VICTORIAN CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS
Donald E. Hall, Series Editor
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James McNeill Whistler, *At the Piano* (1858–59). Oil on canvas. Bequest of Louise Taft Semple, Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati, OH. Courtesy of the Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati, OH. Photo Credit: Tony Walsh, Cincinnati, OH. • 110

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It is a common occurrence in the literature classroom: a student muses aloud that if only Pip would face the facts and get over Estella, or if Dorothea would realize the horrors that await her and refuse to marry Casaubon, or if Angel Clare would just forgive Tess’s past transgressions—if characters in a novel would simply do something other than what they do—then they would avoid the painful events of the novel. Equally common, I imagine, is the professorial response: Pip is not real; Dorothea is not real; Angel is not real. These are not real people and they cannot choose to do something other than what is written on the page.

The tendency for students to relate to a novel’s characters as real people, with real choices and real agency, seems painfully obvious to the practiced scholar. In order to facilitate students’ attempts to analyze a text as a text, we must first break them of the comfortable habit of approaching texts as people.

And yet, aren’t we so often guilty of the same? As easy as it is to spot the facile simplicity of the student who wonders why Jane Eyre doesn’t just fix herself up—a dear friend vividly remembers when, as an undergraduate herself, a fellow student asked that very question in a Victorian literature course, to which the frustrated professor responded in a tone of woe-tinged anger, “Jane Eyre had no hair!”—we fail to recognize the tendency of criticism, especially ethical criticism, to relate to novelistic characters exactly as if they were people. And not simply any people, but people who can teach us important lessons, encourage us to altruistic behavior, and provide cautionary examples of how not to behave; think of Wayne Booth’s description of that “unique value of fiction”: “its relatively cost-free offer of trial runs.”

We insist that our students are wrong, that the characters in novels are not people; yet what ethical argument
does not depend on their functioning precisely as other humans?

On a fundamental level, it seems that to deny characters human attributes is to foreclose the possibility of ethical growth. If we cannot relate to the novel or its subjects on a human level, how might we learn the human lessons the novel offers? George Eliot's famous formulation—that art must “enlarge men’s sympathies”—depends on characters standing in for people, functioning for the reader in place of the “others” they may not otherwise come across, doesn’t it?

In this book, I argue that Victorian novels and paintings work hard to disabuse their readers and viewers of this tendency. They do so on two levels: first, they depict the unknowability of the human other. There are distinct limits to knowledge, and the ultimate limit case in the realist work is the human being. Second, these works insist on the distinction—in both form and content—between that unknowability of the person and the knowability of art. Stories can be learned, novels are finite; people, however, are not. These texts and images thus inscribe alterity through their representation of human interaction, and they enact the absence of alterity through their very substance. A reader can know a book, and can know a painting, but the subjects of those books and paintings can never fully know each other.

I do not disagree with the idea that novels teach us how to empathize. Indeed they do. But in this book, I suggest a radical revision of the mode through which that ethical expansion takes place. Art can edify its audience, but we have failed to recognize one mechanism of that edification. Realist art does not make empathy possible by teaching readers what it is like to be another person; it makes empathy possible by teaching us that the alienation that exists between the self and the other cannot be fully overcome, that the alterity of the human other is infinite and permanent. But in that radical, inalterable alterity exists the possibility of ethical engagement.

Perhaps this formulation seems ungenerous. It is human nature to want to overcome a sense of alienation; we want to think that through hard work, we may reach a state of identification leading to sympathy or, better yet, empathy. We have been told for centuries, perhaps most influentially by Adam Smith, that this is how fellow feeling arises. Novels, under that schema, can teach us how to empathize by moving readers through a series of paces: setting up an unfamiliar character who becomes known, possibly endearing, potentially lovable, through the exposure gained by the time and effort required to read the text. This desire explains why a common analogy—that a character in a book, or even a book itself, is like a person—is so very compelling. The complete
knowledge we can have of a novel’s characters fills up the void that must necessarily exist in human interactions. That analogy elides an important distinction, however, between character and person: a character is—to the reader—finite and knowable, but a person is—to another person—ultimately unknowable. And so a novel may depict the realization of alterity between characters, but the same realization cannot exist between a reader and a character.

