiture, but stalled by events related to photography. Despite photography's adverse representation, I maintain that Hardy's novel ultimately advocates for modernity due to the destruction of Stancy Castle, the symbolic seat of tradition and portraiture. For the second, I analyse the link among photography, narration, and repression and argue that Levy's novel, which has been criticized

by scholars as a failed New Woman text, is actually a complex portrait of modern womanhood. The protagonist Gertrude aspires to supersede character to attain the role of narrator, which is achieved through her photography work and embrace of the New Woman lifestyle. Her photographic gaze is pitted against the misogynist artist Sidney's artistic vision in an overt challenge of tradition. Critics point to Gertrude's forfeit of photography and New Womanhood for domestic bliss as the novel's feminist failure, but I read the progression from employment to marriage as a prototype of the modern career woman.

'Beyond the Borders of a Photograph' examines photographs and its related inventions, like the stereoscope, and analyses the ways in which these photographic mediums complicate physicality by substituting their subjects and manifesting their presence despite their absence. I also speculate on whether different photographic media have varying metonymic capacities. The texts examined in this chapter are relatively obscure and were selected over more canonical works due to their narrative focus on seldomly featured photographic media as opposed to an ordinary *carte*. In my discussion of the anonymously written short story 'The Photograph' (1859), I argue that the photographs' lifelike properties are enhanced by their stereoscopic nature. The main character relies on her fiancé's stereoscopic photograph for comfort during his voyage and is hence conditioned to adapt a state of mind where she views optical illusions as real. Consequently, when she sees her fiancé's ghostly features during a magic lantern show, she dies of fright on the spot. I will be looking at two other short stories as well: Charles Allston Collins's 'Her Face' (1858) and E.W. Hornung's 'A Spoilt Negative' (1888). In the former, the male protagonist become obsessed with a photograph and stalks the pictured woman. The story ends with their marriage despite the woman showing no sign of romantic interest to the last. She becomes his possession like the photograph, eerily replicating the courtship practice of giving photographic self-portraits as romantic gifts. 'A Spoilt Negative' sees its protagonist torn between two opposing identities—the photographer

and the gentleman—which is reflected by his desire to take a good photographic negative of his beloved and his subconscious desire to romantically be with her. This conflict is ultimately resolved by a ruined photographic negative, which results in him entering a courtship with her and symbolizes his reconciled identities.

The last chapter on photography explores the medium as the double. Titled 'Me, Myself, and the Photographic "I"', I contend that photography offers writers new ways of imagining and conveying doubling in literature. Characters project their transgressive desires onto a photograph and that image, regardless of who is pictured, becomes the double. Photography makes the link between the doubles more intimate due to its illusory physicality. The double does not possess its own corporal body and is simply a projection of the character's self. Photographic doubles from Thomas Hardy's short story 'An Imaginative Woman' (1894) and Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* (1875) are examined in this section, and I conclude that both figures embody what the texts' female protagonists refuse to voice or has been repressed. There are other works in the period that also engage in photographic doubling, but these two texts specifically feature wives who are dissatisfied with their lives and demonstrate how new media can be utilized to improve existing conjugal unions. In the first section, I argue Ella's passionate love for her literary idol is secretly a yearning for artistic excellence and to escape from domesticity. Moving onto Collins's novel, photography works alongside common sensation fiction tropes like unstable identities and false appearances to communicate that ideal femininity is performative. Valeria's quest to save her marriage conceals radical, implicit messages about female autonomy and selfhood beyond domesticity. This chapter does not dominantly examine emergent media technologies' mediation of romantic relationships, but gives equal attention to the contemporary socioeconomic and institutional conditions in which this process occurs, specifically within a gender framework.

The fourth chapter in this monograph is titled 'Cupid's Letter-Bag'. It examines the postal letter's ability to convey presence and substitute the absent writer following the establishment of the Postage Act in 1839. The reformed Post Office transformed the letter (usually considered private and sentimental) into a public, impersonal object that is mechanically passed through multiple bodies before arriving at its destination. Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and Anthony Trollope's *The Three Clerks* (1857) will be studied in this chapter. Both novels showcase the reformed postal system's institutional power and prominently utilize epistolary means to advance their respective romantic narratives, with *Villette* in particular demonstrating how new media nurtured non-conventional relationships that did not prioritize marriage. The section on Brontë's text argues that Lucy adopts a postal approach to her life through surveillance tactics and through mediating communication between participants of marriage plots, the latter of which enables her to experience strong feelings without fully committing. Lucy's intervention is not depicted negatively though, but rather as welcome and essential to achieving romantic happiness, which reinforces the link between emergent discourse mediums and romantic relationships in the postal age. As for *The Three Clerks*, I interpret it as Trollope's love letter to the Post Office, which he worked at for two decades. The plot, which follows three government clerk protagonists and their frankly cliché marriage plots, frames institutional control over new communications systems like the postal network as beneficial to the public and emphasizes the bureaucratic organization's function in assisting sentimental links. *The Three Clerks*' depiction of Trollope's real-life disapproval of competitive examinations for the Civil Service and Charley's reluctance to marry a barmaid, however, carries an undertone of classism and weakens its representation of an egalitarian regulatory system for discourse mediums that services everyone, even those in far-flung rural areas. The end result conveys an arrangement that serves all, but must only be managed by

‘gentlemen’, a frustratingly vague Trollopian term that aligns with the novel’s determination to associate the impersonal institution with facilitating sentiment.

The final chapter is called ‘Love is in the Wires’ and analyses fictional portrayals of the electric telegraph after its invention in 1837. Like the last section, I look at the telegram’s ability to substitute the physical presence of the sender, but with an emphasis on the figure of the eavesdropping telegraphist and how this third party impacts two-person romantic communication. Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and Henry James’s novella *In The Cage* (1898) were chosen as this chapter’s primary texts due to their conflicting representations of telegraphy. The former is set in the technologically primitive moors and features a metaphorical representation of the telegraph; while the latter is a canonical text in telegraphic studies and contains a female telegraphist as its protagonist. I interpret Catherine and Heathcliff’s bond as telegraphic because her famous declaration of love for Heathcliff, ‘Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same’, suggests that their souls are not constrained by physical bodies. This mimics the telegraph’s ability to send a message while its material form stayed behind. The quote also taps into a common fantasy about telegraphy, that being it is capable of transmitting thoughts. Catherine and Heathcliff’s doomed romance, partially caused by Nelly’s interference, suggests the impossibility of unmediated communication without any chance of misunderstanding and foreshadows the privacy risks that come with necessitating middlemen in telegraphic communication. The section on *In The Cage* argues that its unnamed protagonist’s dissatisfaction with her life leads her to invent a romantic narrative for Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen, in which she is an important component. She oscillates between the roles of heroine and author in their relationship, the former as a telegraphist seeking a better love match and the latter as a telegraphist that interferes in her customers’ lives through purloined intelligence. This liminal position ultimately results in disaster because she will only ever be viewed as an eavesdropper.

Expanding on text selection, these works were chosen to ensure a diverse mix of canonical and non-canonical texts. I have deliberately excluded some well-known texts, like Charles Dickens's novels which have often been analysed in relation to new media technologies, in order to leave room for lesser-known texts like Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* which has been studied less frequently but carries equal analytical value in terms of examining emergent media and romantic relationships.[72] I also apply new frameworks to canonical favourites in Victorian studies, such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* which has never been read in connection to electric telegraphy. Short stories are frequently overlooked in favour of novels as primary texts in monographs, but I dedicate an entire chapter to examining the former because its constrained word count means that if new media technologies are featured in the narrative, they typically become the focus of the narrative as in the cases of the 'The Photograph' or 'A Spoilt Negative' where the titles reflect the respective media's prominence in the stories, rather than a subplot like in Hardy's *A Laodicean*. The focality of the media technology enables me to study how presence and romantic relationships are physically mediated by the medium, like the protagonist's heightened delusion in 'The Photograph' as a result of the shape of the photographic stereoscope. Novels sometimes draw attention to the materiality of new discourse systems, but largely focus on institutional and cultural concerns, such as the impersonal aspect of the reformed postal network. Analysing both novels and short stories will produce a comprehensive view of how emergent media influenced romantic relationships physically and metaphorically.

[72] Charles Dickens has been read in connection to the postal system (Rachel Herzl-Betz, 'Reading England's Mail: Mid-Century Appropriation and Charles Dickens's Traveling Texts', *Dickens Quarterly*, 30 (2013), 131-140; and Christopher M. Kierstead, 'Going Postal: Mail and Mass Culture in Bleak House', *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 17 (2003), 91-106) and the periodical press (Melisa Klimaszewski, *Collaborative Dickens: Authorship and Victorian Christmas Periodicals* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019); and Jessica Valdez, 'Dickens's "Pious Fraud": The Popular Press and the Moral Suasion of Fictional Narrative', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44 (2011), 377-400), just to name a few examples.

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Section 1: Uploading Your Dating Profile Picture

Chapter 1: When Old Meets New

In an oft-cited example of portraiture in nineteenth-century British literature, Emma Woodhouse from Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815) misrepresents her friend Harriet in a drawn sketch. Emma, in an attempt to set up Harriet with her social superior Mr. Elton, has her sit for a painting while he attends them. She embellishes the drawing, adding 'a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance' (39).[1] As she draws, Mr. Elton fidgets behind her and watches every touch. Emma attributes his positioning to a desire to gaze freely at Harriet, but as readers later find out, it is Emma he is interested in and hence Emma he was staring at.

The scene, emblematic of Emma's failed matchmaking effort, is essential to the novel's marriage plot. It sets the stage for Harriet's crush on Mr. Knightley and Emma's own subsequent realization that she loves Mr. Knightley and wants to marry him, leading to their final blissful marital union. The scene also reveals depths regarding characterization and inter-character relations. Emma's desire to improve Harriet is reflected in her aesthetic improvement, and her added height in the portrait demonstrates Emma's wish to advance Harriet's social station through a good match. Those desires, in turn, are connected to Emma's arrogance, which leads to the novel's climax: insulting the genteel but financially poor Miss Bates at the Box Hill picnic. Painting is additionally a form of creation not unlike writing, and the act of painting Harriet, creating a new character through those aesthetic enhancements, places Emma in the role of narrator or author. D.A. Miller has argued Emma's perspective intermingles with the narrator throughout much of the novel, such that it appears Emma aspires to leave behind character and become narrator, or achieve 'Absolute Style'. She wants to remain single in order to attain this position, but soon realizes that it is

[1] Jane Austen, *Emma* (New York: Signet Classics, 2008). I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

impossible because not to marry is to become a spinster, not a narrator. Societal pressure and expectation cause the Austen heroine to forfeit authorship ('style') for marriage ('self').[2] Moving to a different type of relationship, the portrait scene also reinforces the homoerotic undertone to Emma and Harriet's friendship. Drawing Harriet gives Emma the opportunity to gaze at her friend with an artist's 'steady eyes' (39). Her assessment of Mr. Elton's strategic positioning can readily be applied to herself. Much more can be said about this short scene, but I do not wish to divert my argument to any greater extent. My point is that this scene with Harriet's portrait is on par with Box Hill in terms of narrative importance and analytical value.

Emma was published in 1818 before the advent of photography. Would the scene have remained the same—provided the same narrative purpose and analytical weight—had Emma asked Harriet to model a photograph instead of drawing her? Could it? This chapter seeks to pursue these questions. More specifically, it explores the representations of photography and portraiture in texts published in the photographic age. Did one medium simply supplant the other? If not, how are the two portrayed and utilized differently in nineteenth-century amorous plotlines?

David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins, in their introduction of *Rethinking Media Change*, have argued for a collaborative, rather than competitive, view of evolving media systems. They relay that in instances of media transition, the relations between the emerging technologies and their ancestral systems are typically more complex, more congenial, and less abruptly disruptive than doomsayers forsooth. The established and new systems might co-exist for an extended period or the older media may develop new functions and seek new audiences as

[2] D.A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 45-47.

the emergent media begins to dominate its ancestor's cultural space.[3] In some cases, Thorburn and Jenkins continue, the competing media might even strengthen and reinforce each other, like the painted photograph, which seems paradoxical but was relatively commonplace in the nineteenth century.[4] The painted photograph amended its monochromy and predisposition to fade over time.[5]

With *Emma*, however, the differences between photography and portraiture are clear-cut. The former cannot possibly replace the latter in Austen's novel because beautifying Harriet's looks during the painting is entirely different from taking a photograph, then altering it through Photoshop, even if the image-editing program had been around in the nineteenth century. Even though a photograph can be similarly misleading, it is the process of drawing Harriet that partially gives the scene its significance, not purely the result. The differences and potential of substitution may be more subtle in other texts though, like Thomas Hardy's short story 'An Imaginative Woman', which I look at in chapter four. The protagonist has a photograph of her beloved and some might argue it could be replaced by a painted miniature (though I argue otherwise, as will be seen). The issue of photography versus portraiture will be a recurring theme throughout my thesis's first section, but the bulk of the discussion will be in this chapter.

I contend that even though painted portraits and portrait photography share pictorial similarities—or perhaps due to their similarities—texts that feature both tend to portray them as completely different mediums with contrasting associations. Portraiture is utilized to represent the old and traditional, while photography represents the new and modernity. As

[3] David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins, 'Introduction: Toward an Aesthetics of Transition', in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. by David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 1-16 (p. 2).
[4] Thorburn and Jenkins, 'Introduction', p. 3.
[5] Heinz K. Henisch, *The Painted Photograph 1839–1914: Origins, Techniques, Aspirations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 1, 11.

such, portraiture and photography in these texts are written in such a manner that makes it near impossible for one to readily supplant the other. I realize in advancing this stance, I risk falling into what Thorburn and Jenkins describe as the trap of focusing exclusively on competition and tension between two media systems and hence ignore the significant hybrid and collaborative forms that often emerge during periods of media transition.[6] I do not deny that there was often harmonious overlap between photography and portraiture in the nineteenth century, like hand-coloured photographs, but there was also undeniable animosity towards the former from supporters of old-school visual representation. Much of their hostility stems from an age-old fear of technology, but that fear is fundamentally related to the dread of what societal changes that new technology might bring and its impact on existing structures of power. In the past, only the upper classes could afford painted portraits and miniatures, the latter of which were small portraits of loved ones typically incorporated in jewellery that had been practiced from the late eighteenth century onward.[7] The invention of photography meant that even the poor could now own 'portraits', and the removal of such status symbols narrowed the gulf between the haves and have-nots. As photographer Andrew Pringle remarked, 'Fifty years ago what poor man had a portrait of his wife and children? What mother could look on a picture that reminded her of the features of a son in foreign lands? What lover could carry near his heart her portrait? Now, what cottage so lowly as not to have its portrait album? Art, or if you prefer it, portraiture, was then for the prince or plutocrat; it is now for all'.[8] Studying photography and portraiture side by side is more than a simple compare and contrast; it is a study into a changing social structure as the disadvantaged gain access to privileges previously denied to them and the turmoil that inevitably comes with a redistribution of resources. This will be explored most thoroughly in

[6] Thorburn and Jenkins, 'Introduction', p. 3.
[7] Batchen, 'Ere the Substance Fade', p. 35.
[8] Andrew Pringle, 'Convention address', *Photography*, 1 (1889), 486.

my analysis of Amy Levy's *A Romance of a Shop*, where I interpret the clash between photography and portraiture as the battle between proto-feminism and patriarchy.

The democratization of portraiture worried the upper classes enough to result in disparaging pieces that mocked the poor for desiring to be represented pictorially. An anonymous and untitled 1861 *Punch* illustration depicted an unkempt street-side photographer trying to convince two equally dishevelled workers to have their likeness captured.[9] Painters could generously alter their appearances, like Emma does for Harriet in Austen's novel, but photographers have a comparatively narrower margin for touch-ups. More importantly, the illustration plays off the snobbish assumption that affordable street-side photographers were unskilled hacks who would not possess the knowhow, or want to expend time, towards beautifying their customers' likenesses. A *Daily Telegraph* article published in 1858 further faulted photographers whose 'doorjambs are hideous with frames filled with vilely-executed photographs of men and women, of squalid and repulsive appearance; the practitioners are ignorant, coarse, and clumsy in manipulation; and the result is a collection of faces and figures that reminds us of the Chambers of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's'.[10]

Photography's artistic value in a realm accustomed to painted portraiture was a particular point of contention. Some believed the former improved upon traditional modes of visual representation. Photographic pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot, for example, defended the worth of his now infamous photograph of a broom leaning against an open stable door by identifying it with painting: 'We have sufficient authority in the Dutch school of art, for taking subjects of representation scenes of daily and familiar occurrence. A painter's eye will

[9] Dennis Denisoff, *Sexual Visuality from Literature to Film, 1850–1950* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 7.
[10] *Daily Telegraph*, 6 April, 1858, p. 5.

often be arrested where ordinary people see nothing remarkable'.[11] Others, however, barred photography from the fine arts or saw it as a threat, like illustrator Joseph Pennell who likened photography to painting as 'the man who sells margarine for butter, and chalk and water for milk'.[12] Lady Elizabeth Eastlake's 'Photography'—perhaps the most famous essay on the subject from this period—dismisses photography as art: 'Whatever appertains to the free-will of the intelligent being, as opposed to the obedience of the machine—this, and much more than this, constitutes that mystery called Art, in the elucidation of which photography can give valuable help, simply by showing what it is not'.[13]

Scholarship in our time tends to examine photography and portraiture separately, but through remarkably similar frameworks. Realism, an important aspect of art, is a major common denominator. There are numerous works on photography and realism and portraiture and realism individually. Sophie Andres provides an excellent account of Pre-Raphaelite art's influence on Victorian texts and the realist movement in *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel.*[14] Ruth Bernard Yeazell's *Art of the Everyday* centres on Dutch painting, which George Eliot famously referenced in her novel *Adam Bede* (1859) while justifying her writing about ordinary life and domestic realism. Eliot compares her faithful representation of everyday homely folk to the 'truthfulness' found in Dutch paintings.[15] As for photography, it has been overwhelmingly studied in connection to realism. Jennifer Green-Lewis's *Framing the Victorians* argues that photography has long since been a mediating point between

[11] William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844) <https://www.thepencilofnature.com/plate-6-the-open-door/> [accessed 1 June 2022].
[12] Joseph Pennell, 'Is Photography among the Fine Arts?', in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. by Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1981), pp. 210-13 (p. 212).
[13] Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, 'Photography', *The London Quarterly Review*, 101 (1857), 442-68 https://www.nearbycafe.com/photocriticism/members/archivetexts/photohistory/eastlake/eastlakephotography1.html [accessed 1 June 2022].
[14] Sophie Andres, *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel: Narrative Challenges to Visual Gendered Boundaries* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005).
[15] Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Art of the Everyday: Dutch Painting and the Realist Novel* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

romance and realism, while Nancy Armstrong's influential *Fiction in the Age of Photography* demonstrates that the novel's shift to pictorialism coincides with the entry of photography into contemporary culture.[16] Daniel A. Novak's *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* complicates the idea that literary realism aspired to the condition of the photograph by arguing that photographic manipulation, like composite photography, is essential to realism. A narrative chooses certain events to include, forming an aesthetic, coherent whole, just like art photographers used multiple models for a single picture.[17] The overlap between the academic fields of photography and portraiture regarding realism bolsters my decision to analyse the two mediums together in the same chapter. The two were intertwined in Victorians' minds, and modern scholars have repeatedly linked them as well. To understand how photography impacted romantic relationships, we must first understand how its predecessor portraiture impacted it. At the same time, studying the two media forms side by side better reveals what Victorians thought of and how they understood the transition.

The two texts analysed in this chapter were chosen not only because they utilize both photography and portraiture in their amorous narratives, but also because their main themes revolve around the clash between old and new. They were also published in the 1880s during the Victorian *fin de siècle,* a time period, as Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst note, that was marked by the collision between old and new, the Victorian and the Modern.[18] The first novel, Thomas Hardy's *A Laodicean*, revolves around a love triangle and the two male rivals' efforts mimic the tug of war between tradition/portraiture and modernity/photography. The second is less well-known but just as rich in analytic value: Levy's *A Romance of a Shop*. Its

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[16] Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 2; Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 7.
[17] Daniel A. Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 3-4.
[18] Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, 'Introduction: Reading the "Fin de Siècle"', in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880-1900*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. xiii-xxiii (p. xiii).

narrative pits the New Woman against the fallen woman figure in a proto-feminist triumph over conventional gender standards. The mix of canon and non-canonical works is particularly fitting given my chapter's subject matter and allows me to investigate underexplored topics in an underexplored text.

The Aristocrat and the Architect

The extended title of *A Laodicean* is *A Story of To-day*, hinting at the 'clash between ancient and modern' that lies at the crux of the novel (25).[19] Donguk Kim rightfully points out that *A Laodicean* is characterized by 'disjunctive doubling', which is manifested by the contrast between technological advancements and their old versions.[20] Obvious textual examples include letter and telegram, train tunnel and ancient castle, and of course, painting and photography. The battleground between ancient and modern is primarily reflected in the novel's marriage plot, consisting of the love triangle among Paula Power, George Somerset, and Captain De Stancy, in addition to William Dare who participates by helping Captain de Stancy's romantic pursuit. In general, portraiture in Hardy's novel is used to advance romantic interests while events involving photography leads to a setback. Paula's decision to marry Somerset signifies a median and collaboration between old and new. However, given Stancy Castle's destruction and delayed rebuilding in the end, I contend that the novel ultimately advocates for modernity as opposed to a simple stalemate. *A Laodicean* operates as a wistful love letter to the past while acknowledging the futility of clinging to nostalgia and promotes looking towards the future—no matter how bitter that decision may be.

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[19] Thomas Hardy, *A Laodicean: A Story of To-day* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008). I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

[20] Kim Donguk, 'Thomas Hardy's *A Laodicean*: Paula Power as an "Angel of History', *Thomas Hardy Yearbook*, 37 (2008), 3-14 (p. 3).

The heroine Paula is a ‘mixed young lady’ who perfectly embodies the overarching theme of competing ideologies (27). Not only is she romantically torn between Somerset and Captain De Stancy, but she holds and is associated with various opposing beliefs. She is the daughter of a famous railway contractor, the steam engine being emblematic of progression. She also installs telegraph wires at the ancient Stancy castle. At the same time, she possesses a romantic spirit and idolizes the De Stancys, the feudal bloodline that used to own the castle she now resides in. In Paula’s opinion, ‘feudalism [is] the only true romance in life’ (73). She is practical and modern-minded enough to erect a new clock that tells both hours and seconds (in line with the invention of uniform and accurate time to accommodate train schedules), but romantic enough to invest in ‘beautiful’ and impractical Hellenic pottery (27). Her surname ‘Power’ is appropriately multi-faceted to match her contradictory nature. The most obvious association is to electricity, one of the crowning jewels of scientific advancement. However, ‘power’ can also mean influence, which Paula has in abundance. She is rich, well-known, and the outcome of her love triangle indirectly validates the values each man stands for: Captain De Stancy representing the past and Somerset symbolizing the future. The novel is penned in such a way that Paula’s marital decision has great thematic power and tips the scale with regard to whether *A Laodicean* is pro-tradition or pro-modernity. Anticipating the potential anti-feminist implications of my argument, I want to clarify that I do not mean Paula’s value rests in whichever man she chooses, but rather it is her freedom to choose, and consequentially influence the text, that grants her power.

The novel’s clashing ideologies extends to its literary genre, which oscillates between realism and the Gothic. The latter is seen strongly in the scene where Paula asks a portrait to step down from his frame to keep her company, then withdraws her appeal almost immediately due to superstition: ‘Old paintings had been said to play queer tricks in extreme cases, and the shadows this afternoon were funereal enough for anything in the shape of revenge on an

intruder who embodied the antagonistic modern spirit to such an extent as she' (153-154). Haunted portraits are a staple in Gothic fiction, with Kamilla Eliot asserting that portraits and miniatures appear more frequently than 'monasteries, convents, secret passageways, orphans, ghosts, libertines, banditti, seduction, rape, shipwrecks, dreams, crossdressing, letters, and the discovery of lost relatives'.[21] In a novel all about the old versus the new, it is unsurprising that we should locate tension within its literary genre. The Gothic Romance enjoyed its vogue in the 1790s whereas the realist novel, which originated in the early eighteenth century, continued to be popular throughout the nineteenth century.[22] They are considered very different genres, with the former focusing on the supernatural and the latter striving to present a realistic view of the world. Yet, as scholars such as Robyn R. Warhol have proposed, Gothic elements can be found in even the most steadfast realist novels.[23] George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), one of the most famous novels of the category, has a blackmail plotline that contains hallmark Gothic characteristics, like an atmosphere of fear and the intrusion of past secrets on the present.[24] The realist novel is haunted by the Gothic, not unlike Paula who is a 'modern spirit' haunted by the feudal past.

Her fear that the paintings will come to life to exact revenge upon her represents the pervading presence of what Raymond Williams calls the 'residual' in modern times. The 'residual' refers to 'experiences, meanings, and values' formed in the past, but still influence the dominant culture in the present. Williams distinguishes 'residual' from the 'archaic', which is fully recognized as an element of the past and can be consciously revived on

[21] Kamilla Elliott, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 6.
[22] Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-20 (p. 1); Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 33.
[23] Robyn R. Warhol, 'Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36 (1996), 857-75 (p. 858).
[24] Hogle, 'Introduction', pp. 2-3.

occasion, but is not active in the cultural process the way the ‘residual’ is.[25] Part of the reason Paula yearns to be a De Stancy is to gain legitimacy for her ownership of Stancy Castle. Even though her father purchased the structure legally, there are still those who view it as the De Stancys’ rightful property and denounce her as an ‘iconoclast’ for ordering construction work (88). Paula belongs to the ‘new aristocrats’, a party that prioritizes money over noble blood, technology over tradition, but she is still hampered by residual values (347). The lingering power of the past, embodied by the De Stancys and their paintings, permeates the novel’s pages to the very end, as evident by its last line which is uttered by Paula: ‘I wish my castle wasn’t burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancy!’ (353). Modernity is the dominant culture, but that indecisive final remark demonstrates that it is impossible to fully eliminate the past’s influence on the present.

The past lives again through Captain De Stancy, whose ties to portraiture give him the initial advantage in the love triangle. His ancestral portraits at Stancy Castle are a visible reminder of feudalism, in part because they are a status symbol for wealth and influence, but also because they carry distinctive facial characteristics, like the ‘dinted nose of the De Stancys’, that can be traced back generations (20). Paula feels like an ‘intruder’ within the castle and turns to portraiture to legitimize her presence, like commissioning her own portrait and dressing as some of the ‘bygone beauties’ in the gallery (154, 54). Captain De Stancy leverages her desire to be a De Stancy and his connection to his ancestral paintings to woo her. He bears a ‘very traceable likeness’ to Edward De Stancy in particular, right down to the painted mole on his cheek (151). His resemblance has the desired effect for when Paula spots the ‘inherited’ mole, a ‘new and romantic feeling that the De Stancys had stretched out a tentacle from their genealogical tree to seize her by the hand and draw her in to their mass took possession of Paula’ (155). During the visit, Captain De Stancy takes up the ‘position of

[25] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 122.

exhibitor rather than spectator' and relays the history behind each portrait to his listeners (155). In doing so, he transforms himself into a 'host' as opposed to a 'guest' and reminds Paula that she can gain access to his family line via marriage (155). One of the depicted forebears has a particularly romantic but tragic backstory. Painted as a knight in full plate armour including a sword, this ancestor kills himself after the woman he loves chooses another. He composes some passionate verses with his own blood and directs them at her before doing the deed and the lady is so touched by his devotion, she wears his portrait in a heart-shaped necklace for the rest of her life despite her husband's prohibition. The tale transforms the artwork from a feudal symbol to emblematic of romantic love, which is what Captain De Stancy hopes to achieve. He also dons his ancestor's plate armour and poses in front of a painting frame with the sword afterwards. Looking like a 'man of bygone times', he appears a near replica as his deceased forefather and promises Paula the same dramatic devotion (157).

At times, the narrative seems to portray Captain De Stancy as a living, breathing portrait rejuvenated by Paula's entry into his life. Prior to her ownership of the castle, the paintings were neglected and left to decay, many of them 'dropping apart at their angles, and some of the canvas was so dingy that the face of the person depicted was only distinguishable as the moon through mist' (18). Captain De Stancy's life before he meets Paula was in similar decay. He had vowed to remain celibate to honour the memory of his illegitimate son's mother and resolves to live an uneventful life as a 'melancholy, unaspiring officer' (146). However, just as Paula restores the paintings in the castle, she restores Captain De Stancy to his former self. He begins to show interest in living again and symbolically breaks his vow to shun life's little pleasures by opening a bottle of 'ruby liquor' toast her (146). Red is the colour of blood, which is metaphorically pumping through his veins again. Before Captain De Stancy's visit, Paula had 'flippantly asked one of those cavaliers to oblige her fancy for

company by stepping down from his frame' (153). Captain De Stancy's arrival shortly after her request suggests that *he* is the portrait and here to alleviate her loneliness. He further poses as one of the paintings, 'his modern and comparatively sallow complexion' lending 'an ethereal ideality to his appearance which the time-stained countenance of the original warrior totally lacked' (157). The captain has become 'a man again' from her playful request for company, the promise of her love allowing him to exit the musty frame that was his celibate life into the real world (147).

Although Captain De Stancy is meant to be assuaging Paula of her guilt for owning the historic Stancy Castle, he too is haunted by the past in the form of his illegitimate son Dare, who is the antithesis of the ancient De Stancys and paradoxically causes the destruction of his lineage's future. Dare embodies a rapid, dangerous type of modernity that is completely unmoored from the past. He does not possess the famed 'inherited' De Stancy looks; in fact, his appearance eludes Somerset's attempt to reproduce it through a drawn portrait, a contrast to his father's 'traceable' features and the castle full of his ancestors' painted likenesses (155, 151). He has to alter his body through artificial means to identify himself as a De Stancy, 'a family on whom the hall-mark of membership was deeply stamped' (155). The tattooed letters 'DE STANCY' across his chest are as telling and 'deeply stamped' as the De Stancys' distinctive looks. His tattoo is his sole identifying feature about him. No one can pin down his age or nationality: 'I never can quite make out what you are, or what your age is. Are you sixteen, one-and-twenty, or twenty-seven? And are you an Englishman, Frenchman, Indian, American, or what?' (115). Given his fluid and indiscernible appearance, it is perhaps not too surprising that the only medium that can capture his image is photography. Somerset is unable to affix a 'satisfactory likeness' of Dare to paper, but gives the chief constable his photographic portrait for identification purposes (123). Jennifer Green-Lewis has detailed photography's complex relationship with authenticity and temporality. Many Victorians

lauded photography for its objective truthfulness and its capacity to freeze a fleeting moment in a permanent form, but a near equal number doubted its abilities.[26] Dare's slippery appearance cannot escape the camera's pinning gaze, though photography can hardly be characterized as an honest medium as evident by Somerset's doctored photograph. It is subject to manipulation, its unreliability reflecting Dare's false character. His inscrutable looks, alongside his illegitimate birth, also enhance his rootlessness. Dare has lived in multiple countries, including India, Malta, Gibraltar, the Ionian Islands, and Canada, and proclaims that he is 'at home anywhere' (115). He is a world citizen, completely at odds with the well-rooted De Stancys and their historic castle.

It is Captain De Stancy's involvement with Dare that tanks his romantic chances with Paula and leads to the obliteration of his family line. Had Paula and Captain De Stancy been left alone, they would have likely gotten married eventually, especially with her obsession with his lineage. Dare's artificial interference and desire to speed up a natural trajectory destroys his father's marital chances. He fakes a telegram and photograph to debase Somerset's character in Paula's eyes, and when she discovers the truth, Captain De Stancy protects his son by asking her not to contact the authorities, which results in the cancellation of their wedding. His surname Dare reflects his inclination towards risk and addiction to gambling. As Melanie East points out, Dare attempts to eliminate risk from gambling through studying a mathematical treatise on probability, Abraham De Moivre's *The Doctrine of Chances*.[27] However, his repeated losses at the casino demonstrate that gambling cannot be rationalized through science. With risk, there is always a chance for failure—which is exactly what occurs through his risky interjection in Captain De Stancy's courtship of Paula. The De Stancy line

[26] Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, p. 3; Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Victorian Photography, Literature, and the Invention of Modern Memory: Already the Past* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 25.
[27] Melanie East, 'A "Network of Hopes": the Romance of Gambling in Thomas Hardy's *A Laodicean*', *The Comparatist*, 38 (2014), 297-313 (p. 303).

was already in decay before Dare's involvement. None of its living members hold any interest in their familial history; Captain De Stancy only reads up on it in order to impress Paula. The paintings, representative of aristocratic longevity, are viewed as 'mere lumber' by Captain De Stancy's father, the patriarchal head of the family (35). Captain De Stancy's conjugal union with Paula, representative of a more moderate brand of modernity that respects the past, would have ensured his line's survival. However, in allying his 'worn-out old party' with swift, rootless, and ravenous modernity, Captain De Stancy guarantees his lineage's annihilation (347). Dare even burns Stancy Castle and all its ancestral furnishings at the end of the novel in an overt spectacle of the new consuming the old. Ironically, in choosing to save his progeny, Captain De Stancy destroys its continuation. We can conclude with near certainty that he will never seek to marry another afterwards. Charlotte De Stancy joins a nunnery at the text's close, so she will never bear children either. Dare, being illegitimate, cannot continue the family line. The De Stancy name will end with Captain De Stancy. The past cannot be fully eliminated, but it will not be a 'worn-out old party' that carries on its legacy into the modern age (347).

Captain De Stancy's romantic pursuit of Paula was doomed from the start because his first encounter of her is contaminated by the photographer's invasive gaze. John Tagg reads the camera as an instrument of surveillance, arguing that the second half of the nineteenth century sees the invention developing parallel with new practices of observation and record-keeping that were central to the development of disciplinary institutions, such as the police, prisons, hospitals, asylums, factories, schools, and reformatories.[28] Susan Shelangoskie conveys a similar point on photography's threat to privacy. Amateur photography violated the individual's right to physical autonomy and privacy in public spaces.[29] Copyright

[28] Tagg, *Burden of Representation*, pp. 74-77.
[29] Susan Shelangoskie, 'Domesticity in the Darkroom: Photographic Process and Victorian Romantic Narratives', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 24 (2013), 93-111 (p. 95).

legislation created a new but related set of problems as debate raged regarding whether a photograph belonged to its taker or its sitter—an important issue that will be discussed further in my analysis of Charles Allston Collins's 'Her Face' in the upcoming chapter.[30] Captain De Stancy unintentionally invades Paula's privacy and bodily autonomy by watching her exercise through a peephole that Dare created. She is oblivious to his voyeuristic gaze peering through the equivalence of a camera lens.[31] The funnelled view and limited scope of the hole also put in mind a photographic stereoscope or a peep show, both of which are common pornographic objects.

In all fairness, Captain De Stancy is unwittingly following Dare's instructions and the imagery he uses to describe the vision before him inclines towards portraiture. Calling Paula an 'optical poem', he likens her to Bona Dea, the Roman goddess of female fertility and the earth, and imagines her resting on a cloud instead of the silk net supporting her in reality (143). The noonday sun illuminates her face and figure to 'complete the picture of Grace personified' (144). The image Captain De Stancy paints resembles a Renaissance era painting, flush with colour, rather than a black-and-white photograph unmodified from its moment of capture. It suits a representative of romantic feudalism. However, his artistic vision does not eliminate the predatory means by which he gained access to her. In a later chapter, Paula must be cajoled into reluctantly giving permission for Captain De Stancy to photograph her painted likeness. He does not even get to photograph her but an artist's interpretation of her, which adds an extra layer of separation from the signified. Given Paula's reaction over a painted portrait, she certainly would not be happy if she learned that

[30] Shelangoskie, 'Domesticity in the Darkroom', pp. 96-97.
[31] While the photographer's violating peephole seems to be a twentieth-first-century concern due to modern photography's ability to capture unsuspecting subjects secretly and swiftly as opposed to Victorian photography's elaborate and carefully planned images, E.W. Hornung's 'A Spoilt Negative' (published seven years after Hardy's novel) about a photographer who hides in the bushes and covertly takes a photograph of his sleeping crush demonstrates that the voyeuristic peephole can be associated with Victorian photography and reflects contemporary concerns about the invention's intrusion on privacy.

Captain De Stancy had spied on her while she was wearing sheer athletic clothing and bending her body in compromising positions. Even though he has not actually photographed her, he is privy to an image of her that she did not consent to share—one that was made possible through the photographer's violating peephole.

Photography is generally portrayed negatively in *A Laodicean*, in no small part due to its linkage to the villainous Dare. Portraiture advances its amorous storyline, but photography always hinders it. The false telegram Dare sends in Somerset's name causes a small tremor in his relationship with Paula, but the fabricated photograph of Somerset looking drunk causes a seismic rift that leads to Paula proclaiming her favour for Captain de Stancy. Dare alters the image after learning that Somerset had endeavoured to pass along his own photograph to the authorities. The photographer, enraged that someone had dared to use his own craft against him, transforms the medium from an object of revelation (as photography's proponents would hail it) to one of deceit like himself. As for Captain De Stancy, he embarks on a project to obtain photographic 'duplicates' of the castle's paintings at Dare's suggestion, but is rebuffed 'somewhat coldly' by Paula when he asks permission to photograph her painted portrait (160-161). Paula eventually assents under his persistence, but in a manner that is 'severe and icy' (165). Her displeasure stems from the fact that photographic portraits were often given as romantic gifts and in allowing Captain De Stancy to possess a copy of her likeness, she unwillingly promises him a level of intimacy that she is not ready to commit to. The scene also underlines Dare's duplicity. Interwoven with Captain De Stancy's photographic ploy are conversations among characters that reveal the architect Havill's personal troubles. Havill is in competition with Somerset for the job of restoring Stancy Castle and obtains the contract by 'copying' the latter's designs (108). Captain De Stancy is photographing 'duplicates' of the gallery, and Paula tells Charlotte not to inform her brother that she complained about him for the matter is too trivial for 'repetition' (160, 162). These

phrases evoke photography's power of mechanical reproduction, which is mirrored in Dare's duplicitous character. Curiously enough, the De Stancys' distinctive facial features can be perceived as almost photographic in their replication throughout generations (20). Charlotte's face is even called a 'defective reprint' because her 'nose tried hard to turn up and deal utter confusion to the family shape' (20). The 'family shape' escapes the taint of photography through its association with romantic genealogy, which frames it in terms of feudal inheritance rather than clinical cloning.

The fake photograph of Somerset possesses such disruptive power because up until this point, the novel has tried to link appearance with identity. The De Stancys are identified by their characteristic looks. Dare's duplicity is reflected by his fluid looks and his secret identity as a De Stancy is literally inscribed on his body. Even Charlotte whose face is a 'defective reprint' of the family shape bears a resemblance to an effigy of a long dead ancestor (20). Paula opts for methods related to the visual when trying to fulfil her desire to be a De Stancy, like dressing up as some of the paintings' inhabitants and having her own portrait commissioned. Armstrong points out that Victorian fiction's turn to the pictorial in the 1850s meant that it had to reference objects that 'had been or could be photographed' in order to appear realistic.[32] In doing so, fiction 'equated seeing with knowing' and 'made visual information the basis for the intelligibility of a verbal narrative'.[33] Jonathan Crary argues that a 'reorganization of the observer' can be traced back further to the early decades of the nineteenth century, where vision was uprooted 'from the stable and fixed relations incarnated in the camera obscura' and relocated to the human body.[34] Using the stereoscope as a main site of analysis, Crary demonstrates how the apparatus made perception visible and contends

[32] Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, p. 7.
[33] Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, p. 7.
[34] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1990; repr. 1992), p. 14.

that vision is produced internally as the 'outcome of an interactional process within the subject' that makes the observer an active participant in the perceiving process.[35] The standardization of vision was achieved through its observers and the 'plural forces and rules composing the field in which perception occurs'.[36] Speaking on Thomas Hardy specifically, Penelope Vigar argues that a 'pervasive theme' that runs throughout all of his works is the 'contrast between appearance and reality, what life is *like* and what life *is*'.[37] Photography was an ideal tool for Hardy to explore this dichotomy, because it promises authenticity but does not always deliver. The fake photograph possesses 'all the cogency of direct vision' and Paula would sooner believe 'the sun could again stand still upon Gibeon' than the fact that photographs can be altered (259). This mindset is partially fostered by her belief in the direct connection between appearance and identity: the photograph must be real because the depicted individual looks like Somerset.

Charlotte is the catalyst for a rare instance in which photography is portrayed positively and embodies a more measured modernity like Somerset, but because her homoerotic interactions with Paula destabilize the main heterosexual marriage plot, she must be cast out of the narrative by the novel's end. The two women are 'more like lovers than maid and maid' (39). Charlotte is likened to a 'complete negative' like Dare is, but while the comparison to Dare refers to his unknowable appearance, Charlotte's refers to her blank personality. She is akin to an empty photographic negative, ready to be imprinted with an image. In this case, it is her love and admiration of Paula: 'Miss Power is looked up to by little De Stancy as if she were god-a'mighty, and Miss Power lets her love her to her heart's content' (39). Charlotte has little personality of her own beyond her affection for Paula. Her face does not match the De

[35] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 100.
[36] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 6.
[37] Penelope Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1974; repri. 2013), p. 18.

Stancy familial looks and would be 'decidedly plain', if not for a 'precious quality … a tender affectionateness which might almost be called yearning' (20). Her love for Paula is so strong, it makes a permanent mark on her physical appearance. This 'tender affectionateness' is comparable to the 'women of Correggio when they are painted in profile' (20). Her ties to portraiture do not identify her as a De Stancy, but reveal her feelings for Paula, a considerably more central part of her identity than her ancestors, whom she has 'never been able to give much attention to' (23). Charlotte is portrayed in a more positive light than her nefarious nephew and she slightly redeems photography's reputation by transforming it from an item of deceit back into an item of truth. It is Charlotte who discovers that photographs can be altered and indirectly exposes Dare's schemes. Her redemption of photography, alongside her hybrid looks that combine elements from both photography and portraiture, makes her a figure of restrained modernity to rival Somerset. She is also adept at telegraphic communication and uses the wires on at least one occasion to talk to Paula, while Somerset finds telegrams 'poor substitutes for letters' when forced to use them to maintain correspondence with Paula (223).[38] In this aspect, Charlotte is the more modern-minded marital choice over Somerset.

A lesbian couple is too progressive for this era though. Charlotte is neutralized by falling in love with Somerset and converting the queer love triangle (both Charlotte and Somerset love Paula) back into a heterosexual one (both Charlotte and Paula love Somerset). She is further banished from romantic consideration altogether by joining a nunnery towards the end of the novel and henceforth vanishes from its pages. Readers hear about, rather than see, her departure. She leaves behind a farewell letter to Paula as opposed to sending a telegram,

[38] Karin Koehler's reading of the novel's telegraphic elements is worth mentioning because it is similar to my argument on how Charlotte is an alternative choice to heterosexuality. Koehler reads telegrams as Paula's primary weapon against a 'romantic master narrative' that demands monogamous marital endings and female submission to male authority. For more, please see: Karin Koehler, *Thomas Hardy and Victorian Communication: Letters, Telegrams, and Postal Systems* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 147.

which would be more fitting considering its importance to their friendship. The letter as a media format is a relic of the past and must be vanquished to make way for modernity, just like Charlotte must be ushered out of the narrative for a safe romantic pairing.

Paula and Somerset represent a socially acceptable median between ancient and modern. Individually, they each have a foot in both worlds. Paula is the daughter of a famous railway contractor, but romanticizes feudalism and longs to be a De Stancy. More practically, she puts a great deal of faith in the physical training of the Greeks and builds a gymnasium to further female higher education.[39] She utilizes the past for a modern cause. Somerset acknowledges and admires the 'musical threads' that are telegraph wires, yet also admits they lack the personal touch of handwritten letters (14). His intended redesign of the castle does not bend an old building to the desires of the new civilization. Instead, he adds a new structure next to the existing one, 'harmonizing with the old; heightening and beautifying, rather than subduing it' (114). Paula's romantic preference for Somerset and eventual marriage to him symbolizes a balance between the old and new. Although the novel's final line is her half-seriously lamenting, 'I wish my castle wasn't burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancy', Paula does not choose Captain De Stancy; she agrees to his proposal only out of pity after his father's passing. She chooses Somerset, the median path, both science and art.

Ultimately though, *A Laodicean* pushes for modernity over a neutral median. Before Dare burns down the castle, he gives a remarkably self-aware speech aimed towards readers more than the person he is speaking to: 'We De Stancys are a worn-out old party—that's the long and the short of it. We represent conditions of life that have had their day—especially me …

[39] Patricia Marks points out that a major factor in the women's movement in the late nineteenth century was fitness for marriage and propagation. Reflecting a generalized scientific viewpoint, it helped redefine the Victorian conception of female beauty in a more realistic light. For more, please see: Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), pp. 27-28.

We are past and done for. Our line has had five hundred years of glory, and we ought to be content' (347). Paula and Somerset choose not to rebuild Stancy Castle and will begin their married life in a new house. Somerset adds Paula will soon recover from the 'warp given to your mind … by the medievalism of the place' and once more be a 'perfect representation of "the modern spirit"' (353). Paula promises she will 'keep straight on', following the ever moving train of progress and modernity. Her lament about her castle and Somerset's non-aristocrat lineage is just that—a lament. Victorians can be nostalgic for the past, but they must 'keep straight' or risk becoming obsolete like the De Stancy line. As Somerset says, Stancy Castle is beautiful in its decay and it is unhealthy to cling to medievalism. Through Dare, Hardy showcases the negatives of modernity, but through the ending, he glorifies it and cements it as the final lasting impression on readers' minds after they close the book.

Storytelling Through a Camera Lens

The battlefield between old and new is relocated to women's rights in Amy Levy's first full-length novel *The Romance of a Shop*.[40] The Lorimer sisters open a photography business to earn a living following their father's death, a venture that is denounced by their friends and relatives as 'dangerous and unwomanly' (23). Their craft, however, leads to respectable marriages for most of the sisters whereas portraiture, belonging to the old world, leads to Phyllis Lorimer becoming a fallen woman and later dying. Phyllis's fall is largely instigated by the misogynist artist Signey Darrell. His artistic gaze, representative of tradition and patriarchy, is challenged by Gertrude Lorimer's photographic one, emblematic of New Womanhood and evolving times. Their sparring gazes symbolize a tug-of-war for narratorial control as Gertrude struggles to define herself by her own terms as a fulfilled, independent woman instead of the prevailing pitiful, redundant woman stereotype advanced by Darrell

[40] Amy Levy, *The Romance of a Shop* (Fairford: Echo Library, 2018). I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

and Victorian society. Gertrude's ultimate triumph over Darrell in their fight for narratorial dominance signifies modernity's victory over tradition and gender equality winning over patriarchy. Like *A Laodicean*, *The Romance of a Shop* offers a relatively tempered brand of modernity and, in this case, feminism. Gertrude ultimately gives up her career in photography for marriage. The ending makes the proto-feminist text more palatable for mainstream audiences (hence ensuring that its message will be easier to spread) while maintaining a constant thread of female rebellion that continues through to the very last page.

Critics have generally been dismissive of *The Romance of a Shop*'s literary and feminist value due to its marital ending. Linda Hunt Beckman claims that it 'neither strives for profundity nor reaches for originality' despite its 'parodic' connection to Victorian realism.[41] Deborah Epstein Nord scathingly calls it a bad imitation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) with all 'four sisters searching for an appropriate husband' and bemoans that Levy 'does not know what to do with her independent, idiosyncratic heroines … and resorts to killing off the beautiful, "fallen" sister and marrying off the remaining ones'.[42] Deborah L. Parsons agrees and contends that Levy 'backs down from the implied female radicalism by concluding the girls' stories with the conventional endings of marriage or fall and death'.[43]

Elizabeth F. Evans is one of the few outliers who contend that Levy's compromised representation of modern womanhood is more complex than scholars have acknowledged.[44] Evans reads the Lorimer sisters as the shopgirl, which was one of the new occupations that

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[41] Linda Hunt Beckman, *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 158.
[42] Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 202.
[43] Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 93.
[44] Elizabeth F. Evans, '"We Are Photographers, Not Mountebanks!": Spectacle, Commercial Space, and the New Public Woman', in *Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, ed. by Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 25-46 (p. 26).

popped up for women in the late nineteenth century and was a socially ambiguous figure that blurred the boundary between private and public.[45] Although I concur with Evans's assessment on *The Romance of a Shop*'s feminist potential, I interpret the sisters as the more general New Woman as opposed to pigeonholing them as the shopgirl figure. The New Woman largely emerged from economic need rather than desire. The imbalanced male-female ratio in the national population meant that marriage as a financial support system was no longer readily available to every single woman.[46] Many had no choice but to join the workforce in order to earn a living. Eventually, the New Woman became an attractive if controversial alternative to conventional female identities, such as the pitiful spinster or the domestic angel.[47] Common traits assigned to her by the press were: educated, mannish, career-oriented rather than marriage-oriented, desired suffrage, short-haired, and adopted rational dress.[48] I make this distinction from Evans's shopgirl interpretation because I am more interested in the sisters' initial prioritization of work over marriage rather than the public aspect of their career path (publicness being a trait shared by both the New Woman and the shopgirl, but is much more fundamental in the latter).

Women in the labour force is not a rare subject matter in late nineteenth-century fiction, but what makes Levy's novel unique is that the Lorimer sisters not only work, they run their own business, situating themselves firmly in that part of the public sphere defined by financial gain and competition. As Evans states, the text is one of the few contemporary fictional depictions of female shop proprietors.[49] Gertrude explicitly proclaims the benefits of

[45] Evans, *Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, pp. 27-28.
[46] Marks offers a number of reasons that might have led to the imbalanced ratio, such as wartime casualties, higher infection rate of tuberculosis for men, and better health practices and medical supervision for women. For more, please see: Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, p. 26.
[47] Levy's novel was published in 1888 before the term 'New Woman' existed. However, Marks points out that the bob-haired figure of the New Woman had already begun to appear in prominent humour magazines as a comic icon in 1870s, which inadvertently promoted her cause and manners. For more, please see: Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, p. 10.
[48] Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, pp. 1-2.
[49] Evans, *Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, p. 31.

managing their own shop: 'Think of all the dull little ways by which women, ladies, are generally reduced to earning their living! But a business—that is so different. It is progressive; a creature capable of growth; the very qualities in which women's work is dreadfully lacking' (8). The 'women's work' Gertrude refers to is likely nursing or becoming a governess, two socially acceptable careers that masked the uncomfortable implications of women in the public sphere through nurturing roles. Those on the lower end of the social scale worked in factories, mines, or as seamstresses.[50] All paid poorly with little opportunity for financial or personal growth. Other socially approved alternatives to working was to emigrate abroad to find a husband or become a penniless dependent reliant on extended family, options given to and rejected by the sisters in favour of the 'progressive' but controversial decision to run a business.[51]

Working as a photographer allows Gertrude to ascend to a narratorial position of authority and freedom that is comparable to the liberties experienced by the New Woman. Gertrude is the main narrator, the other being an elusive 'I' narrator who appears infrequently and is never depicted on-page. Narratology emphasizes the 'voice', but a synonymous term would be the 'gaze', in alignment with terminology like 'point of view' or 'perspective'.[52] Green-

[50] Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, p. 26.
[51] Touched upon in the introduction chapter, female emigration to the colonies was expounded by various periodicals as a solution to the disproportion number of unmarried women. *Punch* painted a picture of domestic bliss abroad through an 1850 illustration titled 'The Needlewoman at Home and Abroad', which depicted a ragged woman in England being harassed by a well-dressed gentleman outside a gin shop, while her counterpart in the colonies played with her baby in a comfortable room with her farmer husband and son looking fondly on. W. R. Greg predicted female emigration would lead to more marriages back home because reduced competition for jobs would lead to fewer women turning to prostitution out of economic desperation. Men would hence be less likely to obtain illicit female companionship and be forced to turn to respectable marriages. Even the feminist *English Woman's Journal* supported the idea, arguing that sending women abroad would not only alleviate the immediate social crisis, but also provide long-term benefits like education, experience, and a higher standard of living. For more, please see: Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, p. 30; Greg, 'Why Are Women Redundant?', p. 460; A. James Hammerton, 'Feminism and Female Emigration, 1861-1886', in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. by Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977; repri. New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 52-71 (pp. 53-54).
[52] Gérard Genette bids us to ask 'Who is seeing' and 'Who is speaking' when considering narratology. The former refers to the character 'whose point of view orients the narrative perspective' and the latter refers to the narrator. The two often blend together in character-narrators like Gertrude. For more, please see: Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980), p. 186.