Part of what I’m saying may seem familiar—others have gestured toward the very limitation that my book is built upon: we cannot know people, but we can know the people in books. E. M. Forster describes this condition with such clarity and precision that his formulation deserves to be quoted:

For human intercourse, as soon as we look at it for its own sake and not as a social adjunct, is seen to be haunted by a spectre. We cannot understand each other, except in a rough and ready way; we cannot reveal ourselves, even when we want to; what we call intimacy is only a makeshift; perfect knowledge is an illusion. But in the novel we can know people perfectly, and, apart from the general pleasure of reading, we can find here a compensation for their dimness in life. . . . They are people whose secret lives are visible or might be visible: we are people whose secret lives are invisible.

And that is why novels, even when they are about wicked people, can solace us; they suggest a more comprehensible and thus a more manageable human race, they give us the illusion of perspicacity and of power.²

What makes a character in a novel realistic, in Forster’s telling, is in fact antithetical to what makes human beings human: a character in a book is real, he writes, “when the novelist knows everything about it,” even if the novelist withholds some of that “everything” from the page.³ That his argument, so clearly rendered, did not forestall decades of ethical criticism insisting on ideas contrary to his demonstrates the concentrated power of the solace he describes. I want to insist steadfastly that to the reader, a novel’s characters are knowable. Only to the other characters within the work are fictional people “others.”

Realist novels depict characters who recognize on some level the ultimate unknowability of another character, and more often they depict those who plow ahead assuming (erroneously) that in fact they do know exactly what the other is thinking and who the other is. Such is the marvelous faculty of the omniscient narrator or the multiplot structure that
those formal qualities of the book can lay bare the gulf of alterity to the reader, even though the characters within may remain ignorant. Tertius Lydgate might think he knows Rosamond Vincy, but we readers know better.

There are two levels of knowledge, then, presented by these works: the limited knowledge shared by the subjects of art, and the comprehensive knowledge available to the audience. Where we (the audience) get muddled—to borrow Forster’s word—is in the confusing of the two. The lesson of Victorian realism is that we cannot know the other, and since that lesson applies only to the human other, the means of pedagogy—the book, the painting—must be safe from presumptions of alterity. But the impulse to view artworks as analogous to people is strong, as is our belief that identifying with or knowing the other is essential to empathic or ethical extension. To counter the strength of that desire, I call upon the work of Emmanuel Levinas, who gives language to the idea that acknowledging alterity, and not overcoming it, is ethics. His phenomenology reframes the apperception of alterity not as an obstacle but rather as the very means to interpersonal ethics. Essential to Levinas’s formulation is the denial of the book-to-person analogy, as any work of art is fungible and ultimately knowable.

It is indeed problematic for humans living together to treat other people as if they were books: knowable, fungible. But for the literary critic, at least, and I would argue for any engaged reader, the inverse of the analogy is equally troublesome. When we treat artworks as human—when we insist that the art object can and should function as the other—we miss the point that these works are at pains to make. We can know the subjects of art precisely because they are subjects of art. The nonhuman-ness of the novel or painting is what gives us the tantalizing feeling that we have access to a person in a way that, in reality, we lack.
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The above scene is not pivotal in the plot of David Copperfield, but it illustrates a quiet dynamic which rules that plot: the realization that one’s knowledge of another—even family members or dear friends—is incomplete at best. Copperfield’s aunt is known by her family as Miss Betsey, and long before David meets her, arriving unannounced on her doorstep after abandoning his miserable London existence, he knows her through stories told by his mother. Miss Betsey’s storied past mingles with David’s years-long experience living with her, resulting in the closest familial relationship David has; he even takes her name. At Ludgate Hill on a shopping day, David is thus shocked to learn that his dear Aunt Betsey Trotwood, whom he loves and has known better than
nearly anyone else in his life, is in this moment a stranger to him. The man who Copperfield assumes is a “nothing but sturdy beggar” is in fact much more than that. He is the husband of Miss Betsey Trotwood, long believed to be dead, and his revelation throws into question, at least briefly, even Betsey’s title; she is no longer “Miss,” is she? Betsey herself abandons her usual self-command in favor of near-hysterics, a response that David cannot comprehend, and though she begins by articulating her own uncertainty—“I do not know what I am to do”—she ends by transferring uncertainty to David. By repeating “you do not know,” Betsey underscores David’s lack of comprehension. This scene, and Miss Betsey’s insistent exclamations, illustrate a realization essential to realist representation: the human embodies the unknown.

Miss Betsey Trotwood’s admonition to her young nephew speaks to a condition larger than the immediate moment on Ludgate Hill. In this book, I take up the mantle of Miss Betsey Trotwood’s reproach—“you do not know”—to argue that realist texts and images embrace the inherent limitations of the unknowable other. As depicted in *David Copperfield*, confronting the real alterity of another person can, paradoxically, lead to an enhanced sense of that individual. We cannot fully know the other. That the idea can be so simply stated might suggest that the idea can be simply learned, but nothing could be further from the truth. Realist novels and paintings of the nineteenth century demonstrate that moving into the recognition of alterity is a process through which one comes to realize one’s limits. To attain what these texts conceive as literacy is to learn that empathetic extension arises from the recognition of difference. I suggest that realists illustrate the problems that result when one individual does not or cannot recognize the difference between herself and others, because that failure overlooks the limitations of knowledge. In these instances, empathetic extension occurs only through the appreciation of the limits of the self. These works demonstrate that effective connection between people is predicated on the recognition of such very limits. Novels employ strategies of reading to present a means of engaging alterity; paintings employ strategies of seeing to do the same. Realism thus points to the unknowable in addition to describing the knowable world.

The works addressed in this study—by Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and J. M. Whistler, among others—not only depict humans in community as ultimately unknowable and inscrutable but also engage the ethical imperative that arises from interaction with the unknowable other, an ethics that, in the twentieth century, Emmanuel Levinas defined in terms of alterity. As depicted in these works, recognition of
this alterity is not easily achieved, not inherent in human interactions, but rather must be learned. Realist novels and paintings show individuals growing into this recognition by learning to appreciate difference: a character, for example, might realize an empathic relationship only after the often difficult process of setting another character free from her preconceived ideas or self-centered readings. Realist texts and images further insist through both form and content that while an artwork may represent the process of apprehending the alterity of the other, it cannot provide the reader or viewer a means of achieving that process. The novel and the painting, in other words, cannot function as “other” for the viewer or reader.

J. M. W. Turner and the Representation of Difference

You will find no better teachers than your own eyes, if used aright to see things as they are.
—J. M. W. Turner, to students at the Royal Academy

I have so far elided the distinction between textual and visual literacy, but the characteristics of visual literacy make it a particularly useful entrée into issues of interpretation and comprehension. Joseph Mallord William Turner’s oeuvre, spanning from the end of the eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth, can frame the shift toward the foregrounding of uncertainty that fully develops later in the century. His work suggests that realist depiction of limitation is not new, but rather had been percolating for some time. Turner’s instruction to his students at the Royal Academy offers both a lucid declaration of a primary tenet of art in the nineteenth century and an indication of the murky boundaries of that tenet: “paint what you see,” he seems to say, but the advice is tempered by one condition—that the eyes are used “aright.” To paint the reality one sees, one must be taught to see as much as one is taught to paint. And being taught to see is as much learning to appreciate what is before our eyes as learning to recognize what is beyond the limits of our perception. Turner’s style, with its divergence from the then normative representational strategies used by other artists, inscribes difficulty into the viewing process, complicating the easy approach of reading meaning, if not an explicit narrative, into an image. Instead, Turner’s paintings demand that their viewers encounter them as surface and not as narrative. That proto-realist insistence fuels my approach to the
novel; Turner’s example makes the case for viewing text as painting, not painting as text.