Lewis further augments my point, arguing that 'photography as a way of looking became increasingly present to the literary text'.[53] The narrator controls the narrative, similar to how the New Woman took control of her own narrative in the late nineteenth century. Akin to how a narrator possesses power over how characters and events are portrayed, the New Woman redefines her identity as a redundant woman and a female member of the workforce on her own terms. Sarah Grand's 1894 article, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', which first coined the term 'New Woman', criticized men for perpetrating the 'cow-woman' (the boring housewife) and the 'scum-woman' (the prostitute) for their convenience. Grand offered an alternative female identity that rejected those stereotypes: 'the new woman … has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's Sphere, and prescribed the remedy'.[54] Gertrude refashions herself as a self-sufficient New Woman who is not ashamed to work for a living and partakes in activities that would usually be denied to a middle-class woman due to propriety, like riding on the top floor of an omnibus.

The iconic omnibus scene aptly encapsulates the link between narratorial power and New Womanhood. Gertrude 'boldly' climbs to the top of an omnibus in defiance of social protocols that dictate that women sit belowdecks (28). The whole city is laid out before her vantage point and is described akin to a heart: 'the pulses of the great city could be felt distinctly as they beat and throbbed' (28). Atop the omnibus, with its lofty perch and panoramic vision, Gertrude can be viewed as a narrator presiding over its text with its numerous 'citizens.' Aunt Caroline, however, shames Gertrude 'down from her elevation' through a 'frozen stare of non-recognition', which installs in Gertrude a 'humiliating

[53] Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, p. 88.
[54] Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *The North American Review*, 158 (1894), 270-76 (p. 271).

consciousness of the disadvantages of her own position' (45). Gertrude's narratorial authority is momentarily dispelled; she becomes an object of the gaze instead of the gaze's source and suffers its accompanying consequences by internalizing her aunt's sexist opinion on her New Woman lifestyle. Though Aunt Caroline is swiftly if temporarily pacified, the scene demonstrates the weaknesses in Gertrude's narratorial gaze and her susceptibility to being hijacked. The New Woman is constantly fighting back against judgmental stares that strive to impose their own labels upon her. Gertrude's descent from the omnibus displays her tenuous confidence in her new identity and foreshadows her eventual forfeit of her photography career and New Womanhood for the more socially acceptable female identity as Lord Watergate's wife.

Gertrude's photography occupation holds significance beyond narratology lexicon like the 'gaze' and actively influences her narration style. There is an established tradition of considering narration from a photographic lens. Armstrong, whose argument was cited earlier, contends that novelists had to adhere to a new visual standard brought about by photography. Green-Lewis echoes this point and describes 'photography as a structuring principle or standard of truth to which the language itself aspires'.[55] Gertrude is a failed writer and her switch to photography to earn a living slyly symbolizes Victorian fiction's migration towards pictorialism. Her narration style inclines towards the visual through elaborate descriptions of landscapes and characters' physical appearances, or as David Wanczyk puts it: 'There is a narrative focus on vision, eyes, light, shadow, blurriness, clarity, colours, changing appearances, and contrast'.[56]

[55] Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, p. 35.
[56] David Wanczyk, 'Framing Gertrude: Photographic Narration and The Subjectivity of the Artist-Observer in Levy's *The Romance of a Shop*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 43 (2015), 131–48 (p. 132).

What makes Gertrude's narratorial gaze photographic is not mainly because of its pictorial leaning though, but because she channels the mechanical eye of the camera to turn herself into a similar unfeeling machine in order to repress unwanted emotions. Her narration is conspicuously in third-person rather than first-person; she divorces herself from the 'I', her personal desires. Lady Eastlake states that a key feature of photography is 'to give evidence of facts, as minutely and as impartially as, to our shame, only an unreasoning machine can give'.[57] Typically, to perform an action 'mechanically' is to do it without emotion or coherent thought. Whenever Gertrude does something 'mechanically' or is compared to a machine, she is simultaneously suppressing strong emotions. For instance, as Phyllis lies on her deathbed, Gertrude 'vibrated between the studio and the sick-room, moving as if in obedience to some hidden mechanism, a creature apparently without wants, emotions, or thoughts' (112). Romantic desire is included in the emotions Gertrude strives to repress. When Lord Watergate broaches the topic of their mutual attraction, she begins 'mechanically arranging some flowers in a vase' (123). Gertrude's aversion to romantic love stems from the New Woman's ties to the redundant woman. Before the term 'New Woman' appeared, she was called among other names 'Novissima, the Odd or Wild Woman, the Superfluous or Redundant Woman'.[58] The two identities, the New Woman and the redundant woman, have very different connotations even though they both refer to unmarried working women. The former was intended to be a feminist solution to traditional gender ideology, whereas the latter labels single women as pitiable and a problem to be fixed. Gertrude, in rejecting romantic desires, identifies herself as a New Woman who chooses career over marriage rather than a redundant woman who desperately yearns for a husband but cannot obtain one. Her

[57] Eastlake, 'Photography', https://www.nearbycafe.com/photocriticism/members/archivetexts/photohistory/eastlake/eastlakephotography2.html [accessed 29 June 2022].
[58] Lena Wånggren, *Gender, Technology and the New Woman* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 14.

decision is likely influenced by the societal expectation that women should cease working after marriage as well. This creates a mindset in which Victorian women feel as though they must pick one or the other: work or family—a conflict that continues in this century with modern women struggling to balance work and domestic expectations.

The biggest challenge to Gertrude's narratorial authority is Darrell, whose rivalling vision enforces traditional gender roles. Upon meeting his 'cold, grey glance', Gertrude became 'suddenly conscious that her hat was shabby, that her boots were patched and clumsy, that the wind had blown the wisps of hair about her face. What was there in this man's gaze that made her, all at once, feel old and awkward, ridiculous and dowdy?' (52). The more frequently she is subjected to 'his glance of cold irony', the more she finds herself 'beginning to take part not only against herself but also against the type of woman to which she belonged' (52). The 'type' of woman she belongs to is the New Woman and under his gaze, Gertrude does not feel liberated and economically self-sufficient; instead, she is reminded of her poverty and the disadvantages of not having a man provide for her. Like Aunt Caroline's 'stare', Darrell's 'glance' strips Gertrude of her claimed identity and forces her to adopt his impression of her. Narrators get to frame events to their liking and this is how Darrell chooses to see Gertrude's New Woman lifestyle: an old, unattractive woman who cannot get a husband and is forced to scrabble for pennies. His gaze is more powerful than Aunt Caroline's due to his gender. Gertrude still struggles with internalized sexism, like having a 'lost reputation' or, in this case, bowing to male authority (46). Darrell's lavishly decorated home, demonstrative of his eminent social status and the exact opposite of the Lorimers' tight financial circumstances, actively obstructs her narration within that space. Instead of describing her surroundings in photographic detail like usual, Gertrude finds herself in 'a position badly adapted for taking stock of the great man's possessions' and 'only carried

away a prevailing impression of tiger-skins and Venetian lanterns' (51).[59] He also looks like a more trustworthy narrator. His appearance is a 'masterly combination of the correct and picturesque', whereas Gertrude's good looks 'varied from day to day, almost hour to hour' (51, 5). Like *A Laodicean* attempts to link physical appearance to identity (only to manipulate the connection towards the end), *The Romance of a Shop* too tries to mislead readers through characters' outward appearances in addition to utilizing them to great symbolic effect. Darrell's 'correct' appearance contrasts against Gertrude's unstable good looks, which suggests that his narratorial gaze—his version of reality—is more accurate than hers.

Under Darrell's rival narratorial gaze, Phyllis is transformed from a modern woman helping out at the photography studio to a pliable artist's model who suffers the fatal consequences of a 'lost reputation' (46). She becomes a passive object to be gazed upon rather than an active producer of images. Paintings are far more subjective in representation than photographs and more rooted in the creator's vision, which enhances his influence. Darrell initially promised to paint Phyllis as herself, but instead paints her as Cressida from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. In the play, Cressida swears to be faithful to Troilus, but when she is sent to the Greek camp as part of a hostage exchange, she betrays him by flirting with the general Diomedes. Phyllis becomes a fallen woman like Cressida by entering an illicit relationship with Darrell despite knowing that he is married. Modelling itself touches dangerously close to prostitution because both occupations utilize the body as a commodity. As Erin V. Obermueller reveals, the Royal Academy used to hire prostitutes as models.[60] Darrell sends Phyllis expensive presents like sweets and gallery tickets as an 'indirect means of paying his

[59] Susan Sniader Lanser has postulated that a 'major constituent of narrative authority' rests on the narrator's 'social power'. Darrell enjoys a dominant position in society due to his gender and wealth, and his opinion on matters is consequentially valued more than the voice of the often-ridiculed New Woman. This social authority translates to narratorial authority. For more, please see: Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 6.
[60] Erin V. Obermueller, 'The Artist's Model in Mid-Victorian Women's Fiction', *Women's Writing*, 11 (2004), 55-72 (p. 57).

pretty model', and the exchange of material goods for use of her body pushes Phyllis even closer to the line separating modelling from prostitution (74). Phyllis originally detests Darrell's 'sort of eye; prominent, with heavy lids, and those little puffy bags underneath', which signifies her rebelling against his imposed vision of her, but repeated exposure to his gaze chips away at that dislike and makes her yearn for his gaze, willingly seek to be his mistress. When Phyllis runs away from home to elope with Darrell, Gertrude finds her—not hurriedly packing or getting ready for travel—but modelling for him at leisure, basking in his gaze. In alignment with Armstrong's argument on Victorian fiction's shift towards visuality, Phyllis's transformation is reflected upon her body in viewable ways. Gertrude sees 'somebody new and strange; not the pretty child that her sisters had loved, but a beautiful wanton' (108). Even her hair changes colour from brown to 'gold in the light of the lamp swung above her' (108).[61]

Gertrude's determination to save Phyllis from further disgrace triggers the restoration of her narratorial authority, which is unsurprisingly accomplished through a literal staring contest with Darrell. Phyllis's modelling sessions take place away from Gertrude's watchful eye; Fanny Lorimer is appointed to chaperon, but Phyllis secretly models for Darrell unsupervised as well. Fanny obviously fails in her duty given that she never detected Phyllis and Darrell's flourishing bigamous relationship, but seeing as Gertrude herself finds it difficult to stand against Darrell's rivalling narratorial authority, Fanny, who is described as a 'large and superannuated baby', stood no chance of countering his 'cold, grey glance' (6). Gertrude's 'short-sighted eyes' failed to predict Phyllis's actions, but there is no weakness in her

[61] Audrey Linkman contends that Victorian photographers preferred natural daylight over artificial lighting due to the latter's tendency to produce 'harsh shadows and strong contrasts'. The artificial lighting in Darrell's apartment conveys the inauthenticity of the situation and emphasizes that Phyllis is located far away from the safety of her sisters and the photography studio. To read more on lighting in relation to Victorian photography, please refer to: Audrey Linkman, 'Taken From life: Post-Mortem Portraiture in Britain, 1860–1910, *History of Photography*, 30 (2006), 309-47 (p. 334).

'glowing eyes' when she barges into Darrell's house to bring her wayward sister home (5, 108). The opulently decorated room that once impaired her vision now 'smote on her sense with a curious familiarity', signifying that she is no longer intimidated by his greater social status (107). Darrell 'glare[s]' at Gertrude, his 'prominent eyes, for once wide open' instead of lidded, in order to unleash the full force of his narratorial power to cow Gertrude into submission like before (108). Gertrude meets 'his glance with eyes that glowed with a passion yet fiercer than his own'. For a brief while, the 'silent battle raged between them' until Gertrude realizes that 'she, not he, the man of whom she had once been afraid, was the stronger of the two' and Darrell 'drop[s] his eyes' in defeat (108-109). Gertrude regains narratorial authority over Darrell once she realizes she does not need to accept his misogynist perception of the New Woman. She removes all the extravagant things that Phyllis is wearing, such as the diamond rings and a 'loose, trailing garment, shimmering, wonderful, white and lustrous as a pearl' that Gertrude conceals under a cloak, in an attempt to revert Phyllis back to a respectable New Woman through altering her outward appearance (108). Although Phyllis can never be restored to the 'pretty child that her sisters had loved' due to what Deborah Anna Logan coins the 'once fallen, always fallen' maxim, she somewhat returns to her old self thanks to Gertrude's intervention, as witnessed by her telling Darrell that she should not have come to his house (108).[62]

Phyllis's death marks one of the more conservative moments in the text. It follows Nina Auerbach's observation that fallen women always die in Victorian fiction because 'death rather than marriage is the one implacable human change, the only honourable symbol of her fall's transforming power'.[63] Amanda Anderson connects the word 'falleness' to narrative

[62] Deborah Anna Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p. 17.
[63] Auerbach continues that the fallen woman is occasionally brought to the edges of the family, which hints at the interchangeability of the fallen woman and the virtuous wife. However, the uneasy implications of fluid feminine identities mean the fallen woman will always be isolated from the hearth in the end. She is ostracized

itself, observing that such individuals in the Victorian novel find their lives following a 'downward path' from the moment of their perceived sexual transgression.[64] As Evans notes, Phyllis suffers the 'quintessential Victorian female death' from consumption.[65] Her health has always been poor, but her condition worsens through constant coughing and unnaturally bright eyes as the plot progresses throughout the novel, her physical body mirroring her moral deterioration. Her death is punishment for her sexual transgression. Darrell warns Gertrude that taking the medically delicate Phyllis home midst a snowstorm may very well kill her, but Gertrude does so anyway, intoning, 'I think I have killed her … and if it were all to be done again—I would do it' (110). Gertrude's admission suggests that being a fallen woman is a fate worse than death, a conservative mindset that idolizes female sexual purity and dilutes the novel's forward-thinking stance on gender roles.

The Romance of a Shop admittedly goes back on its radical position on the New Woman towards the novel's end by having Gertrude give up her photography work for conventional domesticity. Phyllis's death functions as the trigger for it makes Gertrude realize she is ill-suited for the matriarchal duty of protecting her family, and she admits 'how weak she was, for all her struggles to be strong' (127). She is tired of being a 'strong-minded woman' and resents that 'the world, even when represented by her best friends, had labelled her' as such, despite having fought so hard against Darrell to be recognized as she currently is (127). When Lord Watergate confesses his love for her, Gertrude lets herself be held 'as one holds a tired child' and looks into the 'lucid depths of his eyes', feeling 'all that was mean and petty and bitter in life fade away into nothingness; while all that was good and great and beautiful

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from a social context and cast in ready-made roles as the 'destitute and drowned prostitute or errant wife cast beyond the human community'. For more, please see: Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 161, 159.

[64] Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 9.

[65] Evans, *Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, p. 38.

gathered new meaning and became the sole realities' (128). She willingly gives up her narratorial authority and submits to his perception of her as a child-like woman who needs to be taken care of, which becomes the unchallenged 'sole realities'. The last chapter, which follows the events just described, is notably narrated by the 'I' narrator instead of Gertrude. She encounters Darrell once again post-marriage and Lord Watergate shoots her 'reassuring glances' to remind her that, in her current role as a wife, she does not need to fear him anymore (129). Sure enough, Darrell does not even notice her or pays her no heed; she has become utterly inoffensive to him. Gertrude's eager embrace of domesticity seems to endorse what some *Punch* satirists predicted about the New Woman, that true love would eventually restore natural order.[66] Desperation rather than any true desire makes the Lorimer sisters open a photography business, and they still subscribe to some of the values they left behind, like the myth of a 'lost reputation' and the importance of marriage to women. Gertrude equates 'the woman's cry for love' with 'the human cry for happiness' and dreads the 'long years of solitude, of dreariness, which she saw stretching out before her' (124, 127). She represses her romantic desires in part due to low self-esteem; her former unnamed fiancé breaks off their engagement and makes her believe herself romantically undesirable. She adopts New Womanhood to transform her status as a redundant woman into a choice as opposed to a curse, but she still yearns for happiness in the form of traditional marriage. Read in this light, Gertrude's pursuit of New Womanhood and a career in photography seems like a farce because they are only paths that she grudgingly walks until marital love—the supposed key to female bliss—comes along.

The Lorimer sisters' mocking attitude towards Fanny can also be attributed to her perceived unmarriageability rather than her antiquated mindset, which transforms the novel from a

[66] Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, p. 35.

proto-feminist text that pokes fun at women who are 'behind the age' to an anti-feminist one that snickers at women who cannot attract a husband (9). Fanny is described as 'a round, sentimental peg in the square, scientific hole of the latter half of the nineteenth century' who belonged 'by rights to the period when young ladies played the harp, wore ringlets, and went into hysterics' (9). Her appearance as a 'large and superannuated baby' is appropriately comical to signify that such an individual and her views do not deserve to be taken seriously (6). Her babyish features and bygone beauty ('Her complexion had once been charmingly pink and white, but the tints had hardened, and a coarse red colour clung to the wide cheeks') demonstrate her alliance to the past as well (6). She is the only sister who objects to opening a photography shop and does not know the craft at all. While her other sisters run the shop, she is relegated to housekeeping and 'creating an atmosphere of home for her more strong-minded sisters' which, to Fanny, entails establishing a 'thoroughly womanly presence' in the flat through excessive embroidery and riband bows (30). Like many housewives in both fiction and reality, Fanny soon feels isolated and suffocated by domestic labour. Although Fanny's struggles are related to the issues her sisters face in their line of work, like customers expecting cheaper prices based on their gender, the sisters do not sympathize with Fanny, but treat her reasonable complaints as a 'hysterical' outburst (66). Lucy gathers the 'big, silly head, and wide moist face to her bosom', descriptive terms that emphasize Fanny's comical appearance and demean her justifiable protests (66). When Phyllis expresses a similar sentiment about only getting to view life from afar, Gertrude 'tenderly' strokes her younger sister's hair (50). The bleak contrast between how Fanny and Phyllis are treated derives from the sisters' belief that Phyllis, young and beautiful, is marriageable whereas Fanny, past her prime and unattractive, is not. Once Fanny does get married, 'her importance' goes up 'considerably in their estimation', demonstrating that the sisters conflate Fanny's worth as an individual with her marital success rate (81). Gertrude is actually 'a little indignant' to

discover that Fanny's fiancé is not the least bit swayed by Lucy and Phyllis's 'youthful prettiness', because it disrupts her opinion on their marriageability and, correspondingly, their value in her eyes (81).

Despite these conservative aspects, I maintain that *The Romance of a Shop* is primarily supportive of the New Woman. It is not the photography shop, with all its phantom dangers, that leads to Phyllis's fall and death, but portraiture which is associated with tradition and the past. As Gertrude states, what happens to Phyllis is an 'old story' and might occur even if the sisters duly keep to social convention (105). Gertrude and Darrell's narratorial war is similarly framed as 'an old, old story' centred around the 'strife of the woman who demands respect, with the man who refuses to grant it', clandestinely suggesting that the ridicule the New Woman faces is comparable to the fallen woman's negative reputation (72). Though the novel is not so bold as to redeem the fallen woman, by drawing a connection between portraiture and Phyllis's tragic fate, it pushes the message that the New Woman should not be a controversial figure, but should be viewed as a respectable alternative female identity to the wife or the redundant woman. Rather than introducing new threats to women, New Womanhood offers them new opportunities in terms of financial independence, personal fulfilment, and even marriage. Employment and marriage are not depicted as divergent paths, but as choices that can and do intersect, as evident by Gertrude and Lucy Lorimer meeting their husbands through their photography work.

Although Gertrude gives up her photography career for domesticity, Lucy continues working as a photographer even after marriage. She subscribes to the 'modern practice of specialising' and her work in photographing fashionable-looking children is incredibly 'successful', netting her a medal from an industrial exhibition (129). While it can be argued that Lucy's photographic fixation on children represents her inability to fully depart from the domestic sphere, an equally valid argument can be made regarding the merging of the domestic sphere

with the public and demonstrating that such boundaries are antiquated. Her courtship with her now husband Frank Jermyn is intertwined with photography. They formally meet when he procures her photographic services and much later, after Lucy accepts his marital proposal, she puts his photographic negative in a printing-frame while admitting, 'I never felt that I had a right to do it before' (88). This not only highlights that photographic portraits are often used as a romantic gift, but also emphasizes the importance of photography to their relationship. Like Darrell, Frank is an artist, but unlike his fellow painter, he respects the sisters and happily aids their business since he is 'so genuinely struck with the quality of their work, so anxious to recommend them to his comrades in art' (44). Mainly a black-and-white illustrator, Frank eventually 'permanently abandons the paint-brush for the needle … to take a high place among the black and artists of the day', which aligns him closer to Lucy's line of work and modernity as opposed to what Darrell symbolizes (129). Lucy's children additionally display 'excellent training' in terms of 'mental, moral, and physical culture', which signifies that her domestic life does not suffer as a result of her work accomplishments and readers too are able to strike a healthy balance between the two if they desire (129).

Marriage remains a central concern in most New Woman fiction and having a secondary character, instead of the protagonist, take the unconventional path of continuing to work after marriage fits perfectly with *The Romance of a Shop*'s brand of relatively conservative modernity. Lucy is a less central character and her decision can be framed as an outlier that does not threaten to unseat the traditional path of full-time domesticity. Levy's novel is filled with such concessions, but in doing so, it tempers its otherwise extremist message on the New Woman and makes her more acceptable to mainstream audiences. The text does not propose that we break with tradition, but rather work with it to secure a harmonious middle ground. Like *A Laodicean*, the marital couples at the end of *The Romance of a Shop* reflect its position on modernity. Award-winning photographer Lucy marries an artist, and the

domesticated Gertrude weds a scientist. Fanny finds marriage despite possessing outdated views, but her spousal pairing is the only one unable to have children, symbolizing that her beliefs are unsustainable and should not be passed on the next generation. The novel's last paragraph speaks of an 'enterprising young photographer' who has moved into the Lorimer sisters' former studio and 'enlarged and beautified it beyond recognition' (130). This young photographer's gender is never stated, but it is implied to be a female photographer carrying on the work of her predecessors—with enough plausible deniability to avoid offending its more old-fashioned readers.

Both texts discussed in this chapter shun radical modernity and, by extension, rapid social change. Dare is a self-professed world citizen with no family ties and is an innovator who has 'invented a new photographic process, which I am bent upon making famous' (43). However, his rootlessness threatens the concepts of social hierarchy and nationhood itself, so he is portrayed as morally decrepit, signifying that the absence of societal and country boundaries will lead to moral corruption. Phyllis is fatally punished for engaging in premarital sexual activities and her transgression is made to appear more immoral by having Darrell be an already wed man. Modernity is good, these narratives suggest, but not too much or too swift. Both novels end in companionate marriages, conjugal unions based on love and respect that reflect the recommended middle way between the old and the new. Modernity should not overwhelm tradition, but neither should tradition stubbornly resist change. By advocating for a moderate approach in an era filled with technological innovation and social turbulence, Hardy's and Levy's works coax readers into becoming less fearful and more receptive towards change in general. The existence of photography does not negate the existence of portraiture. Both have a place in the future.

Chapter 2: Beyond the Borders of a Photograph

Upon seeing her first daguerreotypes in 1843, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote about them to her friend, querying if she had seen this marvellous novelty yet:

> It is not merely the likeness which is precious in some cases—but the association, and the sense of nearness involved in the thing… the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever! It is the very sanctification of portraits I think—and it is not at all monstrous in me to say what my brothers cry out against so vehemently—that I would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest artist's work ever produced.[1]

Barrett Browning hit upon the very elements that make photographs such attractive romantic gifts. They evoke an 'association' and 'sense of nearness' to the portrayed individual that the 'noblest artist's work' cannot provide. While she never fully clarified what made photography superior to portraiture in terms of representational potential except for a vague 'sense of nearness', her preference was clear. Photographs, to Barret Browning, were 'the very sanctification of portraits', a two-dimensional embodiment of a loved one, supposedly safe from the mediating interference of the artist's brush.

This chapter does not aim to rehash the debate regarding photography versus portraiture, but instead digs deeper into the former's metonymic capability (or what Barrett Browning has described as 'sense of nearness') and investigates to what extent its ability to substitute a beloved's presence stretches to other photographic media in fiction. Much like the invention of glass spawned numerous other discoveries like the telescope or the lightbulb, the advent of

[1] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Letter 320, [Thursday] Dec. 7. 1843', in *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford 1836-1854*, ed. by Meredith Raymond and Mary Sullivan, 3 vols (Waco: Armstrong Browning Library of Baylor University, 1983), III, 357.

photography branched into dozens of related media forms, including but not limited to: stereoscopes, mutoscopes, kinoras, kinetoscopes, zoopraxiscopes, zoetropes, praxinoscopes, alethoscopes and megalethoscopes, and magic lantern shows.[2] Some of these devices occasionally used drawn illustrations instead of photographs, but this does not offset my contention that the invention of photography fuelled and partly led to the vast array of optical instruments that emerged throughout the nineteenth century. Examining photographic mediums beyond the run-of-the-mill photograph augments my overarching investigation into how various media technologies express and mediate presence in romantic relationships. Instead of simply comparing two completely different discourse systems like photographs and written letters (the latter of which will be discussed in a later chapter), I believe that studying mediums that all stem from photography as a category will allow us to better scrutinise the minute details of how a media form influences the embodiment of its depicted individual. A binocular-shaped stereoscope, for example, is physically at odds with a flat photograph and, as I will demonstrate in my section on the anonymously written short story 'The Photograph', provides a dissimilar viewing experience. In addition, analysing different photographic media gives us a more thorough insight into what Jonathan Crary calls the 'mass visual culture of the nineteenth century'.[3] All the aforementioned instruments played a role in redefining the concept of vision and, in Crary's words, constructing a 'new kind of observer' which, in turn, is intertwined with how Victorians viewed presence or lack thereof.[4]

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[2] I will explain what stereoscopes and magic lantern shows are in a later section, but the rest will be described in brief here. Most of the devices are precursors to motion pictures. The mutoscope is a relatively bulky machine that is operated by hand crank. Like its smaller counterpart, the kinora, it uses flip book techniques to create the illusion of movement. The kinetoscope and zoopraxiscope are both forerunners to the film projector. The former works by passing a strip of film bearing sequential images over a light source at high speed, while the latter spins a glass disc traced with similar images around the outer edges of its circle. Meanwhile, the zoescope is a drum that can be spun to produce a moving image and can be viewed by multiple people at once. The praxinoscope is the zoescope's successor and uses a strip of pictures placed around the inner surface of a revolving cylinder. Its use of mirrors offers a brighter and less blurry picture as opposed to its predecessor. Finally, both the alethoscope and megalethoscope utilize lenses to enlarge photographs in order to create a mirage of depth and perspective.

[3] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 16.

[4] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 3.

Vision can be a large aspect of how we experience another individual's presence, and this chapter aims to explore this further through various mediums related to photography.

There are detractors that challenge the photograph's ability to adequately portray or stand in for a pictured subject. George Eliot in particular professed 'a horror of photography' and greatly regretted owning an enlarged photographic portrait of her partner George Lewes.[5] In her letter to Elma Stuart, Eliot lamented, 'It is smoothed down and altered, and each time I look at it I feel its unlikeness more. Himself as he was is what I see inwardly, and I am afraid of outward images lest they should corrupt the inward'.[6] Eliot also scathingly equated Charles Dickens's characterization to a 'sun-picture' in critique of what she perceived as a lack of psychological depth in Dickens's creations.[7] Numerous reviews of Dickens's work in 1850s similarly played on the belief that photography only captured what was on the surface and not the person beneath by likening the author to 'a taker of daguerreotypes, sun-pictures, or photographs'.[8] While Eliot and these reviewers' assertions seemingly counter my case for photography's metonymic potential, I contend that they are more relevant to my argument than they appear. There are romantic relationships that value physical looks over an internal connection, so the supposed superficiality of photography works in their favour in their love lives. Even if the photograph does not match up to one's 'inward' image of the depicted like Eliot claimed, what this proves is that the authenticity of a photographic rendering is heavily

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[5] In 1860, Eliot's editor John Blackwood requested a photograph of her and Eliot replied, 'It would be a pleasure to me to meet a slight wish of yours; but I have rather a horror of photography. Mayall took one a couple of years ago, and we have several copies of it on paper, but it is not thoroughly satisfactory'. The full letter can be found here: George Eliot, 'George Eliot to John Blackwood, 23 June 1860', in *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1954-78), III (1954), 307.

[6] Eliot, 'George Eliot to Elma Stuart, 24 December 1879', *George Eliot Letters*, VII, 233.

[7] Eliot wrote in her review: 'If he could give us their psychological character—their conceptions of life, and their emotions—with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies. But while he can copy Mrs. Plornish's colloquial style with the delicate accuracy of a sun-picture … he scarcely ever passes from the humorous and external to the emotional and tragic, without becoming as transcendent in his unreality as he was a moment before in his artistic truthfulness. For the full text, please see: George Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', *Westminster Review*, 66 (1856), 51-79 (p. 55).

[8] Philip Collins, 'Introduction', in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Philip Collins (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), pp. 1-26 (p.6).

contingent on the beholder. Barrett Browning, for instance, would most certainly adore a photographic 'memorial of one I dearly loved'. What qualifies as faithful representation is further complicated by the fact that a person is never fully knowable to others—or even to themselves according to psychoanalysts. When we claim to know someone, we refer to our perception of that person, which may not align with their own self-image or how others view them. This dissonance between surface appearance and psychological depth will be explored at length in my analysis of Charles Allston Collins's 'Her Face', where the protagonist falls in love with a photograph of a young woman and assigns qualities to her despite having never personally interacted with her.

In line with my focus on various photographic media, I will pay particular attention to the material form. Elizabeth Edwards has fairly pointed out that photography studies tend to prioritize what the photograph shows rather than what the photograph is. She speculates the reason for this past neglect of this part of the scholarship is Western understanding of the hierarchy of the senses, in which seeing and hearing are linked to the production of rational knowledge while touch, smell, and taste represent the lower, 'irrational' sensory realms.[9] Edwards and Janice Elart advocate for viewing the photograph as a three-dimensional object instead of purely a two-dimensional image, arguing that the very materiality of the photograph itself reveals volumes about its relationship to its owner.[10] To quote Geoffrey Batchen, photographs have 'volume, opacity, tactility and a physical presence in the world'.[11] Creases, torn corners, written text on the surface, various handling damage, or even where it is displayed (in a frame or an album) point to the history of the photograph and its usage. Patrizia Di Bello makes a similar argument. She succinctly points out that photographs have

[9] Edwards, 'Thinking Photography Beyond the Visual?', p. 36.
[10] Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Elart, 'Introduction: Photographs as Objects', in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-15 (p. 1).
[11] Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography's Objects* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), p. 2.

been historically small-scale objects and thus invite handling, close looking, carrying around the body, and display in houses and accessories like lockets or albums. Once photographs are blown up to gallery-size prints, they lose that sense of intimacy because they overwhelm the human body and become more visually imposing.[12]

This chapter looks at three short stories: the anonymously penned ‘The Photograph’, Collins’s ‘Her Face’, and E.W. Hornung’s ‘A Spoilt Negative’. Short stories rather than novels were chosen because as Susan Shelangoskie points out, the latter tends to portray photographers as authoritative and untrustworthy side characters, while short fiction pieces indiscriminately make photographers protagonists in their right.[13] Having a photographer as the main character indirectly makes photography the narrative focus and rebrands the usually sinister figure into someone readers can sympathize with and root for. Since I am only examining texts with prominent amorous storylines, these photographer protagonists will engage in their own relationships, which will enhance my argument on photography’s romantic implications. Levy’s *The Romance of a Shop* is a notable exception to Shelangoskie’s observation since Gertrude is a photographer protagonist. However, readers rarely see the sisters making or taking photographs (the only lengthy session is when Gertrude photographs Lord Watergate’s deceased wife) and the technical aspects of the craft are never mentioned. This was likely to make the text as accessible as possible, but has the unfortunate consequence of marginalizing photography as a theme in favour of other plotlines, like the multiple romances or the sisters struggling with propriety. In contrast, one of the short stories that will be analysed, Hornung’s ‘A Spoilt Negative’, features a photographer as the titular character and also details the technical process of producing photographs through its darkroom setting. These qualities make it a richer analytic source

[12] Di Bello, ‘Seductions and Flirtations’, p. 150.
[13] Shelangoskie, ‘Domesticity in the Darkroom’, p. 93.

compared to Levy's novel in terms of exploring photography's metonymic powers in romantic connections.

All three short stories are relatively obscure and were selected over more canonical works due to their varied use of photography. 'The Photograph' contains two different photographic media: a stereoscope and a magic lantern show. 'Her Face' showcases an ordinary flat photograph, but provides the foundation for an interdisciplinary discussion on gender, privacy, and copyright legislation. 'A Spoilt Negative' revolves around a photographic negative and as mentioned, lays out the technical side of photography in addition to presenting a photographer as the main character. Analysed in conjunction to each other, these stories offer a discursive tapestry of photography's influence on Victorian life with regard to but also beyond romantic love, ranging from optical amusements to controversial legislature.

The Illusionary Ghost

'The Photograph' is about an engaged couple, Alice and James, who rely on each other's stereoscopic photographs for emotional support when the latter departs on a voyage.[14] James soothes his worried fiancée by joking that he is safe as long as his photographic counterpart appears healthy, which eventually backfires when Alice sees a projection of his corpse-like face during a magic lantern show and expires from a mixture of shock and grief on the spot. While Alice's imagination plays an undeniable role in facilitating her belief that James's stereoscopic photograph is a 'magic-glass', I argue that the stereoscope plays an even larger role in enhancing photography's metonymic ability to such an extent that it causes Alice to assign it magical properties. This leads to her adopting a psychological state in which she

[14] I am using the digitalized version of the short story originally published in *Sharpe's London Magazine*: 'The Photograph', *Sharpe's London Magazine*, 30 (July 1859), 225-332. I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

views visual representations as real and culminates into the fatal magic lantern show.[15] The plot twist, where readers discover that the lanternist had used the stereoscopic photograph as a slide for his show and that there was never anything supernatural afoot, can be read as a pre-emptive criticism of the spirit photography craze in the mid-nineteenth century and places the text firmly on the side of sceptics who abhor the mystification of photography.

A stereoscopic photograph has a tactile aspect that increases the lifelikeness of James's image. Invented in 1838 by Charles Wheatstone, a stereoscope is characterized by its use of two slightly different pictures (both ensconced behind lenses to be viewed with a right eye and left eye respectively) to form a single three-dimensional image. Alice specifically mentions how well his 'curls come out' in his picture, a feature that would likely be flattened in an ordinary photograph but, in a stereoscopic one, heightens its likeness (226). Underwood and Underwood, a prominent seller of stereographs in America and Britain from 1880 to 1920, actually advertised them on the basis of its tactility being an improvement on photographs' two-dimensionality and abstraction.[16] John Plunkett further points towards embodied viewing as the main reason for pornographic stereoscopes' popularity.[17] Scottish physicist Sir David Brewster, who redesigned the stereoscope for commercial use, likewise emphasized the device's three-dimensionality, contending that it would be particularly useful to sculptors, painters, architects, and engineers.[18] Alice treats James's photographic depiction akin to her real fiancé by housing it in her bedroom—a private space with romantic

[15] Jonathan Potter offers a slightly similar reading in his analysis of the story. He contends that Alice weaves a narrative of security around James's stereoscopic photograph and this produces a devastating psychological effect when entangled with the deathly narrative of the magic lantern show. My argument differs from his in that I focus on photography's metonymic value and how it leads to Alice adopting a mindset in which she accepts visual representations as reality. Jonathan Potter, *Discourses of Vision in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Seeing, Thinking, Writing* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 158.
[16] Albert E. Osborne, *The Stereograph and the Stereoscope with Special Maps and Books forming a Travel System; What They Mean for Individual Development. What They Promise for the Spread of Civilization* (New York: Underwood and Underwood, 1909), p. 25.
[17] John Plunkett, '"Feeling Seeing": Touch, Vision and the Stereoscope', *History of Photography*, 37 (2013), 389-96 (p. 395).
[18] David Brewster, *The Stereoscope: Its History, Theory and Construction, With Its Application to the Fine and Useful Arts and to Education* (London: John Murray, 1856), pp. 183–88.

connotations—instead of a communal area like the sitting room and shutting herself in with it for most of each morning, as if enjoying the company of the actual person. The image itself bears visual markers of James's personality, increasing the equivalence between him and his stereoscopic photograph. He looks 'cheery and hearty' there, in a perfect encapsulation of the jolly sailor who tried to cheer up his betrothed before leaving (227).

It can be countered that three-dimensionality is unimportant with regard to increasing Alice's faith in her 'oracle' since it is something that can be readily supplemented by imagination, but the stereoscope's other distinctive feature—its funnelled view—is not so easily dismissible (229). Unlike a photograph, one must look through a stereoscope's lenses in order to see the picture, and the uncertainty that the image might have slyly changed its appearance while out of sight strengthens its mystique. Alice always feels a 'pang of fear' and waits a moment before daring to look through the stereoscope, then experiences an 'indescribable sensation of relief' when she finds the picture unchanged (228). A normal photograph carries this unpredictability to a certain extent as well because we cannot eye it perpetually, but a stereoscopic one, with its secreted image, possesses this factor more. The funnelled point of view also makes for a more intimate and intense viewing experience. A stereoscope can only be viewed by one person at a time and the lenses block all external visual stimuli except for the image, creating a transformative effect where the viewer feels as though they are truly alone with the photographed subject.[19]

Alice's overactive imagination is not to be discounted though and explains why James, who lacks 'delicacy of imagination or sentiment', does not react to her stereoscopic photograph the same way (227). According to Jill Galvan, women in the nineteenth century were thought

[19] While not explicitly stated, I believe 'The Photograph' uses Brewster's stereoscope model due to its commercial prominence.

to have an excess of sensitivity and sympathy due to their delicate nervous systems.[20] 'The Photograph' follows these gender conventions by characterizing James as a 'great strong fellow, with enough common-sense' whereas Alice is 'of a timid nature and sensitive to excess' (226). He gains 'some comfort' from Alice's stereoscopic photograph, but his desire to have its eyes meets his like 'their originals' is far more idle than his fiancée's obsessive state (227). She has never seen the sea before, but has a 'fixed idea' of 'black skies and howling winds, of rocks and surging waves, of wrecked ships and specks of men struggling in limitless waters' (228, 227). Her fears unsurprisingly take on the form of imagery in accordance with the photographic age. The 'fixed' reticence of her imagined reality is comparable to the connotative permanence of a photograph. By that, I mean that Alice always believes that her fiancé is in danger until the static stereoscopic photograph proves otherwise. She visits the stereoscope multiple times a day, sometimes even during the night after a bad dream, to reassure herself of James's safety. A photograph is obviously vulnerable to technical modification and physical deterioration, but to reference Barrett Browning's letter again ('… the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever!'), the media is still very much associated with the concept of permanence. Alice proclaims that 'her imagination would have its own way in spite of probabilities, in spite of the actualities surrounding her', so her mind turns to photography—a discourse system that is associated with illusionary reality and perpetuity—as the sole means of dispelling the imaginary reality she has conjured in her mind (228).[21]

Magic lantern shows are similar to the stereoscope in that they strive to make photographic images appear real and tangible, but its tradition of phantasmagoria makes it a deadly

[20] Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859–1919* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 12.
[21] Potter has contended that the stereoscope itself is a 'prompt, guide, or facilitator for imaginative self-expression' due to its funnelled gaze in the space of the home, which generates 'a sense of stillness and timelessness conducive to psychological states of reverie'. Potter, *Discourses of Vision*, p. 149.

medium for Alice since her coping mechanism rests on her accepting visual depictions as reality. Lantern shows had been around since the late seventeenth century in the form of small-time travelling entertainers, but phantasmagoria—performances in which spectres are produced with magic lanterns—only emerged in the last few decades of the eighteenth century.[22] The genre became increasingly popular following the invention of the lantern's iconic dissolving views in the late 1830s. Two lanterns were placed side to side and projected their images at the same time to produce a dissolving effect, which complemented phantasmagoria's emphasis on the dark and mysterious.[23] By the second half of the century, lanterns were mass-produced as a consumer item, and hundreds visited the Great Hall of London's Royal Polytechnic Institute to witness phantasmagoria shows and slides with dissolving views against a backdrop of oxy-hydrogen gas.[24] Phantasmagoria was frequently promoted on the basis of public enlightenment by showing that ghosts were merely optical illusions, but since clever lanternists almost never shared their secrets regarding how the illusions were produced, it actually had the opposite effect and intensified the supernatural effect. Tools and props were shamelessly used to enhance the mystique and put on a good show. The illusions were so convincing, audience members sometimes tried to fend off moving 'phantoms' or even fled the room in terror.[25]

The magic lantern show in 'The Photograph' generates an atmosphere of fear and anticipation that coaxes Alice into a mental state prepared to believe in James's spectre. The lanternist Dobey includes a shipwreck narrative among his slides, which Isobel Armstrong illustrates was a popular slide choice—next to night to day transitions—due to dissolving

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[22] Sally B. Palmer, 'Projecting the Gaze: The Magic Lantern, Cultural Discipline, and Villette', *Victorian Review*, 32 (2006), 18-40 (p. 19); Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 141.
[23] Palmer, 'Projecting the Gaze', p. 20.
[24] Shalyn Claggett, 'The Animal in the Machine: Punishment and Pleasure in Victorian Magic Lantern Shows', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 40 (2018), 1-18 (p. 1).
[25] Castle, *Female Thermometer*, pp. 143-44.

views technology. The Theatre Royal's 1827 'Dissolvent Views', for instance, depicted a storm scene with shifting waves and a phantom ship followed by the 'Appearance of a Rainbow'. A late-century offering by Negretti and Zambra advertised the six-slide 'The Emigrant Ship' in its catalogue: 'The Ship leaving Port; at Sea; Full Sail by moonlight; the Storm; Ship struck by Lightning; Ship on Fire; the Raft with Survivors'.[26] Dobey's exhibition showcases a ship gliding on calm seas under sunny skies, which 'gradually' changes into a darkened sky and stormy waves with the ship tossed about (231). Darkness overwhelms everything before a rosy sunrise emerges, illuminating the wreckage on shore and a floating corpse in the water. The dissolving scenes make the mirage more realistic, as though viewers are watching the shipwreck happen in real time. Alice's anxiety, already heightened by the illusionary wreckage, is further aggravated by her friend immediately engaging her in a conversation about James's potential death. Dobey's announcement, 'Prepare—prepare—prepare to see the *ghost*!', alongside the atmospheric 'ghost melody' in the background have the same impact on her already frazzled psychological state (231). When someone in the audience identifies James midst the projections, Alice readily accepts it as truth because she has conditioned herself to view images as reality and the spooky atmosphere increases her certainty that what she is seeing is real.

The anti-supernatural plot twist reflects the state of photographic affairs during the period 'The Photograph' was published, when photographers were trying to demystify their craft to the general public, a movement that came under threat with the advent of spirit photography in the 1860s.[27] Spirit photography, as the name suggests, refers to when 'spirits' are captured on photographic plates, usually as veiled figures or indistinct shapes. Brewster was among the first to suggest that 'for the purpose of amusement the photographer might carry us even

[26] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 294-95.
[27] Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, p. 80, Potter, *Discourses of Vision*, p. 164.

into the realms of the supernatural' by using tricks of the trade 'to give a spiritual appearance to one or more of his figures'.[28] His book, titled *The Stereoscope* and published in 1856, presented spirit photography as a commercial novelty with no doubts regarding its falsity and for a few years, it remained a known photographic trick, with periodicals like the *Photographic News* publishing articles on how to create them.[29] William Henry Mumler, a photographer from the United States, produced the first allegedly real spirit photograph. The image depicted Mumler next to a faint image of a young girl sitting on a chair, who he identified as his deceased cousin.[30] His assertation that the photographic plate had not been tampered with frustrated British photographers not just because they did not know how it had been accomplished, but also because it interfered with their mission to shed light on the trade.[31] Most dismissed the ghost picture as the product of inexpertise or fraud, like the *Photographic News* which released an article apologizing to its readers for 'occupying their attention' with a matter that it styled a 'pitiable delusion originating in shameful fraud or mischievous trickery' and condemned how 'our own art is prostituted to purposes of imposture'.[32] Some acknowledged that ghosts might be captured on a plate, but warned against believing in every spirit photograph that came along.[33] A phrenologist writing for the

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[28] Brewster, *Stereoscope*, p. 205.
[29] Some of the articles were: 'Stereoscopic Ghosts', *The Photographic News*, 10 September 1858, p. 11; D. Davie, 'Formula for Raising Ghosts', *The Photographic News*, 20 August 1869, p. 408.
[30] Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, pp. 73-74.
[31] Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, pp. 80, 74.
[32] 'Spirit Photographs', *The Photographic News*, 13 February 1863, pp. 73-74 (p.73).
[33] Supporters of spirit photography saw the subgenre as the next step in photographic technology. As early as 1839, scientists articulated their optimism in the future of photography by proposing 'its application to studies of phenomena at the threshold of vision, including accurate and easy recording of celestial bodies, measurement of their brightness, and spectral analysis of their light'. These believers countered sceptics by pointing out if spiritual beings did exist, then it stood to reason that they could be photographed: 'who will deny the possibility of photographing the angels who appeared unto Abraham, partook of food, and conversed with him for a considerable time? … Spirit photographs may seem absurd now but so did scientific discoveries ridiculed in other ages'. Spirit photography had its fair share of defenders even among the scientific community. William Crookes, a founder and editor of the *Photographic News*, stayed open to the idea, as did Alfred Russell Wallace, who was a distinguished explorer and the co-discoverer of the natural selection theory alongside Charles Darwin. In order of reference: Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, p. 67; 'Spirit Photographs', *The Photographic News*, 11 June 1869, p. 285; William Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London: James Burns, 1874); Alfred Russell Wallace, *On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, 3rd edn (London: George Redway, 1896).

American Phrenological Journal in 1863 scoffed that only 'weak' people like a grieving mother were easily 'deluded' into accepting a 'rounded something, like a foggy dumpling' for her infant.[34] Mumler's photograph of his spectral cousin sparked a trend in viewers recognizing photographic phantoms as familiar deceased people, like one sitter from Maine who proclaimed: 'The likeness nearly overcame me, it was so plain. His collar and cravat are precisely as he used to wear them. It is as plain a picture to me as the one hanging in my room'.[35] The irony that they could instantly recognize a shadowy blur when there were numerous court cases involving defendant photographers and sitters whom were disappointed by the unlikeness in their photographic portraits (precisely because portrait photography did not always yield glowing results) seemed to be lost on these believers.[36]

Alice's anxiety makes her as susceptible to spirit photography as a mourning mother, and the communal viewing aspect of magic lantern shows creates a group-think effect that reinforces her belief that she is in the presence of James's ghost. His 'corpse-like' spectre during the magic lantern show bears no explicit resemblance to the original (231). It is described as having 'dead or closed' eyes, 'undefined' outlines, and a 'rigid' mouth; the curly hair that Alice so admires in his stereoscopic photograph—which we know does look exactly like James—is not mentioned at all (231). Dobey is using James's stereoscopic photograph to cast this image, but his audience is unaware of this at the time and the projection, devoid of any telling features, could be any standard ghostly figure. The spectators are made more susceptible to identifying the apparition as James through the shipwreck slides that were shown shortly beforehand and when a child in the audience cries out 'James!' in response to the projection, this cements the idea in everyone else's heads, including the unnamed narrator-character who asserts that 'it was the face of James' (231). Walter Benjamin

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[34] 'Curiosities of Photography', *American Phrenological Journal*, 38 (September 1863), 80–81 (p. 81).
[35] Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, p. 76.
[36] Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, p. 76.

illustrates that ‘nowhere more than in cinema do the individual reactions that together make up the mass reaction of the audience prove from the outset to be caused by their immediately imminent massing’; audience members make themselves heard, then also check on one another.[37] I believe Benjamin’s theory applies here through the horde effect that the child’s identifying scream brings. Alice’s paranoia would have caused her to die even without the communal aspect (a stereoscope can only be viewed by one person a time and any spectral change in James’s image would have been a lethal shock to her), but this does not contradict my point on the magic lantern show’s group-think consequence. Surrounded on all sides by those who believe they are in the presence of James’s phantom, Alice becomes all the more certain that she is not being a ‘silly little woman’ for believing the same (226).