Turner’s art, with its idiosyncratic renderings of sunsets and fogs, made the common world of England appear new to those who had seen its landscapes and natural effects throughout their daily lives. Such newness was not always appreciated by the viewing public, however, and his works were met with ambivalence throughout his active career. While Turner’s *The Fighting Temeraire* received at first a merely “sympathetic reception,”3 by 2006 the painting was voted the “Greatest Painting in Britain” by the British public.4 Ezra Pound understood that Turner’s paintings could only have been misconstrued upon first exhibition. He noted that Turner’s pictures “educated up” their viewers: standing in front of his paintings one might be perplexed, “but when you leave the pictures you see beauty in mists, shadows, a hundred places where you never dreamed of seeing it before.”5 Without being overtly pedantic, Turner developed a pictorial vocabulary that enriched the visual literacy of his audience; his works “taught” their viewers. Pound’s comment was itself not particularly novel in 1909, and Viktor Shklovsky and the Russian Formalists would later tease the idea into the literary application of “defamiliarization.” What Turner did in images in the early part of the nineteenth century was precisely to render the familiar unfamiliar, changing the public’s vision as well as conventions of the medium. A similar effect was achieved by realist authors; note Erich Auerbach’s praise of Zola’s novels, which echoes a Turneresque emphasis on visual literacy: “Did anyone,” he asks, “before [Zola] see a tenement house as he did in the second chapter of *L’Assommoir*? Hardly!”6 The question is not one of sight, but one of vision. And by focusing their vision on stories not told, images not painted, and characters not represented, realists built upon Turner’s example (not only depicting difference but emphasizing it) and ushered in a new artistic vocabulary. That their public or critics would uniformly understand it, or even welcome it, was perhaps too much to expect.

Given the significant overlap in the representational strategies employed in both realist texts and images, it is not surprising that critics responded similarly to both media.7 Yet there is a danger in collapsing entirely the difference in apprehending images and texts. First, by imagining the apparatus of texts and images as being inherently the same, many tend either to narrativize every image or regard the image merely as a portal composed of symbols to be interpreted.8 Second, doing so can result in problematizing verisimilitude in images more than is necessary. The overlap between style—the conventions of visual render-
ing—and a sense of reality in painting (especially) has had an unmistakably strong foundation throughout Western history of the development of the medium. Verisimilitude has been at stake at least since Zeuxis challenged Parhassius. And that each successive generation of artists sought to improve upon the veridicality of the previous generation is also a saw of art-historical surveys—the trick was, the argument goes, the development of technologies of representation and the viewing public’s ability to process and accept those technologies as being more representative of perceived reality than what came before. The movement toward greater verisimilitude seems to suggest that we’re moving ever closer to the depiction of things as they really are, and along with greater lifelikeness, greater recognition and therefore greater knowledge will ensue. Turner offers an early example that greater verisimilitude can foreground visual uncertainty, and in fact decrease familiarity. It is almost as if an actual correlation between representation and “the real” in painting is bracketed; this sensation is particularly evident when reading psychologically inflected histories of art such as Gombrich’s seminal Art and Illusion, in which he convincingly adopts a formalist reading of the seemingly teleological march of the visual arts toward illusionistic verisimilitude. One benefit of such bracketing and the formalist readings that result is an emphasis on the surface, the artifice, and the conventions of the visual arts.

In light of those conventions, novelistic claims of truth might seem quaint in their earnestness, as authors did what painters rarely did—they included within their works claims of veracity. The concreteness of those claims (as opposed to the effusive, implicit nature of Turner’s sunsets, for example) opens the texts to criticism based on fidelity to intention: are the authors able to meet the standards they propose, standards that seem impossibly extreme? An impossible aim coupled with content focusing on people and places hitherto underrepresented in fiction, including the rural, the poor, the laboring, and the common—these aspects of the movement open literary realists to critique. Claims of truth become naturalized, as if engagement with realist texts ought to be easy rather than difficult. If what’s being represented is reality, we should be able to recognize it immediately; it should remind us of ourselves and our world. But problems arise if the reality represented is the impossibility of representation, the limits of knowledge. That assumption underpins much critical reaction to realist novels, which is hyperfocused on the differences between realist conventions or content and that of non-realist works, to the extent that it fails to recognize that the novels themselves describe and depict the recognition of difference
and, more important, the limitations of knowledge. The insistence on object-ness embodied in Turner’s work provides a counterpoint to those critical gestures, if only his lessons can be retained.

“Defective” Mirrors: Realist Claims and Critical Responses

The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.

—Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray

In his 1891 preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde’s aphoristic take on realism is partnered with his similarly glib (or genially sincere) take on Romanticism: “the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.” Wilde identifies both literary movements as provoking “dislike” among their readership, especially their critical readership. That dislike is essential to understanding how the critical response frames the discussion of realism’s successes and failures, just as the mechanisms of realist critique are essential to understanding the role that difference plays in the realist project. Moreover, Wilde’s epigrams demonstrate the ambivalence that is at the heart of so much criticism of realism, namely the pressing desire to see oneself reflected accurately and the repulsion at seeing in that reflection an unfamiliar vision of oneself or one’s world.

Wilde’s invocation of the mirror in both descriptions presents as a given one principle of artistic production that is disputable, for he seems to accept that realist or Romantic art can function as a mirror. In fact, the inability of art to reflect reality accurately has always been a part of the realist impulse, at least from the perspective of the artist. Claims of exact verisimilitude come more often from critics. The loud, reductive voice of the most vociferous criticism persists long after the more subtle, nuanced modulations of the artists themselves, and critical responses to realism lay bare some of the primary anxieties pervading its readership, concerns that continue to guide our present conceptualization and analysis of the genre. To be sure, the anger at seeing one’s true self reflected in art noted by Wilde can certainly account for some, but not all, of the vituperative responses to realism. Seeing the other defamiliarized, through representations that break free from existent artistic conventions and readerly expectations, was equally provocative. Early responses to realism included a mix of reactions to seeing the self and
seeing the radically other, manifested in twin objections to form and to content.

The most persistent charge against realist fiction is an assault on its perceived claim of veracity, a charge that establishes a dangerous series of mutually exclusive potentialities, starting with the most basic: truth or falsity. J. Hillis Miller summarized the problem with a battery of binary constructions; criticism of realism, he writes, “tends to express itself in either/or dichotomies: either realism or vacuous, free-floating fiction; [. . . ] either the representation of some verifiable and objective truth, or merely the relative, some partial, subjective truth, therefore no truth at all.”14 Any indication of deviance from a purely objective truth thus rendered the whole effort futile. Indeed, early iterations of realism did seem to support such all-or-nothing paradigms, as they regularly employed superlative language. The earliest definitions of the term came out of France, and between 1841 and 1851 French critics of art and literature characterized realism as follows: “the exact imitation of nature just as she is” (Gautier); “nature herself as she is, without lying and without ornamentation” (Houssaye); “the great merit of seeing and rendering nature, just as it is” (Clément de Ris); “the faithful reproduction of the first passing object” (Geofroy); and “[the] claim that all, ugly and ignoble, can and must be represented under the single condition that the imitation be faithful” (Delécluze).15 Lofty ideals, to be sure. These definitions also do not address how realist goals differ from those of any other literary movement, which aspects of nature realist artists choose to replicate faithfully, or with what formal characteristics they do so, demonstrating a lack of precision that was itself regarded as anathema to realism’s very goals.