Both the stereoscope and the magic lantern show were largely purposed towards entertainment despite their scientific potential, and the text’s inclusion of them, over numerous other mediums related to photography, implies that the tragic ending could have been averted had Alice (representative of the general public) been better educated on these new media technologies. Wheatstone originally invented the stereoscope to demonstrate the effect of binocular vision and prior to its commercial prominence, the instrument provoked fierce scientific and philosophical debates on whether it significantly altered understandings of sensory perception.[38] In 1849, Brewster designed a cheaper, more convenient model that could be easily outfitted with photographs and it appeared at London’s Great Exhibition of 1851 to overwhelmingly positive reception, even garnering praise from Queen Victoria herself.[39] By 1856, the stereoscope was ‘seen in every drawing room; philosophers talk learnedly upon it, ladies are delighted with its magic representations, and children play with

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[37] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. by J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 26.
[38] Potter, *Discourses of Vision*, p. 146; Plunkett, ‘Feeling, Seeing’, p. 390.
[39] Robert J. Silverman, ‘The Stereoscope and Photographic Depiction in the 19th Century’, *Technology and Culture*, 34 (October 1993), 729-56 (p. 735).

it'.[40] The downside to its mainstream popularity though was diminished scientific impact. Scientific discourse on the stereoscope at the time was mainly split between two clashing approaches: one being 'broadly empirical, idealist and phenomenological' while the other was 'nativist, material and geometrical'.[41] While both enjoyed prevalent dissemination in the periodical press, popular explanations on the subject did not portray them as contradicting and instead combined them. As Hunt vented in the same *Art-Journal* article, 'we find a very general ignorance prevailing of the principles upon which this instrument is constructed, and still greater want of knowledge of the philosophy which it involves'.[42] As for the magic lantern, the British lantern industry sought to rebrand the device towards scientific and educational uses towards the beginning of the nineteenth century, such as via the serious-minded trade journal *Optical Magic Lantern Journal*, but its popularity as a toy and entertainment tool persisted.[43] Shalyn Clagett has argued that the magic lantern does have a significantly educational purpose because a high number of popular slides are comedies about animals that violate the established order and are consequentially punished.[44] I do not view them as overtly educational, however, because they are marketed as entertainment for children and they do not attempt to elucidate the technical aspects of magic lantern shows. They are no different to phantasmagoria exhibitions which claim to educate the public, but incline towards providing a spectacle. In attributing Alice's death to the mystification of the stereoscope and the magic lantern show, the text demonstrates the risks in prioritizing entertainment over instruction and infers that emergent media are only conducive towards romantic joy if used properly.

[40] Robert Hunt, 'The Stereoscope', *The Art-Journal*, 18 (April 1856), 118-20 (p. 118)
[41] Plunkett, 'Feeling, Seeing', p. 394.
[42] Hunt, 'The Stereoscope', p. 118.
[43] Joe Kember, 'The Magic Lantern: Open Medium', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 17 (2019), 1-8 (p. 2).
[44] Claggett, 'The Animal in the Machine', p. 2.

In a sense, 'The Photograph' is a spectacle with its melodramatic ending, but in showing readers the logic behind James's ghost, the text sets itself apart from phantasmagoria thrills and places itself on the side of education and reason. The tale does not deny that photography can seem magical; its very premise testifies that photography's metonymic talent is so powerful, it can inspire supernatural escalation. Both its featured mediums improve on the ability to substitute an individual's presence: the stereoscope by adding a three-dimensional aspect to the image and the magic lantern show by functioning as an early attempt at creating a motion picture. Alice's unfortunate fate highlights the psychological complexity of photography's pseudo presence, in addition to reminding readers that ocular illusions are simply that—illusions.

His Photographic Wife

If a photograph can stand in for an individual, it puts forth the uneasy notion that possessing the representation is akin to possessing the person, which is what transpires in Charles Allston Collins's short story 'Her Face'.[45] The protagonist Charles Robert glimpses a photograph of a beautiful woman (Miss Fenton) in a shop display, then becomes obsessed with locating her and making her his wife. I view the text as a sobering interpretation of photography's metonymic value, because Charles is not interested in getting to know the person behind the photograph; he merely wants a silent beauty onto which to project his fantasies.[46] The ending in which Miss Fenton's father acquiesces to Charles's marital proposal because he is a financially stable suitor—despite his daughter's clear disgust with

[45] I am using the digitalized version of the short story originally published in *Household Words*: Charles Allston Collins, 'Her Face', *Household Words*, 18 (August 1858), 258-64. I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.
[46] Charles Allston Collins, artist and writer, was brother to the famous sensation author Wilkie Collins and husband to Charles Dickens's daughter Kate. *Household Words*—where this story was published—was edited by Dickens, though this story was written two years before the marriage. Potter gestures towards Collins's artistic background as proof that the writer was well-informed with regard to matters of representation and points to Kate Dickens's lucrative art career as evidence that Collins knew representation was not the sole domain of men. Potter, *Discourses of Vision*, pp. 160, 180.

him—analogizes the commodification of women in the marriage market to the commodification of her photograph and copyright legislation that gave sitters little control over how their images were used. This link transforms Miss Fenton's situation from a mere women's issue that might not garner much sympathy from conservatives to a far-reaching violation of the fundamental right to privacy that should concern everyone.

'Her Face' is not the only short fiction text in the Victorian era to put a photographic twist on the love-at-first-sight trope, but whereas most stories like 'The Two Photographs; Or Maggie Mumford's Romance' (1911) utilize it as a romantic obstacle, Collins's story accentuates the shallowness in claiming to love a stranger simply based on their photograph.[47] That claim is rooted in the metonymic equivalence of a subject with their photographic image; love blossoms through the viewer's interaction with the photograph, meaning the picture is filling in for the sitter. In 'The Two Photographs; Or Maggie Mumford's Romance', two individuals come in possession of the other's sample photograph and when they eventually meet in person, the man confesses he has been in love with the woman since he glimpsed her likeness.[48] The scenario is meant to be romantic, but since he knows nothing about the woman, what he is truly in love with is her pleasing features and his fantasy of who she is. Unlike Charles from 'Her Face' though, he does seem open to learning more about her, but since the story ends there, readers will never find out if they are compatible beyond surface appearances. This narcissistic superficiality is always present in cases where the looker has little to no knowledge about the pictured, but it can also exist to some extent in courtships

[47] 'The Two Photographs; Or, Maggie Mumford's Romance', *The London Journal*, 11 (April 1911), 17.
[48] 'Jeremy's Profile; or The False Photographer' (1862) also features an anonymous sample photograph. Its plot follows a young woman who nearly casts aside her beloved after discovering his photograph in another woman's brooch. It plays on the romantic practice of gifting one's photograph to a sweetheart, except in this case the other woman had gotten hold of the photograph because its negative had been used by a photographer without the sitter's knowledge. Like 'The Two Photographs; Or Maggie Mumford's Romance' though, it does not really highlight the invasiveness of the photographer's action and portrays it as a small roadblock to romantic happiness. F.O., 'Jeremy's Profile; Or, The False Photographer', *The National Magazine*, 11 (April 1862), 253–56.

where the couple know each other fairly well. A photograph will never talk back or do anything to disappoint the observer. It stands in for the pictured, so it can be a vehicle for selfish fantasies.

Miss Fenton's photograph is the most metonymic in terms of representing the original out of all the texts examined so far, because both are soundless beauties that are powerless to reject whatever thoughts and desires their viewer projects onto them. Like Jonathan Potter, I read Charles's way of looking—that is, his first-person narration—as an obvious example of the male gaze.[49] The term stems from feminist theory and refers to when women are represented as sexual objects for the pleasure of the heterosexual male viewer. Darrell from Levy's novel embodies the male gaze to a certain extent, especially with regard to Phyllis, but his power is largely rendered non-existent by Gertrude's position as the main narrator. Charles is not a photographer like Gertrude, but he is a reporter for a 'cheap newspaper', a profession similarly known for creating narratives and presenting them as objective truths (259).[50] He imagines Miss Fenton holds 'an ignorance of evil, a good sense and kindness of heart' and was 'neither discontented, nor listless, nor a grumbler', with 'an almost excessive cleanliness and neatness' (258). All this he gleans from simply looking at her photograph and what little he learns from her afterwards is neatly fitted into the 'picture I had drawn' (261). Charles is relieved from the mental effort of reconciling his fantasy with the person on the sole occasion Miss Fenton seemingly does something that 'disappointed' him, because it turns out that he

[49] Potter, *Discourses of Vision*, p. 161.

[50] Reporters were largely viewed as 'hacks and demagogues' prior to 1840. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that journalism began to be acknowledged as a respectable vocation that prided itself as a source of information and truth, but this would not apply to Charles's 'cheap newspaper' because it belongs to that disreputable penny press that relies on advertising income and would readily print salacious stories to attract a wide readership. The nature of the publication Charles works for highlights the inaccuracy of his first-person account of Miss Fenton. George Boyce, 'The Fourth Estate: The Reappraisal of a Concept', in *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, ed. by George Boyce, James Curran, and Pauline Wingate (London: Constable, 1978), pp. 19-40 (p. 20); Haia Shpayer-Makov, 'Journalists and Police Detectives in Victorian and Edwardian England: An Uneasy Reciprocal Relationship', *Journal of Social History*, 42 (2009), 963-87 (p. 965); Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers*, pp. 8, 49.

had mistaken another woman for her (262). He attributes his mistake to 'a pre-determination on my part' that he is supposed to encounter Miss Fenton in those rooms, which symbolically signifies the disparity between Miss Fenton and his imagined version; he sees what he wants to see (264). Miss Fenton is unable to correct any potential misconceptions about herself to the reader because she is voiceless in Charles's narrative. His first-person narration denies her the opportunity to tell her side of the story, and she does not utter a single word throughout the plot either. She is reduced to a pretty face like her photograph, which is literally an object. Her silence means Charles gets to fill in the gaps with whatever he pleases, so her selfhood is doubly denied: by Charles and by readers who can only know her through his eyes.

Charles feels 'uncomfortable' whenever he is on the receiving end of others' gazes because he utilizes the gaze as a narratorial tool for dominance and control (259). As he is watching a house to gain information about Miss Fenton, he notices that he too is being 'observed' by multiple people on the street and eventually the weight of their stares forces his retreat, leaving 'my observers masters of the field' (260). Charles is unable to manipulate them into seeing his perspective, which is that he is on a romantic quest to find his beloved; instead, he is forced to see himself from their viewpoint, which is that a suspicious individual at the 'comparatively mature age of nine and twenty' is 'standing, staring at those inexorable bricks' and likely up to no good (260). His inability to control the narrative causes him to leave. The policeman, who 'took up a position there apparently with the sole object of observing me', perhaps inspires the most concern in Charles. The police force is a Foucauldian disciplinary institution which has the power to regulate and punish individuals. Charles is incapable of challenging a gaze that is backed by governmental authority, so he is forced to self-discipline and cease his actions.[51] The photographer whose studio displays

[51] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, 2nd edn (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

Miss Fenton's photograph causes him the most discomfort: 'I had vague inclinations to put up my umbrella as a shelter from the glare which I felt consuming the very marrow of my spine' (259). As discussed in the last chapter, photographers are formidable narrators in their own right. This practitioner's clear suspicion towards Charles querying after a female stranger disrupts his vision of himself as a romantic hero. Charles's fear of becoming the object of another's gaze and narrative is further symbolized through his dislike of roofs; he prefers sleeping in a tent if he were allowed to place one on the street. Hidden within its folds, he can watch without being watched.

The traits assigned to Miss Fenton are related to ideal Victorian femininity, which engages with the same identity erasure politics found in objectification. The parameters for acceptable female behaviour were largely narrow and rigid, and those that stepped outside them were consequently viewed as lesser beings like the controversial New Woman.[52] Victorian women were encouraged to follow the codified standards even at the cost of their personhood. Mr Fenton's dance studio is located on Angel Street, drawing a link between Miss Fenton and the angel in the house figure from Coventry Patmore's popular poem of the same name. Published in parts between 1854 and 1862, *The Angel in the House* revolves around the aptly named Honoria, a virtuous, self-sacrificing, and dutiful wife. In the section titled 'The Wife's Tragedy', Honoria never snaps back at 'impatient' words from her husband and instead waits until his mood improves, 'too gentle even to force/His penitence by kind replies'.[53] When he finally extends an olive branch, she selflessly takes the blame for his bad mood even though she had naught to do with it. She is 'dearly devoted to his arms' and 'loves with love that cannot tire'.[54] Her 'passionate duty' as a wife strengthens their love.[55] This is the woman

[52] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 23.
[53] Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (London: John W. Parker and Son, West Strand, 1858), p. 105.
[54] Patmore, *Angel in the House*, p. 106.
[55] Patmore, *Angel in the House*, p. 106.

Charles envisions Miss Fenton to be, someone who is kind-hearted and devoted, 'neither discontented, nor listless, nor a grumbler' (258). Her 'excessive cleanliness and neatness' showcases her fictional aptitude in managing a clean and organized household (258). Miss Fenton's imaginary 'modesty and difficulty of access', in addition to Mr Fenton's desire to shield his daughter from public spaces, increase Charles's admiration for her all the more because it plays into the conservative idea of female sexual purity (261).

Marriage was implicitly a business transaction for Victorian women because many were raised to be financially dependent wives, and 'Her Face' makes this connection explicit by presenting Miss Fenton's photograph as a commodity in a shop display. Charles wants to buy her photograph and upon failing that, sets his sights on procuring the original who is 'infinitely' more 'satisfactory' (259). He would pursue her even if he had managed to purchase the photograph because, in a monetized perversion of the romantic act in gifting one's photographic self-portrait to a sweetheart, Charles would view his acquisition of her likeness as part of their fantasy courtship. Isobel Armstrong argues that goods displayed behind shop windows appear more valuable since the protective glass thwarts the gaze and generates a desire for the prohibited products.[56] This equally applies to the commodified Miss Fenton, whose 'difficulty of access' magnifies her allure and solidifies Charles's determination to maritally possess her (261). Miss Fenton's photograph is specifically taken for advertising purposes and housed in a street-door case, alongside other 'exquisitely rendered' images, to entice customers to have their likeness captured (259). The commercial use of her photographic portrait likens her to the shopgirl figure who, as we know, had a precarious reputation. She sold the clothes she modelled and the involvement of her body in the transaction threateningly merged commerce and sexual exchange in a manner not unlike

[56] Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, pp. 121-22.

prostitution.[57] Rephrasing Judith Walkowitz's quote on shopgirls ('If she sold things, did she not sell herself?') in relation to store-displayed photographs: if she sold her likeness, did she not sell herself?[58] Susan Sontag specifically likens the camera to a 'predatory weapon' because: 'To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed'.[59] Miss Fenton's commodification is further signified by Charles seeing her face everywhere on marketable goods and different advertisements after glimpsing her photograph:

> I was mixing up my beauty with T. P.'s advertisements … Her face was on the lids of the snuff-boxes in the tobacconists' windows; on the headings of the songs at the music-sellers'; on the shoulders of the dummies at the hairdressers'; and finally, it hovered before the columns of my penny newspaper when I got home (259).

Contemporary celebrities often lent their likeness to products, leveraging the promiscuous connection between themselves and their images in order to cultivate their stardom.[60] Actress Sarah Bernhardt, for instance, promoted 'long and attenuated' cigars meant to provoke fantasies about caressing her body.[61] In Charles's case, he is 'haunted' by the product he does

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[57] Evans, *Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, p. 31.
[58] Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 46.
[59] Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 4. Jessica Lake also illustrates that photography has a historical connection with violence and theft against the depicted subject. As the craft spread to amateur practitioners in the 1880s and 1890s, cameras were branded with names like 'Bulls-eye', 'Bullet', and 'Hawks-eye'. The phrase 'take a shot' became common lexicon and some cameras were even manufactured in the shape of revolvers. Jessica Lake, 'Privacy, Property or Propriety: The Case of "Pretty Portraits" in Late Nineteenth-Century America', Law, Culture and the Humanities, 10 (2014), 111-29 (p. 114).
[60] They also accomplished this by selling their photographs. Sharon Marcus reports that shopkeepers actually fought over off-market pictures of Sarah Bernhardt to display as attractions in their windows. According to Marcus, fans sought 'intimacy, connection, and proximity' to their idols by collecting photographs and memorabilia related to them. Susan B. Cook adds that the celebrity photograph offers a false sense of intimacy by letting its owner possess a piece of the celebrity through their image. Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 113, 96; Susan B. Cook, *Victorian Negatives: Literary Culture and the Dark Side of Photography in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: SUNY Press. 2019), p. xxvii.
[61] Marcus, *Drama of Celebrity*, p. 114.

not yet own (258). Unsurprisingly, the way he finally gains access to Miss Fenton is by answering an ad placed by her father's dance studio. He pays a guinea for that first meeting and purchases a marital contract by proving his financial stability.

Charles tries to portray the photographer who commodifies Miss Fenton's photograph as an 'inhuman' freak with fingers 'deeply stained with chemicals', but the former is a much greater threat to her privacy and, by extension, bodily autonomy. If a photographic portrait can substitute the pictured subject's presence, then the photograph is comparable to the sitter's physical body, something that can similarly be touched and fondled. As such, to misuse someone's likeness violates their bodily autonomy, that is, their right to decide what happens to their own body. Misappropriation of someone's image impedes their control over the way they are perceived, like Somerset's fake photograph damaging his relationship with Paula. Contemporary discourse on privacy in relation to photography often evoked the word 'property', linking the body and its image under the umbrella of property rights.[62] Jessica Lake's analysis of the famous Manola v. Stevens court case (in which actress Marion Manola was secretly photographed while performing in tights by the defendant) demonstrates how its commentators largely gravitated towards property rights while discussing the incident: 'Miss Manola's tights, with their contents, belong to her. She has a right to exhibit them, but there is a difference between the spectators in the theatre for a few moments with a glimpse of something gorgeous, and the cold matter-of-fact reality of a photograph to be hawked about and critically examined'.[63] Tom Gunning further notes that photography transforms the body into 'a transportable image fully adaptable to the systems of circulation and mobility that

[62] Arguing for sitter rights, the *American Journal of Photography* claims: 'The private sitter, whose photograph is intended solely to give pleasure in the family circle or among intimate friends, is clearly entitled to be protected from a publicity which he has not courted and which is probably repugnant to his feelings; and such protection is still more demanded when the sitter is a lady, to whom it cannot be agreeable that her features should become the property of any passer-by who cares to spend two shillings in purchasing them'. 'The Photographer and His Sitter', *American Journal of Photography*, 10 (January 1888), 23–25 (p. 24).
[63] The quote stems from an 1890 article that appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution*, which Lake cites in her own discussion: Lake, 'Privacy, Property or Propriety, p. 122.

modernity demanded'.[64] The photographer in 'Her Face' at least gains consent from Miss Fenton to commodify her in a shop display, a courtesy not always offered to sitters. The Fine Arts Copyright Act of 1862, which was implemented as a result of rising commercialism and photography's ascent as a feasible occupation, granted photographers authorship over their wares and the slippery phrasing allowed them freely use images they had taken even without permission from the depicted subject.[65] Collins's story came out four years before the bill's enactment, but debate regarding the issue was already underway prior to its legislation and reinforces how fiction is inspired by and inspires public opinion at large. The photographer refuses to sell Miss Fenton's picture to Charles on the basis that he does not want to 'disturb' a profitable exhibition, but his denial can also be attributed to him not wanting to break his informal contract with her by selling her image to a stranger (259). Charles's commodification of Miss Fenton goes against her approved commercial use of her image and leads to tangible consequences for her physical person. She is forced to marry Charles despite her clear distaste for him, and her body will be subject to his sexual advances and may even become a vessel for motherhood. She has no bodily autonomy as witnessed by her father agreeing to Charles's marital proposal on her behalf. Mr. Fenton restricts his daughter's movement by forbidding her from freely visiting the dance studio, a bodily constraint echoed by Charles physically stopping Miss Fenton from escaping the room once she recognizes her stalker. If her body is property, she does not own it; it belongs to her father who passes along ownership to her husband.

[64] Tom Gunning, 'Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives and Early Cinema', in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. by Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995), pp. 15-45 (p. 18).
[65] Shelangoskie, 'Domesticity in the Darkroom', p. 97. A correspondent in *Chambers's Journal* detailed how several photographers attempted to keep pictures of customers without permission to display. As contemporary writer Andrew Wynter illustrated: 'Many a man, through some accidental circumstance, wakes up and finds himself famous, and in two or three days his *carte de visite* is staring at him from every window in town'. 'A Group of Artists', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature*, *Science*, *and Art*, 4 (October 1869), 658–61 (p. 660); Andrew Wynter, *Curiosities of Toil and Other Papers* (London: Chapman, 1870), p. 117.

In linking its marital storyline to the invasive and non-consensual use of photographic portraits in commercial settings, Collins's story implicitly claims that those outraged about photographers' violation of privacy rights should similarly be angry about the unfair treatment of women in Victorian society because they both infringe on bodily autonomy. Its point is augmented by photography's metonymic process of turning people into objects that can be possessed. Miss Fenton's control over her identity is so tenuous, readers never find out her first name. She is only ever known as Miss Fenton, a subsidiary of her father, and in the end, she is passed from her father's possession to Charles's, where her name will be changed to Mrs. Robert to reflect her shift from daughter to wife. She will never get to be her own person, only an object—or a photograph—owned by a man. Gazed at, but never genuinely seen.

The Photographer's Negative

The protagonist in E.W. Hornung's 'A Spoilt Negative' is another man obsessed with his love interest's likeness but, unlike Charles, is ultimately redeemed.[66] Photographer Dick Auburn longs to take a good photographic negative of his elusive object of affection, Elsie Keswicke, and seizes his opportunity when he discovers her sleeping in a hammock. He accidentally takes two photographs on the same plate and the hideous negative that emerges during development—a half-girl and half-cow hybrid—nearly destroys his romantic chances with Elsie. He manages to convince her it was a mistake and the story ends with them officially in a relationship. A negative is metonymically closer to the captured subject in comparison to a photograph because, like the original, multiple copies can be derived from it.

[66] 'A Spoilt Negative' was originally published in *Belgravia Magazine* in March 1888. I am using a reprinted version from an anthology: E.W. Hornung, 'A Spoilt Negative', in *The Short Story and Photography, 1880's-1980's: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Jane M. Rabb (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), pp. 1-15. I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

I argue that Dick's desire to obtain a negative of Elsie stems from a misplaced desire to romantically pursue her, but he misinterprets that emotion for artistic appreciation of her beauty. The driving force behind Hornung's narrative is Dick's struggle between his perceived opposing identities as a stoic photographer or a 'gentleman' worthy of entering a courtship, a conflict that is replicated in Elsie's ploy to uncover whether Dick only desires her as an aesthetic object or if he cares about her as an individual (14). The layered negative that eventually brings them together represents a conciliation between Dick's identities, making him a more integrated and acceptable member of Victorian society, in addition to symbolizing that women who do not conform to the Victorian feminine ideal are still deserving of marriage.

The negative is not only important to the story for its metonymic value, but also due to its metaphorical light/dark contrast that reflects Dick's conflicting self-image. The photographic object was originally part of calotypy, which was invented in 1841 by Fox Talbot as a rival technique to the daguerreotype. Fredrick Scott Archer developed the negative further with the glass-negative wet collodion process in 1851, making it easier and quicker to reproduce than the calotype process with a sharper final image. This eventually led to the abandonment of the daguerreotype, as collodion-based methods all but dominated the industry from the 1850s to the 1880s.[67] The negative's biggest difference to the daguerreotype is its ability to produce multiple copies, but as Susan B. Cook points out, less scholarly attention has been given to the technical means of how this occurs in comparison to the implications of image reproduction.[68] A negative facilitates reproduction by inverting light and dark. Negatives are created by directing light through a box onto a chemically treated metal, glass, paper, or plastic. Traditionally, photographs are developed in a darkroom with only red-tinted

[67] Cook, *Victorian Negatives*, p. xvii.
[68] Cook, *Victorian Negatives*, p. xxviii.

safelights. The parts of a photograph that appear the lightest in the final print are actually the parts that have been exposed to the least light. Cook argues that the photographic representation of light ironically depends on the withholding of light in the development process, and a negative-based photograph relies on its own inverse.[69] Photography promises to shine an objective light on the world, she continues, but it requires darkness in its creation; or as Oliver Wendell Holmes put it in 1859: 'This *negative* is now to give birth to a *positive*,—this mass of contradictions to assert its hidden truth in a perfect harmonious affirmation of the realities of Nature'.[70]

For Dick, dark/negative represents his perception of himself as a photographer and light/positive signifies his perception of himself as a gentleman. He considers himself 'an artist first and a man second' and his 'eligible' bachelor traits only apply to his person 'in a secondary kind of way', demonstrating that his self-professed identity as a photographer is the original image from which the gentleman will emerge (2-3). This is reflected in the narrative progression where Dick enters his makeshift darkroom as a photographer intending to develop his negative of Elsie and emerges after being suffused in the darkroom's 'warm ruby glow' as a gentleman in a romantic relationship with her (11). A gentleman, by definition, is someone who follows codified behavioural standards, so being with Elsie concurrently signifies his participation in society. Dick even likens himself to a negative on one occasion; when he stumbles across Elsie's sleeping form, he frantically muses on the photographic negative's image inversion and compares it to himself who, in his panic, hardly knows 'whether he was standing on his head or on his heels' (8). The dark/negative metaphor is further highlighted by the photographer's negative portrayal in the text. Dick literally dwells in darkness to practice his craft, in a 'cellar remote from solar beams' (3). He spends

[69] Cook, *Victorian Negatives*, p. xxviii.
[70] Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 3 (June 1859), 738-48 <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/LEVIN/owholmes.html> [accessed 19 September 2022].

‘lonely hours’ there which ‘issued smells and vapours the most vile’ and follows ‘these nasal invaders from the under-world, looking pale and careworn, and wearing on his hands the stains—not, indeed, of blood, but of some virulent chemical compound far less easy to expunge’ (3). The description conjures an image of a skeletal denizen of the underworld whose hands are permanently stained through unnatural craft—an ’inhuman freak’ like the photographer in Collins’s text with similar chemical-stained fingers. Though Hornung’s text offers a more sympathetic depiction of the photographer through Dick’s redemption as opposed to his counterparts in ‘Her Face’ and Hardy’s novel, it still draws on negative stereotypes associated with the figure—most prominently, the violating gaze which is shown through Dick secretly photographing Elsie in her sleep. The grotesque and ‘lonely’ occupation seems utterly incompatible with romantic love or indeed general company, heightening Dick’s initial belief that he must choose to either be a photographer or be a gentleman: his beloved craft or his beloved (3).

Echoing Nancy Armstrong’s argument on the Victorian novel and visual information, Dick’s appearance—and personality—changes depending on his current self-perception:

> Besides being an artist, Dick Auburn was also—in a secondary kind of way—a jolly, genial, good-looking, and perfectly eligible young fellow. He was blessed with a mercurial temperament, a gay humour (when untrammelled by artistic anxieties), and an independent income … When at work Dick wore professorial spectacles: at all other times he sported a smart-looking single eye-glass. The change thus wrought in his appearance was typical of the contrast between the light-hearted young blade and the anxious, care-ridden travailer in Art—a contrast which nobody who spent a day in Dick’s company could fail to remark (2-3).

While practicing his craft, Dick is an ‘anxious’ and ‘care-ridden’ perfectionist. Any other time, he is a gentleman, a ‘perfectly eligible young fellow’ with an independent income that can support a wife and favourable character traits that make him welcome company: he is ‘light-hearted’, ‘genial’, and ‘jolly’ with a ‘mercurial temperament’ and ‘gay humour’. Dick wears ‘professorial spectacles’ at work rather than his usual ‘smart-looking single eye-glass’, a detail that lines up with his change in personality and is so noticeable that ‘nobody who spent a day in Dick’s company could fail to remark’ upon it. The ‘professorial’ spectacles match his professionalism and high standards in his work, and the ‘smart-looking’ eye-glass reflects his good looks and bachelor eligibility. The change in his eyewear indicates that Dick views the world differently as a photographer as opposed to when he is an ordinary man. His perception of Elsie is the perfect example. As a photographer, he views her as a visually appealing object to capture on a plate; as a gentleman, he sees her as a person he would like to court. Spectacles have also two lenses in comparison to the single eye-glass, which not only references photography’s association with superior vision, but also symbolizes the ending in which the light/positive gentleman emerges from the dark/negative photographer and Dick’s two identities are reconciled.

Dick’s passion for photography causes him to misinterpret his growing feelings for Elsie as desire for her as an aesthetic object. Obtaining a negative indirectly satiates his desire to be romantically involved with her without disrupting his image of himself as a photographer devoted to his ‘Fine Art’ (2). When Dick happens across Elsie napping in a hammock, the gentleman in him momentarily hesitates to invade her privacy by photographing her without her knowledge, but the photographer in him sees it as a rare opportunity to finally capture his ‘coveted model’: ‘A moment longer the *man* knelt chained to the spot; the next, the *artist* stole back across the lawn as noiselessly as he had approached’ (8, italics mine). Elsie always shuns his attempts to photograph her, even going as far as to clap her hand over his camera

lens; she actively resists being turned into an object. Asleep, however, she is passive and unmoving—simply a pretty picture. The way in which the sleeping Elsie is described renders her akin to a painting:

> There, in a light hammock of network—there, all plastic curves and softened outline, lay his coveted model, asleep! She lay robed in palest pink that seemed to his kindled fancy, against the deep shades of the tree, like the first wan streak of dawn over treeless plains. The gold-brown hair that crowned her pale, fair face showed like amber filigree against one white hand beneath her head; the other hand hung lightly over the hammock's side. Long lashes fringed each cool cheek beneath the closed eyelids; red lips, just parted in a smile that had been checked by slumber in its dawning, displayed one gleaming flake of white between (7-8).

Her 'plastic curves' signifies that Dick is currently looking upon her like an object and additionally hints at the artificiality of the scene for, as readers find out later, Elsie is merely feigning sleep to discover his intentions towards her. Dick's emphasis on colour in the description reinforces his commitment to his 'Fine Art' by linking photography, a medium that many contemporary commentators deny as art, to portraiture, an established and respected form of art (2). The colours will not 'in this era of half-fledged science, be transmitted to the negative', but his adamance in the superiority of his trade causes him to lean on language related to painted artwork in order to communicate photography's artistic value (8). Dick explicitly hates photographing groups, in part due to his symbolic shunning of society while obsessively working in his 'lonely' cellar, but also because the participants' fidgeting and joking around interfere with his 'artistic ambition' (3, 5). He does not mind solo photographic portraits, because he is able to retain more control over his subject and create

art in the form of ‘the most elaborate selection and arrangement of light, shade, background, and pose’ (5). He prefers sitters that behave, that is, objects that he can easily bend to his will and creative vision.

His objectification of Elsie—specifically the scene in which Dick photographs her sleeping—bestows her with traits associated with the Victorian feminine ideal. Her sleep-induced passivity is a prominent example and she is also likened to multiple mythical creatures that are emblematic of womanly ‘loveliness’, like ‘Dryads’, ‘wood-nymph’, ‘river-nymph’, and ‘Fairy Queen’ (8). These entities are fictional, signifying that female gender conventions are likewise unrealistic. Dick specifically compares Elsie to Aenone, a river nymph from Greek mythology who commits suicide after her lover dies in battle.[71] Her slavish love and self-renouncing spirit are familiar traits of the formerly discussed angel in the house figure. These mythological beings also symbolize nature, which in turn symbolizes female fertility.[72] According to Mary Poovey, the reproductive system was considered the defining characteristic of Victorian womanhood because many believed that traits women should possess, such as altruism and kind-heartedness, branched from an innate maternal instinct.[73] Elsie, ‘all plastic curves and softened outlines’, is surrounded by nature in her hammock, highlighting her fertility and resemblance to the traditional ideal (7-8).

Elsie does not adhere to the feminine ideal though, as seen by her wilful personality and refusal to be a passive puppet. As mentioned, Elsie repeatedly rebuffs Dick’s efforts to photograph her and obstructs his objectifying photographer’s eye. She is the ‘worst offender in every group’ picture and is an ‘intolerable tease during the progress of the important after-

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[71] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘Oenone, Greek Mythology’, *Encyclopedia Britannica* < https://www.britannica.com/topic/Oenone-Greek-mythology> [accessed 19 September 2022].
[72] Kathy Alexis Psomiades argues that British Aestheticism, through the Pre-Raphaelite period and into the 1890s, organized itself around beautiful feminine visual objects that were defined by their femininity. Kathy Alexis Psomiades, ‘Beauty’s Body: Gender Ideology and British Aestheticism’, *Victorian Studies*, 36 (1992), 31-52 (p. 31).
[73] Poovey, Uneven Developments, p. 6.

processes of developing, printing, and toning' (5). She becomes enraged at Dick when she mistakes the double-exposed negative as a cruel prank, her rage at complete odds with the self-abnegating Honoria from Patmore's poem who takes full responsibility for her husband's bad moods despite not being the cause. In the scene where Dick photographs her sleeping, he believes he has successfully transformed her into a pretty collectible, but Elsie subverts the power dynamic since she engineered the whole scenario in the first place. She allows herself to be gazed upon and photographically captured as an object, making her not a passive object but an active participant in the objectification process with control over her own body and how she is viewed. Elsie's original plan is to smash the negative once developed in order to humiliate and demoralize Dick, demonstrating that she has full control over the situation. Scholars like Carol Mavor and Catherine Robson have raised questions about the female model's agency, arguing that she possesses power of her own and that her relationship with the male photographer is not always one-sided. Mavor, writing about the caste-defying relationship between Arthur Munby and Hannah Cullwick (the former possessing a voyeuristic fetish for working-class women like Cullwick), illustrates that the latter masterminded at least one of the dress-up characters she was photographed as. The character of Magdalene was decided cooperatively with the photographer (not Munby, but someone called Mr. Stodart). She initiated getting a haircut to Munby, leading to a photograph of her as a man with short hair.[74] Robson, on the topic of Lewis Carroll's photographs of little girls, admits that it is obviously an unequal relationship, but points out it is impossible to determine how wide that inequity is and perhaps the girl always intrinsically brought something of her own making to the photographs.[75] Elsie's situation is similar to Cullwick's in that she seizes

[74] Carol Mavor, *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 73.
[75] Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 144.

control over the male fantasy by spearheading it. The negative is a joint project by both Dick and Elsie, its authorship mirrored through its hybrid image.

The layered negative—which ultimately brings Dick and Elsie together—symbolizes the latter's multifaceted personality and demonstrates that unconventional femininity is not simply valid, but can equally result in romantic success. The picture is described as 'a literal and compact rendering of Beauty and the Beast' (14). It shows Elsie 'supported on four cloven hoofs', with two large horns protruding from her 'shapely head' and a tail dangling from her feet. Her pictured hand rests on the back of 'what appeared to be an ill-shapen black dog' (14). Sighting her hideous representation, the furious Elsie too morphs into a sort of beast: a 'veritable Pythoness' (14). The Minotaur-like creature and Pythoness serve as mocking contrasts to Dick's previous imaginings as Elsie as a sweet nature nymph. Both are the antithesis to the selfless and kind-hearted feminine archetype; Elsie's horns and cloven hooves have demonic connotations, while the Pythoness evokes association with the snake in biblical Eden and Eve's transgression. A black dog is traditionally considered a death omen as well. Elsie's animalistic features in the negative and as the Pythoness exaggerate her headstrong personality by suggesting that she is governed by base instincts and making her appear dangerously uncontrollable. Nina Auerbach argues that the Victorian cultural imagination imbue the woman with divine and demonic powers that can be divided into three central paradigms: the angel/demon, the old maid, and the fallen woman.[76] Talking about the angel/demon in particular, Auerbach contends that 'female demons bear an eerie resemblance to their angelic counterparts', but traits that are 'suggestively implicit in the angel come to the fore in the demon'.[77] In 'A Spoilt Negative', Elsie is seemingly caught between two extremes, the angelic feminine ideal (the nymph) and the demonic temperamental woman

[76] Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*, p. 63.
[77] Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*, p. 75.

(the Pythoness), but as Auerbach illustrates, these two figures frequently influence each other. The double-exposed negative has a 'dissolving views' effect, 'when the canvas is shared equally by the coming and the parting guest', accurately depicting Elsie as a nuanced individual who is neither the nymph or the Pythoness, but a mixture of both (14). While unsightly, Elsie's negative does not portray her as a complete monster; it depicts her as a beautiful girl with bestial features—something in-between. The appearance of the savage Pythoness, emblematic of her seemingly unfeminine flaws, does not repulse Dick, but rather leads to their relationship. This contradicts the advice given by conduct manuals aimed towards Victorian women which, according to Susan Fraiman, typically follow a chapter sequence that closes with the 'marital or maternal', like Sarah Ellis's famous *The Daughters of England* (1842).[78] Fraiman notes that 'Love and Courtship' is the tenth chapter out of twelve in Ellis's guide, positioning marriage as a goal achieved through proper behaviour learned from earlier chapters such as 'Taste, Tact, and Observation'.[79] Hornung's amorous storyline normalizes and advocates for non-compliance with the feminine ideal in a language that even conservative readers can understand: heterosexual courtship.

The double-exposed negative simultaneously signifies Dick's reconciliation of his photographer and gentleman identities to become a more integrable, functional member of society. Courtship is a social bond, alongside being a foundational aspect of many Victorians' lives, especially if we take into account marriage's role in directing the succession of familial assets and surnames, so it is fitting that a romantic relationship is what guides Dick back to

[78] Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 16. Michael Curtin illustrates that no etiquette guides were published between 1804 and 1828, but in the 1830s, multiple publications crowded the market. The *Quarterly* reviewed eleven conduct manuals in 1837 alone, all of which were published in the last two years, some in several editions. The timing coincides with the 1832 Reform Bill, a period in British history which, in Curtin's opinion, was dominated by a desire to remedy certain inequalities in political representation and a compensatory drive to regulate the class structure along codified lines. Michael Curtin, *Propriety and Position: A Study of Victorian Manners* (New York: Garland, 1987), pp. 42, 34.
[79] Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women*, p 16.

decorous society. Shelangoskie reads the ruined negative as the moment where Dick loses control of the craft's technical aspects and hence creates a space where the photographer's authority and interpretation are challenged by the photographed subject.[80] I agree with her interpretation, as discernible from my own analysis of Elsie's agency over her body and image, but in relation to Dick, I view the negative not representative of the photographer's failed authority, but rather of the layered individual he needs to be in order to be with Elsie. Dick sees the half-girl, half-cow negative as a 'prime blunder' because, typically, a photographic plate is meant to contain just one single photograph, echoing his belief that he must decide between being a photographer or being a gentleman (14). However, that negative is what finally brings him and Elsie together, demonstrating that he can inhabit both identities and that this multifaceted disposition is what he requires to charm Elsie. Dick threatens to drink poisonous photographic chemicals unless she listens to his explanation for the ruined negative, symbolically showing his willingness to destroy the photographer in him to earn her affection, but just as Elsie's undesirable characteristics are not vilified, neither is Dick's creepy 'Fine Art'. His passion for the medium simply needs to be tempered. The darkroom lights are repeatedly referenced in the scene where Dick and Elsie resolve their differences, further showing photography's importance to their relationship (apart from the negative) and that his identification with the photographer is not simply eliminated to make room for the gentleman. Its 'warm ruby glow' is used to indicate when characters are blushing, which in turn is a bodily reaction often related to experiencing romantic feelings (11). Elsie's mortification at Dick potentially caring more about his trade than her is communicated through her 'bewitching crimson face', and Dick's 'bloodless' cheeks are tinted by the 'blessed ruby light' when he addresses her as 'dearest' (11, 13). Readers do not directly witness their kiss, but rather infer it through the pair's coloured cheeks under the

[80] Shelangoskie, 'Domesticity in the Darkroom', p. 104.

photographic lights: ‘Then, somehow, he leant forward and drew her to him over the three feet of glass and chemicals. Then—oh, blessed ruby light! What matters a blushing cheek in your crimson glow?’ (15). Dick is still identified as an ‘artist’ while flirting with Elsie after they emerge from the darkroom and when someone rudely questions him about how his ‘dirty tricks’ are getting on, he calmly replies that he had ruined a negative (15). In the past, Dick would have likely scowled and feverishly defended the honour of his ‘Fine Art’, but now that he has become a more balanced individual as both the photographer and the gentleman, he displays better social skills that enable him to leave his Othered status as an isolated photographer and be an acceptable participant in general society.

A photographic negative is a ‘picture that should never, never fade’ and Dick’s resolve to ‘preserve the negative for ever and ever’ at the end of the story hints that his relationship with Elsie will share the same longevity (9, 15). She is the true original, far better than the negative he used to desire in lieu of an easily degradable photograph. The last few lines of Hornung’s story states that Dick has spoilt a negative ‘in more senses than one’ (15). Not only does he resolve the ‘negative’ situation with his sweetheart by producing a bad negative, but he also redeems his ‘negative’ reputation as a photographer. Elsie’s ‘negative’ traits are likewise absolved through her successful romance plotline, leading to an overall positive stance on alternative brands of femininity.

‘The Photograph’, ‘Her Face’, and ‘A Spoilt Negative’ all emphasize photography’s metonymic potential, even across different photographic mediums and especially in conjunction to romantic relationships, but at the same time, they take care to deride mentalities that ascribe too much metonymic value to photographs. Alice from the first tale believes that the photographic stereoscope of her fiancé can give her up-to-date reports on his well-being and dies as a result. Collins’s story portrays a creepy stalker who sees no variance

between a photograph and its depicted. The male protagonist of Hornung's text similarly views attaining a photographic negative of his beloved as attaining his beloved, but is shown the error of his ways towards the end and his changed viewpoint is rewarded with a reciprocal relationship with his sweetheart. Again and again, characters that confuse photographic objects for the real thing are shown to be in the wrong. These texts contribute to the mythos of photography, a multi-medium invention that can substitute a beloved's presence according to them, but also warn that one's interpersonal relationships will be put at risk if one unequivocally treats a two-dimensional picture as a three-dimensional person. These stories also reinforce that metonymic presence and intimate feelings fluctuate across different photographic media, continuing last chapter's discussion on how visual mediums are not so easily substituted with each other. They all mediate romantic relationships in slightly different ways, whether due to their material shape or social connotations, characteristics that simultaneously impact society in infrastructural ways beyond the amorous union of two individuals.

Chapter 3: Me, Myself, and the Photographic 'I'

In E.W. Hornung's 'A Spoilt Negative', Dick's struggle between his conflicting identities as a gentleman and a photographer can simultaneously be read as an example of literary doubling. The differences in his appearance and personality depending on which role he is currently inhabiting is comparable to the opposing figures of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, who are a classic instance of good-evil doubles in literature.[1] As a gentleman, Dick wears a 'smart-looking single eye-glass' and is a 'jolly, genial, good-looking, and perfectly eligible young fellow' with a 'mercurial temperament' and a 'gay humour' (3). As a photographer, he dons 'professorial spectacles' and is a 'anxious, care-ridden travailer in Art', who spends 'lonely' hours in a cellar 'wearing on his hands the stains—not, indeed, of blood, but of some virulent chemical compound far less easy to expunge' (3). The divide between the two is so prominent, 'nobody who spent a day in Dick's company could fail to remark' on the contrast (3). Dick is often overwhelmed by his passion for photography, which leads him to engage in transgressive actions like sneakily photographing his crush Elsie while she sleeps. Unlike Dr Jekyll who is ultimately consumed by his dark side as embodied by Mr Hyde, Dick gets his socially unacceptable obsession with photography under control in the end and becomes a more well-adjusted individual in a romantic relationship.

I deliberately refrained from bringing up the double in my analysis of Hornung's text last chapter, because its connection with photography warrants its own chapter. I contend that photography, with its connotations of revelation and metonymic ability to stand in for the depicted, led to new ways of envisioning and conveying doubling—namely, enabling the photograph, rather than a separate character, to function as the double. Defined within the context of my argument, a double is a character's other half, their dark side; or as David

[1] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Galef puts it: their 'perfect mirror-image'.[2] Doubles share numerous similarities with one another except for one key distinction that forces them into conflict; or, they can be complete opposites but are linked by at least one strong similarity. Galef adds that writers usually work with close resemblances rather than precise clones.[3] In most cases, the double also represents an externalization—sometimes grossly exaggerated—of its corresponding character's defects or transgressive desires. As discussed in previous chapters, viewers of a photograph often project their own thoughts and feelings onto it, so their vision of the pictured subject's appearance and personality may not be accurate; it is simply how the viewer sees them. With photographic doubles, a character projects their transgressive desires onto a photograph and that photograph, regardless of who it depicts, becomes their double. The photographic double does not have a corporal body of their own beyond the image and is purely a piecemeal composition of others' perceptions, reiterating that sometimes a photograph can take on an entirely different persona than the depicted whose likeness it shares.

In accordance with my focus on romantic relationships, I will be examining photographic doubles who represent the female protagonist's transgressive feelings about matrimony and its related concepts, like domesticity and motherhood. Photography was historically used by Victorian women as a means towards creative self-expression and empowerment. Patrizia Di Bello's study into Victorian women's albums demonstrates that they were far from being 'quaint, old-fashioned, purpose-less activities, on which women wasted their time and talents for want of better outlets' and were actually a sophisticated collecting practice that 'played an important role in the construction of the genteel identity of women and their families'.[4] Her analysis of Lady Anna Waterlow's family album shows that Lady Waterlow was able to use

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[2] David Galef, *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 19.
[3] Galef, *The Supporting Cast*, p. 19.
[4] Patrizia Di Bello, Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers, and Flirts (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1, 3.

photography to enjoy her children—whether in their attendance or without—away from the drudgery of maternal duties: ‘Anna Waterlow could use the socially accepted ritual of album making, to image pleasures and desires, associated with a relaxed and self indulgent motherhood, that were not socially sanctioned’.[5] Lindsay Smith’s examination of Lady Charlotte Milles’s photo-collage creations likewise illustrates how Lady Milles cut up ‘precious photographs, in themselves keep-sakes’ to form new, ‘personally crafted’ keepsakes that contain ‘a type of authoritative stamp’ of personal creativity.[6] Smith additionally shows how photography contributed to women’s participation in the male-dominated world of natural sciences. Anna Atkins, an enthusiastic botanist and only daughter of the scientist John George Children, took up the photographic cyanotype process in order to document algae specimens and her work, *Part I* of *Photographs of British Algae; Cyanotype Impression*s (first published in 1843 over the course of ten years), pre-dates William Henry Fox Talbot’s famous *The Pencil of Nature* as the first photographically illustrated book.[7] Investigating photographic doubles not only emphasizes new media technologies’ influence on fiction at the base level of literary motifs, but also advances these scholars’ research by studying photography’s relationship with subtle female transgression during a period in which many women were taught to bury certain traits and desires in favour of the feminine ideal. Amateur photography (not to be conflated with the ‘unwomanly’ business run by the Lorimer sisters in Levy’s novel) was a socially condoned space in which women could express themselves, similar to how the double is arguably a contained way to explore non-conformity. Doubles that go against society, like Mr Hyde or Bertha from Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, are usually punished at the end of the text either through death or an equivalent unfortunate event, making them a sanctified method of exploring but also regulating

[5] Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 98.
[6] Smith, *The Politics of Focus*, p. 64.
[7] Smith, *The Politics of Focus*, pp. 53-54.

transgression. Traditional or alternate forms of doubling still existed in the photographic age, like the magical portrait in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891) or the contrasting doubles, Val Helsing and Dracula, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), but now there was an additional tool to communicate the literary trope which directly plays on photography's historical connection to female self-expression and quiet defiance of gendered expectations.

The double's association with transgression has an extensive scholarship, especially in the area of psychoanalysis. This is partially why the figure is famously linked to the Gothic genre, which Donna Heiland points out, 'is about transgressions of all sorts: across national boundaries, social boundaries, sexual boundaries, the boundaries of one's own identity'.[8] I do not plan on taking a strong psychoanalytic angle in my argument, but will draw on its concepts on the fractured and repressed self. Speaking on Victorian ideology on the self specifically, Jenny Bourne Taylor claims that the 'dominant model' of the self was one based on 'containment and control' and promoted 'moral management' as a method by which 'a stable, sane identity could be built up by proper training and self-regulation'. Gesturing towards Matthew Arnold's fear of 'barbarians' in his 1869 work *Culture and Anarchy*, she continues that Victorians believed they could attain the ideal rational, whole self if they repressed what was savage, irrational, and uncivilized.[9] Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay 'The Uncanny' hypothesizes that any type of emotional effect can be transformed into anxiety through repression and hence there are forms of anxiety that are the result of something repressed that has resurfaced. The uncanny is something that should have been hidden, but is rediscovered after repression has rendered it strange and frightening.[10] Freud brings up the

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[8] Donna Heiland, *Gothic & Gender: An Introduction* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 3.
[9] Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 31.
[10] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 147-48.

double specifically as representative of suppressed infantile impulses, that is, a primitive state.[11] Julia Kristeva, building on Lacanian and Freudian theories, postulates a similar point through her concept of abjection. It refers to the process by which an individual separates one's self from what threatens one's sense of life—the Other. The main example she uses is a corpse which reminds us of our own fragile materiality. Between the spectrum of the subject (a part of one's self) and object (something entirely independent of one's self), there lurks pieces that used to be part of one's self but must be rebuffed for the sake of social order. That is the abject, the Other who disrupts the cultural world; and to face it is a traumatic experience.[12] In relation to doubles in literature, the trope is the abject that is split from a character's self and symbolizes what must be rejected to uphold identity, system, and reason. The double sometimes inspires revulsion, like a corpse, because they symbolize what its corresponding character can morph into.

Roland Barthes contends that interest in the double waned following photography's invention due to its psychoanalytic connection:

> For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity. Even odder: it was *before* Photography that men had the most to say about the vision of the double. Heautoscopy was compared with an hallucinosis; for centuries this was a great mythic theme. But today it is as if we repressed the profound madness of Photography: *it* reminds us of its mythic heritage only by that faint uneasiness which seizes me when I look at 'myself' on a piece of paper.[13]

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[11] Freud, *The Uncanny*, pp. 142-43.
[12] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 3-4.
[13] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 12-13.

I disagree with his stance; Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* and Stoker's *Dracula* are all famous literary examples of doubles and were published in the late nineteenth century in the photographic era. I believe that photography expanded the possibilities of representing doubling in literature, which would lead to a resurgence in interest as opposed to a regression as Barthes argues. Texts about doubling that seemingly have nothing to do with photography might not fully escape its influence either, as Susan Cook demonstrates with her analysis of Stevenson's novella and Wilde's novel. Reading both works in relation to photographic negatives, she suggests that Jekyll and Hyde are two individuals occupying a single body, akin to two negatives creating a single image.[14] For the latter, Cook proposes that Dorian and his painting are both negatives at the start, coalesced as a single image. As the story progresses, the picture transforms into Dorian's ugly but true inverse, a negative that depicts reality more than Dorian himself.[15]

As evident by Barthes's musings and Cook's work on the negative, I am hardly the first to consider photography in relation to the double. Smith takes a firm psychoanalytic approach on the topic, reading photographic doubling alongside the mirror stage. She contends a photograph is akin to possessing a 'fixed and portable double of oneself as seen in a mirror'.[16] The inability to immediately recognize oneself in a photograph reproduces the initial misrecognition experienced by the child in front of the mirror. The adult subject can be said to undergo a second mirror stage through the photograph. However, whereas the child experiences pleasure and a sense of wholeness after recognizing itself in the mirror, the adult feels it lacks wholeness because of the photograph's distance and difference from the self

[14] Cook, *Victorian Negatives*, p. 84.
[15] Cook, *Victorian Negatives*, p. 92.
[16] Smith, *The Politics of Focus*, p. 77.

experienced in the mirror.[17] I intend to add to the scholarship through my exploration of photographic doubles who reflect the female protagonist's repressed or transgressive feelings towards marriage and the hearth, a framework that draws on photography's historical role as a creative outlet for Victorian women's suppressed individuality and socially unsanctioned desires. To put it more artistically, in my argument, photography is a means for self-expression and an externalized expression of the (suppressed) self.