Such critiques persist to this day, as can be seen in the ongoing debates on epistemology and representation in realist fiction. George Levine’s introduction to Realism and Representation (1993) presents the then current status of the debate, termed in largely stark distinctions similar to those articulated by J. Hillis Miller: realist versus antirealist, positivist versus relativist, and so forth. After noting the violent responses of academics against the very idea of “objectivity,” Levine summarizes: “The views that all facts are theory laden, that all argument is ‘interested,’ that all knowledge is culturally constructed, that all reality is mediated by representation, are dominant in literary theory and criticism, in sociology of science, and in some areas of the philosophy of science. The exposure of the hidden political, social, and gender implications of ‘facts’ and ‘objectivity’ and rigorous procedures of verification has been one of the most exciting and valuable activities of
modern intellectuals,” before warning that, taken to the extreme, such skepticism leads to “relativism and [ . . . ] anti-intellectualism.” Just as the “exposure” of fissures in the ideas of “truth” or “objectivity” may lead to relativism or anti-intellectualism, those same critiques have also led to a wholesale condemnation of the realist project; as described in J. Hillis Miller’s account, rigid binaries can result in the “realist” baby being thrown out with the “subjective” bathwater. Critic Michael Boyd, for example, decries realism for “[pretending] to be what it is not” and declares it “a form of bad faith” because realist authors “pretend that their art is not a compromise but a slice of life—not the whole of life, perhaps, but a selection that reveals a one-to-one relationship with the experience to which it refers.” D. A. Williams similarly speaks of the realist’s choice of content as a resignation to what cannot possibly be: “Knowing the dream of total absorption of the real to be impossible, the realist resigns himself to working with a scaled-down model of reality.”

These objections depend on a definition of realism more akin to that of the French critics than that of the artists themselves. Realists repeatedly address another central issue that is raised in Wilde’s quip: the trustworthiness of the mirror. The “glass” is a metaphor used consistently by realists to describe their work, but those metaphors often hedge the very meaning of the term by limiting or restricting the mirror’s accuracy. For Balzac the mirror was but “some sort” of “concentric” mirror (his inability to articulate precisely what that meant is clear in the original French: the artist “est obligé d’avoir en lui je ne sais quel miroir concentrique où, suivant sa fantasie, l’univers vient se réfléchir”), and for Eliot the mirror was doubtlessly “defective” and the reflections “faint or confused.” Allowing that even a mirror might be affected by the experience of the individual acknowledges the difficulty of transcending one’s own subjectivity, a proposition that is echoed in constructions that do not depend on the mirror as a symbol. Zola describes art not as a reproduction of nature but as the representation of objects being filtered through the screen of the artist’s temperament. Dickens, in the preface to *Oliver Twist*, mitigates his promise to “paint” the criminals of London “in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery of their lives; to show them as they really were” by noting that he performed the task “as best I could.”

In spite of such admissions, the critical eye often regards limitation as a deciding factor in the zero-sum game of truth, which results in criticism dependent on the objective/subjective binary. According to Lillian Furst, the mirror’s status as “the symbol of realism” only calls attention to the “pretense that [realism] tries to maintain.” She continues:
Far from the anonymous, unbiased, scientific instrument that it was meant to be, the mirror acts as a prism in its passage through the artist’s evaluating mind. It offers, therefore, not a faithful, objective replica of actuality as it “really” is, but a subjective interpretation of things as they seem through the refraction of the perceiving mind.