This chapter examines photographic doubles from Thomas Hardy's short story 'An Imaginative Woman' and Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*. There are other works in the period that similarly utilize photography in their portrayal of doubling, but these two texts specifically present a photograph as the double and feature heroines who are dissatisfied with their marriages in some way.[18] Their respective photographic doubles embody what they refuse to voice or has been repressed. These heroines are already wives, so the goal of their romantic storylines is not marriage or courtship, but the attainment of a healthier companionate marriage that prioritizes the autonomy and mental well-being of the heroine. Hardy's short story is discussed first, despite having been published later, because its main character practices the fine arts and better exemplifies photography's role as a means of expressing one's self in comparison to the other text. In that section, the protagonist Ella Marchhill is in love with her literary idol who functions as her photographic double and reflects her covert yearning for artistic excellence and to escape from domesticity. Moving onto Collins's novel, the photograph of Eustace Macallan's deceased wife Sarah acts as the heroine Valeria Macallan's double and represents the insecurities she has about her marriage.

[17] Smith, *The Politics of Focus*, pp. 77-81.

[18] Other works that engage in photographic doubling include *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, with Jekyll drinking a chemical solution to photographically develop his dark double Hyde into existence; Oscar Wilde's 'A Sphinx Without a Secret', which features a woman trying to escape her banal life through her enigmatic photographic portrait; and *The Picture of Dorian Grey* even though Dorian's double is a painting, because Novak has argued that the painting functions like a photographic portrait. These texts do not always feature a photograph as the double, but display unmistakable photographic influence in their portrayal of doubling. Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 138.

These insecurities are rooted in Valeria and Sarah's obsessive love for their husband, which the former ultimately overcomes to achieve what the text portrays as a more ideal marriage.

This chapter, especially the section on Collins's novel, admittedly strays from my overarching argument on new media's mediation of romantic relationships, because while I focus on how photographic doubling assisted the heroines' amorous goals, I also give pronounced attention to contemporary gender issues through analysing Ella's unhappy domestic life and Valeria's concealment of her proto-feminist behaviour behind gender stereotypes and duplicitous narration. As explained in my introduction however, I take into account broader considerations about institutional and socio-economic conditions in order to give weight to new media's cultural associations and to contextually inform my discussion of the link between emergent discourse mediums and personal relationships—both of which influence and are influenced by their social environment to varying extents. Given gender's importance in romantic relationships (the masculine/feminine binary in heterosexual pairings was replicated in often restrictive ways for Victorian women), my thesis would benefit from a chapter dedicated to studying new media technologies within a gender framework and its impact on matters of the heart. This chapter also reinforces the power of new transmission systems and builds on Nancy Armstrong's assertion regarding the novel's turn to the visual, by illustrating how photography's influence extends beyond narrative content to textual structure itself, like to the double motif or sensation novel tropes.

The Artistic Double

'An Imaginative Woman', in Hardy's own words, is 'the best piece of prose fiction' he has ever written yet, like most of his short stories, remains largely understudied.[19] On the surface,

[19] Walter Peirce, 'The Best Piece of Prose Fiction I Ever Wrote', *Thomas Hardy Remembered*, ed. by Martin Ray (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 157-58 (p. 157). Juliette Berning Schaefer and Siobhan Craft Browson point out that although Hardy had penned almost fifty short stories throughout his career, they received next to no critical attention until the publication of Kristin Brady's 1982 book *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy:*

the story is about a woman falling in love with a fantasy. Ella is a dull, discontented wife and mother whose only avenue for self-expression is through her male pseudonym as a poet, albeit to lacklustre critical attention. By chance, her family ends up renting the room of a poet, Robert Trewe, during their seaside vacation. Already a fan of Trewe's work, Ella soon becomes obsessed with him and interacts with him through his possessions and photographic portrait, the latter of which manifests a physical presence so real, she can feel his 'warm and loving' breath on her cheeks.[20] Ella dies in childbirth after Trewe's suicide and a few years later, her husband Will comes across the male poet's photograph and a lock of his hair. Will notes his child bears strong resemblance to Trewe in features and hair colour and concludes his wife was unfaithful to him before renouncing the boy.

While tempting to heed the title and solely analyse Ella's imaginative power in connection to photography's alluring canvas, I contend that 'An Imaginative Woman' invites an additional and more intricate reading, that Trewe is actually Ella's double. Her romantic devotion initially stems from artistic admiration as an unsuccessful poet. Trewe represents all Ella cannot have in her life and marriage: success in her literary career, a husband married for love instead of financial need and—to that end—a yearning to break free from domesticity and the economic limitations imposed on women that force them into loveless marriages. Ella's child, who looks so much like her double, is ultimately rejected by her husband, the patriarch, signifying that her radical aspirations have no place in the Victorian family and society.

Tales of Past and Present. Academic interest has steadily grown since then, but still lags behind scholarly research done on his full-length works and poetry. Juliette Berning Schaefer and Siobhan Craft Brownson, 'Introduction', *Thomas Hardy's Short Stories: New Perspectives*, ed. by Juliette Berning Schaefer and Siobhan Craft Brownson (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

[20] I am using a digitalized version of the short story reprinted in the *Pall Mall Magazine*: Thomas Hardy, 'An Imaginative Woman', *The Pall Mall Magazine*, 2 (1894), 951-69. I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

Scholars are often dismissive of Ella's literary ambitions, a position that Michal Peled Ginsburg accurately finds ironic given Ella's canonical fear that critics will not take her poetry seriously if they find out she is a married woman with children and our modern-day renewal of interest in *fin-de-siècle* female writers.[21] Kristin Brady asserts that 'Ella's poetry is an evasion of reality rather than a heightened engagement in it'.[22] Sophie Gilmartin and Rod Mengham claim that Ella's writing 'produces nothing of value in and for itself but serves mainly as a form of therapy'.[23] Mark Durden fails to mention her writing poetry at all.[24]

Like Ginsburg, I view Ella's poetic aspirations as essential to our understanding of the story, primarily because I interpret her fervent passion for Trewe as a desire to *be* him rather than *with* him.[25] I do not deny that there is a romantic element to Ella's fascination with him, which comes from a related dissatisfaction with her life in general, but her yearning to be him far outweighs her amorous feelings. Her interest in the male poet precedes any personal affection; both Ella and Trewe draw inspiration from a tragic incident reported in the daily newspapers to pen their respective poems, which are then featured on the same page in a prominent magazine, hers 'at the bottom, in smallish print' and his 'at the top, in large print' (954). He later collects his poems into a volume that generates enough sales to fund its printing, but when Ella tries to copy him at her publisher's suggestion, her 'poor little volume' receives scant sales and attention and her husband had to step in to pay the 'ruinous' publisher's bill (956). Ella is acutely aware of their skill difference and often attempts to emulate the 'rival poet's work' until her 'inability to touch his level sent her into fits of

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[21] Michal Peled Ginsburg, 'Imagination, Poetic Creation, and Gender: Hardy's "Imaginative Woman"', *Modern Philology*, 110 (2012), 273–88 (p. 274).
[22] Kristin Brady, *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982), p. 99.
[23] Sophie Gilmartin and Rod Mengham, *Thomas Hardy's Shorter Fiction: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 113.
[24] Mark Durden, 'Ritual and Deception: Photography and Thomas Hardy', *Journal of European Studies*, 30 (2000), 57–69.
[25] Ginsburg reads Ella's unsuccessful career as Hardy's way of ironizing and undermining the male poetic model she strives to emulate. Ginsburg, 'Imagination, Poetic Creation, and Gender', p. 274.

despondency' (955). Upon gaining access to his residence, she pointedly tries to imitate his verses again, perhaps in hope that being 'surrounded noon and night by his customary environment' will inspire her to match his writerly prowess (957). When that fails, she turns to wearing his clothes, an act that as romantically intimate as it is reflective of her craving to physically transform into the poet: '*His* heart had beat inside that coat, and *his* brain had worked under that hat at levels of thought she would never reach' (957). The heart and brain are symbolically associated with life and intellect respectively. Combined with the punctuated 'his', the event emphasizes Ella's longing to live Trewe's life and possess his literary ability.

While Ella yearns to be her successful double, I maintain that she does not specifically want to be male. An argument can be made for Freud's controversial concept of penis envy in relation to Ella's male pseudonym 'John Ivy' and her decision to follow the same career path as her father, 'a struggling man of letters', before migrating to identifying with a successful model of writer in Trewe (954). Freud defines penis envy as a stage in female psychosexual development where young girls experience anxiety upon realization that they do not have male genitalia.[26] However, as psychoanalysts Karen Horney and Clare Thompson have reasoned, the concept works better as a metaphor: women feel inferior because they lack the social prestige and opportunities that men have, not because of their literal lack of a penis.[27] Ella envies Trewe not simply because of his literary skill, but because he possesses 'a man's unsusceptibility on the question of sex' and has 'never once thought of passing himself off as a woman' (954). She, in turn, must conceal her gender behind a male penname due to her very realistic fear that no one will take her work seriously if they know it is written by a

[26] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Imago Publishing, 1949), p. 195.
[27] Clara Thompson, '"Penis Envy" in Women', *Psychiatry*, 6 (1943), 123-25 (p. 123).

‘pushing tradesman’s wife, from the mother of three children by a matter-of-fact small-arms manufacturer’ (955).

Ella’s doubling connection with a member of the opposite sex (a link that is formed through their commonalities), in addition to Deborah Manion’s claim that the male poet is feminized through his craft and Romantic personality, signifies a transgressive breakdown of the Victorian gender binary.[28] Trewe is fanciful and overemotional, traits that are traditionally considered feminine. These characteristics carry over to his work and later lead to him committing suicide over a bad review. His poetry prioritizes emotion over form and tradition: ‘Being little attracted by excellencies of form and rhythm apart from content, he sometimes, when feeling outran his artistic speed, perpetrated sonnets in the loosely rhymed Elizabethan fashion, which every right-minded reviewer said he ought not to have done’ (955). Trewe’s distain of structure and ‘right-minded’ convention is emblematic of his doubling link to Ella and related rejection of a strict gender dichotomy. The two writers have similar personalities and interests despite being of the opposing sex and in the scene where they metaphorically fuse as one, Trewe’s essence flows past the borders of his material photograph in response to Ella’s fervour—feeling outpacing form as usual—to merge with her in a demonstration of gender fluidity. In that moment, they are both male and female, destroying the conservative binary. Trewe’s ‘impassioned rather ingenious, luxuriant rather than finished’ poetry is a sharp contrast to Will’s ‘squarely-shaped sentences’, which represents clearly defined boundaries in terms of gender—neat square-shaped categories with no deviation from structure (954, 953). Will’s ‘pondering regard’, which signifies slowness and traditionalism, additionally clashes against Trewe’s tendency to allow feeling to outpace artistic speed, the latter symbolic of invention and progressiveness (953). Dissimilar to the effeminate poet,

[28] Deborah Manion, ‘Pregnant by a Portrait: The Dynamics of Desire for Hardy’s “Imaginative Woman”’, *Thomas Hardy’s Short Stories: New Perspectives*, ed. by Juliette Berning Schaefer and Siobhan Craft Brownson (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 68-83 (p. 68).

Ella's spouse is the embodiment of conventional masculinity: a virile, practical-minded breadwinner of the family. He is a gunmaker, the weapon symbolic of manly power, and 'his soul was in that business always', in that masculine public sphere dominated by self-interest and economic aggression (952).[29] Ella, who admires and tries so hard to imitate Trewe's boundary-pushing literary style, finds Will's interests 'sordid and material', emphasizing her distaste of 'squarely-shaped' gender norms and the material world that forces her to abide by them (952).

The scene where Ella conjures Trewe's physical presence with his photograph represents a union between the doubles, Ella finally becoming Trewe for one brief moment through an effect akin to composite photography. The photographic technique refers to when multiple photographs are assembled onto one print, transposing figures from one scene to another. Gazing upon Trewe's likeness for the first time, Ella whispers, 'And it's *you* who've so cruelly eclipsed me these many times!' (960). The word 'eclipse' has a cunning dual meaning: it refers to Trewe's obvious overshadowing of Ella's literary ability and the solar/lunar eclipse phenomenon in nature where either the sun or the moon directly passes over the other like a layered composite photograph. Cook identifies double-exposed negatives as a form of composite photography, 'when two photographic negatives or images are combined to create a single positive image'.[30] Ella and Trewe are negatives on their own—the former due to her unfulfilling life and the latter due to 'narrow-minded' reviewers who do not understand his unconventional style—but together, they form a positive, her having found a 'fuller appreciator' of her intellect and fulfilling her long-held dream to become Trewe, while he gains that 'unattainable creature', 'a mother, or a sister, or a female friend of another sort tenderly devoted to me' (969, 964-965). The sun/moon dichotomy in an eclipse also

[29] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 10.
[30] Cook, *Victorian Negatives*, p. xvi.

matches the male/female binary, symbolizing the doubles coming together as one. Trewe is first photographically developed into existence by his ‘electric’ gaze meeting Ella’s ‘liquid sparkle in each pupil’ (960, 953). The male poet is described as ‘more striking than handsome’ with a ‘very electric flash in his eye’, in line with the flashes of inspiration that cause him to wake in the middle of the night and scribble ‘ideas in the rough’ on the wall surrounding the bed (960). When Ella looks at his photograph at night, his ‘electric’ eyes meet her ‘liquid’ ones in a metaphorical re-creation of the photographic process: the electric flash of the camera, prolonged seeping in liquid photographic chemicals to develop the negative, night-time as the darkroom. Trewe’s scribblings, ‘like Shelley’s scraps’, retain its owner’s ‘electric’ power and work in tandem with his likeness to manifest a Frankenstein-like creation of his physical presence that is so vivid, ‘it seemed as if his very breath, warm and loving, fanned her cheeks from those walls’ (960). Ella and Trewe are subsequently unified, the former ‘immersed in the very essence of him, permeated by his spirit as by an ether’ (960). Ella imagines her body akin to Trewe’s, noting the walls that ‘had surrounded his head times and times as they surrounded her own now’ and miming his writing in the night: ‘He must often have put up his hand so—with the pencil in it. Yes, the writing was sideways, as it would be if executed by one who extended his arm thus’ (960). Ella and Trewe’s fusion had been foreshadowed through their poems being published on the same page, but whereas that had been a clear case of Trewe eclipsing Ella with his more prominently presented contribution, this ‘eclipse’ is on equal terms. The poets are layered on top of one another, neither outdoing or replacing the other: ‘She knew his thoughts and feelings as well as she knew her own; they were, in fact, the selfsame thoughts and feelings as hers … Trewe is nearer my real self, he’s more intimate with the real me, than Will is, after all, even though I’ve never seen him’ (960).

Trewe's photograph, with its illusory physicality, accomplishes what his clothes cannot in terms of facilitating Ella's transformation into her idol. While wearing his hat and mackintosh, all Ella can think of is how '*his* heart had beat inside that coat, and *his* brain had worked under that hat at levels of thought she would never reach' (957). They summon reminders of Trewe's materiality (his corporeal heart and brain) and prevent Ella from becoming him the way she does in the bedroom with his photographic portrait. Daniel Novak contends that Victorian photographers often used the composite technique to make more realistic-looking photographs, so the technology of realism paradoxically produced 'the non-existent, the fictional, and the abstract'.[31] Trewe's photograph metonymically replicates the poet's presence without involving his actual physical body and hence generates a space in which Ella and Trewe can merge into one, materiality and immateriality in flux.

In general, Ella displays a preference for the intangible in adherence to her aversion to that physical world which seeks to place restrictions on her self-identity, a connection that can be applied towards Jennifer Green-Lewis's likening of Ella, who is '"an impressionable, palpitating creature"', to 'a piece of light-sensitive paper'.[32] Photography has connotations of permanence and objectivity, but as demonstrated by the composite technique or by William Dare's falsified photograph of Somerset in *A Laodicean*, it is actually a very malleable and manipulable medium. The dissonance between reputation and reality in photography reflects Ella's struggle against the myth of model femininity: what society thinks she should be and what she wants to be. Ella is described as 'impressionable', which makes her seem like a silly woman who is vulnerable to the slightest influence, but also signifies that she is receptive to progressive ideas and refuses to be limited to just one rigid, unchangeable identity (952). She

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[31] Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 3.

[32] Green-Lewis claims that 'the fertility of Trewe's photograph extends from the subject to the perceiver as though the mediating image were compelled to imprint itself on a receptive surface', that being the impressionable Ella. Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, p. 78.

is forced to marry her 'sordid and material' husband due to the 'necessity of getting life-leased'—that is, finding someone to materially provide for her—and since then, she has come to some 'vague conclusions' about her situation, which she avoids thinking about too concretely (953). Instead, she keeps 'her heart alive' by 'letting off her delicate and ethereal emotions in imaginative occupations, day-dreams, and night-sighs' (953). The immaterial fuels her life as opposed to the physical necessities and comforts that Will provides. Ella's writing career functions as a 'channel' for her unhappiness, letting 'flow her painfully embayed emotions' that are otherwise congealed 'in the stagnation caused by the routine of a practical household and the gloom of bearing children to a commonplace father' (954). The phrases used are aptly water-related; Ella is formless 'liquid' struggling against the confining labels of wife and mother (953). The now dulled 'marvellously bright and liquid sparkle' in her eyes matches Trewe's 'unlimited capacity for misery', demonstrating their joint discontent in a world that does not accept their divergence from the mould (953, 960). Ella's fading 'sparkle' and Trewe's 'misery' are conspicuously located in their gazes, which highlights their dislike of the material world, something they can visually see. Her eyes often grow 'wet' when she is reminded of the skill difference between her and the male poet, her desire to be him conveyed through her emotional tears' escape from her physical body and the societal expectations attached to it (957).

Will, who is overwhelmingly associated with the material, acts as Ella's anchor to her unchosen identity as a wife and mother. Readers are notably introduced to Ella on the text's first page when she is startled out of her reading 'reverie' by him and paying no heed to their children, which accentuates her partiality for the imaginary over reality, but simultaneously highlights Will's persistent role in reminding her about her station (951). When he finds Ella kneeling at Trewe's grave following the poet's suicide, he does not become jealous, but rather berates her for straying from her wife-mother identity: 'it is too ridiculous that you, a

married woman with three children and a coming fourth, should go losing your head like this over a dead lover!' (967). Ella's infidelity and indifference towards her family—the second having existed even before her obsession with Trewe—are hardly suitable traits for a devoted wife with children, but those transgressive feelings do not provoke Will's anger because they are never materially realized. He believes that Ella only had an emotional affair (which does not infringe on his 'material' interests and does not bother him) and only becomes incensed when he spots Trewe's features on his son's face because then, the child is evidence of Ella's physical unfaithfulness that concurrently trespasses on his patriarchal authority of continuing the family line through descendants. Will's paradoxical standards for proper wifehood suggests that women are allowed to have socially unsanctioned thoughts as long as they do not act on them, which implicitly sides with the radical idea that Victorian ideal femininity is performative rather than innate: a woman's thoughts may not match her actions. This subtle but not inconsequential proto-feminist concept complicates the text's ultimately conservative ending of punishing Ella with death for her transgressions. Despite this small concession to proto-feminism though, 'An Imaginative Woman' cannot be labelled a progressive text because its narrative dictates that women can have socially unapproved thoughts only if they remain intangible. Those that attempt to make their desires a reality, like Ella, will be swiftly disciplined.

Ella is not completely averse to the tangible as seen by her reliance on Trewe's photograph and belongings to facilitate her fantasy, and her selective approach demonstrates that she is trying to construct a new reality (one in which she is free to materially express her transgressive desires) by picking which elements to keep and ignoring the others like assembling a photo collage. Photo-collaging is similar to composite photography in that both involves combining multiple images into a single amalgamated image, but I believe Ella's relationship with materiality more closely resembles the former as opposed to the latter due to

the resemblance between her selective usage of material objects and the photo collage's cut-and-paste method. A composite photograph is seamlessly layered in a way that fittingly symbolizes Ella and Trewe's unification, but does not adequately convey Ella's pickiness about which physical aspects to keep or ignore. Di Bello additionally argues that a collage makes its viewers aware of the 'materiality of the images in a way that one cannot be to the smooth, continuous surfaces of composite prints', which underpins how hyperaware Ella is to the material elements she does pay attention to, such as Trewe's residence 'which literally whispered of him to her every moment' (957).[33] Ginsburg has argued that both Ella and Trewe have unstable senses of self-identity and that they derive some form of support for them through images. The textual examples Ginsburg points out are Trewe keeping a photographic self-portrait beside his bed—rather than a picture of loved ones as is conventional—as if to reassure himself of his being, and Ella 'testing the reflecting powers of the mirror in the wardrobe door' almost immediately after settling into her rented quarters (954).[34] In relation to my argument, this reinforces Ella's dependence on the physical in her desire to become Trewe. An image is something that can be seen, something that can be captured on a photographic plate and rendered physically ownable. When Ella dresses up in Trewe's clothes, she turns to look at herself in the mirror, craving visual assurance about her desired transformation that simply wearing his material clothing cannot provide. There is not always a direct correlation between what can be viewed and what is corporeal, but in this case, the circumstantial and ambiguous connection complements the text's thematic focus on hybridity of all kinds. Even Ella's literary career, her lifeline to her preferred self-identity, has a mild visual element; she reads Trewe's poems with her eyes and pens her own while looking down at the paper. The male poet's physical presence in the key scene where Ella

[33] Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 70.
[34] Ginsburg, 'Imagination, Poetic Creation, and Gender', pp. 280-81.

finally achieves her wish to be Trewe is partially summoned through his scribblings on the wall, multitudes combining into one in a reproduction of Ella's photo-collage reality.

The scene where the doubles fuse as one can equally be read as a romantic fantasy, which seemingly nullifies my argument since Ella's bid for independence is still enclosed within a love-seeking framework. Manion attempts to justify Ella's passion towards Trewe by arguing that her shift from intellectual admiration to romantic love is due to insecurity; she would rather claim a 'passive, feminine role' than struggle to establish herself as a 'credible "masculine" rival'.[35] I do not believe Ella's romantic feelings need to be justified though, because they do not negate her transgressive desire to abandon her socially implemented identity. I view Ella's multifaceted affection not as a form of containment, but as an expansion of the parameters for female independence. She desires a successful literary career like Trewe, but also desires the emotional and intellectual fulfilment that her marriage with Will lacks. Her marriage was entirely based on fiscal necessity rather than any real attraction and afterwards, she 'kept her heart alive by pitying her proprietor's obtuseness and want of refinement, pitying herself, and letting off her delicate and ethereal emotions in imaginative occupations' (953). The connection between her 'heart' and 'imaginative occupations' reveals that Ella's literary ambitions and yearning for a companionate marriage have been linked from the beginning. She wants someone who appreciates her writing (which simultaneously bolsters her poetic ambitions) and whose intellectual ability she respects in return.

Female sexual desire was considered transgressive in itself and the scene where Ella engages with Trewe's photograph is tinged with erotic overtones, gesturing towards the sexual satisfaction that she lacks in her existing relationship. Michael Mason has persuasively

[35] Manion, 'Pregnant by a Portrait', p. 75.

argued that William Acton's famous remark that 'the majority of women … are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind' was a minority opinion and that laypeople at the time largely believed that achieving orgasm was essential to conception which—despite the unsound link between a woman's sexuality and her capacity for childbearing—prioritizes female pleasure.[36] However, as Mason admits, such pro-sex sentiments were mainly reserved for courting couples, which would drastically narrow the parameters for socially acceptable female sexual desire to such an extent that it would be transgressive unless regulated by these conservative standards.[37] Mary Poovey illustrates that as late as the 1740s, women were predominantly portrayed as 'sexualized, susceptible, and fallen' with carnal appetites and it was not until the eighteenth century that this sexualized characterization of women began to shift into the angelic domestic ideal.[38] This earlier image of women as did not disappear, but was absorbed within the domestic ideal to justify gender inequality: 'If women were governed not by reason (like men), but by something else, then they could hardly be expected (or allowed) to participate in the economic and political fray'.[39] Ella seemingly embodies the older female representation as an 'impressionable' wife and mother with 'wicked' bodily desires whose husband is constantly trying to guide her back to her rightful station, but as she confesses on her deathbed, she actually desires a 'fuller appreciator, perhaps, rather than another lover' (952, 960, 969). It is not purely about sex, but about being in a loving relationship that prioritizes her sexual, emotional, and intellectual needs. The most telling sign of Ella and Trewe's coupling is the child with his features, which correlates with Claire Jarvis's contention on how the 'most potent material sign of a couple's sexual connection was the appearance of a baby' due to the Victorian fiction's avoidance of explicit sexual

[36] Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 195, 200.
[37] Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, p. 220.
[38] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, pp. 9-11.
[39] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 11.

description.[40] William A. Cohen agrees by pointing out that 'silence about sexuality composes a strategic form, not an absence, of representation'.[41] Draped in the sanctity of fantasy, Hardy's short story is able to depict Ella seeking sexual fulfilment and indulging in self-pleasure without violating propriety.

Trewe's photograph and his poetic scribblings on the wall work in conjunction to satiate Ella's bodily and psychological desires. The lead-up to his photograph's reveal is tinged with the type of sensual anticipation associated with waiting for one's romantic partner. Its appearance comes on the heels of a missed encounter between Ella and Trewe, as if to substitute his absent person. She deliberately waits until nightfall to gaze upon his likeness so that she will be alone and so 'a more romantic tinge [can] be imparted to the occasion by silence, candles, solemn sea and stars outside, than was afforded by the garish afternoon sunlight' (960). She gets rid of 'superfluous garments' and simply slips on a dressing-gown, an intimate piece of clothing usually worn in private (960). When she finally unveils the photograph, she sets it in front of her, positioned upright, rather than facing the ceiling, increasing the illusion that her date is sitting across from herself. Lounging in bed with the photographic portrait, Ella reads some of the poet's 'most touching and true' verses, which function akin to a hallucinatory aphrodisiac (960). The photograph is merely 'cardboard' when she kisses its surface, but after reading his poems, Trewe begins to take physical shape. The scribblings near the bed that cause her to flush red feel like 'his breath, warm and loving, [fanning] her cheeks' (960). Ella visualizes how his arm would have looked as he wrote those phrases and imagines her hair dragging across where his arm had lain, materializing him in bed with her. The fusion of the doubles, in this context, becomes sexual penetration: 'She was

[40] Jarvis, *Exquisite Masochism*, p. 3.
[41] William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 2.

sleeping on a poet's lips, immersed in the very essence of him, permeated by his spirit as by an ether' (961).

Trewe is not purely a passive surface for Ella to project her desires upon and possesses agency through his receptiveness towards her romantic advances. I raise this point to establish that even though Trewe is feminized, he is not emasculated as a result to assume a submissive feminine role in relation to Ella's sexualizing gaze. As mentioned, he wants 'a mother, or a sister, or a female friend of another sort tenderly devoted to me' (965). His desire is admittedly sexist; he does not want a literary equal like Ella does, but a woman whose life revolves around him. However, it also reveals his yearning to find a like-minded individual who loves him despite his feminized nature and subversive boundary-pushing literary style. This 'undiscoverable, elusive one' plagues him even more after Ella's stay and inspires his latest 'impassioned' volume titled 'Lyrics to a Woman Unknown' (965). It is as if Ella's 'essence' has infused his house, imprinting herself on his belongings, the way that his 'unseen' presence, 'which literally whispered of him to her every moment', previously did to her (957). The poets never get to meet in person, but their temporal lapses are compensated through spatial union. They meet through each other's immaterial presence in the house and through the photograph. Trewe's landlady covers up Trewe's photographic portrait at his request, but tells Ella that Trewe would not mind 'such an attractive lady' looking upon him (959). Read in this light, the manifested Trewe from his photograph is a willing participant in Ella's fantasy. He whispers poems to her, his 'warm and loving' breath fanning her cheeks, a precursor to 'Lyrics to a Woman Unknown' that he will never be able to utter to Ella in person (960).

Trewe's death naturally leads to Ella's because it signals the expiration of her literary dreams. The doubles can never meet in person because that would signify the material realization of their transgressive desires; for Ella, writerly success and a marriage based on compatibility

rather than financial necessity, and for Trewe, someone who accepts him for who he is. They can only ever meet in absentia through each other's invisible presence in the house, an illusionary physicality that makes them crave the material fulfilment of what they are missing even more, and when they realize such a task is unachievable, they permanently remove themselves from reality. Ella fittingly dies in childbirth following Trewe's suicide in accordance with the text's depiction of motherhood and literary acclaim as irreconcilable roads, the opposite of composite photography. This forked path is foreshadowed by the coincidence of her third pregnancy with her 'poor little volume' of poems, which commercial and critical failure is described akin to a shameful miscarriage: 'nobody talked of it, nobody bought it, and it fell dead in a fortnight—if it had ever been alive' (956). Will pays 'the publisher's bill with the doctor's', the syntax momentarily pulling the two roads together only to show how financially reliant Ella is on her husband even with regard to her chief means of escape from her dull life with him (956). Ella is 'less a poet of her century' and 'more a mere multiplier of her kind' (956). Prior to immaterially meeting Trewe, Ella uses motherhood as a secondary distraction from her unhappy life when poetry-writing is not available, such as during the 'collapse of her poetical venture', which 'had perhaps less effect upon her mind than it might have done if she had been domestically unoccupied', or when she narrowly misses an in-person meeting with her idol: 'she went into the nursey and tried to let off her emotion by unnecessarily kissing the children, till she had a sudden sense of disgust at being reminded how plain-looking they were, like their father' (954, 965). The text seems loathe to make its protagonist (who readers typically empathize with) stray too far from the feminine ideal by being both a bigamous wife and uncaring mother and as such, rationalizes Ella's disinterest in her offspring as the result of 'gloom of bearing children to a commonplace father'; it is their relation to Will she loathes, not children specifically (954). Upon temporarily experiencing the fulfilment of all her desires through uniting with Trewe,

however, Ella realizes that motherhood is no substitute for literary accomplishment nor can it alleviate her unhappiness: 'When the children came in with wet stockings, and ran up to her to tell her of their adventures, she could not feel that she cared about them half as much as usual' (959). The impending birth of her fourth child reminds her that she will soon have to give up her creative work again and Ella knows she will not be able to survive its absence, especially given that Trewe's death symbolizes the permanent end to her literary ambitions. She will never be a successful writer and what remains—the stifling existence as a wife and mother—murders her.

The ending represents a return to traditional social order. Will finds a new wife a few years after Ella expires, fulfilling her deathbed prediction that he will 'soon find somebody to fill my place', somebody who is not a defective model of the domestic ideal (967). Hardy's heroine leverages the pseudo presence of her double's photograph in order to materially manifest a reality where she is an acclaimed poet and in a relationship that satisfies her emotional, intellectual, and sexual needs. However, her transgression never goes beyond fantasy; and the child with Trewe's likeness, the only surviving physical evidence of her brief moment of gratification, is ultimately renounced by the patriarch Will during his preparation of the house for his second wife, signifying that her desires are likewise illegitimate and have no place in the Victorian family and society. Her death is punishment for violating the norm and smoothly ejects her from the text, along with Trewe and the rejected child, to make room for what is deemed the proper social structure.

The Wife Duality

Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* too features a rebellious heroine (Valeria Macallan),

but she enjoys a much happier fate than poor Ella Marchhill.[42] After Valeria stumbles across a photograph of her husband Eustace's first wife, she discovers that he had been trialled on suspicion of murdering his former spouse and charged with the indeterminate Scottish verdict 'Not Proven'. Eustace does not want to dishonour Valeria further, so he leaves her alongside setting up instructions to provide for her welfare and encouraging her to annul their marriage. Fiercely in love with her husband, Valeria embarks on a quest to clear his name in order to bring him back to her in spite of his objections. It is eventually revealed that the first wife Sarah killed herself via slow poisoning in order to set Eustace free to marry someone else because she had discovered that he does not return her affections.[43] The novel ends in a picture of domestic bliss: Valeria's husband is back by her side and they have a new-born baby in the house.

Tamar Heller has argued that most of Collins' works end with the 'containment of female power and subversion' due to his aspiration for professional status as a writer working in a genre usually populated by female authors.[44] I disagree with her claim with regard to *The Law and the Lady*. Although the text concludes with a return to traditional gender roles, Valeria repeatedly defies her husband to achieve this purpose and holds a newfound position of power in her marriage in the end. Sarah, who only appears through her photograph and hearsay, functions as Valeria's double and embodies the self-consuming infatuation for her husband that Valeria must overcome before attaining what the novel portrays as the ideal

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[42] Wilkie Collins, *The Law and the Lady*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

[43] Collins was likely inspired by the heavily publicized trial of Madeleine Smith, who was charged with poisoning her lover Emile L' Angelier by putting arsenic in his cocoa. In a replica of Smith's admission to bathing with arsenic to improve her complexion, Sarah in *The Law and the Lady* uses the poison to beautify her skin and to later kill herself. Smith's trial likewise ended with the Scotch verdict of 'Not Proven'. Dougald B. Maceachen, 'Wilkie Collins and British Law', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 5 (Sept 1950), 121-39 (pp. 135-36); Sara Murphy, 'Inadmissible Evidence: The Trial of Madeleine Smith and Collins's *The Law and The Lady*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 44 (2016), 163-88 (p. 167).

[44] Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 8.

marriage: an equal partnership that accommodates female selfhood outside of wifehood and domesticity. This transgressive message is concealed behind a seemingly anti-feminist narrative about a woman trying to win back her husband and is further symbolized by Valeria's unreliable narration, which utilizes the physiognomic theory of assigning personality traits based on characters' appearances in order to imply that everything is not as it appears.

Valeria starts off as a near copy of Sarah. Their doubling bond is formed through their shared status as Eustace's wife and slavish devotion to him, the latter being so extreme that their sense of self-identity becomes conflated with wifehood. The text opens with Valeria's wedding day, giving off the impression that her life only begins now through matrimony. She accidentally signs her married name instead of her maiden one on the marriage register as well, suggesting that she primarily identifies herself in relation to her husband and has no selfhood outside those parameters. There is little information given on Valeria and Sarah's past, and their joint status as orphans with no identifiable familial background adds to their monotonal sense of self. Sarah readily gives up everything in her life to be with Eustace, running away from home to visit him, and after Eustace marries her to save her reputation, their marital life is predictably unhappy with her spending all her days trying to beautify herself so that he would love her more. When it becomes clear that he never will, she kills herself to grant him happiness. Valeria too possesses this self-destructive instinct at first: '"Go where you may", I said, "I go with you! Friends—reputation—I care nothing who I lose, or what I lose. Oh, Eustace, I am only a woman—don't madden me! I can't live without you. I must and will be your wife!"' (21). This outburst occurs when Eustace's secrets start coming to light and Valeria fears that he may leave her. He then 'brought me back to myself with his tender caresses' (21). His affection stabilizes her perception of herself, that being his spouse.

Whereas Ella's interaction with Trewe's photograph involves her projecting her desires onto him in a union of doubles, Valeria's discovery of Sarah's photographic likeness sees her projecting her insecurities onto her double and reinforces the similarities between the two wives (88). She spitefully notes that this 'unknown' woman is 'not young', 'unattractive', 'hard-featured and ugly', all traits that highlight her unmarriageability (the first criticism in particular insinuates that Sarah is infertile and unable to continue the family line for her husband) and Valeria's own fear of losing Eustace. While it seems to be fact that Sarah is plain-looking, Valeria's realization that she might be gazing upon her sister-in-law and subsequent re-examination of her with 'a kinder and truer appreciation' demonstrates that she is exaggerating Sarah's ugliness (89). As such, the photograph is less a depiction of Sarah and more a self-portrait of her own 'unknown' flaws (88). Valeria also notes that Sarah's face has the 'marking lines of strong passions and resolute self-will plainly written on it', which signifies Valeria's unconscious recognition of herself in her double (88). 'Strong passions and resolute self-will' are traits that both women possess. Sarah directs them towards her unhealthy love for Eustace and her resolve to commit suicide. Valeria initially follows her predecessor's lead, her self-professed inability to exist without her husband provoking her to detective action despite his objections, but later, they motivate her to continue pursuing the case to satisfy her curiosity even after Eustace returns of his own volition.

Through her search for the truth about Sarah, Valeria symbolically finds herself (to put it colloquially) and successfully formulates a multifaceted self-identity in contrast to a rigid sense of self as Eustace's wife. Heller muses that recent criticism on Collins usually focuses on the 'various kinds of hybridity—of race, gender, ideology, class, and even aesthetic value' in his works.[45] I follow this tradition in that I interpret Valeria's newfound identity as hybrid

[45] Tamar Heller, 'Masterpiece Theatre and Ezra Jennings's Hair: Some Reflections on Where We've Been and Where We're Going in Collins Studies', *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, 41 (2003), 361-370 (p. 363).

as opposed to the unmalleable domestic angel.[46] Her defiance of Eustace's orders not to pry into his secrets and her later disobedience of his instructions to dissolve their marriage in order to clear his name can still be interpreted as her trying to preserve her wifely identity, but even after he returns to her side with the mystery still unresolved, she refuses to stop sleuthing. In her own words, she has 'everything a woman could want to make her happy', but is willing to 'put that happiness in peril, rather than remain ignorant of what was going on at Gleninch' (373-374). Her refusal to cease her investigation is the moment she effectively separates herself from her self-sacrificing double because she is able to find happiness and fulfilment in something outside of the domestic framework. Symbolically, information about Sarah is assembled from multiple sources like the trial report or personal accounts, which reflects Valeria's journey in fragmenting her inflexible wifely identity into a multifaceted one. Sarah's revelatory suicide letter is literally pieced together from shreds. The effect is slightly similar to composite photography, where multitudes come together to form one. Novak contends that while photography was frequently thought of in relation to defining identity, Victorians also considered it as a medium with the potential to dismember the body and efface individuality, as with the composite technique.[47] The contradictory associations of composite photography suit Valeria, whose fragmented self-identity chafes against the conservative concept of innate femininity. Valeria also has the 'figure' of Sarah and 'same carriage of the head' of an unnamed minor female character, a mismatched appearance that complements the novel's theme of aligning appearance with character and signifies her

[46] Anne Longmur too reads hybridity in Collins's Britain since it attempts to repress 'uncivilized' drives embodied by Scotland. She contends that Valeria is only able to restore her identity and solve the mystery through Sarah's letter located in 'that symbol of Scottish "wildness", the dustheap at Gleninch'. The persistence of the Scottish verdict 'Not Proven' at the novel's end represent Valeria's resistance to self-control and embrace of uncivilization.
Anne Longmur, 'The Scotch Verdict and Irregular Marriages: How Scottish Law Disrupts the Normative in *The Law and The Lady* and *Man and Wife*', in *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Newscastle: Cambridge Scholars Printing, 2007), pp. 166-77 (pp. 166, 176).
[47] Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 5.

diversified personality (84).[48] As Jeanne Fahnestock puts it, she is a heroine of 'irregular features' who is capable of 'irregular conduct'.[49] Valeria tellingly has Sarah's body, which highlights their doubling connection, but their different 'carriage of the head' foreshadows their eventual mental dissimilarity.

The duality of Valeria's psyche (as represented by her doubling connection which leads to the formulation of her multifaceted personality) is replicated in her duplicitous first-person narration, which masks her controversial proto-feminist behaviour by framing it as out of character. Whenever Valeria performs or experiences transgressive things—like falsifying her appearance with cosmetics—she reports feeling 'in some strange way to have lost my ordinary identity—to have stepped out of my own character' (57). She typifies her actions as 'strange' or simply says she cannot account for the 'extraordinary inconsistency in my character' (68). *The Law and the Lady* is told in retrospective, allowing Valeria to frame the story as she pleases as well as control the inclusion of events. By framing misbehaviour as out of character for herself, Valeria is able to propose that that conventional femininity is innate since she must adopt another persona to perform those emotions and actions, hence preserving her 'ordinary identity' (57). Valeria's personality changes with her cosmetically altered appearance, as if to bolster her point on the connection between appearance and character, Normally, Valeria is of a 'nervous and anxious' temperament and plays out

[48] Emily Steinlight argues that sensation novel heroines typically embody the 'spectre of the crowd' in contrast to classic heroines like Pamela and Jane Eyre. By condensing the masses into a singular character who could be disciplined or vanished as a consequence of her transgressive actions, fictional narratives justified 'dispensing with vast numbers of people via the pathologization of a specific individual', like the redundant woman figure who some Victorians recommended be shipped off to the colonies for better marital prospects. Emily Steinlight, 'Why Novels are Redundant: Sensation Fiction and the Overpopulation of Literature', *ELH*, 79 (2012), 501-35 (p. 503).

[49] Jeanne Fahnestock contends that exhaustive descriptions of literary heroines increased from the mid-nineteenth century onward due to physiognomy's popularity. The detailed descriptions were 'a way of suggesting without proclaiming, of imputing intelligence, caprice, and even sexuality to heroines without indecorous explicitness'. This led to the emergence of heroines who deviated from contemporary standards of beauty ('irregular features') and whose behaviour likewise deviated from the norm ('irregular conduct'). Jeanne Fahnestock, 'The Heroine of Irregular Features: Conventions of Heroine Description', *Victorian Studies*, 24 (1980), 325-50 (pp. 326, 331).

imaginary scenarios in her head before an important meeting with a stranger, but after applying makeup, she feels 'an unreasonable confidence in myself' and 'never gave my interview with the Major a thought' (58). However, the creation of an alternate identity to accommodate her 'ordinary identity' itself implies that female identity is fragmented and ultimately disproves the concept of innate and inviolable femininity.

Valeria's concealment of her hybrid self-identity includes vilifying female characters who occupy ambiguous identities or behave outside the domestic angel ideal. Her landlady is a 'gentlewoman' who has been 'reduced by family misfortunes to let lodgings', but is scorned by Valeria because, as an independent genteel woman who does not need patriarchal protection, she occupies a hybrid status that threatens conventional gender norms (38). In general, Valeria looks down on women beneath her on the social ladder, coincidentally people with no marital prospects or, like Miss Hoighty, who brazenly marry for money and social standing.[50] The working-class chambermaid who helps Valeria do her makeup is dubbed 'cynical' and 'wicked' not simply because cosmetics were associated with female deceit in the nineteenth century, but because her occupation represents instability (56).[51] She works in the domestic sphere, but is concurrently part of that public sphere of employment.

Valeria also repeatedly makes generalized, deprecating statements about her gender, like her 'miserable, mischievous woman's tongue', throughout the novel to cover up or excuse behaviour that would otherwise be condemned. Her characterization of assertive speech as a product of her 'miserable, mischievous woman's tongue' diminishes it and effectively

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[50] Jonathan Loesberg argues anxieties about identity in sensation fiction are tied to class structure and parliamentary reform in the late 1850s and 1860s, as opposed to a psychological aspect. While class identity is relevant in many sensation novels, including *The Law and the Lady*, I believe interiority—especially with regard to gender— is not to be neglected. Jonathan Loesberg, 'The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction', *Representations*, 13 (1986), 115–38 (p. 117).

[51] Michelle J. Smith, '"The Arts of Beauty": Female Appearance in Nineteenth-Century British Library Newspapers', *British Library Newspapers, Part V: 1746-1950*, 2017 <https://www.gale.com/binaries/content/assets/gale-us-en/primary-sources/newsvault/gps_newsvault_britishlibrarynewspapers_p5_essay.pdf> [accessed 24 November 2022], (p. 2).

nullifies its threating potential (52). By disguising her actions as what society usually expects of women, Valeria can engage in controversial behaviour without explicitly challenging the conventional gender system while subverting it at the same time. It is through this method Valeria successfully recruits the reluctant Major's help in hunting down clues at his residence: 'You know—everyone knows—that one of a woman's many weaknesses is curiosity. Suppose my curiosity led me to examine everything in my new house?' (72) The line on curiosity displays self-awareness about the stereotypes related to women, and Valeria manipulates them to give herself permission to snoop while not appearing overly pushy. She stays within the acceptable bounds of femininity. Her aggressive femininity also compensates for Eustace's effeminacy and lapse in maintaining gender roles. Bourne rightfully points out that Valeria's husband is unable to 'uphold the codes of patriarchal authority'.[52] This is enhanced by his limp, symbolically implying that he is less of a man. During an argument triggered by Valeria's refusal to accompany him to Ramsgate because she knows Eustace is keeping secrets from her, the 'ominous alteration in his tone' makes 'another woman' of Valeria and 'roused in my mind—I can't tell how or why—an angry sense of the indignity' that jars her into revealing that she knows he married her under a fake surname, the 'rash reply' flying from her lips like 'like a bird set free from a cage' (52). The simile conjures connotations of imprisonment and liberty, but Valeria cunningly distances herself from the proto-feminist imagery by claiming she was 'another woman' at the time and could not 'tell how or why' she was angry at her husband for demanding absolute obedience. Eustace, upon hearing her 'rash reply', turns 'so deathly pale that I feared he was going to drop at my feet in a swoon' (52). Swooning is traditionally associated with women and his actions threaten to disrupt the gender binary, so Valeria immediately apologizes while internally chastising her

[52] Jenny Bourne Taylor, 'Introduction', in *The Law and the Lady*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. vii-xxiv (p. xiv).

lack of control over her 'miserable, mischievous woman's tongue' (52). Eustace then recovers his 'stern' countenance, restored to a position of power through her careful display of penitence and subservience (53).

Physiognomy, a pseudo-science based on the belief that a person's appearance and expressions are suggestive of character, appears often within the text with the covert aim of presenting her narration as truthful. According to Jessica Cox, physiognomy's origins can be traced as far back as 350 BC, where Aristotle wrote extensively on the subject in *Historia Animalium.*[53] Interest in the field heightened in the nineteenth century following the publication of John Caspar Lavater's 1772 *Essays on Physiognomy*. Its first English editions appeared in the 1780s and by 1810, no fewer than twenty editions had been published.[54] Photography was a game-changer for those who studied and used physiognomy because it could replace drawn illustrations, which were time-consuming and could be impacted by artistic skill and style. The technological innovation captured a face swiftly and objectively, or at least more so in comparison.[55] French neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne studied facial expressions by applying localized electrical stimulation to facial muscles and photographing the resulting countenance. Calling photography the 'true mirror', he considered the expressions elicited by electric shocks too fleeting to be captured by pen: 'This skill was beyond the most dextrous artist; he did not understand the physiological facts I was trying to demonstrate … I needed to photograph rapidly the expressions produced by the electrophysiological stimulus'.[56] English polymath Francis Galton used composite photography in his study of physiognomy. He experimented with combining numerous faces

[53] Jessica Cox, 'Reading Faces: Physiognomy and the Depiction of the Heroine in the Fiction of Wilkie Collins', in *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Printing, 2007), pp. 107-21 (p. 107).
[54] Cox, 'Reading Faces', p. 107.
[55] Nicholas J. Wade, 'Faces and Photography in 19th-Century Visual Science', *Perception*, 45 (2016), 1008–35 (pp. 1008-1009, 1024).
[56] Wade, 'Faces and Photography', p. 1020.

into one face, in addition to photographing a face from different viewpoints. One set of composite portraits he created was of criminals, which he presented as 'the man who is liable to fall into crime', demonstrating physiognomists' desire to define types through facial characteristics.[57]

Valeria's physiognomic assignment of personality traits to characters based on their looks not only reflects Armstrong's argument on Victorian literature's shift towards visuality following photography's invention, but also demonstrates her desire to promote the message that appearance equates truth so that readers will take her duplicitous narration at face value. False appearances are a common sensation fiction trope and *The Law and the Lady* cunningly applies it to the medium of storytelling itself: 'Appearances are not always to be trusted' (80).[58] On the surface, it appears to be about a woman trying to return her husband to her side and restore her place in the domestic sphere. However, on closer inspection, Collins' novel is about a woman's journey to expand her identity beyond wifehood and achieve a domestic life that accepts female self-autonomy. Valeria, while penning this narrative, takes such a strong stance in favour of physiognomy to conceal this transgressive message and mislead readers into thinking she is exactly how she appears: a devout and dutiful wife. There are frequent references to acting within the narrative as well, like Eustace misleading Valeria into thinking his mother put on the 'character of a stranger' to furtively get to know her daughter-in-law or Miserrimus Dexter pretending to be different historical figures like Napoleon and Shakespeare (33). Tara Macdonald, whose analysis of the novel is similar to my own, contends that the genre's emphasis on identity and performance made it an ideal form for

[57] Wade, 'Faces and Photography', p. 1026.
[58] The trope was so renown that Henry Mansel, in 1863, found himself 'thrilled with horror' to think that the 'man who shook our hand with a hearty grasp half an hour ago—the woman whose beauty and grace were the charm of last night … how exciting to think that under these pleasing outsides may be concealed some demon in human shape, a Count Fosco or a Lady Audley!'. Henry Mansel, 'Sensation Novels', *Quarterly Review*, 113 (April 1863), 482-514 (p. 489).

challenging Victorian gender norms.[59] Women's talent in imposture through costumes and cosmetics hints that femininity is a performance rather than innate as contemporary beliefs dictated.[60] I add to Macdonald's work by proposing that Valeria's imposture not only lies in altering her physical appearance, but in actively manipulating her first-person story to depict herself as a subservient wife. Her retrospective narration contributes to her status as an unreliable narrator. She is penning this tale in the future after all the events have passed and has prior knowledge of characters that her past self did not have. Readers can never be certain if a character's detailed description is because Character Valeria (the one experiencing the events) is able to deduce that person's personality traits based on their appearance or if Narrator Valeria (the one writing the account in the future) is embellishing the character with information she now has. In both cases, however, she is projecting her perception of a character onto them. The narrative is told through her eyes, so her image of a character becomes their identity.

The very first chapter of the novel sees Valeria trying to establish herself as an objective and honest narrator via a lengthy description of her appearance. She describes her height, weight, hair colour, complexion, eyes, nose, mouth, facial shape, clothes, even her eyebrows; after which, Valeria mentally intones, 'Have I succeeded or failed in describing the picture of myself which I see in the glass? It is not for me to say. I have done my best to keep clear of the two vanities—the vanity of depreciating, and the vanity of praising, my own personal appearance' (11). By claiming that she tried to keep a middle way in between the 'vanity of depreciating' and the 'vanity of praising', she implies that she strives to be an impartial and honest narrator. Her usage of this scene (describing her appearance) as a means to promote

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[59] Tara Macdonald, 'Sensation Fiction, Gender and Identity', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 127-40 (p. 127).
[60] Macdonald, 'Sensation Fiction, Gender and Identity', p. 130.

her narratorial trustworthiness reinforces my point on how she uses physiognomy as a smokescreen for her clandestinely subversive tale.