Realists seem not only to admit but to promote this more limited vision of their powers. The charge of “bad faith” must then be considered in light of the literary critics who make the charges, whose own weighted assessments affect their readings. Such critics hold claims of comprehensive objectivity up to stronger scrutiny than any acknowledgment (whether within or without a literary work) that an attempt to comprehensiveness is inherently and unavoidably limited. Interpreters of texts are naturally limited by our own cultural context, our own limitations. And while today we critique the realists’ implicit dependence on hegemonic structures to present a supposedly single, privileged, and therefore problematic version of reality, in the authors’ own time the charge would more likely have been that they were in fact violating the standards of the hegemonic order.

The vituperative cast of much contemporary criticism of realism suggests that the claim of objective representation was, at the time, less challenged than was the artists’ choice of content: assuming the mirror is to any extent accurate, why choose to represent Caliban instead of Miranda; why choose to depict the ugly instead of the beautiful? Claims of truth and dispassionate representation were collapsed by readers with visions of familiarity: the truth was understood to be my truth. If the subject choices were unfamiliar to the reader, or were outside of the bounds of acceptability (conditions that often overlapped), the creative agent was seen as culpable. Consider the heated British response to Émile Zola’s fiction. Claiming to depict the real, Zola was charged instead with opting for a more violent, negatively skewed version of life. If this was reality, the British did not like “seeing it in a glass” at all. According to The Globe, Zola’s works “sapped the foundations of manhood and womanhood, not only destroyed innocence, but corroded the moral nature,” and the Birmingham Daily Mail asserted that the author himself “simply wallowed in immorality.” In charging Zola’s publisher with immorality for publishing Nana, La Terre (a novel that won Zola the decoration of the Legion of Honor in France), and Pot-Bouille, the court declared they were “the three most immoral books ever published!” Their immorality arose not because the novels were false or deceitful, but rather because their author chose to represent in text realities that
were deemed offensive and because their publisher chose to publish them.

If the mirror is regarded as accurate and the reflection as complete, the public objects to what is reflected. If, even as Balzac and Eliot note, the mirror must necessarily be warped or clouded, then the objections raised are that the reflection is inaccurate. Representation is thus placed in a bind; one escape from that bind is to depict the limitations or the defects of the reflection accurately (a proposal that gives rise to the Barthian construction of realism as a textual strategy that makes its artifice clearly evident26) and to represent the limits of representation.

Responding to Difference:
Detachment versus Self-Extension

I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind.

—George Eliot, Adam Bede27

Critical responses both to content and to form demonstrate reactions to difference, either a text appearing different from its stated goal or its content appearing different from the expected. Further, each objection is founded on an assumption: in the first case that an objective point of view is possible and or representative of reality, and in the second case that the acceptable real is somehow aligned with the pleasant or the moral. Overcoming these assumptions is necessary to understanding how realism represents the human other as a limit case of knowledge without falling into bad faith; it is useful to articulate the realist project in terms that emphasize its drive toward an ideal rather than its success or failure at achieving that ideal.

Novels and paintings of the period depict the difference of the sovereign other from oneself, engage that difference, and replicate the alienation felt in an encounter with such difference. Most importantly, they show that overcoming alienation is an impossibility. This bears repeating: elemental to the moral claims that underpin realism is the recognition that alterity cannot be overcome. A most important means of addressing difference is via representations of failure, especially the failure to achieve an ultimate objectivity. As discussed above, realists entertain the mirror’s failure as a foundational truth of their work, and not as an impediment. Ameliorating the potential negative effects of
depictions of the pedestrian or base subject is made possible in part via this narratorial distance, born not of bad faith but of an acceptance that limitations are inherently part of the human lived experience. It is an ambivalent position, to be sure, but such distance allows for a movement toward a critical, detached understanding of even oneself, and certainly others.