Jessica Cox's analysis of Collins's works in relation to physiognomy illustrates that the author provides elaborate descriptions of almost all his heroines as a means of introducing readers to their personalities. Cox claims that Valeria's black hair and eyes 'of so dark a blue that they are generally mistaken for black' reference physiognomic ideas widely known during that century (10). Black hair suggests 'intensity of feeling' and black eyes signal towards 'a firm mind, not wavering, fearful, but courageous, true and honourable', all traits that match Valeria's textual personality.[61] Her 'aquiline' nose is indicative of 'a penetrating, quick cast of brain' and shows that she is 'capable of command, can rule, act, overcome, destroy'.[62] However, Valeria also has a pale complexion (suggestive of a 'dreamy [and] capricious' nature) and dark blue eyes, which differentiates her from Collins's more assertive heroines and instead aligns her with the traditional, passive heroine who is blue-eyed, light-haired, and fair-skinned.[63] Cox concludes that Valeria's black hair and 'aquiline' nose represent her brief stint away from the domestic sphere as an amateur detective, but her pale complexion and blue, rather than black, eyes demonstrate Valeria's ultimate conformation to conventional gender roles.[64]

While I agree with Cox that Valeria's appearance reveals aspects of her personality, I disagree with her conclusion on Valeria's submissive return to domesticity and contend that her looks can instead be physiognomically interpreted to provide evidence for her narratorial unreliability. Valeria has self-described 'strongly marked' eyebrows, and the 'muscles that move the eyebrows, of all the expressive muscles' were generally considered the 'least under

[61] Cox, 'Reading Faces', p. 112.
[62] Cox, 'Reading Faces', p. 112.
[63] Cox, 'Reading Faces', p. 111.
[64] Cox, 'Reading Faces', p. 112.

the control of the will; in general, only emotions of the soul can move them in an isolated fashion' (10).[65] Them being 'strongly marked', in Valeria's words, helps her hint to readers that she has a supposedly natural predisposition against lying. She also likens her hair to Venus de' Medici, one of the most admired sculptures of Venus (Roman goddess of beauty and love, or Aphrodite in Greek mythology) in the nineteenth century and which John Ruskin called 'one of the purest and most elevated incarnations of woman conceivable'.[66] However, Venus de' Medici was simultaneously associated with coquettish and unstable femininity and was eventually replaced by the Venus de Milo as the ideal model of beauty. The hybridity of Venus de' Medici—contrasting symbolism and Roman equivalent of a Greek goddess—emphasizes the duality of Valeria's narration and character.

Valeria's narratorial unreliability is further brought out by the text's use of photographs as revelatory items that both advance the mystery plotline and Valeria's self-discovery character arc, but simultaneously illuminates that what they reveal is entirely filtered through the viewer's perception and is consequentially questionable in terms of veracity. The novel borrows photography's association with truth in a manner that highlights how manipulable a medium it actually is—just like the story's narrator. There are only two photographs that appear in the text: Sarah's and Mrs. Macallan's, the latter being Eustace's mother. Sarah's photograph marks the moment Valeria partially uncovers her husband's secret and its discovery is followed by her reading of the trial report which exposes Eustace's shameful past in its entirety. It is additionally, as mentioned, a stepping stone for Valeria to realize her flaws, which means that Sarah's ugliness is exaggerated through Valeria's jealous gaze.

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[65] J. A. Cuthbertson, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 43.

[66] 'Explanatory Notes', in *The Law and the Lady*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 433.

As for Mrs. Macallan's photograph, it seemingly resists Valeria's assumptions about the depicted subject at first, but a closer reading demonstrates that it still shows what she wants to see. Valeria expects the woman who disapproves of her marriage to her son to have a 'stern, ill-tempered, forbidding countenance', but to her surprise, 'the face showed the remains of great beauty; the expression, though remarkably firm, was yet winning, tender, and kind' (24). The actual Mrs. Macallan is as physiognomically kind and genial as her appearance suggests as well. Mrs. Macallan's defiance of Valeria's initial assumptions can be attributed to the latter's desire for reassurance about her marriage. Valeria finds the photograph in a secret compartment of Eustace's dressing-case the day after their wedding, during which Eustace sheds tears and his explanation does not fully '[satisfy] my mind' (22). She wakes the next day 'suddenly and unaccountably, from a deep and dreamless sleep, with an all-pervading sensation of nervous uneasiness, which I had never felt before' (23). It is 'strange to me in my experience of myself' because she is typically a sound sleeper (23). Valeria conjures another out-of-character experience to justify why husbandly love does not soothe her and why she still yearns for answers. Her appearance is noticeably 'haggard and worn' as a result of waking before her usual time and complements her out-of-character behaviour. The 'confinement to the four walls of the room began to be intolerable' to her and she departs for another room in hopes 'the change would relieve me' (24). The bedroom, with her loving spouse sleeping in bed, represents domesticity, but it is domesticity on Eustace's terms. He refuses to admit Valeria into his confidence as she does with him, making their relationship an unequal one. Valeria, by departing the room and seeking 'change', rejects this type of marriage. The photograph of Mrs. Macallan 'quieted me as nothing had quieted me yet' because rather than a stern, intimating woman whose approval Valeria can never win, here is a 'person possessing unusual attractions—a person whom it would be a pleasure and a privilege to know' (25). Valeria clandestinely gives herself permission to ask Mrs. Macallan,

‘a person whom it would be a pleasure and a privilege to know’, for information—which she does later. Mrs. Macallan also appears reasonable in Valeria’s eyes and would not forbid the marriage unless for a valid reason. It is not a problem with Valeria and her desire to know the truth (according to the photograph) but the issue that threatens her marriage itself.

Events or characters that disrupt the alleged link between appearance and truth are predictably cast in an unappealing manner, such as the chambermaid who helps beautify Valeria’s looks with cosmetics. Valeria emphasizes her distaste of using ‘paints and powders’, but ‘in the madness of that miserable time’, she feels as though she has no choice but to use ‘odious deceit’ to lend her ‘skin a false fairness, my cheeks a false colour, my eyes a false brightness’ in order to charm the Major into giving her information about Eustace’s secret (57). Afterwards, with her appearance transformed, she feels like she has ‘lost my ordinary identity—to have stepped out of my own character’, which preserves the physiognomic connection between one’s looks and one’s personality (57-58). The chambermaid who performs the ‘transformation’ is adversely depicted as a ‘middle-aged woman, with a large experience of the world and its wickedness written legibly on her manner and on her face’ (56). Her ‘wickedness’ is physiognomically displayed on her appearance. When Valeria gives her money for a yet unsaid transaction, the chambermaid ‘thanked me with a cynical smile, evidently placing her own evil interpretation on my motive for bribing her’ in an interaction that increases the scene’s prostitution overtones (56). Part of the reason ‘paints and powders’ had a largely negative reputation in the nineteenth century was because they were associated with painted women, and the novel partially leans on this view in order to present Valeria as a morally upstanding wife. An 1864 article in *Punch*, while referring to an advertisement that offered makeup advice to young women, declared that a father ‘would as soon allow his sons to take in a miscellany of which the advertising columns contained offers to give them lessons in forgery, as let his daughter read one by

whose means they might be corrupted with instruction in the art of falsifying their own faces'.[67] Read in this light, Sarah's death is not only symbolic punishment for practicing an undesirable form of romantic love (that being self-destructive infatuation), but also punishment for repeatedly trying to falsify her face by applying cosmetics to her 'muddy, blotchy' complexion (130).[68] She breaks the sacred connection between appearance and truth. Michelle J. Smith points out that female use of cosmetics was socially permitted as long as it was not perceivable, a contradictory belief that perfectly matches Valeria's performative femininity and deceptive narration.[69]

The ending, while concluding in a perfect domestic framework, is as slyly subversive as expected. *The Law and the Lady* craftily opens with a biblical quote on wifely obedience during Valeria and Eustace's marriage service, but illustrates through its narrative that they would not have a good marriage if Valeria had not defied her husband and investigated his case, the transgression of her actions dampened by Eustace attributing them to 'the courage and devotion of my wife' (411). Valeria has no reason to continue pursuing the restoration of Sarah's torn suicide letter since Eustace has voluntarily returned to her, but she still wants to fulfil the 'one cherished purpose of my life' (368). When Valeria finally reads the reconstructed letter, she weeps for her 'pitiable' double and the identity she used to inhabit, one that conflates wifehood with selfhood (395). The novel closes with a reversal of roles regarding Valeria and Eustace: she holds information (the contents of Sarah's letter) hidden

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[67] 'Fraudulent Faces', *Punch*, 9 Jan 1864, p. 19.
[68] Aviva Briefel demonstrates that contemporary beauty manuals and advertisements for makeup often emphasized the hazards of artificial embellishment for moralistic reasons. However, cosmetics could be used if a woman 'is skilled enough to avoid their physical or social dangers'. The hypocrisy of this message stems from contemporary concerns on the low marriageability of ugly women and the social duty of women to look pleasing to the eye. Analyzing Collins's novel in particular, Briefel argues that while Sarah 'does not literally poison her husband, her unregulated use of cosmetics contaminates his reputation and identity' through the shameful 'Not Proven' verdict which nearly destroys his second marriage. Aviva Briefel, 'Cosmetic Tragedies: Failed Masquerade in Wilkie Collins's "The Law and the Lady"', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37 (2009), 463-81 (pp. 464-465, 472).
[69] Smith, '"The Arts of Beauty"', p. 2.

from him for his peace of mind, while he remains in the dark. However, unlike Eustace's obstinate withholding of information, Valeria offers Eustace the choice to be enlightened. He chooses ignorance out of respect for his deceased wife, but the fact that he was given a choice demonstrates the couple's newfound marital equality. The last paragraph contains one final Medici-like contradiction: 'Don't bear hardly, good people, on the follies and the errors of my husband's life. Abuse *me* as much as you please. But pray think kindly of Eustace, for my sake' (413). Valeria is a good wife—and an even better masquerade of Victorian femininity.

Hardy and Collins's texts, while both utilizing narratives about love to conceal their radical proto-feminist messages, apply photographic doubling towards opposing outcomes. Their heroines feel dissatisfied with their marital life in some way and utilize photographs to uncover what they want or lack. However, while Ella desires to be her photographic double, Valeria is encouraged to move away from it. Ella is also punished through her death and outcast child for her transgressive yearnings, while Valeria is covertly rewarded with domestic bliss for her rebellion against her husband's wishes. These contrasting endings demonstrate how gender ideology in the nineteenth century was constantly in flux, under construction, and open to dispute—a state that mimics photography's unstable physicality and contradictory connotations. Given its own duality, it is little wonder that writers gravitated towards photography to communicate a literary motif all about the divided self.

Section 2: Messaging Your Matches

Chapter 4: Cupid's Letter-Bag

Given Elizabeth Barrett Browning's enthusiasm about the photographic daguerreotype, it is little surprise that she welcomed the revolutionary Postage Act with equal fervour. As she wrote to her American friend Cornelius Mathews in 1843:

> Why will you not as a nation, embrace our great Penny Post scheme and hold our envelopes in all acceptation? You do not know—cannot guess—what a wonderful liberty our Rowland Hill has given to British spirits, and how we '*flash* a thought' instead of 'wafting' it from our extreme south to our extreme north, paying 'a penny for our thought' and for the electricity included. I recommend you our Penny Postage as the most successful revolution since the 'glorious three days' of Paris.[1]

We may call the postal system 'snail mail' these days, but the 1839 Postage Age was ground-breaking to the Victorians—so much so that Barrett Browning likened the post's speed to a 'flash' and compared the reform to the government-toppling July Revolution of 1830. Prior to the new legislation, postal deliveries were slow, expensive, and disorganized. The Act, which was spearheaded by Rowland Hill, drastically lowered postage prices and improved the overall efficiency of the mail delivery system. Franking privileges were abolished; and letters weighing up to half an ounce would henceforth only cost a penny to send, regardless of their destination within the United Kingdom.[2] Universal postage transformed the Post Office into a symbol of equality and inclusivity. Victorians were encouraged to imagine themselves 'connected to each other and as part of a national discourse network', drawing a connection

[1] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Letter 1222, EBB to Cornelius Mathews', in *The Brownings' Correspondence*, ed. by Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson, 28 vols (Winfield: Wedgestone Press, 1984), VII, 91-94 (p. 93).
[2] Catherine J. Golden, *Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), p. 82.

between postal letters and the national body.[3] As a *Blackwoods*'s writer exclaimed in 1885, 'If ever there was a democratic community, it is that of letters. For some hours peer and peasant—even her Majesty and the village cobbler—are thrown together in the letter-bag, and arrive the same hour at their destination'.[4] Eventually, in December 1898, penny postage was expanded to the entirety of the British Empire and her colonies.[5] The other huge change was the implementation of postage stamps and prepaid stationary, like envelopes and letter sheets. The Penny Black stamp, also known as a 'Queen's Head', as well as prepaid envelopes won instant popularity with Victorians.[6] 112,000 letters were posted on the first day universal penny postage came into effect. The figure was nearly four times the usual number and indicative of the Act's success.[7]

It is admittedly difficult to judge how many in the tide of posted letters qualified as personal correspondence. At a penny a letter, people could easily send insulting missives, advertisement pamphlets, political circulars, and begging letters, the last of which were designed to milk money from addressees.[8] Catherine J. Golden confirms that the Penny Post did lead to unwelcome, unsolicited mass mailings.[9] M.J. Dauton conversely asserts that 'before the introduction of the Penny Post, most letters were probably sent for business purposes', but afterwards there was 'an increase in personal correspondence'.[10]

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[3] Katie-Louise Thomas, 'A Queer Job for a Girl: Women Postal Workers, Civic Duty, and Sexuality, 1870-80', in *In a Queer Place: Sexuality and Belonging in British and European Contexts*, ed. by Kate Chedgzoy, Emma Francis, and Murray Pratt (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 50-70 (p. 54).
[4] A. D. R. W. Cochrane-Baillie, 'The Royal Mail', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 137 (May 1885), 617-30 (p. 617).
[5] Laura Rotunno reports that advocates for the imperial penny post often emphasized the connections letters could forge between nations in their rhetoric. British anxiety about losing economic interests and its appearance as a benevolent colonial mother played a part in penny postage's international expansion as well. Laura Rotunno, *Postal Plots in British Fiction, 1840-1898: Readdressing Correspondence in Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 32-33.
[6] Golden, *Posting It*, pp. 82, 84.
[7] Golden, *Posting It*, p. 83.
[8] Rotunno, *Postal Plots*, p. 23.
[9] Golden, *Posting It*, p. 154.
[10] M. J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (London: Athlone Press, 1985), p. 79.

The Postage Act's disadvantages do not detract from its benefits though, nor its intended purpose in ensuring cheap postage and creating a letter-writing republic. More reforms followed in time. Distribution to rural areas expanded in 1842 as post offices were built in four hundred registrars' districts.[11] The Post Office also tested six letter boxes in London in 1855 and by 1900, there were 32,593 letter boxes throughout the country, further improving the postal system.[12] Howard Robinson's study confirms that by 1864, there was a 94 percent successful delivery rate for letters.[13] By 1860, Victorian cities had six to twelve daily postal deliveries in addition to daily collections from letter boxes. Writing 'return of post' in a missive instructed the recipient to answer it by the next letter collection on any given day. A letter frequently arrived eight or nine hours after posting, immensely quicker than today and explains why Barrett Browning, in the age before the electric telegraph, considered the speed equivalent to a ground-breaking 'flash'.

This chapter ruminates on the use and portrayal of letters in literature with respect to romantic relationships after the Postage Act's implementation in January 1840. It not only examines the epistle's ability to embody physical presence and substitute the absent writer specifically in the postal age, but also the circumstances around its sending and delivery. The democratization of the mail service meant that all letters were treated the same regardless of the sender's social class, which raised concerns about the letter's metaphorical loss of individuality and sentimentality. Mary A. Favret accurately states that the letter has sentimental connotations due to its role in interpersonal communication.[14] Menke argues that pre-reform letters were handled in a 'highly "individual … manner", as a unique object' from start to finish due to the need to ascertain its contents, determine its postage, and to collect the

[11] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 12.
[12] Rotunno, *Postal Plots*, p. 28. Letter boxes appeared on the continent in Paris as early as 1653, but its appearance in Britain can be credited to Anthony Trollope, who was a long-standing postal employee. Golden, *Posting It*, pp. 116-17.
[13] Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office: A History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 358.
[14] Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*, p. 10.

money from the recipient.[15] Following 1840, they were transformed into uniform, categorizable items that could be quickly processed to facilitate a quick and efficient postal system. I am interested in exploring how this might impact the letter's ability to stand in for the writer's presence, if the postal system no longer treated letters as individual, highly identifiable objects, and whether the clinical procedure would cause fictional correspondence between sweethearts to be depicted as less emotionally meaningful as a result. Related is the interconnectedness of the postal network, which granted the letter—usually connotated as private—a new public aspect. Favret aptly sums up the situation: 'The individual corresponded with society, or with himself; she sent letters to the post office, not to friends or lovers'.[16] Courtship is meant to be a private matter between two individuals, a straight line connecting two people, but through entering the mailing system, it becomes part of a vast grid that involves multiple unseen figures, ranging from the postal personnel that process and deliver the letter to the numerous other enveloped bodies in the post-box and postbag. One can argue that courtship was never fully a private matter before the postal reform due to arranged marriages and overlapping social circles, but what I am pointing out is that the increasingly complex information network exposed matters of the heart to even strangers—such as in the case of matrimonial advertisements where individuals sought love in a public forum, an activity that would not be possible without the ability to cheaply send letters back and forth to mimic in-person conversation.

In conceptualizing personal letters in amorous narratives as potentially public and impersonal rather than private and sentimental, this chapter reveals contemporary anxieties about industrialization and privacy issues arising from new media. The Post Office's industrialized, machine-like efficiency symbolically threatened to eliminate the personal touch from social

[15] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 36.
[16] Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*, p. 203.

interactions, even from something as special and emotionally intimate as a love missive. I had previously analysed photography's complicated relationship with privacy through the stereotype of the sinister photographer and copyright laws that interfered with the sitter's rights to their own image; this chapter on the post deepens that discussion by contextualizing my readings with historical evidence on how the Post Office indirectly thrust courtship into a more public light and even conducted surveillance on personal correspondence. For instance, letter-writing manuals often warned men to show restraint in their love letters, or to avoid writing them at all, in case they were presented as proof in breach-of-promise court cases, where women could sue their partners for reneging on their marriage proposals.[17] Fear of having one's private messages exposed continues today through screenshotted texts sent to outside parties or submitting texts as legal evidence in divorce proceedings, which emphasizes the relevance of the issues investigated in this chapter.

The impersonal love letter was not just metaphorical for Victorians, thanks to templates from letter-writing manuals. The new accessibility of the postal service led to a proliferation of consumer goods related to writing, like stationary, paper, envelopes, writing desks and cases, sealing adhesives, and of course manuals that offered guidance on what precisely to write.[18] Many guidebooks, such as *The Letter Writer for Lovers: A Complete Guide to Lovers' Correspondence, Suited to All Classes in Society* (n.d.) and *The Lover's Letter Writer for Ladies and Gentlemen* (1866) offered models for love letters (with individual sections for different social castes), making the sentimental activity a simple act of reproduction.[19] While *The Lover's Letter Writer* warns against copying its models directly, the reason given has nothing to do with the personal flourish, but rather to mediate risk in case the writer had

[17] Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage*, p. 54.
[18] Nigel Hall, 'The Materiality of Letter Writing: A Nineteenth Century Perspective', in *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, ed. by David Barton and Nigel Hall (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000), pp. 83-108 (p. 104). Golden, *Posting It*, pp. 118-19.
[19] Phegley's *Courtship and Marriage* (p. 54) drew my attention to these volumes.

misjudged the intimacy of their relationship to the recipient and sends a floridly effusive love letter as a consequence.[20] There were also templates for admonishing one's romantic interest for not writing back, or to put in modern speak: 'Why haven't they texted me back yet?' *The Letter Writer for Lovers* features models titled, 'From a Lady to her Fiancé, complaining of his silence', 'From a Lady, Upbraiding her Fiancé for not writing.—More Severe', 'From a Gentleman to his Fiancée, complaining of her not writing to him', and 'From a Gentleman, Remonstrating with a Lady on her Continued Silence'.[21] The righteous rage in these letters is somewhat dampened by the fact that they can be duly copied out of a book as opposed to summoning words from the heart. The boom in postal products additionally gave an aura of insincerity to the letter-writing craft. An 1886 advertisement for C. Brandauer and Co.'s metal pens was published with the caption: 'The course of a true love letter runs smooth when it is written with one of Brandauer & Co's circular pointed pens'.[22] The ad pushes the message that the choice of writing implement can influence the writer's romantic chances and is as important, or perhaps even more, than the love epistle's actual contents. It was cheaper to send a letter in the postal age, but through templates and consumerism, its contents seemed figuratively less valuable.

Valentines, supposedly 'the most sincere communication from heart to heart' according to Debra Mancoff, could be readily purchased from a store.[23] Exchanging valentines predated the Victorian era, but the Penny Post increased its popularity and led to the design of elaborate envelopes.[24] In 1841, one year after the Act's implementation, Victorians sent more than 400,000 valentines throughout Britain. By 1871, thrice that number passed through the

[20] *The Lover's Letter Writer for Ladies and Gentlemen* (London: George Routledge, 1866), p. 50.
[21] Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage*, p. 57.
[22] 'Advertisements', *London News*, 2 September 1886, p. 37.
[23] Debra N. Mancoff, *Love's Messenger: Tokens of Affection in the Victorian Age* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1997), p. 7.
[24] Golden, *Posting It*, pp. 222-23.

London post alone.[25] Valentine's Day was essentially a 'postal holiday'.[26] Barry Shank contends that valentines 'materialize the quality of the emotional relationships they represented', so high-quality, ornate valentines became the most desirable cards to send and receive.[27] Victorians did often assemble their own valentines by using materials like 'coloured and gilt cards, lace frames, cupids and hearts made out of paper, bows and ribbons, and appliqués made of lace, feather, shell, and gold and silver foil' in addition to 'printed verses and mottoes that could be added to a design'.[28] However, the array of intricate valentines offered by shops demonstrates that store-bought cards were popular as well, an alternative that threatened to dilute the valentine's emotional sincerity. A few London-based shops such as Dobbs and Company, George Meek, and Joseph Mansell, designed their own popular lines of valentine cards decorated with lace, silk, ribbon, and cut-paper flowers and foliage.[29] Some were even infused with scent, like ones from Eugene Rimmel's perfumery. Their products ranged from a 'perfumed sensation valentine' for one shilling to more decorative satin, lace, and hand-painted cards selling for up to ten pounds. Among the more expensive items were valentines that played music, doubled as decorative fans, or held earrings, brooches, and charms.[30] Valentines' passage through the postal system itself dampened their sentiment. Christopher M. Kierstead, analysing Charles Dickens and W. H. Wills's 'Valentine's Day at the Post-Office', interprets it not as a supportive piece for the Post Office, but rather betrays anxiety about 'a mass society, in which mechanical functions

[25] Mancoff, *Love's Messenger*, p. 46.
[26] David Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 149.
[27] Barry Shank, *A Token of My Affection: Greeting Cards and American Business Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 56.
[28] Golden, *Posting It*, p. 224.
[29] Golden, *Posting It*, p. 223.
[30] Jennifer Phegley, 'Reading Victorian Valentines: Working-Class Women, Courtship, and the Penny Post in Bow Bells Magazine', in *Drawing on the Victorians: The Palimpsest of Victorian and Neo-Victorian Graphic Texts*, ed. by Anna Maria Jones and Rebecca N. Mitchell (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017), pp. 269-99 (p. 280).

had replaced personal interaction'.[31] Love letters pass through the machine-like hands of postal employees, leeching its contents of emotion: 'Colourful, fancy envelopes aside, the valentine was just another stamped document duly processed by this unflappable system'.[32]

Use of love letters for logistical or legal functions contributed to their metamorphosis into public objects. Ginger Frost reports that love letters were read out loud alongside being used as evidence in breach-of-promise cases.[33] Fallen women would sometimes attach love epistles to their applications for assistance at the London Foundling Hospital as well to prove that they were mistreated victims, not prostitutes.[34] Funnily enough, the letter's newfound publicness is how we in the modern era are able to get a glimpse into the Victorian working-class's romantic epistles. The famed Browning poets' romantic correspondence would have naturally been preserved (an honourable mention must also go to writer James Joyce's famously risqué missives to his wife), but had love letters not entered the public record as legal evidence or administrative documents, we might have never gotten first-hand samples of working-class epistolary communication. The primary purpose of the Penny Post was to make it accessible to all and in the past, high postal costs greatly limited the working classes' choice of life partners. As one Yorkshire clothier scoffed, 'There [was] no such thing as writing love letters! … otherwise courting amongst the common or working people would [have been] impossible, as a letter cost a half-day's wages'.[35] In addition, many female servants changed job two or three times throughout a single relationship, whereas men usually travelled for school and business.[36] Letters helped mediate distance and maintain intimacy across miles. A letter dated 1867 from Harriet Roper to Sam Hills went, 'Although

[31] Kierstead, 'Going Postal', p. 94.
[32] Kierstead, 'Going Postal', pp. 93-94.
[33] Ginger S. Frost, *Promises Broken: Courtship, Class, and Gender in Victorian England* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 8, 66.
[34] Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage*, p. 55.
[35] Derek Gregory, 'The Friction of Distance? Information Circulation and the Mails in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 13 (1987), 130-54 (pp. 148-49).
[36] Frost, *Promises Broken*, p. 65.

absent you are ever present in my thoughts, and [I] only feel my utter inability of words sufficiently impressive to express my love for you'.[37] Letters, to Harriet, seemed a poor substitution for physical interaction with her lover because she could not find 'words sufficiently impressive' to express her love. However, she assured Sam that although he was absent, 'you are ever present in my thoughts' in hopes that her letter, her words, would convey her presence in her absence. A letter from John Irving to Ellen Wood in 1881 expressed a similar sentiment: 'I write this note on the bank beside your house, and am nearly broken-hearted at your absence from home. Do come home again as soon as you can'.[38] A builder named Henry Davis often added rows of 'X's to represent kisses in his letters to a cook called Annie Hancock, one of which read, 'I am craving to see your dear face and sparkling eyes and to strength you in love'.[39] Although all these relationships ended in heartbreak since they were submitted as proof in breach-of-promise cases, they demonstrate the tangible benefits of the postal reform to the masses, even if there are downsides in the form of personal letters' lack of sentimentality and potential public exposure.

There is a wealth of scholarship on the postal reform and it provides valuable groundwork with regard to my own investigation into the post's public/private dichotomy and the concept of the network. Some of the academics I draw on have been mentioned already, such as Golden who investigates how the Penny Post sparked other revolutionary events and Favret who conceptualizes the letter as a political tool as opposed to possessing purely feminine and sentimental connotations.[40] The latter's work is primarily located in the eighteenth century, but her ideas are still relevant to my study of the public postal letter in the Victorian period. Laura Rotunno likewise explores letters as a vehicle for liberal reform and professional

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[37] Frost, *Promises Broken*, p. 66.
[38] Frost, *Promises Broken*, p. 66.
[39] Frost, *Promises Broken*, p. 66.
[40] Golden, *Posting It*, p. 82; Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*, p. 10.

anxiety as the population grew more literate.[41] Bernhard Siegert's seminal *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System* offers insight into the post's public/private contradiction. He postulates that mail, usually perceived as confidential communication between two individuals, became a daily act that defined one's relation to authority after the reform. Penny postage made the mail indispensable for conducting one's affairs and later became an inescapable part of life once mail slots were required at all residences.[42] In the postal era, he adds, 'identity no longer was a question of biographical depth, but of potential addressability'.[43] In a similar vein, David M. Parker builds off of Favret's ideas to illustrate how the Post Office's surveillance practices helped establish the mail as a potent form of legal evidence.[44] Karin Koehler's *Thomas Hardy and Victorian Communication* alternately examines the penny post's impact upon the literary imagination and representational possibilities.[45] Her argument touches close to mine through her focus on fictional letters, though her work focuses on one author in comparison to my assorted range to demonstrate the reform's vast and diverse influence. David Trotter concentrates on the postal network and connects the circulation systems of plague, money, and the post, emphasizing how the post represented heterogeneity: 'The post was exciting not only because of its scope and efficiency, but also because of its mixed content of ideas and emotions, commercial data and private confidences. For the health of the nation depended on the flow of information *and* the flow of feeling'.[46]

[41] Rotunno, *Postal Plots*, p. 2.
[42] Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. by Kevin Repp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 8, 102.
[43] Siegert, *Relays*, pp. 115-16.
[44] Deven M. Parker, 'Epistolary Form in the Age of the Post Office', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 59 (Summer 2019), 625-45 (p. 626).
[45] Koehler, *Thomas Hardy and Victorian Communication*, p. 3.
[46] David Trotter, *Circulation: Defoe, Dickens, and the Economies of the Novel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 130.

Despite the intriguing potential in analysing romantic relationships in connection to the postal grid, surprisingly little has been done on the topic. A few relevant works include Jennifer Phegley's article 'Reading Victorian Valentines: Working-Class Women, Courtship, and the Penny Post in *Bow Bells* Magazine' and Kate Thomas's *Postal Pleasures*, the latter of which was previously brought up in my introductory chapter. Phegley's piece is relatively limited in its scope because it mainly focuses on Valentine's Day in relation to a contemporary periodical's content.[47] Thomas's book more closely resembles my argument with an equally broad selection of fictional texts. She links the postal system to digressive sexual relations, with one chapter in particular investigating the 1889 Cleveland Street Affair. The incident involved messenger boys—what the Post Office dubbed its young deliverers of telegrams—who were found to be simultaneously employed as sex workers in a West End brothel.[48] I too look at a Post Office scandal in the form of the 1844 Mazzini case (which revealed to the public that the institution had been practicing surveillance on private correspondence) in connection to Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, but my research largely veers from Thomas's in that it examines both same-sex and opposite-sex couplings, which casts a wider net in terms of studying the postal letter's influence on society and the literature it produces.

The texts that will be examined this chapter are Brontë's *Villette* and Anthony Trollope's *The Three Clerks*. They were selected for their showcasing of the reformed postal system's institutional power and prominent utilization of epistolary means to advance their respective romantic narratives, with *Villette* in particular demonstrating how new media nurtured non-

[47] Phegley, 'Reading Victorian Valentines', pp. 269-99.
[48] It was not the first time messenger boys had been embroiled in prostitution, but the Cleveland Street Affair was big news largely because it marked the first high-profile prosecution under Britain's new law against homosexuality: the Criminal Law Amendment Act, Section 11, passed in 1885. Thomas argues that the scandal derived its force from the revelation that sexual deviance was not contained in a single residence, but instead 'circulated as widely and easily as the post, and indeed, with the post'. The boys wore their uniforms while with clients and some even had sex on Post Office premises. She adds that low wages drove messenger boys to prostitution, structurally implicating the Post Office itself in the exploitation of these young boys. Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, pp. 39-45, 53.

conventional relationships that did not necessarily prioritize marriage. The authors behind the page played a role in my decision as well. *Villette* is famously semi-autobiographical since Brontë sent love letters to an unrequited love as the novel's heroine Lucy Snowe does, and Trollope had a long-standing career at the Post Office which overlapped with his vocation as a writer. Both authors clearly had an impactful relationship with letters during their lives, and I am interested in studying how those postal influences emerged in their work, especially given that one only possesses a layperson's knowledge of the postal system while the other is intimately aware of the Post Office's inner workings. The section on *Villette* contends that Lucy occupies a faciliatory role in her friends' romantic relationships by mediating communications between parties, an arrangement she both enjoys and loathes because it allows her to impersonally participate in the marriage plot, but simultaneously reminds her of her own lack of romantic attachments. The positive portrayal of her interference symbolizes the importance of emergent media to romantic connections in the postal age. As for Trollope's novel, its focus on predictable marriage plots with government clerks as leading characters draws a link between the impersonal bureaucratic organization and the sentimental relationships the former facilitates. *The Three Clerks*' portrayal of Trollope's real-life disapproval of competitive examinations for the Civil Service and Charley's reluctance to marry a barmaid, however, weakens its positive depiction of institutional control over new transmission systems like the postal network.

Surveillance Within the Postal System

Analysing letters in *Villette* has frequently been fruitful terrain for critics. Jessica Brent interprets Lucy's passionate attachment to her unreciprocated crush Dr. John Graham Bretton's letters as a 'desperate wish to get Graham's inaccessible image under linguistic

control, to capture his essence in the written word'.[49] Rachel Jackson argues that Lucy's preference for 'pliable present absences of letters over the fixed actuality of bodies' reflects the novel's refusal to provide a definitive ending, a claim that is somewhat echoed by Steven Earnshaw's reading of letters in Brontë's works as 'a potential bridge between souls, the transcendence of the physical by the spiritual' that culminates in the 'ambivalently happy ending of *Villette*'.[50] Tamara S. Wagner and Koehler's respective analyses of the text concentrate on its reworking of the eighteenth-century letter novel.[51] The scene where Lucy buries Dr. John's epistles in particular has received heavy attention from scholars, like Sally Shuttleworth and the authorly duo Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar who scrutinise it in relation to sexual and emotional repression.[52]

What has garnered significantly less scholarly attention is the depiction of the postal system in *Villette*. Examining the post is different from purely examining letters because it places stronger emphasis on how the letter reaches its destination and how personal epistolary exchanges are mediated by the vast, interconnected machine of the Post Office. I argue that the novel's surveillance and espionage themes are inspired by the 1844 Mazzini scandal and symbolizes how private affairs are constantly at threat of being exposed in the postal age. Lucy too practices surveillance and functions as an intermediary between participants of marriage plots in order to detachedly experience strong feelings, but just as the reformed postal network seeps into its epistolary cargo, she inevitably becomes emotionally entangled

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[49] Jessica Brent, 'Haunting Pictures, Missing Letters Visual Displacement and Narrative Elision in "Villette"', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 37 (Fall 2003-Spring 2004), 86-111 (p. 102).
[50] Rachel Jackson, 'Empty Letters and the Ghost of Desire in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', *Brontë Studies*, 35 (2010), 95-106 (p. 97); Steven Earnshaw, 'Charlotte Brontë's Fictional Epistles', *Brontë Studies*, 40 (2015), 201-14 (p. 201).
[51] Tamara S. Wagner, 'Containing Emotional Distress: The Elusive Letter Novel in *Villette*', *Brontë Studies*, 36 (2011), 131-40; Karin Koehler, 'Immaterial Correspondence: Letters, Bodies and Desire in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', *Brontë Studies*, 43 (2018), 136-46.
[52] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, 2nd edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 427; Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 226.

in the connections she facilitates. The novel does not portray Lucy's interference in a negative manner, but instead implies that new media and mediated communication are essential to achieving romantic happiness, especially for individuals like Lucy who seek non-traditional relationship structures.

The 1844 Mazzini case refers to Sir James Graham, Secretary of State for the Home Office, secretly authorizing the opening and reading of letters belonging to Joseph Mazzini, an exiled Italian nationalist and resident of London. According to F. B. Smith's detailed historical account, Mazzini's peers began to suspect secret surveillance in May after one of them discovered a double impression on his letter's seal. Mazzini told his friends to include '*des grains presque invisibles*' in their letters to him and further discovered that the time stamps had been altered to conceal a two-hour delay in handling.[53] Armed with this evidence, a radical English MP petitioned the House of Commons in June, claiming that letters sent 'for no political purpose' had their seals broken by authorities of 'her Majesty's Post Office,' hence introducing 'the spy system of foreign states' into England.[54] While this petition was largely dismissed in the House of Commons, it did provoke a *Times* editorial, which accused the involved ministry of pursuing 'a policy at once unconstitutional, un-English, and ungenerous' and undermining the 'peculiar boast of England that she is not as other countries, that her citizens are not liable to … the same dogging of their footsteps, opening of their letters, and prying into their cabinets as harass the subjects of continental states'.[55] Writer Thomas Carlyle, in his letter defending Mazzini, stated that 'sealed letters in an English post-office' should be 'respected as things sacred' and likens the 'opening of men's letters' to 'a practice near of kin to picking men's pockets, and to other still viler and far

[53] F. B. Smith, 'British Post Office espionage, 1844', *Historical Studies*, 14 (April 1970), 189-203 (p. 193).
[54] Smith, 'British Post Office espionage', p. 194.
[55] Harry W. Rudman, *Italian Nationalism and English Letters: Figures of the Risorgimento and Victorian Men of Letters* (New York: AMS, 1966), pp. 61-62.

fataler forms of scoundrelism'.[56] The controversy escalated with a second petition and the revelation that the British had shared information gained from Mazzini's letters with foreign powers.[57] To quote a Tory minister, this lit 'up a flame throughout the country'.[58] *Punch* published parodies of the letter-opening incident and issued anti-Graham envelopes and wafers. The anti-Graham envelope parodied the ridiculed Mulready envelope (the official prepaid envelope that was swiftly withdrawn), and the wafer was 'extra strongly gummed' with witty designs that warn against intruding on the letter's contents.[59] Many booksellers for the working-class soon followed suit and offered envelopes in the shape of padlocks for sale, with the running motto: 'Not to be Grahamed'.[60]

While Charlotte Brontë's thoughts on the Mazzini case are unknown, she likely would have been aware of it given its impact on the public consciousness. M. H. Spielmann points to the 'extreme rarity' of preserved anti-Graham wafers in our time as evidence that they were widely used.[61] As an avid newspaper reader and a prolific letter-writer (with approximately 950 known letters), Brontë would have most likely been abreast of any discourse surrounding the Post Office.[62] She was acutely conscious of the issue of costly postage as seen by her apologetic tone in a letter to her good friend Ellen Nussey on 4 July 1834 and undoubtably celebrated alongside the rest of England when the Postage Act passed: 'You will be tired of

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[56] Thomas Carlyle, 'To the Editor of the Times; 18 June 1844', *The Carlyle Letters Online* <https://carlyleletters.dukeupress.edu/volume/18/lt-18440618-TC-EOT-01> [accessed 29 January 2023].

[57] Marjorie Stone, 'On the Post Office Espionage Scandal, 1844', *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. by Dino Franco Felluga <https://branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=marjorie-stone-on-the-post-office-espionage-scandal-1844> [accessed 29 January 2023].

[58] Charles Greville, *The Greville Memoirs,* ed. by Lytton Strachey and Roger Fulford, 8 vols (London: Macmillan & Co.,1938), V, 183.

[59] M. H. Spielmann, *The History of "Punch"* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1895), p. 114.

[60] Spielmann, *History of "Punch"*, p. 115.

[61] Spielmann, *History of "Punch"*, p. 115.

[62] Brontë's estimated number of letters is taken from: Margaret Smith, 'The Brontë Correspondence', in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. by Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 115-22 (p. 118). In addition, Joanne Shattock relays that reading newspapers were part of the Brontë children's daily lives from a young age. When the sisters' 1846 joint collection of poems was about to be sent for review, it was Charlotte who drew up a list of periodicals for her publishers, which shows her familiarity with contemporary newspapers and the periodical press. Joanne Shattock, 'Newspapers and Magazines', in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. by Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 269-75 (pp. 269, 272).

paying the postage of my letters but necessity must plead my excuse for their frequent recurrence … If you can read this scrawl it will be to the credit of your patience'.[63] Brontë's 'scrawl' is the consequence of reducing expenses by fitting as many words as possible on a single sheet; one technique was to write the letter normally, then turn the paper ninety degrees and continue writing to form a cross pattern.[64] Postal issues appeared again for Brontë when she and her sister Emily studied abroad in Brussels between 1842 to 1843; Charlotte taught as well in the second year. There were no swift, affordable mail options and they had to send packets of letters home via travelling friends.[65] Lack of regular correspondence with loved ones likely exacerbated Brontë's feelings of loneliness and depression after Emily did not return with her to the Continent towards the start of 1843. In the summer of that year, she wrote to Nussey that she dreaded the coming lengthy vacation when she would be left alone in the deserted school.[66] Contributing to her misery was her unrequited love for her teacher Constantin Georges Romain Heger and the school director Madame Heger's successful efforts to limit contact between Brontë and her husband in order to avoid scandal.[67] The mental anguish eventually became too much for Brontë and she resigned her teaching post in December 1843. She wrote Heger four extant letters upon returning to Haworth, though the contents of those missives suggests that she wrote quite a few more that were not preserved.[68] He answered at least one, but the unbridled fervour of

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[63] Charlotte Brontë, 'To Ellen Nussey, 4 July 1834', in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends, Vol. 1: 1829–1847*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), I, 129-32 (p. 129).
[64] Smith, 'The Brontë Correspondence', p. 115.
[65] Smith, 'The Brontë Correspondence', pp. 116-17.
[66] Charlotte Brontë, 'To Ellen Nussey, 6 August 1843', in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends, Vol. 1: 1829–1847*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), I, 326-28 (p. 327).
[67] Sue Lonoff, 'The Brussels Experience', in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. by Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 107-14 (pp. 112-13).
[68] One of the missing letters should have been sent on 18 May 1845, as referenced in her letter to Heger on 18 November 1845.

her feelings probably deterred him from replying again.[69] Her last known letter to him, dated 18 November 1845, nearly two years after she left Brussels, is testament: 'To forbid me to write to you, to refuse to reply to me—that will be to tear from me the only joy I have on earth'.[70] Mazzini's opened letters, Brontë's isolation in Brussels, and unanswered lovelorn letters to Heger all contributed to the writing of *Villette*, a novel where letters are never secure yet are relied upon as sites of emotional refuge.

There are numerous alternate interpretations of the surveillance themes in Brontë's novel, ranging from religion to Foucauldianism to the ocular and its related subjects, but I contend that my framework regarding the postal system is particularly applicable because, out of all the espionage techniques that appear, it is unpermitted letter-reading that is presented as the most infringing.[71] Lucy does not mind being spied upon. Her reaction to Madame Beck, the headmistress of Rue Fossette, clandestinely going through 'every article' of her belongings on her first night is more curious than offended, and when she catches Madame searching her belongings again on a separate occasion, she extols the 'exemplary … care with which the search was accomplished' (75, 131).[72] Lucy herself takes a 'secret glee' in spying on others

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[69] In the 18 November 1845 letter, Brontë writes that she has been 'sustained' by his last letter to her for six months. I have failed to locate concrete evidence that Heger replied to any other letters. Charlotte Brontë, 'To Constantin Heger, 18 November [1845]', in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends, Vol. 1: 1829–1847*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), I, 434-38 (p. 436).
[70] Brontë, 'To Constantin Heger, 18 November [1845]', p. 436.
[71] For religious readings of *Villette*'s surveillance themes, please see: Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, pp. 219-42; Monika Mazurek, 'Nurslings of Protestantism: The Questionable Privilege of Freedom in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, 49 (2014), 37-54; and Diana Peschier, 'The Priestcraft of the Book: Representations of Catholicism in *Villette*', in *Nineteenth-Century Anti-Catholic Discourses: The Case of Charlotte Brontë* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005), pp. 138-61. With regard to Foucauldian frameworks, please see: Joseph A. Boone, 'Depolicing "Villette": Surveillance, Invisibility, and the Female Erotics of "Heretic Narrative"', *A Forum on Fiction*, 26 (Autumn, 1992), 20-42; and Mark M. Hennelly, Jr, 'The "Surveillance of Désirée": Freud, Foucault, and *Villette*', *Victorian Literature and Culture, 26* (1998), 421-40. As for ocular and visuality related interpretations, please see: Palmer, 'Projecting the Gaze', pp. 18-40; Katherine Inglis, 'Ophthalmoscopy in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 15 (2010), 348-69; and Paul Wotipka, 'Ocularity and Irony: Pictorialism in *Villette*', *Word & Image*, 8 (1992), 100-08. Many of these academic analyses overlap in subject and include themes on gender and psychoanalysis as well.
[72] Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014). I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

(131). In contrast, her response to her ‘most sacred’ letters from Dr. John being illicitly taken by Madame for examination is ‘blank dismay’ and when they eventually return, she hopes that Madame will ‘graciously let alone’ her missives in the future (331-333).[73] When the epistles are disturbed again, she buries them rather than risk having them once more pored over by unintended eyes. It is admittedly uncertain that Lucy would have the same reaction had the letters been from a platonic friend rather than her unreciprocated love (which points to the enduring convention that love letters are considered more private than normal personal correspondence since they are related to romantic intimacy and would understandably not be read out loud to the family as was typical for the period), but I maintain she would have still been irked as opposed to being amused like during Madame’s search through her possessions.[74] Lucy often tries to preserve the privacy of letter-writers and their correspondents by describing rather than transcribing the contents of the numerous missives she is privy to but that are not directly addressed to her. The ‘billet-doux’ from de Hamal to Ginevra is uniquely relayed to the reader in full, but Lucy’s decision can be justified by the fact that she mistook it as being addressed to her. Letters in *Villette* also constantly run the risk of being intercepted. Lucy’s anticipated letter from Dr. John is passed from Rosine the portress to Madame to M. Paul before finally reaching its destination. Its convoluted delivery reflects the postal network and the many hands a letter must pass through during processing. M. Paul follows up his delivery by stating, ‘Keep [the handkerchief], keep it, till the letter is read, then bring it to me. I shall read the billet’s tenor in your eyes’ (272). His words, meant to be comforting, carry an ominous reminder that there is no privacy within the walls of Rue Fossette. Ginevra Fanshawe and her future husband Colonel de Hamal set up a secret post-box for their letters and a signal to indicate the post hour rather than send mail through

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[73] I use ‘Dr. John’ to refer to Graham Bretton throughout my thesis in order to avoid confusion with Sir James Graham from the Mazzini scandal.

[74] Rebecca Earle, ‘Introduction’ in *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers*, ed. by Rebecca Earle (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 1-14 (p. 7).

official channels and risk discovery by Madame. Meanwhile, Paulina Mary Home de Bassompierre's epistolary relationship risks detection by her father. Although this instance is related to dread of parental authority rather than institutional surveillance, it adds to the novel's atmosphere of fear around intercepted letters and reinforces that no missives are secure in the postal age.

The novel tries to portray the invasive surveillance and espionage practised at Rue Fossette—the institution where most of the book is set—as French products in tune with condemnation against Graham for bringing the 'spy system of foreign states' into England, but as the Mazzini incident and Lucy's own habit of observing others demonstrate, they occur on English soil by the English and by English institutions as well. Madame admits that her methods are distasteful, but asserts that 'ruinous consequences would ensue if any other method were tried with Continental children' because they are 'so accustomed to constraint' (80). This implies that the English do not require such heavy supervision and echoes commentary on Graham's methods as being thoroughly 'un-English'. As Smith states, however, letter-opening was 'at the time a normal instrument of government control' and was sometimes deemed necessary in the name of national security even by proponents of Mazzini.[75] Carlyle, who was stoutly on the side of the exiled Italian nationalist, states that the 'opening of men's letters' should not be 'resorted to in England, except in cases of the very last extremity'.[76] While abhorrent, he admits there are certain times when such methods must be used as a last resort. Lucy agrees with this ambivalent stance; she finds Madame's ways 'very un-English', but defends them as 'not wholly bad' and muses that 'many an austere English schoolmistress would do vastly well to imitate it' (76, 80).

[75] Smith, 'British Post Office espionage', p. 191.
[76] Carlyle, 'To the Editor of the Times; 18 June 1844'.

Lucy practices surveillance as a means to access the emotional connections she denies to herself, a goal that she likewise attains through acting as an intermediary between participants of marriage plots. Her belief that she is not meant for happiness leads her to repress any emotions or desires—those 'warmer feelings' that she disclaims 'with the utmost scorn'—that interfere with her goal to be a 'mere onlooker at life' (286, 156). To echo Elizabeth K. Haller, Lucy watches people from the sidelines to voyeuristically experience life and participate in events without direct involvement.[77] While surveillance and mediation are meant to be safe alternatives to actual participation in life, Lucy is unable to prevent emotional cross-contamination from the scenes she observes or the sentimental connections she facilitates. When she watches Paulina interact with her father during their shared childhood, Lucy describes it as 'a scene of feeling too brimful' and wishes Paulina 'would utter some hysterical cry, so that [she] might get relief and be at ease' (13). Paulina's overwhelming adoration for Papa seeps into Lucy and causes her discomfort as a result of unintentionally becoming emotionally intertwined with the subject. The same occurs when she intervenes in external romantic relationships. The role was intended to be a means for her to partake in the marriage plot without forsaking her pessimistic mantra, but despite her best efforts, she repeatedly falls prey to those dreaded 'warmer feelings', like the anger that bubbles up when Dr. John asks her to make some communication to Paulina. The medium simply cannot be extricated from the words and feelings that flow through it.

Far from being portrayed as sinister, Lucy's intervention in the relationships she mediates is shown to be welcome and essential, which not only shows the importance of emergent transmission systems like the reformed post to romantic joy, but implies that Victorians must make peace with the potential loss of privacy in exchange for such benefits. Dr. John,

[77] Elizabeth K. Haller, 'Perception and the Suppression of Identity in *Villette*', *Brontë Studies*, 35 (2010), 149-59 (p. 149).

Paulina, and Ginevra all eagerly involve Lucy in their courtships, either as a confidante or a messenger, and engage in letter-writing with their objects of affection to marital success: Ginevra clandestinely exchanges missives with de Hamal, while Dr. John and Paulina write to each other following his epistolary declaration of love. Lucy's role as a confidante emphasizes that Victorians must become comfortable with the idea of potentially sharing personal information with third parties. Ginevra likes Lucy to be in a 'talking and listening mood' so she can chatter about her multiple suitors (99). Dr. John often consults Lucy about Ginevra when he was still in love with her, because he believes that Lucy, as Ginevra's teacher, is a channel through which he can access his beloved's 'pure, childlike confidences' (167). Paulina likewise seeks Lucy's advice regarding Dr. John and shares 'tender, passionate confidences' in addition to her missives from him: 'She showed me these letters; with something of the spoiled child's wilfulness, and of the heiress's imperiousness, she *made* me read them' (482-483). Love letters are among the most private and personal of correspondence, and Paulina readily shows them to Lucy. Aside from being privy to romantic communication, Lucy also facilitates it by verbally delivering messages from one party to another (like the 'desired communication' she makes to Dr. John at the behest of Paulina during their childhood) or by literally retrieving and transporting a love epistle from the garden to Dr. John (33). For the latter, she unwittingly disrupts Ginevra and de Hamal's marriage plot, but advances Dr. John's relationship with Ginevra. The final matrimonial pairings, Ginevra/de Hamal and Dr. John/Paulina, would have arguably failed without Lucy's intervention. The 'billet-doux' from de Hamal at the secret drop-spot would have likely been found by Madame or her spies had Lucy not happened across it first, which would have put Ginevra under closer surveillance and prevented her later elopement (122). Ginevra's avoidance of institutional postal delivery in order to escape Mazzini's fate is ultimately hollow as her secret method is equally fallible to privacy violations and she ends up relying

on Lucy as a postal facilitator to achieve marital success. As for Paulina, Lucy dispels the lies Ginevra told her about Dr. John which made her 'all doubtful about his character' and later destroys the remaining obstacle in her conjugal path by reassuring Mr. Home that Dr. John is the best match for his daughter (345).

In alignment with the postal system's importance to amorous relationships, Dr. John's marital choice of Paulina over Ginevra is foreshadowed through the women's varying letter-writing abilities. When Dr. John was in love with Ginevra, he asks Lucy about 'letters of her writing' to validate his idealized image of her due to the cultural link between letter-writing and moral character (211). Reformers and correspondence manuals in the nineteenth century consistently promoted penning letters as conducive to fostering moral character and intelligence in addition to social advancement, which would in turn create a more educated, accomplished, and rule-observing nation.[78] Dr. John imagines that Ginevra's handwriting 'must be pretty, light, ladylike' and that her missives 'will not be deficient in wit and naïveté' since there is 'so much sparkle, and so little art in her soul' (211-212). In actuality, her letters are 'commonly business documents, unequivocal applications for cash', which parallel the unwelcome begging letter that emerged with the advent of cheap postage (212). Dr. John, whose 'latent goodness' is signified by his 'fastidious' tastes in letter-writing and his well-equipped writing desk as a child, predictably loses interest in Ginevra after she insults his mother and shatters his delusions about her virtuous personality (480, 425). Paulina's letters, in contrast, decorously follow letter-writing etiquette and reflect her strong moral character. Phegley reports that men were usually presumed to be more ardent and romantic with regard to epistolary wooing, while women were expected to be more restrained in their responses to admirers due to their conduct training.[79] Paulina carefully edits her reply to his letter-bound

[78] Rotunno, *Postal Plots*, pp. 13, 16.
[79] Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage*, p. 55.

admission of love in accordance to social rules, 'chastening and subduing the phrases' until it resembled 'a morsel of ice flavoured with ever so slight a zest of fruit or sugar' (425). She then forbids further letters until their courtship gains her father's blessing, but he still writes and she answers 'were it only to chide' in addition to 'hiding that feeling, and bridling her lover's ardour' (483). Their letters metonymically reveal their personalities as well. Paulina's restrained missives show her genteel breeding and the emotional discipline that she learned at a young age: 'She departed the next day, trembling like a leaf when she took leave, but exercising self-command' (36). Ginevra's begging letters, meanwhile, accentuate her vanity and greed: 'she was obliged to be well-dressed, and she had not money to buy variety of dresses. All her thoughts turned on this difficulty, her whole soul was occupied with expedients for effecting its solution' (96).

Mediating marriage plots causes Lucy emotional pain because it reminds her of her own lack of romantic attachments, but she never rejects the task, partially because it is the only avenue of amorous fulfilment she envisions for herself, but also because the novel largely depicts the communication middleman (who inevitably accompanies increasingly complex information sysstems and causes private communication to become more public) in a positive light. Helen Benedict rightfully states that Brontë's heroine is 'so self-effacing' that she is a 'virtual phantom' for the first three chapters of the novel.[80] This self-hatred, borne from her conviction that she is not destined for happiness and causing her to sideline herself as a 'mere onlooker at life', contributes to her role as a facilitator because it means she is self-sacrificing as well (156). It may be difficult to imagine the reticent, sarcastic Lucy Snowe as self-sacrificing; the same character deliberately withheld Dr. John's identity as Graham Bretton from readers until it suited her 'system of feeling' to reveal the information (196). Even her own creator described her as 'morbid and weak' and told her publisher that 'subtlety of

[80] Helen Benedict, 'Afterword', in *Villette* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014), pp. 575-85 (p. 577).

thought made me decide upon giving her a cold name'.[81] However, textual evidence shows that Lucy consistently puts other people's desires over hers when facilitating romantic relationships. The 'tender, passionate confidences' about Dr. John from Paulina drops in Lucy's ear like 'molten lead' and while Lucy tries to stifle such discussion with 'stern looks and words', she never removes herself from the situation by limiting her contact with the countess (482). Part of the reason can be attributed to Lucy's masochistic desire to be in a relationship with Dr. John by proxy, through reading the love letters she will never receive and gaining intimate knowledge about him via Paulina's 'tender, passionate confidences'. While that is a factor, I maintain that Lucy is concurrently motivated by her desire to unite Dr. John and Paulina, a couple that is 'promise, plan, harmony', so she stays by their side to be at ready service (427).

There is one instance in which Lucy refuses to carry a message, which highlights the drawback of using human middlemen in discourse networks: they have minds of their own outside of their communication duties. Dr. John tries to recruit Lucy as an envoy to converse with Paulina about their collective childhood, so that he can watch how she reacts and gauge his standing in her eyes. His wheedling request and blindness to her discomfort makes her realize his 'entire misapprehension of [her] character and nature': 'He wanted always to give me a rôle not mine … He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke' (359). He does not 'read' the signals she transmits, but rather only views her as a 'quiet' channel for his words (358). Her vehement refusal is fuelled by the crushing realization that Dr. John has never viewed her as a viable romantic option. He laughs when she is accused of being a coquette and offhandedly mentions that had she been a boy, they 'should have been good friends' (356). Lucy is sexless in his eyes, his

[81] Charlotte Brontë, 'To W. S. Williams, 6 November 1852', in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends, Vol. 3: 1852-1855*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), III, 80-81 (p. 81).

‘quiet’ and ‘inoffensive shadow’ (358). *Villette* has never shied away from depicting the downsides of the publicized love letter, either through this scene or the rampant surveillance at Rue Fossette, but as evident by Lucy’s helpful hand in the novel’s final marital pairings, it maintains that the new modes of communication and relationships introduced (or enhanced) through emergent media are ultimately beneficial to lovers.

The scene where Paulina tells Lucy about Dr. John’s love confession most vividly shows the intermediary role Lucy plays in their marriage plot. Paulina holds Lucy’s hand during their conversation and ‘at each favourable word’ offered about Dr. John, she ‘gave it a little caressing stroke’ (421). She also plays with Lucy’s ‘fingers unconsciously, dressed them, now in her own rings, and now circled them with a twine of her beautiful hair; she patted the palm against her hot cheek’ (422). In this moment, Lucy is essentially standing in for Dr. John. Paulina views his love epistle as a substitute for her beloved’s person, in alignment with the enduring convention of eighteenth-century epistolary novels that situate the letter ‘as a metonym for the corporeal body’, or as Janet Altman puts it: ‘the letter as a physical entity emanating from, passing between, and touching each of the lovers may function itself as a figure for the lover’.[82] Dr. John’s handwriting and wax seal, as described by Paulina, are representative of both his personality and physical body: ‘Graham’s hand is like himself, Lucy, and so is his seal—all clear, firm, and rounded—no slovenly splash of wax …but a clean, mellow manuscript, that soothes you as you read. It is like his face—just like the chiselling of his features’ (424). *Villette* alters this metonymic tradition by demonstrating that letters are irreversibly intertwined with the postal system and situating its fusion within Lucy. During their shared childhood, Lucy was asked by Paulina to make a ‘desired communication’ to Dr. John, coalescing the letter with its human messenger (30). Lucy is perceived as a ‘quiet’ communication medium who affably carries messages and during the

[82] Koehler, ‘Immaterial Correspondence’, pp.136-37.

conversation with Paulina in their adulthood, she becomes a hollow channel through which the countess directs her feelings for Dr. John (358). The 'caressing' strokes from Paulina are highly erotic and the act of dressing Lucy's fingers with her own rings, in addition to twining her hair around them, evokes the idea of wedding rings. Hair clippings are customarily an intimate gift between sweethearts as well.[83] Paulina additionally places Lucy's palm against her 'hot' cheek, as if mimicking Dr. John stroking her blushing face, and rests against Lucy's arm, 'gently, not with honest Mistress Fanshawe's fatiguing and selfish weight' (422-423). Being leaned upon is portrayed as a lover's job as seen by Lucy's thoughts when Ginevra does the same: 'When she took my arm, she always leaned upon me with her whole weight; and, as I was not a gentleman, or her lover, I did not like it' (348). By using Lucy as a placeholder for Dr. John, Paulina successfully reroutes the physical affection that decorum will not currently allow her to give him and the passion in her reply letter to him that was carefully subdued into 'a morsel of ice flavoured with ever so slight a zest of fruit or sugar' in order to appeal to his 'fastidious' tastes (425). It gives Paulina the patience to wait for her father to approve their courtship and ensures the fruition of her marriage plot.

Paulina twining her hair around Lucy's fingers underlines the latter's paradoxical invisibility and presence in the former's relationship. The action mirrors a later scene where Paulina braids her hair with Dr. John's and her father's in a plait to safeguard harmony between the two most important men in her life: 'She was become a bond to both, an influence over each, a mutual concord' (494). Through binding her hair around Lucy's finger at a moment when she is standing in for her sweetheart, Paulina similarly binds Lucy to her life, making her a 'bond' between herself and Dr. John. However, while the plait is enclosed in a locket and laid

[83] Batchen argues that hair rose to prominence as the 'raw material of memory' in the early decades of the nineteenth century. An 1856 guidebook titled *Elegant Arts for Ladies* contains an entire chapter on the intricate art of 'Weaving or plaiting hair ornaments' and is further divided into subsections, like 'Plaits for rings, lockets, and brooches' and 'Mourning devices'. Its accompanying text emphasizes its memorial function and, by extension, its use in courtship: 'Hair, that most imperishable of all the component parts of our mortal bodies, has always been regarded as a cherished memorial of the absent or lost'. Batchen, 'Ere the Substance Fade', p. 33.

upon its weaver's heart, the hair-twining action is momentary and leaves behind no tangible footprint. Lucy is expected to share and intervene in romantic relationships without truly being part of them. Paulina tells Lucy that theirs is 'a beautiful life, or it will be; and you shall share it', to which Lucy responds, 'I shall share no man's or woman's life in this world, as you understand sharing'—an admission of the solitary life she leads (482). She was originally close friends with Dr. John and Paulina individually before their romance flourished. Dr. John would write letters to her, and she would learn German together with Paulina—at the countess's suggestion 'as a regular and settled means of sustaining communication' (341). The foreign language brings them closer together since it is a shared means of communication that not readily available to others. However, the lessons terminate once the couple's courtship intensifies in spite of Paulina's former enthusiasm in maintaining 'regular' contact, and Dr. John likewise ceases correspondence with Lucy once Paulina captures his attention. She goes from being on the receiving end of their communications to being a mediating node and a mere 'witness of their happiness' (483).

Lucy's intervention in conjugal narratives is not all misery though; as mentioned, it enables her to participate in amorous relationships by proxy and also allows her to utilize the heterosexual marriage plot as a means to express her repressed queer desires for Paulina and Ginevra. There is a reasonable amount of scholarship on Lucy's queerness, such as Sharon Marcus's contention that some of the desires Lucy represses are lesbian ones or Ann Weinstone's argument that narrative progression in Brontë's novel is motivated by its heroine's drive to 'decentre heterosexual union and its implied construction of family as the locus of both personal and narrative fulfilment'.[84] Lucy has openly stated that she likes Paulina and often describes her in decidedly non-platonic terms, such as 'small, delicate

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[84] Marcus, *Between Women*, p. 102; Ann Weinstone, 'The Queerness of Lucy Snowe', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 18 (1995), 367-84, p. 367.

creature, but made like a model' or 'plentiful yet fine hair, so shining and soft' (297). They meet again as adults when a theatre fire drives spectators out and at the end of the chapter where this occurs, there is an account on the fire which can be construed as Lucy's repressed desire for Paulina: 'it was but some loose drapery on which a spark had fallen, and which had blazed up and been quenched in a moment' (298).[85] Ginevra's beauty too is frequently emphasized. Despite her disparaging attitude towards the airheaded Ginevra, Lucy always gives her the 'lion's share, whether of the white beer, the sweet wine, or the new milk' and half her morning bread even when 'others used to covet the superfluity' (263). Repression prevents her from deducing or admitting why she does so, though we can infer that her actions covertly mimic and compete with the lavish gifts from Ginevra's suitors.

This triangular model of desire, in which Lucy has feelings for both members of the relationship she is facilitating, can be detected prominently in the scene where Paulina tells Lucy about Dr. John's admission of love and the school play. Paulina's 'caressing [strokes]' and makeshift wedding rings are not directed towards Lucy, but in substituting Dr. John, Lucy can enjoy romantic attention from the countess that she would otherwise not receive (421). This is reinforced by Paulina proclaiming 'I love you' to Lucy midst their discussion about him. As for the school play, Lucy is cast as one of two men vying for the hand of Ginevra's character and during the performance, she notices Ginevra 'acting *at*' Dr. John in the audience (155). The 'language' in his look spurs Lucy to view her onstage rival as Dr. John and animates her 'wooing' of Ginevra: 'I … rivalled and outrivalled him. I knew myself but a fop, but where *he* was outcast *I* could please' (155-156). The scene is indicative of Lucy's bisexuality; she gets jealous of Dr. John's flirtation with Ginevra or alternately, Ginevra's flirtation with Dr. John, and assumes a masculine role to woo Ginevra. The fluidity

[85] Gilbert and Gubar interpret the fire as symbolic of Vashti's 'inflammatory performance' that subverts social order. Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 424.

of her desire is highlighted by Lucy's refusal to don men's attire for the role and instead wears a mix of both genders' clothes: 'Retaining my woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed, in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletôt of small dimensions; the whole being the costume of a brother of one of the pupils' (154). René Girard, who coined the term 'triangular desire', postulates that desire can be mimetic, which leads to a love triangle that involves the desiring subject, the person being desired, and the 'mediator' who desires anything his role model (the desiring subject) desires.[86] I assert that Lucy would have homoerotic feelings for Paulina and Ginevra even if Dr. John did not, but his desire for them intensifies Lucy's because she is simultaneously rivalling and outrivalling both parties in the relationship.

When Lucy finally gains her own one-on-one marriage plot with M. Paul, she still relies on the mediating buffer of a discourse medium to experience it. Their long-distance epistolary relationship is out of necessity since he is strongarmed by Madame and her co-conspirators into sailing to the West Indies for monetary reasons and as a bid to keep the couple apart; but whereas Paulina and Ginevra use letters as a solution for forbidden physical contact, Lucy seems to prefer the bodily distance offered by romantic correspondence as witnessed by her declaration: 'M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life' (556). Lucy '[converses] imperfectly' with 'no oblivion of inferiority—no encouragement of delusion: pain, privation, penury [stamps her] language' (257). With 'written language' though, it is the 'medium of better utterance than faltering lips can achieve' where she can freely indulge in 'delight of heart', 'indulgence of intellect', and 'expansion to feeling' (257). She writes two drafts of her response to Dr. John's letter, so that she can relieve her ardent emotions for him on two full sheets of paper before writing a far

[86] René Girard, *Desire, Deceit, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins Press, 1965), pp. 6-7.

more appropriate ‘terse, curt missive of a page’ (286). An epistolary romance with M. Paul satiates her desire for romantic love while fulfilling her morose partiality towards keeping life at armlength. She describes his letters as ‘real food that nourished, living water that refreshed’ and ‘bounteous fuel’ that ‘spared all chill, all stint’ and sustains her ‘genial flame’ (557). To Lucy, they are material and nourishing objects that gratifyingly substitute his physical presence (557). His sending letters is equivalent to expressing love: ‘he wrote as he gave and as he loved, in full-handed, full-hearted plenitude … he took pen and paper because he loved Lucy and had much to say to her’ (557). Their friendship originally blossoms through epistolary means as well. Lucy gifts him a chain for his fête with the initials of his real name on the container box. When he expresses surprise that she knows his name, she explains a ‘little bird’ told her, to which he responds, ‘Does it fly from me to you? Then one can tie a message under its wing when needful?’ (392). Their bond is strengthened through branches of paper and ink—novels for reading and textbooks as M. Paul teaches Lucy arithmetic. It is a note from him that sustains Lucy when she thinks he is departing Rue Fossette without saying goodbye to her. She also cultivates a library during their time apart with books he left in her care—a shrine of paper and ink—as a token of love. It is highly implied that M. Paul dies on the voyage home, yet she continues to love him, though in a different way: ‘I thought I loved him when he went away; I love him now in another degree; he is more my own’ (558). Their long-distance relationship never daunted Lucy; she even enjoyed it. Now, with the unbridgeable distance of death, her love increases rather than diminishes.

The ending in which Lucy opens her own school gives an institutional legitimacy to her matchmaking methods: a worker-operated communication system that has access to individuals’ personal lives and invades their privacy, but ultimately to the benefit of those involved. *Villette* is a unique Brontë novel in that its title is a location rather than its heroine’s

name like *Jane Eyre* or *Shirley*.[87] It is the postal address of all the people whose romantic connections *Villette*'s self-effacing protagonist facilitated. Lucy's final act as a communication mediator is to give readers the happy marital conclusion they have come to expect from Victorian novels: 'Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life' (559). She is the narrator, the deliverer and conveyer of the text's fictional events to the audience. Although the ending seems cruelly ambiguous as many contemporary readers complained, it carries a tone of hope as opposed to definite desolation and signifies a thread of sympathetic sentiment connecting Lucy and the reader.[88]

The Sentimental Hand of the Post Office

Brontë's personal epistolary experiences pale in comparison to Anthony Trollope who worked full-time at the Post Office for over two decades. He joined as a clerk at the age of nineteen in 1834 and by the time he left in 1866, he had risen to nearly the top of the organization. Trollope did not fare well in the early years of his postal career due to a combination of distracting city pleasures and lack of diligence, but after he was sent to Ireland in 1841 to be a surveyor's clerk, he finally found passion for his work.[89] He became

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[87] I do not count *The Professor*, which was published posthumously.

[88] In a 1853 letter to W. S. Williams, a literary editor at her publisher Smith, Elder & Co., Brontë wrote: 'The note you sent this morning from Lady Harriette St. Clair, is precisely to the same purport as Miss Muloch's request,—an application for exact and authentic information respecting the fate of M. Paul Emanuel! You see how much the ladies think of this little man, whom you none of you like. I had a letter the other day; announcing that a lady of some note, who had always determined that whenever she married, her husband should be the counterpart of 'Mr. Knightly' in Miss Austen's 'Emma,' had now changed her mind, and vowed that she would either find the duplicate of Professor Emanuel, or remain for ever single! I have sent Lady Harriette an answer so worded as to leave the matter pretty much where it was. Since the little puzzle amuses the ladies, it would be a pity to spoil their sport by giving them the key'. Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. by Elisabeth Jay (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 405.

[89] Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, 2nd edition, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1883), I, 63-77.

interested in expanding the mail network to rural areas and increasing the scope of civic conveniences.[90] The pillar-box, one of the Post Office's most iconic symbols, was invented by Trollope.[91] His self-written *Autobiography* (1883) describes himself as 'a beneficent angel to the public, bringing everywhere with me an earlier, cheaper, and much more regular delivery of letters'.[92] Working as a postal clerk in Ireland also brought him in contact with his eventual wife and marked the beginning of his writing career. When he finally resigned from the Post Office in 1866, it was not due to dislike of his job, but because he felt that he had been unfairly passed over for a promotion. By then, he had already written a staggering twenty-one out of the forty-seven novels he would complete in his lifetime.

The Three Clerks, which was written during Trollope's postal appointment and is noticeably the most autobiographical of all his works, conveys his positive opinion of institutional control over new communications systems and emphasizes bureaucratic organizations' function in assisting sentimental links.[93] The plot details the lives of three civil servants—Harry Norman, Alaric Tutor, and Charley Tutor—and their respective marriage plots to the three Woodward sisters: Linda, Gertrude, and Katie. Gertrude's insight that 'a man has to give himself as well as his work; to sacrifice his individuality; to become body and soul a part of a lumbering old machine' while doing government work is spoken out of unreasonable bitterness, but covertly demonstrates Trollope's awareness about the impersonal connotations of regulatory institutions, which increase the effectiveness and range of transmission systems at the cost of personalization (526).[94] The novel addresses these issues by making marriage

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[90] Trollope, *Autobiography*, pp. 116-22.
[91] At his recommendation, four red-painted boxes were placed to great success in St. Heliers, Jersey in November 1852. They were formally introduced to the public in 1855. Golden, *Posting It*, p. 117; Rotunno, *Postal Plots*, p. 28.
[92] Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 121.
[93] One of its protagonists, Charley Tutor, analogizes Trollope's 'wretched' early years at the Post Office, right down to the idle pleasure-seeking in London and the debt that leads the money-lender to mortifyingly visit his workplace. Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 73.
[94] Anthony Trollope, *The Three Clerks* (London: Penguin Books, 1993). I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

plots the focal point of the narrative, as opposed to the dry day-to-day operations of bureaucracy, and by spotlighting government clerk protagonists to show that while civic workers are expected to selflessly serve the public, their individuality will never be subsumed by their labour. Brontë as a consumer seemed more open to criticizing the institutions that govern communication networks as seen by *Villette*'s themes on surveillance, but Trollope, as someone whose life changed for the better both morally and materially under postal employment, largely represents his employer in a positive light, as seen by the exemplary Weights and Measures department and the sleazy Internal Navigation Office that is dismantled in the end. *The Three Clerks*' depiction of Trollope's real-life disapproval of competitive examinations for the Civil Service and Charley's reluctance to marry the barmaid Norah Geraghty, however, carries an undertone of classism and weakens its representation of a regulated but egalitarian communication network that services even those in far-flung rural areas. The end result conveys an arrangement that serves all, but must only be managed by 'gentlemen', a frustratingly vague Trollopian term that aligns with the novel's determination to associate the impersonal institution with facilitating sentiment because, to quote Walter Kendrick, 'the recognition of a gentleman can only be felt, never put into words'.[95]

The two main government departments that appear in the novel are the exemplary Weights and Measures and the shady Internal Navigation Office, and the latter is shut down at the end in a symbolic endorsement of institutional regulation which not only manages its domain but also its workers.[96] The Weights and Measures is described as a 'well-conducted public office; indeed, to such a degree of efficiency … it may be said to stand quite alone as a high model for all other public offices' and is housed in a 'handsome edifice', with employees 'stirred by

[95] Walter M. Kendrick, *The Novel-Machine: The Theory and Fiction of Anthony Trollope* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2019), p. 97.
[96] Menke notes that Trollope portions his clerical experience between the Weights and Measures and the Internal Navigation Office, both of which together form a fictional approximation of the Post Office. Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 60.

an honourable ambition to do well for their country and themselves' (1, 3). The Internal Navigation Office, in contrast, has 'little else to redeem it from the lowest depths of official vulgarity than the ambiguous respectability of its material position' and its offices are aptly 'dull and dark', with lazy and unmannered personnel (10-11). Menke rightfully notes that Trollope portions his clerical experience between the Weights and Measures and the Internal Navigation Office, both of which together form a fictional approximation of the Post Office.[97] The Internal Navigation Office is responsible for the 'preservation of canal banks, the tolls to be levied at locks, and disputes with the Admiralty as to points connected with tidal rivers' and its dominion over waterways can be interpreted as the management of communication routes (10-11). This analogy is strengthened by contemporary rhetoric that drew parallels between the circulation of affordable mail and a unified national body, which made the former the 'lifeblood of the nation'.[98] As the *Atlas* declared, 'Letter-writing is a circulation of moral, intellectual, and commercial blood; every postman's bag is a ganglion of social nerves that maintains the vitality of the body politic'.[99] The Internal Navigation Office's postal implications can also be surmised by Trollope's admission that Charley's entry examination for that sector perfectly mirrors his own vocational experience.[100] As for the Weights and Measures, its task in determining the value of coinage references the importance of inexpensive postage and symbolizes the protagonists' various struggles with morality (i.e. the measuring and weighing of a man's value, which in Trollope's opinion, cannot be assessed through competitive examinations). The 'Infernal Navvies' are ultimately disbanded on the basis that it has no use, but that is more a critique on the immorality and lethargy of the branch, in addition to its violation of its duty to serve the nation, rather than disapproval of postal work itself (11). Charley is transferred to the Weights and Measures at

[97] Menke, Telegraphic Realism, p. 60.
[98] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 43.
[99] 'Colonial Postage', *The Atlas*, 12 February 1853, p. 105.
[100] Trollope, *Autobiography*, pp. 47-48.

the end, which implies that the Internal Navigation Office has been absorbed by its moral foil and advances an overall positive depiction of regulatory institutions since troublemakers that do not serve the public are extinguished.

The London-residing trio of clerks' regular visits to their future wives at Surbiton Cottage, either by the rivers tangentially managed by the Internal Navigation Office or the 'Hampton Court five p.m. train', analogizes the government's role in extending the postal network into rural areas (25). Post-reform letters dominantly travelled by train; Golden states that by 1847, trains had replaced horse-drawn mail coaches in all but the countryside.[101] Trollope was greatly passionate about increasing the reach of postal services to rural places, and that is reflected in the three government workers literally entering the countryside. At the novel's start, the urban city (which has always been the first to enjoy media advancements in connectivity) has already infiltrated the country to a good extent: 'It is difficult to say where the suburbs of London come to an end, and where the country begins. The railways, instead of enabling Londoners to live in the country, have turned the country into a city. London will soon assume the shape of a great starfish' (22). Surbiton Cottage in the little village of Hampton, however, is one of the 'few nooks within reach of the metropolis which have not been be-villaed and be-terraced out of all look of rural charm' (22). The Woodwards live on the furthest side of town in an 'old-fashioned brick house' that overlooks a lush lawn and garden which stretches down to a 'bright, quiet, grassy river' (22). Their marital union with the city-residing clerks creates a mailing route through which sentiment travels along and connects the farthest edges of the nation to well-known areas like London. Charley becomes master of Surbiton Cottage after marrying Katie, setting up a permanent postal presence in the countryside. Harry resigns his position at the Weights and Measures a while after his engagement to Linda, but with much regret and only because he has to manage his family

[101] Golden, *Posting It*, p. 3.

estate Normansgrove. The estate name, like Woodward, evokes greenery and his resignation of his clerkship for Normansgrove echoes the theme of traveling towards the countryside. He does not fully forfeit his governmental ties, as seen by his confession that he is glad Charley sits at his old desk because it maintains a 'sort of tie' between him and the place (526). Harry comes from genteel stock and might have possessed franking privileges in the past. His job as a clerk and continued 'tie' to the Civil Service fall in line with reform promises about the democratic and unifying power of the Penny Post—it is available to all throughout the land.

Alaric and Gertrude's emigration to Australia represent the future institutional expansion of the Penny Post to British colonies. Imperial penny postage would not be implemented until late 1898, but backing for uniform postage rates throughout the empire appeared as early as the 1840s.[102] Arguments in favour relied on the same rhetoric that brought about penny postage: inexpensive imperial postage would strengthen the ties between Britain and her colonies. The novel's final chapter supports the movement through its re-enactment of one of the illustrations on the Mulready envelope. Designed by the artist William Mulready and commissioned by Hill to be the official prepaid envelope, the elaborate image featured a seated Britannia sending off four winged messengers while surrounded by figures from East and West: merchant ships sailing towards Chinese traders, Arabs with camels, Indians astride elephants, Native Americans greeting European travellers, and a mother reading a letter to her children who are eagerly clustered around her. The overly ornamental design was widely mocked by the public and quickly withdrawn, but it demonstrates the postal reform's primary aim: to connect individuals, families, and nations.[103] In *The Three Clerks*, the 'postman's knock' brings excitement and renewed connection with Alaric and Gertrude (557). The arrival of these 'monthly missives' are 'moments of intense anxiety' and the letter is 'seized

[102] Rotunno, *Postal Plots*, pp. 31, 33.
[103] Golden, *Posting It*, pp. 91-95.

upon with eager avidity' (557). It is passed from 'eager hand to hand in Katie's drawing-room' followed by discussion about its contents (568). Though the letters are addressed from Gertrude to Mrs. Woodward, the reading of them are a group activity, making them 'joint property' (557). The warm familial scene upholds the promise advanced by postal propaganda: to connect loved ones separated through distance via letter-writing.

The novel's sustained attention to 'Australian exiles' makes the faraway colony more knowable to the reading audience and supports the idea of an empire connected through communication routes (557). Tamara S. Wagner contends that emigration is often used as a remedy to domestic problems in Victorian fiction, with 'troublesome, flawed, and failed characters' transported to a colony where they will be 'offstage, out of sight, [confined] to a vague space of the imagination'.[104] She continues that Trollope is a notable exception in that he refuses to simply exile characters to a vague space off-page and instead offers detailed, ruthlessly realist descriptions of life there. In relation to my argument, Trollope's rejection of emigration as a *deus ex machina* solution demonstrates his commitment to bringing an accessible means of communication to all British lands, including its colonies. Readers are able to learn more about Australia, that previously unknowable outline on a map filled in through Gertrude's letters and the text's continued attention to the emigrants. Gertrude initially envisions Australia as a fresh start for the Tutor family, 'thousands of leagues of ocean between [Alaric] and his disgrace' (527). However, upon arriving, Alaric discovers that his 'history had gone with him to the Antipodes; and, though the knowledge of what he had done was not there so absolute a clog upon his efforts, so overpowering a burden, as it would have been in London, still it was a burden and a heavy one' (557). The fact that knowledge about his crimes follows him abroad demonstrates the linkage between Australia

[104] Tamara S. Wagner, 'Trollope and Emigration', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Anthony Trollope*, ed. by Deborah Denenholz Morse, Margaret Markwick, and Mark W. Turner (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 388-98 (p. 391).

and England. The former is not completely cut-off and secluded. Gertrude likewise finds out that the 'land of promise had not flowed with milk and honey', but rather produces 'gall and bitter herbs for many a weary month' upon her arrival (567). Australia is not portrayed as a fantasyland where all slates are wiped clean and good fortune arrives instantly; it is a place not so different from England in that it demands hard work and persistence in return for dividends. Alaric works as a clerk at the first bank in Australia, with regular hours save for the 'arrival or dispatch of the English mails' (560). In a sense, he is still working at his old department and the arriving letters double back in the form of new missives, a mail route connecting Britain and its colony.

Unlike the tangled love lives in Brontë's novel where readers were never certain who would end up with whom, Trollope's book makes no effort to conceal its marital pairings, which associates regulatory institutions with predictable reliability and comforting familiarity as opposed to being secretive and invasive as depicted in *Villette*. The romantic relationships, as mentioned, symbolize permanent communication routes connecting urban and rural communities. The three clerks naturally marry the three Woodward daughters: Alaric with Gertrude, Harry with Linda, and Charley with Katie. The sole surprise is that Harry initially sets his sights on Gertrude, but after she rejects his proposal, Alaric begins courting and eventually marries her. It can hardly be called a twist though given that readers learn very early on that Gertrude 'neither accepted nor repudiated' Harry's 'vows of love' (28). Harry dutifully marries Linda afterwards despite the pair showing little romantic interest in each other beyond an off-page trip in Torquay in which they become engaged. The narrator explains the lack of narrative attention by musing that 'their loves were honest, true, and happy; but not of a nature to give much scope to a novelist of a romantic turn' (381). A better explanation would be numerical: there are three clerks and three Woodward sisters; hence there are three marriages. Charley's eventual marriage to Katie is equally foreseeable: 'It

need hardly be told in so many words to a habitual novel-reader that Charley did get his bride at last' (554).

Water appears in many forms throughout Charley and Katie's conjugal narrative, which reinforces the Internal Navigation Office's—that is, the bureaucratic government's—importance to romantic relationships.[105] She falls in love with Charley after he saves her from drowning and her blossoming affection, which is described in similar imagery, takes the place of the fate she would have suffered: 'She was sinking deep, deep in waters which were to go near to drown her warm heart; much nearer than those other waters which she fancied had all but closed for ever over her life' (320). The dunking leads the onset of consumption, the 'realist' reason for her prolonged illness, but the symbolic reason is that she has become connected to Charley through water and her condition deteriorates in correspondence with his moral conduct. The doctors all agree that 'her lungs were not affected; but yet she would not get well' (451). Charley works at the Internal Navigation Office and though he entered as a kindly lad with an honest disposition, he is 'easily malleable' and soon 'took at once the full impression of the stamp to which he was subjected' and becomes a debt-ridden idler like the rest of them (18). The river Katie fell in is likely linked to the government-managed 'network' of canals in the city and her lungs accordingly become 'saturated' with the dank fog of immorality that permeates his offices (11). Mrs. Woodward does not approve of Charley as a potential husband for her daughter due to his poor behaviour and bars him from seeing her again, which worsens her condition. Alongside being affected by Charley's diseased morals, Katie is drowning from the feelings she is not allowed to express, while he drowns in debt and vice. Sontag notes that thwarted desire usually leads to tuberculosis in

[105] On a related subject, Susan Zieger's article on the intersection between affect and logistics in Trollope's fiction is worth perusing. The full reference is: Susan Zieger, 'Affect and Logistics: Trollope's Postal Work', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, 128 (2015), 226-44.

nineteenth-century literature.[106] Charley's return to mannered society is prompted by Katie's love confession and culminates in his transfer to the Weights and Measures. He cannot be a good clerk at his old office, for he had 'so long been among navvies the most knavish or navviest, that any such transformation would have met with no credence', but at his new post, he can become someone that Mrs. Woodward would accept as a spouse for her child (546). With his link to the Internal Navigation Office severed, Katie slowly recovers to full health and becomes his wife in an unsubtle display of the regulatory institution's hand in facilitating sentimental bonds.

The scene in which the gravely ill Katie tells Charley she loves him 'wrung' Barrett Browning 'to tears', and illuminates how Trollope's novel draws on the postal reformer tactic of making touching tales the heart of their argument.[107] According to Golden, promotional materials for penny postage revolved around touching stories about lovers, friends, and families prevented from communicating due to unaffordable postage.[108] This was augmented by the famous tale of Rowland Hill's mother living in 'dread' of the postman's knock, which regularly appears in his biographies and postal histories as impetus for his decision to reform the Post Office. In the tale, a postman calls during his father's absence and his mother hurriedly sends eight-year-old Hill into town with a few family possessions to raise money for postage. He is fortunately successful and returns home with a few shillings to rescue his mother from the postman's impatient ire.[109] Another oft-told story is Samuel Taylor Coleridge paying a shilling for a poor cottager to receive a letter. In his own letter dated 1822, Coleridge described how he paid for the woman's postage in an act of kindness, but

[106] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and Aids and Its Metaphors* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 23.
[107] The quote from Elizabeth Barrett Browning is taken from: Jack Hall, 'Introduction to *The Three Clerks*', <https://trollopesociety.org/product/three-clerks/> [accessed 30 January 2023]. In addition, Trollope himself cried whenever he read the scene in which the severely ill Katie bids farewell to Charley. Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 148.
[108] Golden, *Posting It*, p. 46.
[109] Golden, *Posting It*, p. 47.

after the carter (a letter-carrying driver not employed by the Post Office) left, the woman showed him that the letter was entirely blank and that it was a prearranged agreement between her and her son to let her know he was alive and well. The blank letter was not meant to be paid for.[110] Harriet Martineau mistakenly attributes Hill as the one who volunteered the shilling and foregrounds the incident as crucial to his reform plans: 'Most people would have remembered this incident as a curious story to tell: but Mr. Hill's was a mind which wakened up at once to a sense of the significance of the fact. There must be something wrong in a system which drove a brother and sister to cheating, in order to gratify their desire to hear of one another's welfare'.[111] *The Three Clerks* lays on the sentiment thick by focusing on romance over bureaucracy and the three titular characters' various struggles with morality, which creates an associative link between sympathy and clerical work. Trollope had a fondness for writing 'love stories' and he marries it to his passion for postal duties.[112] Katie's sickness, brought on from a combination of an unethical government department and forbidden love, is exceedingly melodramatic, but accomplishes its goal of dispelling the notion of an impersonal communication network.

James R. Kincaid states that trite, formulaic writing and intrusively strong authorial presence are Trollope hallmarks that have always been a point of contention among critics, but with regard to my argument, these qualities contribute to the text's portrayal of a trustworthy supervisory institution.[113] As an author, Trollope valued routine over inspiration. George

[110] Golden, *Posting It*, p. 48.
[111] Harriet Martineau, *The History of England During the Thirty Years' Peace*, 2 vols (London: Charles Knight, 1850), II, 425. This information about Martineau's mistake was drawn from: Golden, *Posting It*, p. 49.
[112] In his *Autobiography*, Trollope details the importance of fictional romance: 'The book which we call a novel contains, we may say always, a love story. Indeed, taking the general character of novels as our guide, we may say that the love stories are their mainstay and the staff of their existence. They not only contain love stories, but they are written for the sake of the love stories. They have other attractions, and deal with every phase of life; but the other attractions hang round and depend on the love story as the planets depend upon the sun'. Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. by Nicholas Shrimpton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 244.
[113] James R. Kincaid, *The Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 3.

Eliot 'positively quivered' with dismay upon hearing Trollope's regimen, which involved 'writing every morning at 5:30 for three hours, with his watch on his desk, pushing on with his 250 words every quarter of an hour'.[114] His drive for efficiency led him to design a portable desk for writing on the train and he even wrote while seasick on a voyage between Marseilles and Alexandria, writing in bursts 'in between rushing away to be sick in the privacy of [his] state room'.[115] *The Three Clerks* was largely written in railway carriages during his travels for postal work. His regularity and 'mechanical' authorship seep into his fiction in the form of the novel's cliché marriage plots which, in turn, communicate the idea of beneficial institutional intervention.[116] By that, I mean the predictability of his love stories can be read as regular mail routes through which sentiment is sent and delivered. Charley, in whom the writer and clerk figures are coalesced, supports my interpretation and simultaneously demonstrates Trollope's sly self-awareness with regard to his 'mechanical stuff'. Charley's submissions to *The Daily Delight* are only allowed ten paragraphs per chapter and must contain 'an incident for every other paragraph for the first four days' (217). He comically finds it a 'great bother finding so many' incidents and making the 'retainers come by all manner of accidents' (217). The publication's editor explains that this formula is the 'great secret of the present day, and where we beat all the old fellows that wrote twenty years ago' because beginning a story with 'description' is a 'devilish bore': 'Of course [the reader] wants his fun at once' (216). *The Daily Delight* is a halfpenny publication and is likely directing Charley to pen sensation fiction as opposed to realism (Trollope's usual genre), but the blatant artificiality of its stories overlaps with Trollope's tendency to remind

[114] Trollope reassured Eliot that 'with imaginative work like yours that is quite natural; but with my mechanical stuff it's a sheer matter of industry. It's not the head that does it – it's the cobbler's wax on the seat and the sticking to my chair!'. N. John Hall, *Trollope: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 63.
[115] Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 158.
[116] Trollope's insistence on authorship as 'mechanical' and routine labour unfortunately played a large role in his critical neglect, mostly after his *Autobiography*'s posthumous publication, but even as early as 1858, reviewers accused him 'guilty of the bad taste of counting quantity before quality'. Kate Osborne, 'Trollope and Literary Labour', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Anthony Trollope*, ed. by Deborah Denenholz Morse, Margaret Markwick, and Mark W. Turner (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 306-14 (p. 307).

readers that the story they are reading is make-believe and everything that occurs, including any surprising twists, is engineered by the author; and hence expected.[117] Routine and predictability—traits that give him a controversial writerly reputation, but are perfect when it comes to transmission systems—are fittingly leveraged through *The Three Clerks*' foreseeable marital plotlines to promote their provider.

Trollope's literary penchant for safe convention is a double-edged blade because his conservatism contaminates his vision of a fair supervisory institution which intervention benefits the public. He wrote about his dislike for competitive examinations as a means of selecting members for public service in his *Autobiography*, explaining that 'at present there exists no known mode of learning who is best, and that the method employed has no tendency to elicit the best'.[118] Trollope elaborates that 'there are places in life which can hardly be well filled except by "Gentlemen"' and resolutely defends the class system: 'The gates of the one class should be open to the other; but neither to the one class nor to the other can good be done by declaring that there are no gates, no barrier, no difference. The system of competitive examination is, I think, based on a supposition that there is no difference'.[119] To that end, the less genteel and overly ambitious Alaric attains a promotion that Harry desired, even though the latter is 'the second son of a gentleman' (3). The promotion gives him the confidence to woo Gertrude after she romantically rejects Harry, which is not immoral in itself, if not for the fact that he misleads Linda into believing that they would one day get married. In a story in which communication routes run parallel to its conjugal

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[117] Mark Turner offers a fascinating study of Trollope's relationship with periodicals: Mark Turner, *Trollope and the Magazines: Gendered Issues in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000).
[118] Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 50. Jennifer Ruth argues that Trollope's disapproval of competitive exams is not because such assessment 'defiles professionalism by assigning it an exchange value', but rather because 'gauging one's general capacity and, thus, predicting the worth of one's future labours, the exam acts as a form of speculation'. As such, she continues, Alaric becomes a sort of stockbroker and uses insider knowledge for capital gains. Jennifer Ruth, *Novel Professions: Interested Disinterest and the Making of the Professional in the Victorian Novel* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. 94.
[119] Trollope, *Autobiography*, pp. 53-54.

narratives, Alaric's 'falseness' to Linda is as severe a moral crime as his later dubious business dealings (157). His selfish ambition also leads him to abuse his civic position in exchange for a bribe, which violates the governmental oath to serve the masses. Alaric is somewhat redeemed through his pursuit of hard work in Australia, where he is exiled to as punishment, but Trollope's point about competitive assessments is made clear: the institution-controlled postal network serves everyone, but should only be managed by 'gentlemen'.

The same traditionalism can be seen in the contrasting characterizations of Charley's two potential love interests: Norah and Katie. As a barmaid, Norah works 'in the public line' and engages in obligatory 'daily or rather nightly flirtations with various male comers' (228, 195). Peter Bailey reports that the modern barmaid appeared in 1830s with the invention of the bar counter, which separated her from the public in a way that 'made her role there more conspicuous and seductive' and positioned her as an object of display.[120] Much like the shopgirl figure discussed in the first chapter, the barmaid's shared space with the commodities she sold suggested that she herself might be 'an article for purchase and consumption'.[121] Norah's lower social rank and the unavoidable promiscuity of her work causes Charley to look down on her and balk at the idea of taking her as wife. In fact, marrying Norah is depicted as the final step of Charley's 'moral suicide' and his gentleman status would have been permanently compromised had she not conveniently wed someone else already, hence ensuring the continuation of his marriage plot with the more worthy Katie (384). Mrs. Woodward's youngest daughter is the standard angel in the house figure, with a 'young sweet angel face' and 'all the exquisite charms of gentle birth and gentle nurture' (226). While Norah and Katie's opposing characterizations can be attributed to anxiety about industrialization and a nostalgia-fuelled desire to romanticize the countryside, they can

[120] Peter Bailey, 'Parasexuality and Glamour: the Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype', *Gender & History*, 2 (Summer 1990), 148-72 (p. 151).
[121] Bailey, 'Parasexuality and Glamour', p. 151.

additionally be interpreted as the difference between the public and private spheres. The former is represented by the city, which is linked to vice and competition; while the latter is signified by the countryside, which is allied with domesticity and morality. The spheres are connected via mail routes, but in a manner that does not introduce controversial overlap and merely represents the postal network fanning out to home addresses. The countryside does have hidden dangers as seen by the narrator's admonishment of Mrs. Woodward for not keeping a closer eye on Katie and indirectly allowing her to fall in love with Charley, but this does not diminish its association with morality. Kendrick reports that 'marriageable young ladies' are Trollope's favourite character type, which aligns with Kincaid's observation that 'for many of Trollope's heroines, life offers only the challenge of making a brilliant marriage' and Nicholas Dames's remark that the female careerist in Trollope's fiction is 'an aberration at best, a criminal at worst'.[122] Trollope's narrative preference for 'marriageable young ladies' contributes to his conservatism (since his heroines think of little beyond love, to quote Kendrick) and to a lesser extent, his classism, because marriage is a more pressing concern for middle-class ladies as opposed to working-class women who must usually work for a living regardless of their marital status.[123]

These limitations do not detract from the novel's primary goal though, but rather work with it to depict the impersonal regulatory institution as a deliverer of sentiment. Only 'gentlemen' are qualified to manage it, but what a gentleman is can never be elucidated in Trollope's view: 'He would be defied to define the term,—and would fail should he attempt to do so. But he would know what he meant, and so very probably would they who defied him'.[124] As Kendrick states, it is a concept based on universal feeling. It is little surprise then that

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[122] Kendrick, *Novel-Machine*, p. 99; Kincaid, *Novels of Anthony Trollope*, p. 29; Nicholas Dames, 'Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition', *Victorian Studies*, 45 (Winter 2003), 247-78 (p. 265).
[123] Kendrick, *Novel-Machine*, p. 99.
[124] Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 53.

‘gentlemen’ are portrayed as the only suitable surveyors of a system all about the transmission of emotion. Trollope’s conservative portrayal of marriageable women and his emphasis on conjugal plotlines similarly divert literary resources towards the depiction of love and its postal circulation.

Henry James, perhaps disparagingly, mused, ‘with Trollope we were always safe’.[125] Yet that is part of the beauty of Trollopian fiction, and he carries enough self-awareness about his ‘mechanical’ style to leverage it towards his representation of a morally upstanding managerial system that is maybe not fully egalitarian, but unquestionably and selflessly serves the masses, even those in the far-flung countryside. The last chapter sees Charley and Katie’s marriage, representing the extension of the mail network to rural areas, and the reading of Gertrude’s letter, symbolizing the Imperial Penny Post that will connect Britain to its colonies. Familial warmth and romantic bonds are the nexus of *The Three Clerks*’ final pages, just as it is the centre of institutional postal reform as Trollope envisions it.

Brontë and Trollope’s novels offer polarizing conceptualizations of the reformed postal system, but both concur on the necessity of the letter to romantic relationships in the postal age. The former emphasizes its invasive nature and demonstrates that messengers are inexorably entwined with the communications they deliver, while the latter supports institutional control over the post and shows how affective bonds are formed and maintained through a growing web of mailing addresses. The impersonal sentimental letter is acknowledged even in Trollope’s relatively rose-tinted visualisation of governmental intervention, but is countered through syrupy conjugal narratives that highlight its role in facilitating love. Lucy in *Villette* relies on the emotional distance afforded by epistolary communication methods to safely participate in marriage plots, all while reaping the

[125] Henry James, ‘Anthony Trollope’, in *Partial Portraits* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1894), pp. 97-133 (p. 100).

metonymic benefits of a discourse medium that provides intimacy without thermal physicality. The importance of the postal system, in relation to romantic love, can be gathered from the simple fact that the majority of the marital plotlines in both novels would have failed without its intervention. Its affordability made it accessible, and its ever-expanding insertion into everyday Victorian lives, like mail slots in residences or post-boxes on street corners, made it inescapable. The trajectory of true love has no choice but to follow a designated mail route.

Chapter 5: Love is in the Wires

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's description of the reformed postal system's ability to 'flash a thought' became achievable with the advent of electric telegraphy.[1] Ironically, the invention came into being in 1837, a few years before the penny post. Scientists had dreamed of harnessing electricity to convey intelligence long before the nineteenth century. As early as 1753, a writer in *The Scot's Magazine* suggested 'an expeditious method to convey intelligence', which involved sending activity along a system of twenty-six wires and making the attached balls tremble on the receiving end.[2] More than sixty different models for a device that could transmit messages by means of electrical signals were developed all over Europe between 1753 to 1837 before William Fothergill Cooke and Charles Wheatstone finally obtained a patent for their needle telegraph, which became the dominant model used in Britain throughout most of the Victorian period.[3]

The telegraph's reputation was bolstered by a steady stream of celebratory literature from 1840 onward.[4] It had the dual effect of educating the masses on the 'wonder-working wire' and firmly cementing it on the forefront of the nation's mind.[5] What seemed to fascinate Victorians the most was the device's ability to 'annihilate time and space', a phrase that was applied to other new technologies at the time like the railway, but was particularly apt for a machine that thoroughly rattled contemporary notions of spatial-temporal limitations.[6] People

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[1] Barrett Browning, 'Letter 1222, EBB to Cornelius Mathews', p. 93.
[2] Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, p. 17-18; C.M., 'An expeditious method to convey intelligence', in *The Scot's Magazine, Volume XV* (Edinburgh: W. Sands, A. Murray, and J. Cochran, 1753), pp. 73-74 (p. 73).
[3] Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, p. 18; Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace*, p. 65.
[4] Iwan Rhys Morus, '"The Nervous System of Britain": Space, Time and the Electric Telegraph in the Victorian Age', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 33 (2000), 455-75 (p. 456).
[5] 'The term 'wonder-working wire' appears in an anonymously written poem called 'The Electric Telegraph', which was widely reprinted in various periodicals such as this one: 'Electric Communications', in *Chambers's Papers for the People, Volume IX* (Edinburgh, William and Robert Chambers, 1851), pp. 1-32 (p. 32).
[6] Physicist William Robert Grove used the exact phrase when talking about the telegraph: 'had it been prophesied at the close of the last century that, by the aid of an invisible, intangible, imponderable, agent, man would, in the space of forty years, be able … in the communication of ideas, almost to *annihilate time and space*; -- the prophet, Cassandra-like, would have been laughed to scorn' (italics mine). William Robert Grove,

sometimes brought parcels to the telegraph office for delivery, demonstrating the novelty of bodiless information.[7] Descriptions of the telegraph were often fantastical as well. It was an invention that 'far exceeds even the feats of pretended magic and the wildest actions of the East'.[8] It was a 'spirit like Ariel to carry our thoughts with the speed of thought to the uttermost ends of the earth'.[9] Telegraph wires were akin to ancient magi using sympathetic lodestones through which 'friends talked together across a whole continent, and conveyed their thought to one another in an instant over cities or mountains, seas or deserts'.[10] By 1845, the public was so enamoured with this new technology that they were willing to pay an entire shilling to visit the telegraph office in Paddington station.[11]

The cultural reverberations of the electric telegraph naturally extended to fiction. This chapter examines how the invention was portrayed and utilized in amorous narratives, with an emphasis on the figure of the eavesdropping telegraphist. I continue last chapter's discussion on how the course of love—and letters—might be altered when mediated through the postal network, but apply it towards the telegraph, which demands more visible, heavy-handed mediation due to the need for operators. Paula from Hardy's *A Laodicean* has a private telegraph line at Stancy Castle, but most Victorians relied on telegraph offices and its employees. The postman can be invisible; the telegraphist is perpetually present and must read one's message in the process of delivering it. There is a dissonance between early promotional commentary on the telegraph and its actual practice in that commentators often framed telegraphy as a private conversation between sender and recipient when in reality, the

On the Progress of Physical Science since the Opening of the London Institution (London: London Institution, 1842), p. 24.
[7] Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, p. 65.
[8] William James Copleston, *Memoir of Edward Coplestone, D.D., Bishop of Llandaff* (London: John W. Parker and Son, West Strand, 1851), p. 169.
[9] Andrew Wynter, 'The Electric Telegraph', *Quarterly Review*, 95 (1854), 119-64 (p. 119).
[10] 'What is Mesmerism?', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. LXX*, (Edinburgh and London; William Blackwood & Sons, 1851), pp. 70-85 (p. 78).
[11] Jean-François Fava-Verde, 'Victorian Telegrams: The Early Development of The Telegraphic Despatch and its Interplay with The Letter Post', *Notes and Records*, 72 (2018), 252-92 (p. 282).

message must be relayed to a telegraphist who then conveys it to another telegraphist before finally reaching its intended individual. Sir Francis Bond Head's 1849 musings on the telegraph, for instance, elevated it to the level of modern-day texting which does not require a human middleman: 'young people who form impudent attachments, instead of being effectually separated, as in old-fashioned times, by distance, can now-a-days, though four and five hundred miles apart, at any moment, by daylight or by moonlight, electrically converse with each other—in short, ask questions and give answers'.[12] It is as though these commentators wanted to erase the operator in their eagerness to show off the telegraph's ability to transform the material into the immaterial. Fiction, being a medium in which imagination has full rein, should presumably follow in the same fanciful vein in portraying electric telegraphy (as I will show through my forthcoming analysis of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*), but the texts I examine offer a more grounded and cautious view of the telegraph through narratives that emphasize privacy concerns and the limitations of telegraphic connections, like misunderstandings despite a faster information flow. There are, of course, fictional texts that offer overwhelmingly positive portrayals of the device, but I am interested in examining works that go against the grain of typical commentary, which reveal why the telegraph eventually fell out of vogue. Imaginative writing has the power to influence contemporary opinion on new media technologies as much as periodicals do, which likely contributed to the instrument's fall into modern obscurity as new discourse systems—ones without such invasively visible intermediaries—rose to take its place.

Other practical factors contributed to the telegraph's slide into disuse as well. Even in the Victorian era, it was not widely used by the public and greatly lagged behind letters in volume. Its unpopularity in the early days primarily stemmed from limited availability

[12] Francis Bond Head, *Stokers and Pokers, or the London and North-Western Railway, the Electric Telegraph, and the Railway Clearing-House* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1849), p. 128.

(communication infrastructure, like telegraph lines and offices, were only partially deployed across the country) and the high cost of sending a telegram. A telegraphic message from London to Cheltenham would have cost over seven shillings, a price far beyond an average individual's salary.[13] The extortionate prices and patchwork systems led to calls for the nationalization of private telegraph operations and through the Telegraph Acts, the Post Office became the sole operator of Britain's telegraphic network in 1870.[14] The Post Office immediately began improving facilities by rearranging wires wherever competition had caused replication and extending wires into existing post offices and rural areas.[15] While telegram prices dropped to one shilling per twenty words under the Post Office (with free delivery in London), they still exceeded what an ordinary person could afford. Government officials, the well-to-do, businesspeople, and gamblers frequently communicated via telegram, but most people only did so for emergencies.[16] The telegraph's speed never managed to outdo the cheapness of the penny post. Jean-François Fava-Verde contends that telegrams were only swifter than postal deliveries over lengthy distances and that the post was the more efficient, cheaper choice for communicating within the metropolis.[17] In 1871, there were 11.9 million telegrams to 1,069 million posted letters. Twenty years later, in 1891, the number of telegrams increased to 69.8 million, but the number of letters too had ballooned to 2,667 million, immensely outstripping the former.[18] The Post Office actually lost money with regard to its telegraph department, because unlike the much-celebrated penny post which could recuperate costs by delivering a large batch of letters each route, telegrams had to be individually received and transmitted, so increase in telegraph traffic

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[13] Fava-Verde, 'Victorian Telegrams', p. 282.
[14] Jeffrey Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph: A Social and Economic History* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), pp. 119, 176.
[15] Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph*, p. 176.
[16] Katie Hindmarch-Watson, 'Male Prostitution and the London GPO: Telegraph Boys' "Immorality" from Nationalization to the Cleveland Street Scandal', *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), 594–617 (p. 603).
[17] Fava-Verde, 'Victorian Telegrams', p. 276.
[18] Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail*, p. 53.

meant increased expense.[19] While postal net profits increased every year after 1840, telegraph profits decreased yearly after 1871 and had to be supported by surplus revenue from the mail and other postal services.[20] The number of telegrams also began to decline at the turn of the century in favour of the telephone.[21]

While the electric telegraph never reached the heights of the penny post in terms of public usage, I chose to include it in my study because aside from being a new form of romantic connection that altered the traditional two-party relationship model due to the presence of a middleman telegraphist, it was a famed invention that reverberated throughout Britain and its cultural imagination. The staggering growth from 11.8 million telegrams in 1871 to 90.4 million at the turn of the century demonstrates that the wires did enjoy a good amount of use.[22] In fact, by the 1890s, the country had become so dependent on the device for long-distance communication, postal strikes became a genuine social concern.[23] Telegraphic infrastructure also greatly improved throughout the nineteenth century. Britain had a mere 2,200 telegraph lines in 1850, but four years later, that number had risen to 40,000.[24] Nationalization further expanded the network and increased the number of telegraph offices, which heightened its accessibility and cemented its status as a viable communication system. As the 1863 Telegraph Act ordered, 'Every telegraph … shall be open for the messages of all persons alike, without favour or preference'.[25]

The discrepancy between the telegraph's larger-than-life descriptions (in fiction and periodicals) and its actual mechanisms divulges what Victorians wanted or expected from

[19] Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph*, p. 184.
[20]Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph*, p. 184; Hindmarch-Watson, 'Male Prostitution and the London GPO', p. 600.
[21] Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail*, p. 53..
[22] Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail*, p. 53.
[23] Otis, *Networking*, p. 162.
[24] Otis, *Networking*, p. 129.
[25] 'Telegraph Act 1863', *Legislation.gov.uk*, March 2001 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/26-27/112/enacted> [accessed 22 March 2023], (Section 41).

advancements in communication technologies. In relation to romantic connections, a telegraphic device that could enable private psychic conversation (as some promoters exaggerated) shows that there was demand for a machine that could more intensely project a lover's presence across distance and enable communication without misunderstanding. Like with the postal reform, proponents of the telegraph often gushed about its ability to connect and unify humankind: 'its networks will spread through every village, bringing every part of our republic, between the two oceans, into the closest and most intimate relation of friendship and interest … The highest offices of the electric telegraph, in the future, are thus to be the promotion of unity, peace, and good will among men'.[26] Andrew Wynter even compared the telegraph network to a populated dinner conversation: 'We are witness to a series of conversations carried out with all corners of the island, and between the metropolis of the world and every capital of northern and central Europe, as intimately as though the speakers were bending their heads over the dinner table and talking confidentially to the host'.[27] However, as I will show in my examination of *Wuthering Heights*, the dream of perfect communication without space for misinterpretation remains unrealized since a telepathic version of electric telegraphy still comes with limitations. There are individuals who might not enjoy telepathic telegraphy and prefer the metonymic distance offered by exchanging telegrams, like Lucy from *Villette* or the unnamed protagonist in Henry James's *In The Cage*, the latter of which will be discussed in this chapter. This demonstrates that the telegram's metonymic value, which is provided through its speed that mimics real-time conversation, is more complex than Laura Otis's claim that telegraphy was akin to 'Tantalus torture, always promising intimacy but offering no real human contact' and reiterates my thesis's

[26] Daniel Davis, *Book of the Telegraph* (Boston: Daniel Davis, 428 Washington Street, 1851), p. 44.
[27] Wynter, 'The Electric Telegraph', p. 134.

overarching argument on how romantic intimacy can be maintained or even intensified through new communication mediums that do not define presence by physicality.[28]

To that end, there is extensive historical evidence of the telegraph's impact on romantic relationships of the period. In the United States, it led to the emergence of the popular telegraphic romance genre and the trend of marrying on the wires.[29] In Britain, contemporary periodicals proved that the telegraph was regularly used for courtship, not just government and business matters. *Chambers's Journal* claimed that 'courting, and even kissing, are said to be practiced on the wires'.[30] The *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, in an 1876 article, similarly observed that 'long courtships have been maintained between persons hundreds of miles apart, who never saw each other' and that this was so pervasive, 'there is now a telegraphic sign for "love's first snowdrop, virgin kiss"'.[31] Telegraphic courtships continued the trend set by matrimonial advertisements and penny postage. A poem published in 1860 even went, 'From my full heart the message flows/What currents are induced in thine?/One click from thee will end my woes'.[32] Some commentators also saw the telegraph as beneficial in preventing unwelcome matches. Its speed was a double-edged blade, capable of both facilitating and obstructing courtship. A popular anecdote cites the detention of an eloping couple after a warning had been telegraphed ahead, which bolsters my examination of the mediating telegraphist because the device's speed made it an instrument of surveillance even without the eavesdropping operator.[33] As one journalist put it: 'Parents of marriageable

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[28] Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 136.
[29] Thomas C. Jepsen, *My Sisters Telegraphic: Women in the Telegraph Office, 1846–1950* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), pp. 118, 137.
[30] 'Women in the Post Office', *Chambers's Journal*, 2 (24 December 1898), 60-63 (p. 61).
[31] 'Fighting and Love Making by Telegraph', *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 12 February 1876, p. 7.
[32] The poem in question was written by James Clerk Maxwell and is titled 'Valentine from a Telegraph Clerk ♂ to a Telegraph Clerk ♀'. It contains numerous references to different telegraph models, which Elizabeth Burton dissects in her article: Elizabeth Burton, 'Technologies of Romance: Valentine from a Telegraph Clerk ♂ to a Telegraph Clerk ♀: the Material Culture and Standards of Early Electrical Telegraphy', *Science Museum Group Journal*, 12 (Autumn 2019) <http://journal.sciencemuseum.org.uk/browse/issue-12/valentine-from-a-telegraph-clerk/> [accessed 22 March 2023].
[33] Morus, '"The Nervous System of Britain"', p. 462.

children, too, may sleep in tranquillity—for Gretna-Green marriages will be hard to effect when the electric telegraph becomes general'.[34]

Given the uproar over the Mazzini scandal and sections in letter-writing manuals that warned men against penning love letters in case they were used in court, it is worth analysing why Victorians still used the telegraph for personal communications despite the process necessitating third parties becoming privy to one's messages. As Iwan Rhys Morus illustrates, Victorians were not unaware of the telegraph's confidentiality issues; numerous users 'chafed against the loss of control over their own communications', and some even outright accused telegraph companies of misappropriating information designated for transmission.[35] It is tempting to simply ascribe forbearance of the eavesdropping telegraphist to the instrument's speedy convenience or courtship's inevitable shift towards the public, but I argue that this tolerance relied on a mindset that erased or diminished the operator's presence. Telegraphists usually belonged on a lower social rung than those that could afford to use the wires, making them easier to view as unimportant or as obedient servants. The latter association is helped by their status as civil workers after the nationalization of inland telegraph services in 1870. In addition, the telegraph technically sends the message, which facilitated the Marxist nightmare of perceiving the operator as an extension of the machine. Gender played a role in minimizing the middleman telegraphist as well. A good portion of

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[34] 'The Electric Telegraph', *The Athenaeum*, 22 January 1848, pp. 84-85 (p. 85).

[35] Morus, '"The Nervous System of Britain"', p. 456. In another academic text penned by Morus, he details how two journalists publicly charged the Electric Telegraph Company with improper use of the intelligence it was entrusted with. Willmer and Smith were Liverpool correspondents for the *Morning Herald*, and they accused the Electric Telegraph Company of favouring certain newspapers over others (particularly the *Times*), hence giving those papers priority in terms of news coverage. One of their allegations stated that the Electric Telegraph Company agreed to transmit some intelligence for free if they could make use of it afterwards, but betrayed this arrangement by passing the information to two different destinations before delivering it to the *Morning Herald*'s headquarters, nearly four hours after the news had been brought to the telegraph station for transmission. The company took Willmer and Smith to court for libel on this basis of this specific allegation. The case never reached full trial though, and the journalists publicly withdrew their accusations. For a full recount of the incident, please consult: Iwan Rhys Morus, *Frankenstein's Children: Electricity, Exhibition, and Experiment in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 223-25.

telegraphists were women for reasons that will be delineated later and their gender, according to Jill Galvan, led them to be considered the ideal medium in the occult and technological sense. Galvan explains that women ‘combined the right kind of presence with the right kind of absence’ since they were thought to have an affinity for sympathy to ‘reach out feelingly to others’, but could also effortlessly revert to ‘automatism, or a state of unconsciousness’ to allay worries about privacy.[36] The telegraphist can never be completely erased, but studying the ways in which their presence is negotiated or justified reveals an overlap with disenfranchised groups like women or the working-class, which shows how technological innovations are manipulated to serve existing power structures even as new social stratifications that posit information as a valuable commodity are forged.

Before I launch into my analysis, I must credit the mountain of scholarship on the electric telegraph that has provided the foundation for my research. Existing research ranges from the purely historical (Jefferey Kieve’s *The Electric Telegraph: A Social and Economic History*) to the more creative (Clare Pettitt’s ‘Mermaids Amongst the Cables: The Abstracted Body and the Telegraphic Touch in the Nineteenth Century’ postulates that mermaids regained popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century due to the construction of underwater telegraph cables, which put new focus on the deep sea).[37] Tom Standage’s seminal work *The Victorian Internet* famously compares the telegraph to the internet and demonstrates how it greatly influenced the Victorians’ lives, much like the internet did for us.[38] Katherine Stubbs builds on the internet comparison in her article ‘Telegraphy’s Corporeal Fictions’, reading the internet and the telegraph’s capacity to anonymize one’s identity as both emancipatory and

[36] Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium*, p. 12.
[37] Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph*; Clare Pettitt, ‘Mermaids Amongst the Cables: The Abstracted Body and the Telegraphic Touch in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Nineteenth-Century Literature in Transition: The 1880s*, ed. by Penny Fielding and Andrew Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 15-33.
[38] Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-Line Pioneers* (London: Phoenix, 1999).

threatening.[39] Otis's *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* too considers the topic of self-concept and argues that information technologies alter the way we think about ourselves, drawing a connection between telegraphy and the human nervous system. Jay Clayton's *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace* evokes the internet in its title, but its contents primarily focus on postmodernism's link with nineteenth-century culture, with a fascinating chapter on the role of sound in telegraphy.[40] On a slightly different topic, Richard Menke, whose book *Telegraphic Realism* I have drawn on heavily throughout my work, brilliantly explores the ways in which the mysterious telegraph registered in the public imagination through his analysis of mid-nineteenth century fiction. For instance, in his reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, he reads Rochester's telepathic cry to Jane as a 'celestial telegram'.[41]

In terms of the telegraph and romantic relationships, multiple scholars have touched upon the topic while discussing gender in telegraph offices, specifically the high number of female telegraphists and its social ramifications. Katie Hindmarch-Watson's 'Embodying Telegraphy in Late Victorian London' offers a comprehensive historical account of the gendered stratifications in British telegraph offices.[42] Thomas Jepsen's *My Sisters Telegraphic* is centred on American female telegraphists, but many of his arguments are applicable towards their British counterparts. Katherine Mullin's *Working Girls* likewise focuses on gender, but from a more sexual angle than the other two works. She claims a new form of sexual identity emerged in the late nineteenth century with the rise of female labour, namely the telegraphist, typist, shop assistant, and barmaid. They inspired both moral

[39] Katherine Stubbs, 'Telegraphy's Corporeal Fictions', in *New Media, 1740–1915*, ed. by Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 91-111.
[40] Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace*, pp. 50-80.
[41] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 80.
[42] Katie Hindmarch-Watson, 'Embodying Telegraphy in Late Victorian London', *Information & Culture*, 55 (2020), 10-29.

apprehension and erotic fascination.[43] Kate Thomas's *Postal Pleasures*—which was mentioned last chapter—dedicates chapters to discussing telegraphy, with one arguing that female telegraphic work complicates the heterosexual marriage plot because these women's experiences with same-sex domesticity and financial independence enable them to glimpse alternatives to conventional marriage.[44] Susan Shelangoskie similarly examines the marriage plot in relation to telegraphy in 'Anthony Trollope and the Social Discourse of Telegraphy after Nationalisation'. Looking at two of Trollope's periodical pieces, Shelangoskie argues that Trollope's fiction combines the theme of paternalistic government with the conventional marriage plot to promote the potential of telegraphic technology for social good.[45] While I also plan to examine gender in my discussion of the telegraph in nineteenth-century literature, my research more closely resembles Thomas's, Shelangoskie's, and Mullin's in that I concentrate on the instrument's influence on romantic plotlines. I build on while diverging from their works by reading the telegraphist as a dispassionate middleman or an interfering interloper in two-way amorous communication. Mullin and Shelangoskie spotlight the telegraph operator in their analyses by depicting her as a sexual agent with her own romantic connections while deemphasizing her role as a communication node through which amorous narratives take place. I will pay attention to the telegraphist's love life beyond the billets she transmits, but I want to focus on her role in facilitating other people's amorous connections, which makes her both ambiguously sidelined and centred in a two-way relationship. I believe my framework will yield a more complex portrait of the telegraphist that gives equal weight to her personal life and the lives she mediates.

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[43] Katherine Mullin, *Working Girls: Fiction, Sexuality, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[44] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 99.
[45] Susan Shelangoskie, 'Anthony Trollope and the Social Discourse of Telegraphy after Nationalisation', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 14 (2009), 72-93.

One might question why I am centring my argument around the telegraphist figure, especially given that eavesdroppers and trickster characters have existed in fiction long before the telegraph's advent. Ann Gaylin has even identified the frequency of eavesdropping in drama and contends that it is a 'theatrical device' that has been imported into the novel.[46] My overarching examination of how new media technologies influenced courtship, however, demands that I look at the human operators in addition to the innovations themselves, which is why previous chapters have given attention to photographers and postal personnel. In addition, the telegraphist perfectly exemplifies the in-betweenness that categorizes the Victorian era as it struggles to reconcile tradition with progress and technological change. Aside from acting as a bridge for communicating individuals and blurring the private/public dichotomy, female telegraph operators were conservatively viewed as future wives to be protected while simultaneously being progressive careerwomen with promiscuous appeal. My final chapter goes full circle in a sense and reiterates the argument of my first chapter on portraiture versus photography by focusing on a figure that embodies both the past and the future, in addition to being a technologically based evolution of the eavesdropper literary trope.

Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and James's *In The Cage* were chosen as this chapter's primary texts due to their conflicting representations of telegraphy. The former was published in the mid-nineteenth century and does not feature a telegraph or telegrams at all throughout its storyline, but displays unmistakable telegraphic influence and can be read as a metaphorical account of the device that so raptured the public imagination. In contrast, the latter is a canonical text in telegraphic studies and contains a female telegraphist as its protagonist. In the section on *Wuthering Heights*, I argue Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship can be

[46] Ann Gaylin, *Eavesdropping in the Novel from Austen to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3.

interpretated as a fantastical imagining of telegraphy that enables its users to telepathically sense each other's thoughts, but this mind-meld does not make them invulnerable to mutual misunderstanding, which demonstrates that increased connection from new communication mediums does not always bring about the promised utopian results. Nelly's prominent role in instigating miscommunication between Catherine and Heathcliff also anticipates the privacy risks that come with necessitating middlemen in telegraphic communication and advancements in communicative technology at large. As for James's novella, I contend that the unnamed telegraphist protagonist's dissatisfaction causes her to construct a romantic narrative for Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen, in which she is a central component. Her queer attraction to Lady Bradeen and her friend Mrs. Jordan represents a triangular model of desire that exemplifies the protagonist's wish to be included in the telegraph's two-way communication, a desire that the novel portrays as transgressive.

Spiritual Telegraphy in the Moors

A decade after the needle telegraph was patented, Emily Brontë witnessed the publication of the only novel she would write in her short lifetime: *Wuthering Heights*. The novel seems very distant from the frenzy of technological innovations—like trains or harnessing electricity for telegraphy—that were slowly reshaping Britain. It is set in the deserted moors, far from the city and the telegraph wires that were sluggishly spidering across the urban landscape. All travel that takes place is accomplished through walking or on horseback, without a puff of steam in sight. I contend, however, that the characters and romantic relationships in *Wuthering Heights* display telegraphic influence. As Menke proclaims, the '*idea* of the electric telegraph was aboard after 1837' and one of the ways it entered the public consciousness was through the literary imagination.[47]

[47] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 70.

I argue that *Wuthering Heights* anticipates the dangers and limitations of telegraphic communication by depicting the impossibility of perfect unmediated communication that fully eliminates misunderstanding. Nelly, as the novel's chief narrator and as a trusted servant who is privy to her employers' private affairs, symbolizes the intrusive but necessary human operators of new communication technologies, like the many invisible hands of postal workers or the go-between telegraphist. Nelly is supposed to neutrally obey orders by facilitating communication when asked, but instead she uses her knowledge to interfere in others' personal lives. A glaring example would be when she instigates a miscommunication between Catherine and Heathcliff by not informing the former of the latter's eavesdropping, which causes their relationship to break down.[48] I further contend that Catherine and Heathcliff's intense bond is a telepathic exaggeration of the telegraph's ability to transform material messages into intangible electric telegrams along the wires. However, their mind-meld does not prevent the misunderstanding that drives them apart, demonstrating that the dream of immaculate communication advanced by proponents of the telegraph is still a dream even in its most fantastical telepathic form.[49] Part of the blame lies with the intrusive presence of the human mediator, but I believe the novel concurrently attributes Catherine and Heathcliff's unsuccessful romance to the difficulty of achieving open, two-way communication (without any room for error) in general. The only way they can be together in the end is by escaping their corporal bodies to merge in telegraphic union, yet even that conclusion cannot be upheld as a model of faultless communication.

[48] For the sake of clarity, I will be calling Catherine Earnshaw 'Catherine' and her daughter Catherine Linton 'Cathy' throughout my thesis.

[49] These proponents also mostly ignored, or deemphasized, how dependent immaterial telegraphic signals were on material telegraphic infrastructure like offices and wires, which were only partially deployed across the country in the technology's early days. They focused on what the telegraph represented (minds connected and conversing over vast distances) rather than the very real transmission troubles (like delivery delays or insulation issues for submarine cables) that plagued the telegraph. Fava-Verde, 'Victorian Telegrams', p. 282; Morus, *Frankenstein's Children*, p. 224; Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph*, p. 101.

It is difficult to discern the extent of Brontë's knowledge about the electric telegraph. As John Hewish proclaims, she is frustratingly 'biographer-proof'.[50] Few self-written traces remain of Brontë beyond her literary contributions; there are two short letters, four diary entries, and a dozen French essays from when she studied in Brussels alongside her sister Charlotte. Most of what we know about her is assembled from the writings of others, primarily Charlotte who eerily predicted in her eulogy-like 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell': 'An interpreter ought always to have stood between [Emily] and the world'.[51] It is safe to assume, however, that Brontë at least knew of the telegraph's existence since her family were keen newspaper readers, as mentioned in my analysis of *Villette*. Even if Brontë knew nothing of the invention (which is highly unlikely), my argument is still valid because it shows how *Wuthering Heights* anticipated new styles of communication associated with the technology and their social ramifications. It is not hard to imagine the 'harsh, consumptive, uncompromising virgin' that dreamed up the violently passionate romance between Catherine and Heathcliff could also anticipate the privacy issues and limitations of telegraphic communication that would plague Victorians in the late nineteenth century.[52]

Given that Charlotte was the predominant 'interpreter' for our image of Emily, it is not too surprising that the former's view of Nelly dictated critics' assessment of the character for decades following the novel's publication.[53] In Charlotte's 1850 preface to the new edition of *Wuthering Heights*, she describes the housekeeper as 'a specimen of true benevolence and homely fidelity' and lists Nelly as an example of 'those spots where clouded daylight and the

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[50] John Hewish, *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 9.
[51] Charlotte Brontë, 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell', in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends, Vol. 2: 1848–1851*, ed. by Margaret Smith, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), II, 742-47 (p. 746).
[52] Rachel Trickett, '"Wuthering Heights": The Story of a Haunting', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 16 (975), 338-49 (p. 344).
[53] Gideon Shunami has the same complaint regarding Nelly frequently being perceived by scholars as a reliable narrator. Gideon Shunami, 'The Unreliable Narrator in Wuthering Heights', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 27 (1973), 449-68 (p. 451).

eclipsed sun still attest their existence' in a text that 'broods "a horror of great darkness"'.[54] Critics often followed this line of thinking by presenting her as a general force of goodness. John K. Mathison calls Nelly an 'admirable woman' who is 'good-natured, warmhearted, wholesome, practical, and physically healthy' and justifies the crises she indirectly set into motion by claiming that her 'tolerant, common-sense attitude' prevents her from understanding the other tempestuous characters, which causes her to offer bad advice or trigger unintentional consequences.[55] Bertil Romberg argues that the honest bourgeois narrators of Brontë's novel provide empirical security for the existence of the highly Romantic principal characters, a stance echoed by Dorothy Van Ghent who contends that Nelly as a narratorial tool believably verifies the objectivity of the astonishing events of the text.[56] Nelly's good reputation was also likely fostered by biographers identifying Haworth Parsonage's much beloved housekeeper Tabitha Aykroyd—with whom Brontë was close to—as a character model for her fictional counterpart.[57] It was not until later in the twentieth century that more scholars began to challenge the established image of Nelly as wholesome and trustworthy. James Hafley's fittingly titled 'The Villain in *Wuthering Heights*' argues that Nelly, not Heathcliff, is the real villain of the tale, explaining that she conspires to gain control over the two estates by expelling Heathcliff from the picture and assuming authority over Cathy.[58] Gideon Shunami similarly maintains that Nelly is an unreliable narrator and that she tries to portray herself as 'genuine and dedicated heroine in contrast to the villainous, cunning Heathcliff'.[59]

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[54] Charlotte Brontë, 'Editor's Preface to the New Edition of Wuthering Heights', in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends, Vol. 2: 1848–1851*, ed. by Margaret Smith, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), II, 748-51 (pp. 749-50).
[55] John K. Mathison, 'Nelly Dean and the Power of "Wuthering Heights"', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 11 (1956), 106-29 (pp. 107, 129).
[56] Shunami, 'The Unreliable Narrator in Wuthering Heights', p. 450.
[57] 'Tabitha Aykroyd', *Brontë Parsonage Museum* <https://www.bronte.org.uk/the-brontes-and-haworth/family-and-friends/tabitha-aykroyd> [accessed 23 March 2023].
[58] James Hafley, 'The Villain in Wuthering Heights', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 13 (1958), 199-215 (p. 213).
[59] Shunami, 'The Unreliable Narrator in Wuthering Heights', p. 459.

I concur with Hafley and Shunami's understanding of Nelly's character in that I read her as a largely nefarious figure who embodies the dangers of middleman-mediated communication. Technological advancements bring increased connectivity, but communications conducted over emergent discourse mediums risk exposure or misappropriation by the third-party middleman on the line. As a trusted servant of the residents at Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange—a position that mirrors many communications workers' status as public servants—Nelly is privy to sensitive intelligence and is frequently relied upon as a messenger. For instance, Catherine bids Nelly to convey a message to her husband Edgar: 'And, Nelly, say to Edgar, if you see him again tonight, that I'm in danger of being seriously ill … Will you do so, my good Nelly?' (85).[60] Isabella's detailed epistle of her miserable time as Mrs. Heathcliff is also specifically sent to Nelly, with the writer's hopes that the housekeeper will relay the information to her brother and that he 'would transmit to her, as early as possible, some token of forgiveness' via the same messenger (106). However, Nelly does not simply mechanically deliver communications; she consistently abuses her position and the information she is entrusted with for her own selfish means. The novel depicts the drawback of incorporating a middleman in one's communications through Nelly's interference in her employers' relationships and shows its disapproval by ensuring that her actions always result in disaster. Her dislike of Heathcliff and preference for Edgar as a love match for Catherine causes her to deliberately not tell her mistress that Heathcliff was eavesdropping on their conversation, which causes him to run away and destroys their relationship.[61] She also reports on Catherine to Edgar, which leads to him eavesdropping on Catherine and Heathcliff's argument. This snowballs into Edgar's ultimatum that Catherine

[60] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000). I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.
[61] T. K. Meier speculates that Nelly despises Heathcliff because she was raised alongside the Earnshaw children despite her servant caste and Heathcliff's coming marked the end of that elevated status. T. K. Meier, '"Wuthering Heights" and Violation of Class', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 15 (1968), 233-36 (p. 234).

must choose between him or her childhood friend and, through Nelly's encouragement 'to harass' her for an answer, results in her fatal illness and him becoming widowed (93). In the next Earnshaw-Linton generation, Nelly's aversion to Linton, who she perceives as having a 'sickly peevishness in his aspect', plays a large part in her decision to put an end to Cathy and Linton's short-lived epistolary romance, despite her acting in line with what Edgar would want (145). Her solo-decided actions give Heathcliff an opportunity to guilt Cathy about leading her cousin on, prompting Cathy to make regular visits to Wuthering Heights and leading her to being imprisoned there. In alignment with her demonstrable belief that she knows best, Nelly further withholds intelligence about Linton's true character from Edgar because she thinks there is no point in 'disturbing his last moments with information that he had neither power nor opportunity to turn to account' (192). When her actions backfire through Edgar reprimanding her for bringing a 'tale' to him, she defends her behaviour: 'I performed the duty of a faithful servant, and I have got a faithful servant's wages! … Next time you may gather intelligence for yourself!' (93). Nelly claims she is a 'faithful servant', but she serves her employers only insofar as their desires align with her own. Most of the incidents Nelly causes revolve around miscommunication, like Heathcliff and Edgar misinterpreting Catherine's words, which reinforces the danger of involving an intermediary in two-way communication. The novel does not glorify private conversation as completely devoid of misunderstanding, as I will elaborate later, but it definitively depicts third-party intervention in a two-way communication line in a negative manner, a stance that is emphasized by Heathcliff and Edgar becoming worse off after eavesdropping on Catherine.

Nelly's position as a narrator, which gives her the ability to frame characters and events to her liking in the process of conveying the story to readers, further mimics the communications middleman's job of transmitting information and her control over those messages. That control is magnified when it comes to the telegraphic conversation because,

unlike with postal letters which are penned by the sending correspondent, telegrams are not technically written by the one sending the message, but rather by the one delivering it. The sender gives their message to the telegraphist who enters it into the telegraph machine. That level of removal between sender and missive means that the telegraphist could potentially alter the communication without the sender's knowledge. Postal epistles can be forged, of course, alongside being lost or intercepted, but with telegrams, there is zero authorial control over one's messages. Through Nelly's intrusion into her charges' personal lives and narratorial power, *Wuthering Heights* articulates a bludgeoning anxiety towards emergent communication mediums that would not be fully realized until the telegraph's entry into mainstream use in the late nineteenth century.

Even Catherine and Heathcliff's telepathic connection, which I read as a mystical exaggeration of telegraphy, cannot withstand the middleman's interference, that being Nelly's instigated miscommunication between them when she does not inform Catherine of Heathcliff's eavesdropping. One might argue that Heathcliff is the violator in this scenario since he is the one listening in on Catherine and Nelly's conversation, but what I am pointing out is that Nelly inserts herself as a third party in their relationship by intervening in their communications. Catherine willingly involves Nelly in her love life at first by soliciting the latter's advice or messaging services, but she eventually realizes that this worker is not interested in carrying out her wishes or objectively facilitating her relationships, but rather meddles in them for her own gain: 'Nelly has played traitor … Nelly is my hidden enemy. You witch! So you do seek elf-bolts to hurt us!' (94). Prior to Nelly's interference, Catherine and Heathcliff are extremely close, an 'androgynous whole' in Jamie S. Crouse's words.[62] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar poetically claim that Catherine's request for a whip is

[62] Jamie S. Crouse, '"This Shattered Prison": Confinement, Control and Gender in Wuthering Heights', *Brontë Studies*, 33 (2008), 179-91 (p. 184).

‘figuratively’ granted by her father bringing home Heathcliff instead, which bestows her an ‘extraordinary fullness of being’.[63] Catherine’s famous declaration of love for Heathcliff implies that they have a telepathic link:

> This is for the sake of one who comprehends in his person my feelings to Edgar and myself. I cannot express it; but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff’s miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it.—My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I’m well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff! He’s always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being (58-59).

Catherine states that Heathcliff is ‘always, always in my mind’, which can be interpreted as him perpetually being in her thoughts, but based on her speech, she appears to indicate a joining of their minds. Pamela Thurschwell states that telepathy is ‘related to love—the desire for complete sympathetic union with the mind of another’.[64] Heathcliff ‘comprehends in his person’ Catherine’s ‘feelings’, just as the younger Earnshaw child can feel each of ‘Heathcliff’s miseries’. His ‘miseries’ have been her ‘great miseries in this world’.

[63] Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 264.
[64] Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 14.

The above passage has often been analysed in conjunction to religious and spiritual readings of *Wuthering Heights*, but I concur with Nicholas Royle that the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff can be considered telepathic which, I contend, makes their bond telegraphic.[65] There is a long-standing link between telepathy and telegraphy. Otis illustrates that with continued advancements in communication technologies like the telegraph, some Victorians began to consider the possibility of thought transference. This line of thinking was bolstered by widespread mesmeric demonstrations—mesmerism being akin to hypnotism in that the mesmerist would transform a conscious individual into a living puppet—which reinforced the belief that one mind could influence another.[66] Wheatstone himself, the man who invented the telegraph alongside Cooke, was highly interested in animal magnetism—a form of mesmerism—and collaborated with Dionysius Lardner (a professor of mechanical philosophy at UCL) to conduct electric and optical experiments to test its validity.[67] The word 'telegraphy' was coined by Frederic Myers at a meeting of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882, where he defined it as 'all cases of impression received at a distance without the normal operation of the recognized sense organs'.[68] The vague definition could apply to the telegraph, with its novel and mysterious capacity of enabling conversation across lengthy distances. Galvan's observation that women were considered better telegraphists for the same reason that they were viewed as better spiritual mediums further supports the connection between telepathy and telegraphy.[69] The Society itself was founded on the basis

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[65] Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 43. For religious interpretations of *Wuthering Heights*, please consult: Graeme Tytler, 'The Role of Religion in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 32 (2007), 41-55; Deborah Lutz, 'Relics and Death Culture in *Wuthering Heights*', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 45 (2012), 389-408 (pp. 396-98); Simon Marsden, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).
[66] Otis, *Networking*, p. 180.
[67] Allison Winter, *Mesmerism: Power of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 39, 54.
[68] Royle, *Telepathy and Literature*, p. 2.
[69] Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium*, p. 12. For more on the female medium, Roger Luckhurst has an entire chapter in *The Invention of Telepathy* dedicated to examining women and telepathic sensitivity: Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 214-51.

of investigating supernatural phenomena in a scientific manner, joining the occult to science, and those that studied telepathy raised the same concerns as scientists analysing the nervous system or devising technological communication networks.[70] The development of the wireless telegraph in the 1890s made telepathy seem even more plausible since it proved that information could be transmitted without a physically continuous conductor.[71] One of the founders of the Society and a firm supporter of telegraphy, William Barrett's belief that telepathy would create a utopia in which 'brotherhood of the race' would be achieved through shared thoughts also coincided with views belonging to the telegraph's advocates who upheld the instrument as the key to universal understanding and world peace: 'the most important in its influence upon the social relations of mankind, and upon the spread of civilization and the diffusion of knowledge, is the electric telegraph'.[72] With regard to *Wuthering Heights*, its imagining of electric telegraphy far exceeded the medium's technical capabilities at the time of its invention and instead darts forward a few decades to reflect what Society members thought the next step in technological improvement should be, yet even Catherine and Heathcliff's telepathic/telegraphic bond is not enough to combat intrusive third-party mediation.

Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship is not telegraphic purely due to its telepathic overtones; her spiritualist exclamation that there is 'an existence of yours beyond you' and that she is Heathcliff also exaggerates the telegraph's novel ability to send a message while

[70] Otis, *Networking*, pp. 181, 185. Even telegraph technicians were open to the possibility of telepathy. According to Richard J. Noakes, the electrician and telegraph engineer Cromwell Fleetwood Varley used telegraphy to support spiritualism and leveraged platforms related to spiritualism to 'uphold the intellectual and moral values of telegraphic engineering and science'. He adds that journals like the *Electrician* and the *Telegraphic Journal* displayed enthusiasm for auras, mesmerism, and animal magnetism. Richard J. Noakes, 'Telegraphy is an Occult Art: Cromwell Fleetwood Varley and the Diffusion of Electricity to the Other World', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 32 (1999), 421-59 (pp. 423, 434).
[71] Otis, *Networking*, p. 186.
[72] William Barrett, *On the Threshold of the Unseen* (London: Kegan Paul, 1917), p. 294; Dionysius Lardner, 'Dr. Lardner on the Subjugation of the Powers of Nature to Human Uses', *The Electrician*, 2 (19 September 1862), 233-34 (p. 234).

its material form stayed behind. Catherine proclaims that 'whatever our souls are made of, [Heathcliff's] and mine are the same', suggesting that their souls are not constrained by physical bodies and can easily slip into another medium (57). They are essentially one soul spilled into two bodies and tethered by their telepathic bond. Contemporary discourse on electricity sometimes likened it to a 'spiritual' force due to its immaterial state. Electricity was an 'imponderable fluid', according to chemist and professor of technology George Wilson; it could 'be assumed to be a highly attenuated substance,—analogous to an elastic fluid, such as hydrogen gas, but infinitely lighter, in truth, not sensibly heavy at all … Electricity, as thus defined, is as invisible as common air; but when its intensity is high, it is cognisable by all the senses'.[73] Such discussions easily morphed into talk about spiritual matter in contrast to a material flow. An 1872 eulogy on Samuel Morse (co-inventor of the American Morse telegraph) hailed the telegraph for offering a 'body' for the 'chainless spirit' of electricity.[74] Contemporary historians Charles F. Briggs and Augustus Maverick further stated that the telegraph's 'electric fluid' was more a 'spiritual than a material force'.[75] Writing about the technological potential of steam and electricity in 1852, Michael Angelo Garvey ruminated, 'If the one unites lands and transports material objects, the other seems destined to become the link of minds, the channel of intelligence and thought between all habitable parts of the globe … They resemble the operations of a spiritual, rather than of a material agency'.[76] Read in this light, Catherine and Heathcliff's intense bond mimics that immaterial 'spiritual' force that flows along telegraph wires.

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[73] George Wilson, *Electricity and the Electric Telegraph: Together With The Chemistry Of The Stars; An Argument Touching The Stars And Their Inhabitants* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1859), p. 16.
[74] James Abram Garfield, 'Dr. Samuel F.B. Morse', in *The Works of James Abram Garfield*, ed. by Burke A. Hinsdale, 2 vols (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1883), II, 26-29 (p. 28).
[75] Charles F. Briggs and Augustus Maverick, *The Story of the Telegraph: And a History of the Great Atlantic Cable* (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1858), pp. 13-14.
[76] Michael Angelo Garvey, *The Silent Revolution; Or, The Future Effects of Steam and Electricity Upon the Condition of Mankind* (London: Cash, 1852), p. 7.

It would be overly simplistic to solely attribute Catherine and Heathcliff's fateful miscommunication to the meddlesome middleman, because I contend that the novel aims to show that faultless communication in general—even with an embellished version of telegraphy—is impossible. If Catherine and Heathcliff truly have a telepathic bond, then their misunderstanding would not occur because he would know that she genuinely loves him. While one might claim that this means they never had a telepathic link in the first place, I argue their faculty connection signifies that no form of communication is foolproof. Increased connection from technological advancements does not always negate misunderstanding, as evident by modern innovations like the internet or video chatting. Conflict between Catherine and Heathcliff begins after her stay with the wealthy and genteel Lintons at Thrushcross Grange, the family representing materialism, and symbolizes how error-free communication is unachievable in the material world that humans inhabit. Conspicuously, the location that triggers the first crack in Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship is also the site of an argument (between Edgar and Isabella Linton) when the adolescents first enter the premises: 'to quarrel who should hold a heap of warm hair, and each began to cry because both, after struggling to get it, refused to take it' (33). An argument can be considered a form of imperfect communication because neither party is able to harmoniously understand or empathize with each other. Heathcliff sneers at the 'petted things' and ironically predicts the future through his derision of the idea that he and Catherine would ever experience such divide (33). As a 'gipsy brat' with an unknown past, Heathcliff signifies immateriality in contrast to Edgar's symbolic materiality (25). Catherine's close friendship with him causes her to become a 'wild, hatless little savage', aligning her with immateriality as well since she does not fit the rigid categories imposed on Victorian women (36). After her stint with the Lintons, Catherine starts to conform to societal expectations for women and becomes more attentive to material concerns, as evident by her shrewd

observation that she and Heathcliff would be 'beggars' if they married and by her altered physical appearance: 'a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver, and a long cloth habit, which she was obliged to hold up with both hands' (58, 36). Her inevitable drift towards materialism, which causes a rift between her and Heathcliff, in order to not become beggared symbolizes the impossibility of faultless communication. Their critical misunderstanding is foreshadowed by Heathcliff showing Catherine a calendar, with 'dots' and 'crosses' depicting evenings spent with respectively him or the Lintons, and Catherine angrily rebuking that she would never notice something so foolish (49). She can no longer instinctively understand him and his communication methods.

Aside from demonstrating that perfect communication is unattainable, *Wuthering Heights* specifically shows the limitations of the electric telegraph by tangentially challenging the claim that it can 'annihilate time and space'. The telegraph can enable conversation and romantic intimacy over vast distances, but for some, like Catherine and Heathcliff, it is no substitute for physical proximity. Catherine intones that separation from Heathcliff is 'impracticable', a sentiment that Nelly confirms: 'The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him' (59, 29). As Otis proposes, the device reveals 'a deep frustration with the limits of electronic communication, which only stimulates the desire for physical presence by offering fleeting, tantalizing contact'.[77] Heathcliff running away—being bodily parted from Catherine—results in a permanent breakdown in their telepathic/telegraphic bond, as witnessed by Catherine standing sentry near the road and 'calling at intervals, and then listening, and crying outright' (61). To put it more colloquially, she is 'calling', but no one is picking up on the other end. Wires could not transmit voices (unlike the telephone that would come later), but early accounts on the telegraph often treated it like a speaking machine. An 1847 handbook called the instrument a 'lightening-tongued

[77] Otis, *Networking*, p. 138.

messenger of thought' and described telegraphic communication as 'speaking'.[78] Wilson too followed this line of analogy in 1859: 'The quivering magnetic needle which lies in the coil of the galvanometer, is the tongue of the Electric Telegraph, and already engineers talk of it as *speaking*. The electricity sent along the line is the silent Moses with his wonder-working rod; the magnetism in the needle is the vocal Aaron speaking as his brother wills'.[79] Menke, observing this phenomenon, states that the instantaneous aspect of the telegraph and the fact that it left no written record made it resemble 'something more direct than writing, something like electric speech'.[80] Brontë's novel, with its mystical portrayal of telegraphy, does not seem to make a distinction between telegraphic communication and speaking either.

Regarding the telegraph's exulted capacity to 'annihilate time', Catherine and Heathcliff's decades-long romance in which they missed all timely opportunities to be together analogizes Britain's lack of a universal standard for timekeeping for most of the nineteenth century, which threatened to undercut the instrument's key selling point of enabling real-time exchange of words. In the past, each city or town had its own local time calculated by the longitude of noon, but this system became increasingly unwieldy with the invention of the railway because train timetables had to include time conversions and travellers had to repeatedly reset their watches.[81] Wheatstone even came up with 'telegraph clocks', which were connected 'through a single wire with one governing chronometer at a central point, so that the indication of time in every part of a country might be the same precisely', in order to circumvent the issue of non-uniform time.[82] It was not until 1880 that Greenwich Mean Time from the postal and railway systems was extended to the whole country.[83] Until then,

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[78] W. Scales, *Hand Book to the Electric Handbook* (London: Clark, 1847), pp. 5, 11.
[79] George Wilson, *The Progress of the Telegraph, Being the Introductory Lecture on Technology for 1858-9* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1859), pp. 48-49.
[80] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 80.
[81] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, pp. 82-83.
[82] 'The Romance of the Electric Telegraph', *New Monthly Magazine*, 89 (1850), 296-307 (p. 298).
[83] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 84.

commentators like Henry Booth would remark, ‘So plighted, when the fair one is far away from her *intended*, what so natural as the mutual request to “think of me at such an hour?” And so, at the appointed time, they do, or think to do; but it is no such thing. The longitude has put it all wrong!’[84] Head had a similar warning for lovers: ‘to communications of this delicate nature, we deem it our duty very gravely to warn our young readers, especially those of the fairer sex, that unless London times were to be adopted—as it is—at all the electric stations … a young lady might appear to have affirmatively answered in Devonshire an important question—say seven minutes and a half before, according to local clocks, it had actually been proposed to her in London!’[85] Graeme Tytler notes that the characters in *Wuthering Heights* have a heightened awareness of time, which I interpret as part of the novel’s commentary on the telegraph.[86] Catherine’s ‘calling at intervals’ with no reply on Heathcliff’s end symbolizes the couple’s relationship following their adolescent separation: one is always waiting on the other and they can never achieve real-time synchronicity on the level of the instrument’s promised simultaneity in terms of communication (61). Catherine must wait three years until Heathcliff’s unexpected return, then it becomes his turn to wait: ‘Last night I was in the Grange garden six hours, and I’ll return there to-night; and every night I’ll haunt the place, and every day, till I find an opportunity of entering’ (111). He waits with the covert hope that Catherine will leave her husband for him, all while plotting payback against those that he perceives to have wronged him, which indirectly includes Catherine: ‘Quarrel with Edgar … and deceive his sister: you’ll hit on exactly the most efficient method of revenging yourself on me’ (82). After Catherine falls grimly ill, he waits in the garden for an opportunity to visit her. He then waits nearly two decades after her death before being able to form a stable communication channel with her again. Heathcliff digs up Catherine’s grave

[84] Henry Booth, *Uniformity of Time: Considered Especially in Reference to Railway Transit and the Operations of the Electric Telegraph* (London: John Weale; Liverpool: Baines, 1847), p. 14.
[85] Head, *Stokers and Pokers*, pp. 128-29.
[86] Graeme Tytler, ‘Facets of Time Consciousness in *Wuthering Heights*’, *Brontë Studies*, 40 (2015), 11-21.

after the funeral and hears a ‘sigh, close to [his] ear’ in addition to feeling ‘warm breath’ (210). In all these years, Heathcliff ‘could *almost* see her, and yet [he] *could not*’, representing a telegraphic connection that is out of sync in relation to time (210). ‘Hear me this time, Catherine, at last!’ he begs at the window after Lockwood reports sighting her spectral form, in a replication of Catherine ‘calling at intervals’ in vain after he runs away in their youth (18, 61). Heathcliff sees her more clearly, ‘within two yards distance’, as he edges closer to death, demonstrating that their local clocks are soon to be aligned (240).

Catherine attempts to enter a deeper telegraphic state by fatally exiting her material body and becoming spiritual matter each time she is separated from Heathcliff, but she will not succeed in restoring their mind-meld until he too dies and joins the same ‘longitude’ of existence. Their telepathic/telegraphic connection has always been deficient as discussed, and Catherine’s suicidal urges confirms it because the type of perfect communication that she seeks—which is analogous to the harmonious wholeness of being she experienced in her childhood with Heathcliff—cannot be found on this material existential plane where humans dwell. When she loses contact with Heathcliff after he runs away, she essentially loses commune with herself since ‘he is more myself than I am’ (57). Numerous scholars have already written about the symbolic effects of Catherine adopting a ‘double character’ and denying her true self by marrying Edgar, so I will not extensively rehash familiar ground and instead examine the telegraphic implications of Catherine’s self-destructive tendencies (47).[87] Her first permanent separation from Heathcliff, which occurs after his eavesdropping incident, marks her first suicide attempt. Some readers may simply agree with the doctor’s diagnosis that Catherine is ‘dangerously ill’ in that scene, but I would emphasize that the

[87] Some of these critics include: Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 276; N. M. Jacobs, ‘Gender and Layered Narrative in “Wuthering Heights” and “The Tenant of Wildfell Hall”’, *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 16 (Fall 1986), 204-19 (p. 216); Barbara Schapiro, ‘The Rebirth of Catherine Earnshaw: Splitting and Reintegration of Self in “Wuthering Heights”’, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 3 (1989), 37-51.

doctor specifically cautions Nelly to 'take care she did not throw herself downstairs or out of the window' (63). Catherine is fully capable of making herself sick, as seen by her later self-prophesizing warning to Nelly to tell Edgar that she is 'in danger of becoming seriously ill', and her illness here can be interpreted as her wanting to purposely depart her corporeal body to become immaterial telegraphic matter by means of suicide or sickness (84). Catherine eventually recovers because there is a chance that Heathcliff might return, and the death she sought ricochets onto Mr. and Mrs. Linton, who had inadvertently engendered their parting through Catherine's initial sojourn at Thrushcross Grange: 'Who is to separate us, pray? They'll meet the fate of Milo!' (58). She does not survive her second separation from Heathcliff though. Tytler has argued that Catherine does genuinely love Edgar, which might explain why she does not run off with Heathcliff following her husband's ultimatum that she must choose between them, especially given that Heathcliff is now relatively wealthy and can financially support her.[88] I believe the reason Catherine does not abandon Edgar for Heathcliff is because she realizes that the immaculate telepathic/telegraphic bond she desires cannot be obtained in the material world, as seen by her rejecting the living, breathing Heathcliff: 'That is not *my* Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me: he's in my soul' (116). My argument falls in line with the general critical viewpoint that Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship, while passionate and grandiose, is fundamentally unsustainable.[89]

The telegraphist's bell fittingly announces Catherine's second and final suicide attempt (97). She rings a bell 'till it broke with a twang' to summon Nelly, the action resembling the

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[88] Graeme Tytler, 'The Presentation of Edgar Linton in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 42 (2017), 312-20 (p. 318). For further reading, William Leung's article is also a persuasive defence of Edgar's character: William Leung, 'Re-Reading Edgar Linton and *Wuthering Heights*', *English: Journal of the English Association*, 57 (2008), 4-38.

[89] Some of these critics include Terry Eagleton who states that what Catherine and Heathcliff possess 'could never have matured into an adult relationship', and Jarvis who argues that the couple's 'demands of masochistic anticipation prove too much for the world in which they live'. Terry Eagleton, 'Nothing Nice about Them', *London Review of Books*, 32 (2010) <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v32/n21/terry-eagleton/nothing-nice-about-them> [accessed 24 March 2023], (paragraph 16); Jarvis, *Exquisite Masochism*, p. 28.

tinkling bell at a telegraph office to announce an incoming message and symbolizes her trying to transform herself into an intangible epistle on the wires (86).[90] The broken bell foreshadows the success of her mission. She also literally flies into a self-destructive rage, grinding her teeth and smashing her head against the sofa arm until her lips are bloodied. Her ferocity leaves her with 'no breath for speaking' and she stretches herself 'stiff' on the sofa, assuming 'the aspect of death' (86). Her bloodstained lips and breathlessness signify a rejection of bodily verbal communication in favour of a more intangible, telepathic kind. Catherine never regains full lucidity following this scene, her mind having left her body to compensate for her spirit still being trapped in 'this shattered prison': 'I'm tired, tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there: not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart: but really with it, and in it' (116).[91] Such is her eagerness to exit the physical world, she does not even carry Cathy to full term and expires after giving birth to the 'puny, seven months' child' (119).

Heathcliff, as mentioned, is unable to properly communicate with the deceased Catherine while he remains in the material realm and can only start 'speaking' to her once he too accesses that telegraphic state of departing his physical body. Heathcliff engages in self-destructive behaviour right after Catherine's death, such as repeatedly dashing his head against a tree trunk and digging up her grave with the intention of lying there with her, but his

[90] Clayton traces the telegraph's signal bell back to the days before the Penny Post, when a tinkling sound in the street announced the passing of a mail carrier. The same signal would be used by the telephone and refashioned as a pleasant ding in modern email systems. He argues that the 'sound of these signal bells is the voice of the communications network itself'. Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace*, p. 56.

[91] Confinement is a prominent theme in *Wuthering Heights* in general. Margaret Homans argues that Brontë uses 'the house, with its windows and doors variously locked or open, as a figure for varying psychic conditions', with the 'closed house generally' representing 'some sort of entrapment'. Elizabeth Napier likewise points out that boundaries such as walls, doors, gates, windows, and property lines, double as emotional boundaries in the novel. Margaret Homans, 'Repression and Sublimation of Nature in Wuthering Heights', *PMLA*, 93 (1978), 9-19 (p. 11); Elizabeth Napier, 'The Problem of Boundaries in Wuthering Heights,' *Philological Quarterly*, 63 (1984), 95–107 (p. 95).

violent urges are largely projected outward towards his perceived enemies rather than inward on himself. His desire for revenge anchors him to the material world and obstructs his access to Catherine, who is now 'incomparably beyond and above you all' (116). It is only when he gives up pursuing revenge (having been dissuaded by Cathy and Hareton's 'startling likeness to Catherine' and the happy couple's obvious parallel to his unsuccessful romance with Catherine) that he starts to lose interest in his material existence and taps into the telegraphic network that his beloved has already ascended to. The world consequently transforms into a network, or 'dreadful collection of memoranda', that whispers to him of Catherine every second: 'for what is not *connected* with her to me and what does not recall her?' (235, italics mine). He stops maintaining his physical body, taking 'so little interest' in his 'daily life' that he can 'hardly remember to eat and drink' and has to remind himself 'to breathe—almost to remind my heart to beat' (235-236). In his final days, his frame shivers like 'a tight-stretched cord vibrate—a strong thrilling, rather than trembling' (238). It is as though he has transformed himself into a telegraph wire, thrumming with electricity and ready to convey—and receive—information. His sensorium expands with the embrace of immateriality. Whereas before he could only catch glimpses of Catherine, he can now freely gaze at her 'within two yards distance' and exchange words 'as one would speak to a person present' (240-241). Readers are excluded from the exact moment of his expiration, but when Nelly finds his corpse, she notes that his eyes are open in a 'frightful, lifelike gaze of exultation' (243). He is finally telegraphically one with Catherine again.

Scholars frequently use the words 'restorative' and 'regenerative' to describe the effects of Cathy and Hareton's love match, as Amy R. Possidente has noted; and I would add that one of the ways the novel presents the couple as a healthier version of Catherine and Heathcliff is

through their successful endeavours to understand and communicate with each other.[92] Cathy and Hareton's courtship begins through the former teaching the latter how to read and correctly pronounce words. Speech plays a dominant role in Hareton's learning process as seen by Cathy's early anger at him having 'debased and profaned [her favourite books] in his mouth' and Hareton's adoration of listening to her read out loud, which suggests that their reading lessons symbolize them learning how to communicate with each other. Notably, Hareton's quest to learn how to read is triggered by him wanting to form a connection with Cathy. The strength of their bond is proven through how they handle their first disagreement after becoming friends. Hareton illuminates Cathy as to how insulting Heathcliff is an insult to him by asking how she would feel if he disparaged her father, and she 'comprehend[ing]' this, never spoke ill of Heathcliff in Hareton's presence again in addition to confessing regret that she had ever done so (233). Catherine and Heathcliff crumbled from their first 'slight disagreement' despite their telepathic connection, but Cathy and Hareton's relationship is strengthened through their argument and its settlement (233). Through this next generation, *Wuthering Heights* depicts a communication channel that is not free of conflict, but promises peaceful resolution and is attainable in the material world.

Cathy and Hareton's relationship thrives in no small part due to the communication middleman's blessing and non-intervention. Nelly more than approves of their pairing, which ensures that she will not attempt to part them as she does with Catherine and Heathcliff: 'The crown of all my wishes will the union of those two. I shall envy no one on their wedding-day: there won't be a happier woman than myself in England!' (230). Prior to Cathy teaching Hareton how to read, she utilizes Nelly as an intermediary between them. It is Nelly who first reprimands Cathy for scorning Hareton's solo efforts to learn how to read. Cathy reads aloud

[92] Amy R. Possidente, 'Women and Landscape in *Wuthering Heights*', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, 134 (Winter 2018), 265-73 (p. 271).

to Hareton under the guise of reading to Nelly and later, bids Nelly to be 'her ambassadress' and 'convey' a gift-wrapped book 'to its destined recipient', along with Cathy's 'message' that she will teach him how to read (228). In instigating Hareton's speech and reading lessons with Cathy, Nelly effectively removes herself from their relationship. Non-interference from a third party is the greatest blessing she can grant them. Catherine and Heathcliff are not so lucky, and third-party meddling in their already flawed communications hastens the breakdown of their relationship. The Telegraph Act of 1868 made it illegal for telegraphists to reveal or tamper with the contents of telegrams, but Brontë's novel, set in the technologically primitive moors, shows that the insidious fear of a communication worker listening in on a supposedly private conversation—and potentially using that intelligence for their own means—existed long before widespread use of the electric telegraph or relevant legislation.[93]

The Telegraphist's Gambit

Wuthering Heights's fears about the intrusive third party on the line are fully realized in Henry James's *In The Cage*. Its unnamed female protagonist is a telegraphist who gets a 'triumphant vicious feeling of mastery and ease' from learning the 'struggles and secrets and love-affairs and lies' of her customers (22).[94] She relishes in 'knowing so much more about them than they suspected or would care to think' (22). She inserts herself into the relationship of two of her wealthy customers, Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen, with the furtive hope of using her information to ascend to their social rank. Her knowledge of their lives, however, only unsettles them, because it forces them to confront the fact that the telegraphist is not like the unthinking machine she operates and that telegraphic conversation is never fully secure.

[93] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 115.
[94] Henry James, *In the Cage and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972). I will be citing page numbers for this reference within the text in parentheses for the entirety of my thesis.

Numerous scholars have explored James's novella in relation to the mediating telegraphist. Hayley Larsen argues that the protagonist appears as the 'perfect medium for electric energies—and even briefly harnesses electric power'.[95] Menke argues that the heroine possesses the characteristics of a novelist and, in her identification with the telegraph and its network, 'exults in her position as the coupling that links the couple'.[96] Otis concentrates on telegraphic miscommunication and contends that telegrams, 'with their enforced abbreviations and their mutilated expressions of human feeling', are not a reliable medium. As such, the parasitic protagonist is doomed to fail in her mission to climb the social ladder through tending her defective web of communications: 'Because each individual is the focus of innumerable relations, each is a nexus of sorts; but fatal errors will be committed if each sees him or herself as the one true centre of an immense web'.[97] Galvan and Margaret Linley's interpretations draw a link between the female telegraphist and the spiritual medium. The former reads the protagonist as a 'psychic sensitive' who unsuccessfully tries to infiltrate the genteel psyche, while the latter proposes that the heroine's telegraphic post amplifies her 'innate sensitivity' and encourages her to encroach Victorian codes of femininity.[98] Finally, in a queer reading of the text, Thomas suggests that the 'doubleness of the telegraphist' and the multiplicity of her clients transforms the heroine into a queer agent.[99]

I expand on these critics' arguments through my similar contention that the protagonist's dissatisfaction with her life leads her to invent a romantic narrative for Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen, in which she is an important component. Instead of solely reading the

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[95] Haley Larsen, '"The Spirit of Electricity": Henry James's *In the Cage* and Electric Female Imagination at the Turn of the Century', *Configurations*, 26 (2018), 357-87 (p. 359).
[96] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, pp. 192, 207.
[97] Otis, *Networking*, pp. 165, 178.
[98] Christopher Keep, 'Touching at a Distance: Telegraphy, Gender, and Henry James's *In the Cage*', in *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch*, ed. by Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp. 239-55 (p. 251); Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium*, p. 36.
[99] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 215.

protagonist as a novelist as Menke does, however, I argue that she oscillates between the roles of heroine and author: the former as a woman seeking a better love match and the latter as a telegraphist that interferes in her customers' lives through purloined intelligence. This framework more accurately represents the average Victorian female telegraphist's liminal position, in which she is passively waiting to get married but is simultaneously an independent careerwoman with tremendous power due to the sensitive nature of her job. In James's text, this boundary-sitting position results in disaster because the main character will only ever be viewed as an eavesdropper. In contrast, Mrs. Jordan's home-decorating florist business is seen as less invasive and secures her marriage within the upper echelons of society. The protagonist's in-betweenness is also exemplified by her same-sex attraction to Lady Bradeen and Mrs. Jordan. The triangular models of desire signify the telegraphist's wish to be included in what should be private two-way communication.

While we do not know the extent of Emily Brontë's exposure to the telegraph and its related literature, we definitively know that James used it—and often. James regularly frequented London's telegraph offices and after he moved to the Sussex countryside in 1898, he was 'reduced … to communication with London by letter and telegram; indeed, the telegram began to play a new role in his life'.[100] The swiftness of the telegram in comparison to the letter for lengthy distances likely led to a new appreciation for the medium on James's part. According to his biographer Leon Edel, *In The Cage* was inspired by the author's 'immediate feeling of being cut off from London'. Being in Sussex isolated him from both London and his homeland the United States and the 'sense of being confined and "out of things"… contributed to his imagining a young girl confined daily to a little cage'.[101]

[100] Leon Edel, *Henry James: A Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 470.
[101] Edel, *Henry James*, pp. 475-76.

Reliant as James was on long-distance communication, he would have been acutely aware of just how much personal information telegraphists were privy to, a peril that his literary peer Oscar Wilde comedically relayed in an 1884 letter. Writing to the American sculptor Waldo Story regarding his engagement to Constance Lloyd, Wilde penned that he had ‘been obliged to be away nearly all the time since our engagement’, but they ‘telegraph[ed] each other twice a day’.[102] His embarrassment at presenting love-billets to be telegrammed was prevalent: ‘the telegraph clerks have become quite romantic in consequence. I hand in my messages however very sternly, and try to look as if “love” was a cryptogram for “buy Grand Trunks,” and “darling” a cypher for “sell out at par.” I am sure it succeeds’.[103] What is notable about Wilde’s grievance is that it was sent through postal letter. One can certainly imagine how much more awkward it would be to complain about the very person that is transcribing said complaint. British telegraphists’ discontent about their salary and working conditions were also beginning to bubble over in 1895, around the time James was starting to write *In The Cage*.[104] After two years of unsuccessful hearings held by the committee assigned to look into their case, the telegraphists threatened to strike. This greatly alarmed the public for angry telegraphists might result in information leaks like in the United States. American telegraphists leaked intelligence on troop movements during the Civil War, and there were multiple insider-trading scandals with telegraphists as sources.[105] Britain had yet to experience any huge leaks, but with strikes looming, the public had reason to fear the worst. The *London Times* printed daily reports on the telegraphists’ negotiations, articles that James

[102] Oscar Wilde, ‘To Waldo Story’, in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), pp. 225-26 (p. 225).
[103] Wilde, ‘To Waldo Story’, p. 225.
[104] Richard Salmon claims that James was acutely concerned with the shifting boundary between public and private, which is reflected in his later fiction. Richard Salmon, *Henry James and the Culture of Publicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 3.
[105] Otis, *Networking*, p. 164.

could not have missed as he penned his novella centred around a resentful female telegraphist.[106]

Having tumbled from a middle-class perch to her current impoverished conditions, the discontented protagonist prefers to spend most of her time in her 'imaginative life' and weaves a sensationalist tale of forbidden love around Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen's cryptic telegrams, in which she is a vital co-conspirator (12). As Nicola Nixon rightfully notes, the heroine 'watches for each new telegraphic hint to their story as if it were the next instalment of a serialized novel'.[107] The couple's use of different signatures, like Mary or Cissy from the same person, also strengthens the notion that she is witnessing something clandestine and exciting—hallmarks of her beloved half-penny 'novels, very greasy, in fine print and all about fine folks' (11). Ironically, the books she loves and reproduces through her clients' lives are targeted towards the lower classes, which symbolizes that she does not belong in high society as she so fervently believes and foreshadows her erroneous narrative regarding Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen. Gaylin argues that 'eavesdropping provokes narrative', but 'interpretive responses are often flawed because they are based on incomplete information'.[108] The protagonist's telegraph office can only send and not receive telegrams, so she is only ever aware of half their conversation, but this arrangement appeals to her because she finds 'immensity' in 'unuttered reference' (40). It allows her imagination to fill the silent gaps with whatever she pleases. For instance, on an occasion where 'no communication with [Captain Everard] proved possible', she (most likely wrongfully) interprets the 'fulness of their silence' and a 'simple sign of the eyes' as 'tacit assent' of her wish they maintain a professional coolness towards each other (71).

[106] Otis, *Networking*, p. 163.
[107] Nicola Nixon, 'The Reading Gaol of Henry James's "In the Cage"', *ELH*, 66 (Spring 1999), 179-201 (p. 190).
[108] Gaylin, *Eavesdropping*, p. 9.

Her authorial pursuits are complemented by her role as the sole, third-person narrator. Readers are limited by the protagonist's perspective and must read between the lines to figure out the truth. Yet, as her misinterpretation of telegrams shows, reading between the lines might not always yield accurate results. Even scholars disagree on certain plot elements within the novella. Galvan reads the scene where Captain Everard puts down 'redundant money' alongside his telegram fees as him attempting to procure prostitution services from the protagonist (77).[109] Menke interprets it as Captain Everard believing he is being blackmailed and attempts to pay her off.[110] So thick is the protagonist's delusion that readers struggle to extract what should be objective fact from the narrative. The protagonist laughably believes that the money is acknowledgment of her respectability, but for all we know, the extra sovereigns could be a genuine mistake on Captain Everard's part and this could be another example in which she is imagining 'immensity' out of nothing. As Thomas argues, *In The Cage*'s protagonist 'allegorizes the production of fiction'.[111] The third-person narration style also grants the protagonist a false sense of omniscient presence. She smugly believes that she '[knows] a great many persons without their recognising the acquaintance', but conversely, no one can 'understand her' (9, 12). The latticed telegraph office, the source of all her information, acts as her lofty throne. However, only a 'frail structure of wood and wire' divides her workplace from its neighbouring commonplace grocery (9). Smells seep through the bars of the cage and telegrams are 'thrust, from morning to night, through the gap left in the high lattice, across the encumbered shelf that her forearm ached with rubbing' (9). Her cage is not impenetrable, and neither is the protagonist inaccessible. She is reachable through that 'gap' and is fallible to wrong data, unlike the omniscient narrator she strives to emulate.

[109] Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium*, p. 40.
[110] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 209.
[111] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 210.

The way in which the protagonist's imagination takes flight is decidedly telegraphic. She surrenders herself to a 'certain expansion of her consciousness' and on the day she encounters Lady Bradeen, she finds 'her curiosity going out with a rush, a mute effusion that floated back to her, like a returning tide' (13, 15). This is accompanied by the 'sharp taste of something', potentially a reference to physicist William Thomson claiming that he could taste different signals after applying telegraph wires to his own tongue in the mid-1860s (15).[112] The 'sharp taste' lends a sensual orality to her contact with Lady Bradeen, whom the protagonist is sexually attracted to. It also reflects the protagonist's belief that her job operating that 'trembling tongue of steel' will allow her to enter high society.[113] As discussed earlier, some of the most fanciful commentary on the telegraph envisioned it akin to telepathy where users could send thoughts back and forth to each other. The protagonist reaches out with her consciousness, like sending a formless telegram, to touch that 'beautiful head' and receive information about Lady Bradeen's background (15). She becomes convinced 'more than ever' that what 'floated to her through the bars of the cage' is the 'high reality, the bristling truth' (15). The cage refers to her latticed telegraph office, but in this context, it can also refer to her physical body. Like Catherine Earnshaw, James's nameless protagonist despises her life and her imaginative flights offer temporary escape by enabling her consciousness to leave her body, which is constantly assaulted with the 'presence of hams, cheese, dried fish, soap, varnish, paraffin and other solids and fluids that she came to know perfectly by their smells' from the grocery in the same room (9). The smells are a relentless reminder of her grocer fiancé, the comedically named Mr. Mudge, and the endless mundaneness of her existence. Despite the protagonist's conviction that 'this at last was the

[112] Otis, *Networking*, p. 121.
[113] Latimer Clark described Cooke and Wheatstone's needle telegraph as a 'trembling tongue of steel' while recounting Cooke's first demonstration of his invention to a railway engineer (88). Latimer Clark, 'Memoir of Sir William Fothergill Cooke', in *Extracts from the Private Letters of the Late Sir William Fothergill Cooke, 1836-39, Relating to the Invention and Development of the Electric Telegraph,* ed. by F. H. Webb (London and New York: E. and F. N. Span, 1895), pp. 61-92 (p. 88).

high reality', the information she gleans is untrustworthy and simply a projection of her imagination—an allegory already hinted at by her office's inability to receive messages (15). In short, she is sending but not receiving. She has always resented minding the sounder, a telegraph receiver that uses clicks to relay messages and which she considers the 'innermost cell of captivity, a cage within the cage, fenced off from the rest by a frame of ground glass' (15). Its unused existence and her aversion to it reinforces her preference for imagination over 'receiving' the truth. She also calls Lady Bradeen an 'apparition' with attire comparable to the Roman goddess Juno, descriptions that further imply the fictional nature of her intelligence (16).

The protagonist frequently oscillates between the roles of character (someone who wants to marry up and participate in society) and author (someone who prefers to remain aloof and preside over society), a liminal position that is advanced by the novella's very first line: 'It had occurred to her early that in her position—that of a young person spending, in framed and wired confinement, the *life of a guinea-pig or a magpie*—she should know a great many persons without their recognising the acquaintance' (9, italics mine). The two animals offer very polarizing connotations. A guinea pig is a passive animal typically kept as a pet or is experimented upon. It represents the part of the protagonist that desires a better marital match and willingly adheres to and reinforces the social hierarchy. In contrast, a magpie steals shiny things and embodies the protagonist's gleeful thievery of her wealthy customers' secrets—the part of the protagonist that longs for authorial control.

Digging deeper into the 'guinea-pig' metaphor, the Post Office's hiring of female telegraphists was, in the Postmaster-General's words in 1871, a 'daring experiment'.[114] The 1869 Telegraph Act nationalized the British telegraph system, and the Post Office inherited

[114] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 101.

the large numbers of female telegraphists already working for those privately owned, commercial businesses. 'By this act', historian Hilda Martindale observes, 'women for the first time became civil servants.[115] Women were highly sought after by telegraph companies since they could be paid less but belong to a higher social class in comparison to their male counterparts. The Post Office predicted that women would '[retire] for the purpose of getting married as soon as they get the chance', which would save them money since 'permanently established civil servants invariably expect their remuneration to increase with their years of service'.[116] Women were additionally considered to have a better temperament in relation to men: 'they take more kindly than men or boys do to sedentary employment, and are more patient during long confinement to one place'.[117] With this cost-effective strategy in mind, the Post Office rapidly became the largest single employer of women within England in the late nineteenth century.[118]

The protagonist's 'framed and wired confinement', while stifling, represents the Post Office's patriarchal protection of their experimental guinea pigs (9). According to Thomas, the institution was viewed as a 'spouse or guardian' to these women.[119] In lieu of a husband or father, the Post Office protected and provided for these unmarried women, offering what Anthony Trollope described as 'surveillance the most tender'.[120] Thomas further argues that the Post Office presents civic service as a means of preparing women to be wives. She cites an article from *The Woman's Gazette* that relates subordination in the workplace to subordination in home life. The female employee is warned not to harbour 'foolish jealousies, unjust fault-findings, or unworthy suspicions', failings that could double as the faults of a bad

[115] Martindale, *Women Servants of the State*, p. 15.
[116] Martindale, *Women Servants of the State*, p. 17.
[117] Martindale, *Women Servants of the State*, p. 17.
[118] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 102.
[119] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 102.
[120] Anthony Trollope, 'The Young Women at the London Telegraph Office', *Good Words*, (1877), 377–84 (p. 378).

wife.[121] Employment at the Post Office may not be a traditionally feminine field of work like nursing and teaching, Thomas's analysis of the article continues, but it could influence a woman's affective life by bolstering her sense of (civic) duty and training her to respect authority.[122]

The 'framed and wired' cage, which doubles as the telegraph office, protects the fatherless protagonist from unrespectability and sexual danger during her clumsy attempts to establish a romantic connection with Captain Everard (9). Many Victorians believed that postal employment would save women from turning to prostitution, though ironically, the telegraphist's job had a promiscuous quality as well since it placed her in close contact with male colleagues and numerous strangers without chaperonage every day.[123] *Temple Bar* fretted, 'We are not quite sure whether it is considered a misdemeanour for members of different staff to exchange conversation'; while *Time* more assuredly ruled, 'Talking is not forbidden, but flirting is severely discountenanced'.[124] Katherine Mullin contends that periodicals like *Time* and *Chambers's Journal* contributed to a popular image of female telegraphists as 'accomplished sexual managers, deft at the initiation and choreography of desire'.[125] In James's novella, the scene in which the protagonist encounters Captain Everard outside the Post Office for the first time is filled with references to prostitution. She leaves work later than usual, the late hour likening her to a 'woman of the night', precisely the comparison the Post Office strove to avoid by implementing 8am to 8pm working hours for its female telegraphists in 1900.[126] The 'scattered lamps' at the Park where they sit are red and there are 'other couples on other benches whom it was impossible not to see, yet at whom it was impossible to look' (55). These couples are presumably prostitutes with clients, or

[121] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 114.
[122] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 114.
[123] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p. 107.
[124] Mullin, *Working Girls*, p. 32.
[125] Mullin, *Working Girls*, p. 32.
[126] Jepsen, *My Sisters Telegraphic*, p. 31.

women whom would be categorized as such by engaging in outrageous displays of affection. The protagonist hastily clarifies her sexual respectability to Captain Everard when they run into each other: ‘Ah I don’t take walks at night! I’m going home after my work’ (52). She also refuses to ‘whine, to count up her wrongs’ to him like a ‘barmaid or a shop-girl would do’ on the basis that ‘it was quite enough to sit there like one of these’ (55). Mullin claims that barmaids and shopgirls were part of a sexual persona for working girls that emerged in the late nineteenth century and were considered much less respectable than the telegraphist.[127] The protagonist enjoys the ambiguity of appearing promiscuous without wholly committing, as evident by her thoughts: ‘Didn’t the place, the associations and circumstances, perfectly make it sound what it wasn’t? and wasn’t that exactly the beauty?’ (58). However, the instant any real sexual danger appears, she flees; Captain Everard offers to walk her home, which would ‘be as bad as his asking her to supper’, that is, asking her to perform the service that actual prostitutes engage in (63). His offer is accompanied by him trying to take her hand, alerting the protagonist to the fact that she is not in her latticed cage where access to her is limited by a small gap. Here, in the open, away from the protection of the Post Office, she is vulnerable: ‘to be in the cage had suddenly become her safety’ (76). She fears the ‘alternate self who might be waiting outside’, the self that would soil her reputation (76).

In the Park scene, the protagonist behaves more like a character instead of the omniscient author she aspires to be. She approvingly thinks that the ‘long and narrow’ street on which she meets Captain Everard ‘only made more of a stage for the small momentary drama’, placing herself in the spotlight and part of the action as opposed to being the invisible director behind the curtains (51-52). She recites her lines with calculated ease: ‘“I’d do anything for you. I’d do anything for you.” Never in her life had she known anything so high and fine as

[127] Mullin, *Working Girls*, p. 2.

this, just letting him have it and bravely and magnificently leaving it. Didn't the place, the associations and circumstances, perfectly make it sound what it wasn't?' (58). Her use of the word 'fine' is noteworthy due to its multiple meanings. It can be defined as something positive, which is how the word is used here, but can also mean 'small', which is how it is used while she describes her ha'penny novels: 'she borrowed novels, very greasy, in fine print and all about fine folk' (6). The duality of the word signifies the ultimate hollowness of her 'fine' fantasies. She imagines that Captain Everard will recognize her innate gentility and that is what holds him back from suggesting anything improper. The foggy evening shows an 'obscure and ambiguous life', further implying the protagonist's impaired vision (55). Captain Everard adds to the fog by lighting a cigarette—but not before decorously asking the protagonist if she minds him smoking. His manners conceal the foul truth and what the protagonist has missed in her blind idealization of him: he is debt-ridden and in 'something bad', all but ruined (100). Her desire to form a romantic relationship with him causes her to abandon her authorial authority and take on the role of a humble character. An author cannot participate in the world she reigns, but as a character, she can marry him and be elevated back to one of the 'fine folk'. She would, however, need to forsake her job because female telegraphists were expected to give up employment after marriage and consequently give up her authorial dominion over 'the class that wired everything' (18). She would become part of their communications web as opposed to operating at the nexus.

It can be argued that the protagonist's engineering of the Park scene (such as walking by Park Chambers every night to produce a tactically spontaneous meetup or her carefully crafted dialogue) belongs to the author's domain rather than the character's, but such overlap between the roles is to be expected. The protagonist has always dealt in ambiguity: she is both part and not part of Captain Everard's conversations with Lady Bradeen, she both loves and hates the class she serves. Her refusal to commit to either one side is replicated in her

repeated postponement of her wedding with the simple Mr. Mudge, who ‘couldn’t understand people’s hating what they liked or liking what they hated’ (38). The overlap between her author and character roles is the most prominent towards the end of the Park scene. When Captain Everard tries to walk her home, the protagonist tells him to stay where he is with ‘the force of a command’ (63). Her words make him sit back ‘as if she had pushed him’ (62). The magpie swoops in to rescue the guinea pig from sexual danger by invoking her authorial authority to ‘command’ him to stop. Through language, the tools of the author, the protagonist is once more in control of the situation. Once reassured of her safety, she reverts to acting her character and vows ‘quite with passion’ not to give him up before dramatically fleeing away (63).

Once it becomes obvious that a relationship with Captain Everard is unachievable, the protagonist falls back on the sole other means she has of accessing the upper classes: rifling through their secrets like a magpie and interfering with their lives like an author. He comes into the telegraph office, in obvious distress, for help in recalling an old telegram. This should have been the protagonist’s chance to prove her devotion to him; instead, sensing her power over him, ‘that she held the whole thing in her hand’, she channels a bored, unfeeling bureaucrat and prolongs providing the information (83). One can imagine that this doubles as petty revenge against him for no longer frequenting her office or thanking her for shielding him from ‘danger’. As she is on the cusp of providing the knowledge, she ‘continued to hold him, she felt at present, as she had never held him; and her command of her colleagues was for the moment not less marked’ (86). Even those in the cage with her acknowledge her centrality—or so she perceives. The word ‘hold’ also has another meaning, that is to hug someone. This is only way the protagonist can ‘hold’ Captain Everard: through a telegraphist’s purloined intelligence rather than a romantic embrace. The word ‘hold’ is used again in relation to Lady Bradeen’s upcoming nuptials to Captain Everard at the end of the

novella when the protagonist realizes that the upper-class couple's relationship is not one of sensationalist defiant love like she fantasized, but rather Lady Bradeen having blackmailed him into marriage: 'Did you mean just now that if she hadn't saved him, as you call it, she wouldn't hold him so tight?' (100). The similar use of the term 'hold' with regard to Lady Bradeen and Captain Everard reinforces the protagonist's ignorant misinterpretation of their relationship; she assumes the romantic definition of the word instead of the power or control ones.

The protagonist has a pattern of choosing power over love, as seen by her final in-person interaction with Lady Bradeen. At first, the protagonist notes how 'handsome' Lady Bradeen looks before staring, with a 'strange passion', at those 'eyes and lips' that are so often near Captain Everard's face (46). She imagines a triangular relationship in which she is 'with the absent through her ladyship and with her ladyship through the absent' (46). The only thing that spoils her joy is that Lady Bradeen has no idea of her existence. While the protagonist claims it does not bother her, it is clearly a blow to her self-importance and she soothes herself by gleefully comparing how little Lady Bradeen knows in comparison to herself. Her opportunity to supposedly prove this arrives when Lady Bradeen forgets an essential codeword in a telegram she is sending and the protagonist provides the right word: 'It was as if she had bodily leaped—cleared the top of the cage and alighted on her interlocutress' (48). The imagery brings to mind the guinea pig and the magpie again. The cage protects the guinea pig; it contains the magpie. By revealing how much she knows, the protagonist has leapt free of the cage meant to protect the customers from the telegraphist. Lady Bradeen is rendered 'scared' and 'helpless' and readily 'submitted' to the protagonist's 'competent hand' (48). If the protagonist is unable to participate in Lady Bradeen and Captain Everard's relationship in a romantic sense, then she will forcibly intrude as an eavesdropping telegraphist while simultaneously reminding the upper classes of the power she wields.

Her queer desire for Lady Bradeen also extends to Mrs. Jordan. Critics such as Clayton and Thomas have noted the protagonist's same-sex feelings towards Lady Bradeen, but few have included Mrs. Jordan as an object of affection. This blind spot can be explained by the protagonist's obvious distain for her, despite considering Mrs. Jordan 'the only member of her circle in whom she recognised an equal' (12). The critical neglect of Mrs. Jordan as a potential love interest ignores—or at least weakens—the argument that the protagonist, when denied a romantic connection with someone, turns to the telegraph and the knowledge it empowers her with as an alternate method to establish a personal link with that individual. Like the protagonist, Mrs. Jordan is a 'victim of reverses' and is trying to regain access to gentility by looking after flowers in rich people's homes (7). Their conversations are largely about them trying to one-up the other by how close they are to the people they serve. The situation resembles a triangular model of desire in which the third individual is the absent upper class that the protagonist and Mrs. Jordan are constantly trying to woo. As discussed last chapter on the postal system, René Girard postulates that within the structure of an erotic heterosexual triangle, the bond between the two rivals arises as a result of the beloved's being chosen by his rival, not because of the beloved's qualities themselves.[128] In the context of *In The Cage*, the protagonist and Mrs. Jordan are attempting to impress each other in the process of trying to get close to the upper classes. When the protagonist accidentally makes Mrs. Jordan cry, she takes 'her hand as a sign of pitying it' and 'confirmed this expression with a consoling kiss' (96). Affection and self-superiority have always gone hand in hand for the protagonist. It is implied that the protagonist and Mrs. Jordan will no longer meet following the latter's marriage to a butler because of the 'social gulf' between them; Mrs. Jordan believes she is marrying into society while the protagonist turns up her nose at the notion of sitting down to dinner with a lowly butler (97). However, the protagonist's sudden eagerness

[128] Girard, *Desire, Deceit, and the Novel*, pp. 6-7.

to marry Mr. Mudge upon hearing about her friend’s engagement suggests that part of the reason they will never meet up again is because Mrs. Jordan is engaged and no longer a viable love interest. The protagonist moves her wedding up to next week as her final act of impressing Mrs. Jordan (who yearns to be remarried) and ensuring that she will not remain the unchosen loser in their strange love triangle. The protagonist’s repeated participation in triangular structures of desire—with Mrs. Jordan and with Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen respectively—additionally symbolizes her delight in being included in two-way telegraphic communications, or as she calls it: ‘combinations of men and women’ (12). It is little wonder then that she actively dislikes Mr. Mudge since, aside from his humble grocer profession, their two-party relationship leaves no room for the illicit desires of an eavesdropping intermediary.

For all of the protagonist’s ridicule of Mrs. Jordan’s work with flowers, her job grants her better access to high society than the telegraphist’s eavesdropping ever can. Flowers have a language of their own—floriography—which operates as an alternate mode of communication to the protagonist’s telegrams. Jessica Roux states that floriography emerged as a coded language in the early nineteenth century, when open displays of affection were discouraged.[129] One of the very first gifts Prince Albert sent Queen Victoria was a gold and porcelain brooch in the shape of an orange blossom sprig. Its symbolic meaning is chastity. Queen Victoria would later walk down the aisle wearing a headdress constructed of real orange blossoms and a snowy white gown (also emblematic of virginity) trimmed with Honiton lace and more orange blossom flowers.[130] The flowers became part of her image, linking her to chastity. The protagonist asserts that ‘her one idea about flowers was that

[129] Jessica Roux, *Floriography: An Illustrated Guide to the Victorian Language of Flowers* (Kansas City: Andrew McMeell Publishing, 2020), p. ix.
[130] ‘Wedding Flowers’, *Royal Collection Trust* <https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/trails/royal-weddings/wedding-flowers> [accessed 26 March 2023].

people had them at funerals', but fails to consider one of their most important functions: romance (27). Mrs. Jordan manifests her own marriage through the art of flower-arranging. Unlike the protagonist, Mrs. Jordan does not purely rely on coded floral messages to gain information about her clients. That is perhaps the key difference between her and the protagonist, why she succeeds where the telegraphist fails. Mrs. Jordan is invited into her customers' homes, whereas the protagonist's presence is intrusive. The former has actual conversations with servants who, in turn, pass along intelligence about their employers and their social circle: 'only through Mrs. Jordan, who touched him through Mr. Drake, who reached him through Lady Bradeen' (99). Their communication chain resembles a comedic game of telephone, but *In The Cage*, in its quest to portray the disadvantages of the telegraph, asserts through its ending that even gossip is a far more reliable information source than one-sided coded telegrams due to in-person interactions. The word 'touched' evokes a physical intimacy that the telegraph sorely lacks.

On the surface, James's novella seems to reassure his upper-class audience that nothing will come of the telegraphists' strike. The nosy protagonist gets her comeuppance by discovering it is impossible to glean accurate intelligence from telegrams and presumably trades in employment for housewifery following her marriage. Mrs. Jordan, who is more successful, only marries a butler and is not a serious threat to the status quo. However, in true *In The Cage* fashion, the ending dispels such a neat message. The last line sees the protagonist pondering that 'it was strange such a matter should be at last settled for her by Mr. Drake' (102). She has learned nothing through her experience; her snobbery towards the working class is intact and therefore so is her resentment towards those socially above her. Its ending is a warning: there is no need to worry about the person listening in on your messages … but you should be careful anyway.

There is a fifty-year gap between *Wuthering Heights* and *In The Cage*, with the former being published when telegraphic infrastructure was just starting to spread across the nation and the latter coming out at the height of the electric telegraph's relevance to society, but both unflinchingly depict the limitations of the media technology in addition to the invasiveness of its obligatory mediating operator. Brontë's novel offers a mystical imagining of telegraphy that is comparable to telepathy, but shows that even such an advanced version of the medium is not infallible against misunderstanding for its users or the meddling actions of the communications middleman. James's novella dives into the mind of a resentful female telegraphist who takes a savage joy in eavesdropping on her affluent customers. These two texts illustrate that the telegraph showed more promise than it could deliver on in terms of actual usage and to a lesser extent, demonstrate how—despite its promise to connect humankind and bring about harmonious concord—class lines were stratified through those who had access to telegraphic communication (Catherine Earnshaw, arguably Heathcliff since he is an honorary Earnshaw and becomes wealthy later, Lady Bradeen, and Captain Everard) versus those who worked the wires and were forced to function as obedient servants to their social betters (Nelly and the nameless protagonist from James's novella). With their largely negative portrayal of the telegraph, these books unintentionally predicted, or perhaps even contributed, to its descent into modern obscurity as the telegraph gradually got phased out by the telephone, which likewise provided instantaneous communication but without the glaring presence of a mandatory eavesdropper.

Conclusion

Around the period that matrimonial advertisements were enjoying controversial popularity across Victorian England, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) postulates an advanced dating app that could guide individuals towards their soulmate:

> In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour for loving. Nature does not often say "See!" to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing; or reply "Here!" to a body's cry of "Where?" till the hide-and-seek has become an irksome, outworn game. We may wonder whether at the acme and summit of the human progress these anachronisms will be corrected by a finer intuition, a closer interaction of the social machinery than that which now jolts us round and along; but such completeness is not to be prophesied, or even conceived as possible. Enough that in the present case, as in millions, it was not the two halves of a perfect whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness till the late time came. Out of which maladroit delay sprang anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing-strange destinies.[1]

Such technology still does not exist today, but matchmaking algorithms that use personal data in order to enable better matches are present in many modern dating apps, which once again demonstrates my overarching argument on the ties between our century and the nineteenth one in relation to media innovations.[2] Despite the two-century difference, there are still marked similarities between us and the Victorians in terms of public reception towards new

[1] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), pp. 35-36.
[2] Liesel Sharabi, 'Finding Love on a First Data: Matching Algorithms in Online Dating', *Harvard Data Science Review*, 4 (2022) <https://hdsr.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/i4eb4e8b/release/2> [accessed 26 May 2023].

media technologies and their impact on personal relationships. Any invention is viewed with varying amounts of optimistic enthusiasm and foreboding vitriol. The emergent media technologies discussed in this monograph—photography, postal letters, electric telegraphy—significantly altered Victorian lives, especially in terms of courtship, and invited mixed reactions. Photography made portraiture available to the masses and facilitated romance through its highly metonymic value, but also heightened concerns over fraud, aestheticism, privacy, copyright, and control over one's image. The reformed postal system made long-distance communication affordable and accessible to all; and like photography, facilitated new forms of courtship that did not rely on direct physical contact for intimacy but even made distance a prerequisite to emotional closeness. However, the creation of an efficient and mechanical mailing system hatched worries that the private, sentimental letter would transform into something public and impersonal. As for the electric telegraph, its speed increased its metonymic value and made long-distance communication feel more like a real-time conversation, but the necessity of an eavesdropping telegraphist posed security risks and diminished its personal factor. All the issues surrounding these three mediums can be applied to modern discourse systems, such as texting which similarly provokes arguments about privacy and scams. My project was born from a desire to challenge the stigma against online relationships and I hope, by showing how alike we are to the Victorians, we can attempt to move past antiquated views or at least acknowledge the benefits of technological advancements rather than emphasizing its downsides.

Call Me Maybe

Numerous media innovations have been regrettably left out of my thesis due to time and word constraints, but there is one I would like to briefly highlight because of its role in expanding the parameters of non-physical presence in relation to romantic relationships: the

telephone. Unlike the electric telegraph which became obsolete in the latter half of the twentieth century, the telephone is still in popular use today and is heavily intertwined with romantic relationships, as seen by the well-known flirting technique by asking someone for their phone number or a widower dialling their spouse's voicemail to hear their voice again.[3] The telephone combined the telegraph's capability for instantaneous communication with the postal letter's ability to facilitate lengthy conversation, and most importantly, it enabled the transmission of a beloved's voice over distance. All the emergent media technologies discussed in this thesis, one way or another, can be utilized as substitutes (or prostheses) for the human senses: photographs provide the visual pleasure of gazing at one's beloved, while letters and telegrams facilitate intimate conversation. The telephone gives a voice to the written words of the latter mediums in order to simulate in-person chatting more fully. John M. Picker has argued that the Victorian period was an age of unprecedented sound, 'alive with the screech and roar of the railway and the clang of industry, with the babble, bustle, and music of city streets, and with the crackle and squawk of acoustic vibrations on wires and wax', so it is not unusual that a device meant to connect individuals via sound was invented in this era.[4]

The telephone was not widely used in the century it was conceived, which is why I omitted it from my main discussion. It was patented by Alexander Graham Bell in the United States in 1876, then introduced to England the following year.[5] Although it made a relatively big splash with periodicals espousing Bell's 'speaking telegraph' and Queen Victoria herself

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[3] I am aware that getting someone's phone number is probably an outdated flirting move now as young people tend to ask for an object of affection's social media, like Instagram or Snapchat for texting. I maintain, however, that sound—the hush and tenor of a lover's voice—plays an important role in romantic connections and the telephone's invention enabled the use of that human sense outside of in-person interactions.
[4] John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 4.
[5] While Bell is credited with the telephone's invention, its earliest form can be traced back to 1849 when Italian innovator Antonio Meucci created the 'teletraphone' in Havana to share information among different rooms in his house. He developed as many as 30 different versions of the teletraphone between 1850 and 1862, but was too poor to afford a patent. Janna Quitney Anderson, *Imagining the Internet: Personalities, Predictions, Perspectives* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), p. 27.

installing a set of phones at the palace, Britain's telephonic development greatly lagged behind the United States and most of Europe.[6] This was because England had already committed itself to expanding the telegraph network and the telephone, which was subsumed within the Post Office's monopoly over the wires due to a legal ruling that declared no difference between the two media, was a direct competitor.[7] In its early years, the telephone was largely used for business rather than personal purposes (as evident by the first telephone exchanges appearing in central business districts) due to pricey usage costs and its slow integration into society.[8] Victorian fiction glaringly reflects the telephone's underdevelopment; the device rarely appears in novels in a narratively significant way and is largely only featured in periodical literature.[9] Even George Eliot, who was enamoured with the instrument, shied away from directly referencing the telephone in her works despite making mention of telegrams in *Daniel Deronda* (1876).[10]

However, a closer look at contemporary texts reveals that the amorous allure of a vocal-based communication system was very much present and the voice's significance in literature prophesizes the telephone's enduring popularity in the decades to come. Ella from Thomas Hardy's 'An Imaginative Woman' conjures a romantic fantasy of her beloved poet via his photograph, but that lifelike fantasy is facilitated through her imagining of his voice reciting poetry to her. If both parties had telephones, Ella would no doubt call him just to hear the voice of her dreams say 'Hello?' In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine stands near

[6] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 101; Richard Menke, 'The Medium is the Media: Fictions of the Telephone in the 1890s', *Victorian Studies*, 55 (Winter 2013), 212-21 (p. 212).
[7] Menke, 'The Medium is the Media', pp. 212-13; Jessica Kuskey, 'Listening to the Victorian Telephone: Class, Periodicals, and the Social Construction of Technology', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 38 (2016), 3-22 (p. 10).
[8] Jeremy Leon Stein, 'Ideology and the Telephone: The Social Reception of a Technology, London 1876-1920', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 1996), pp. 70, 73.
[9] Kuskey, 'Listening to the Victorian Telephone', p. 9.
[10] Kate Field, who was assigned to publicize the telephone in England, wrote about Eliot's positive experience with the telephone: 'Only once did I succeed in luring her away from The Priory, and that was to see the telephone, about which she was very curious. Yes, she would be able to come with Mr. Lewes, provided no one else was present. So one afternoon George Eliot visited the office of Bell's Telephone in the city and for an hour tested its capacity—"It is very wonderful, very useful", she said—'What marvellous inventions you Americans have!"' Kate Field, 'Recollections by Kate Field', *New York Daily Tribune*, 24 December 1880, p. 5.

the road ‘calling’ for Heathcliff in a scene I have analysed as indicative of telegraphic influence and the common conception of the telegraph as a speaking machine, but can also be understood as a yearning for vocal connection, comparable to ‘calling’ a number and waiting for an articulated reply on the other end. Contemporary commentary likewise reflects and contributes to the future trend of using the telephone for romantic purposes. The front cover of telephone promoter Kate Field’s *History of Bell’s Telephone* (1878) depicted a woman in New York telephoning a man in London, placing transatlantic romance on the forefront of the telephone’s functions.[11] The lesbian duo that made up the poet pseudonym Michael Field additionally enthused about the device’s ability to transmit a faraway lover’s sweet nothings in their shared diary: ‘We have again talked through the telephone—oh, we need nothing but the voice to be to each other. All my love is in her generous laugh, with its little pricklets of amusement. Nothing delights us so much as chatting to each other. And Michael says she understands why the Dead talk such nonsense—What logic would any lovers utter?’[12]

The phonograph’s popularity as a tool for amusement also indicates the seductive quality of a vocal-based communication medium. Invented by Thomas Edison in 1877—roughly the same time as the telephone—the phonograph was originally intended as a dictating machine, but the market for office phonographs never took off.[13] It was much more popular as a source of entertainment, mimicking the telephone’s transformation from a business device to an all-rounded instrument for both official and personal use. The phonograph’s ability to repeat what was sounded into it enables it to preserve a lover’s voice and replay it at one’s pleasure. Its function is reminiscent of photography’s associations with mimesis and memory, which its inventor acknowledged: ‘For the purpose of preserving the sayings, the voices, and the *last*

[11] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 105.
[12] Michael Field, *Works and Days*, BL ADD MS 46794: Vol. 19 (1905), 32v. I was alerted to this quote by Carolyn Dever, who includes the quote in her upcoming book: Michael Field, *One Soul We Divided: A Critical Edition of the Diary of Michael Field*, ed. by Carolyn Dever (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024).
[13] Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium*, p. 106.

words of the dying member of the family—and of great men—the phonograph will undoubtedly outrank the photograph'.[14] Although the phonograph did not typically appeal to sentiment in its advertisements, Victorian fiction proved that the public did associate the instrument with romantic feelings. The male protagonist of Arthur Conan Doyle's short story 'The Story of the Japanned Box' (published in the *Strand* in 1899) staves off alcoholism by repeatedly listening to his wife's dying words which are recorded in a phonograph: '"I am not really gone, John", said the thin, gasping voice. "I am here at your very elbow, and shall be until we meet once more. I die happy to think that morning and night you will hear my voice. Oh, John, be strong, be strong, until we meet again".'[15] In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, a text that is famously crammed with mass media, Mina Murray listens to 'a number of hollow cylinders of metal covered with dark wax' which contain John Seward's confessions of unreturned love for Lucy Westenra and is profoundly touched by the raw truth of his vocalized feelings: 'That is a wonderful machine, but it is cruelly true. It told me, in its very tones, the anguish of your heart. It was like a soul crying out to Almighty God. No one must hear them spoken ever again! …I have copied out the words on my typewriter, and none other need now hear your heart beat, as I did'.[16] Both texts attest to the affective power of the voice, which can be equally applied to the telephone and further explains its future importance to personal relationships.

The Future of Media Technologies

The other reason I brought up the telephone is because it—alongside my selected media technologies—helped pave the way for video chatting, which is arguably the most metonymic simulation of physical presence we have at this moment in time. Photography is

[14] Thomas A. Edison, 'The Phonograph and Its Future', *The North American Review*, 126 (May-June 1878), 527-36 (p. 533).
[15] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Story of the Japanned Box', *Strand Magazine*, 17 (1899): 3-11 (p. 10).
[16] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), pp. 184-85.

the predecessor to the film technology required to create a live video feed, and the telephone (preceded by the affordable postal letter and the telegraph) allowed for instantaneous vocal communication. Video calls enable one to see the other party's facial expressions, their (perhaps naked) body, and items they might want to display in front of the screen. The medium has all the hallmarks of an in-person conversation (including awkward lulls in the conversation and flirty body language) except for the tactile aspect. The exclusion of touch is both a curse and a blessing, as I have shown throughout my thesis. On one hand, the maddeningly accurate simulation of presence reminds the users that they are not physically together and the anonymity provided by these discourse systems increases the risk of fraud. On the other hand, the distance provided by media technologies can be welcoming and even seized upon as an alternative form of courtship, one that might feel more emotionally intimate than a relationship conducted in the flesh. Video calls are a continuation of a trend started in the nineteenth century, as individuals discovered that physical touch is not the only avenue to romantic intimacy.

What will be the next step in presence-generating media technology? Perhaps further breakthroughs in technology focused on transferring physical sensation are on the horizon. There is currently a variety of electronics aimed towards delivering the tactile to long-distance lovers, such as remote-controlled sex toys, hand-holding devices, machines with personalized silicone lips that replicate kissing, rings that are attuned to your partner's heartbeat, shirts with special sensors that create the sensation of a hug, or pillows with heartbeat sensors that allow one to feel as though they are falling asleep with their partner.[17] These machines only cater to one specific experience at a time (kissing, hugging, hand-holding, etc) due to technological limitations, but in the future, there may be a sophisticated

[17] Lolo and Nate, '19 Weird to Wonderful Long Distance Relationship Gadgets', *Lasting The Distance*, 23 February 2023 <https://lastingthedistance.com/long-distance-relationship-gadgets/> [accessed 13 May 2023].

virtual reality device that fully recreates the sensation of touch while its user sits alone in their bedroom. Or maybe resources will be diverted towards improving matchmaking algorithms in dating apps instead. When we browse websites, we often see disclosures about personalized advertisements that present products based on our online personal information and browsing history. Dating apps might one day do the same in order to present users with more compatible matches; or do what Coffee Meets Bagel (a dating app that is marketed towards people seeking serious relationships) does and have users fill in an extensive survey as part of the signup process, with questions ranging from favourite book to ethnicity preferences to educational background. Alternatively, human romantic partners might not even be needed, as AI (Artificial Intelligence) technology grows more advanced to the extent that AI chatbot boyfriends/girlfriends can satiate the user's emotional wants. Priced between free to relatively affordable (the latter providing more functions), these virtual companions have customizable appearances and can text, roleplay sexual fantasies, send sexy pictures, engage in video calls, and stroll around in their own fictional homes.[18] Unlike a real human partner, an AI lover has no emotional baggage of its own, will never make its user feel neglected or unloved, and can act as a safe space for abuse victims who do not feel emotionally prepared for a relationship with another free-willed individual.

Whatever the next intersection between media innovation and romantic love might be, what we can be certain of is that it will be controversial because, as noted, we are still grappling with the same issues the Victorians were when it comes to new technology. Electronics that

[18] Replika, a chatbox, recently banned its AI creations from participating in racy talk and sending seductive pictures on the basis that it was not intended to be an erotic platform. This demonstrates the fragility of relationships with virtual companions as they can be altered at any time, with no provocation, due to arbitrary company policy. Outdated software can also cause the demise of a beloved virtual partner, like the case of Akihiko Kondo who lost communication with his virtual wife after technical support for her character ended. Sangeeta Singh-Kurtz, 'The Man of Your Dreams', *The Cut*, 23 March 2023 <https://www.thecut.com/article/ai-artificial-intelligence-chatbot-replika-boyfriend.html> [accessed 13 May 2023]; Ben Dooley and Hisako Ueno, 'This Man Married a Fictional Character. He'd Like You to Hear Him Out', *New York Times*, 24 April 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/24/business/akihiko-kondo-fictional-character-relationships.html> [accessed 13 May 2023].

simulate physical sensation for long-distance lovers and AI romantic companions will undoubtably raise concerns about the authenticity and intimacy of the experience, in addition to provoking existential questions about being in a relationship with a machine rather than a human (the latter more than the former). Meanwhile, improved matchmaking algorithms will inevitably come with privacy issues and potential accusations of discrimination, as users attempt to filter out certain ethnicities or wealth brackets in their preferences. These are all concerns that the Victorians had—with photography, with the electric telegraph, and even with a non-technological development like the reformed postal system. Regardless of what century we live in, any interference in human relationships on the part of new media technology will invite dire predictions about fraud or the diminished validity and sentiment of the interaction. While undeniable that technological advancements have disadvantages, we should not ignore how they create new types of personal connections or enrich existing ones. The world is continuously changing and it is only natural that the way we interact with each other will undergo a software update as well—but this does not mean that our relationships are any less from the heart.

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