Current criticism attempts to understand or theorize those realist encounters with difference, and one more nuanced way to approach realist works is by recognizing their rendering or installation of what Amanda Anderson refers to as “detachment”—a complex balance of acknowledging difference or distinction while not employing distance as a means to dismiss, wholesale, the other. Anderson’s analysis provides a useful model for my study because it embraces ambivalence and interminability as being constructive aspects of detachment. Detachment is thus not necessarily a final stance, but is instead a process that takes as its aim the possibility of an objective consideration of the “facets of human existence so as to better understand, criticize, and at times transform them.” The movement toward objectivity is not to be confused with objectivity itself, and Anderson is clear to note that the cultivation of detachments is an “aspiration to a distanced view” as opposed to an absolute objectivity that cannot be achieved. This “distanced view” is explicitly not superlative or extreme, a distinction imperative to understanding Victorian realism. If Eliot, for example, argues for a disinterested perspective for her readers and characters, she also acknowledges the risks of wholesale detachment: in “German Life” she warns of the potential for regarding all country hay-balers as jolly, happy, rosy-cheeked people.

My interest is in the singularity of otherness found expressly in the closeness of familial or communal relationships, relationships that sit outside of the binary systems long ascribed to realism and elucidated above whereby the “other” gets placed in a dialectic relationship with the self. It is easy to understand otherness in terms of the seemingly radical other, differentiated by nationality, class, race, or gender, while necessarily overlooking the fact that those who look much like oneself must in fact be understood as radically other as well. The binary formulation lulls one into thinking that if the other doesn’t appear to be wholly other, she must be just like me. This sensibility is not born of critics but was, as Tim Barringer writes, a paradigm through which the Victorians “defined” themselves: “Respectable society in Victorian Britain defined itself through a series of structured oppositions by which any group thought to adhere to different concepts of social and sexual behavior,
of work and time discipline, of value and of religion, was accorded the status of an inferior and potentially hostile other.” Barringer, in his study of the pictorial representation of difference, posits race as the “most powerful” of these factors of otherness. As Barringer notes, racial difference was regarded as being easily represented and thus easily perceived. If, as he suggests, “the field of visual representation offered a site for the production and dramatization of powerful distinctions between self and others,” those who are unlike oneself are “constructed as deviant,” while those who appear to be like oneself are understood in terms of that similarity.

While not dismissing the distant or foreign other—whether they be the rural poor or those colonized across an ocean—I wish to focus on the intimate interpersonal relationships that, in spite of or perhaps because of their banality, populate realist works. It is those closest relationships that abound in Victorian texts and paintings, and which prove most difficult to navigate, in large part because intimacy itself (even proximity itself) obstructs one’s realization of the other’s alterity, despite the necessity of that realization. In this way, the interpersonal relationships depicted in realist works echo the inherent closeness, the connection between what is depicted in realist works and what one sees in the real world. Achieving a critical distance becomes difficult for readers, even if it is encouraged by the writers and painters. As Kay Young writes, “The experience of intersubjectivity—knowing another and being known by another—depends on the acknowledgment of separate and mutual presence, or experiencing one’s own separate presence in simultaneity with the other’s separate, co-presence.” Thinking outside of the self seems necessary to sharing an intersubjective experience, and thus in addition to knowing the other better, one comes to know oneself better.

It is an idea that already had currency in the nineteenth century. John Stuart Mill, for example, asserted that failing to know the other can only lead to failing to know the self. Mill reminds us that what we believe may be false; those who “have never thrown themselves into the mental position of those who think differently” may not, “in any proper sense of the word, know the doctrine which they themselves profess.” The rub is that Mill’s reading of detachment persists in placing the self in relation to the other and is fraught (as Anderson admits) with susceptibility to the same critiques of hegemonic power relationships that are leveled at realism itself: there is no pure detachment just as there can be no pure objectivity. Emmanuel Levinas, as will become clear, escapes this bind by removing any definition of the self from a dependent relationship with the other. For him, the other’s alterity does not determine the self, just as
Anderson’s reading hinges on the claim of aspiration toward detachment as opposed to an achievement of complete detachment.

George Levine’s *Dying to Know* takes up this paradigm of aspiration to consider the intersection of scientific epistemology and ethics: “in the nineteenth century,” he writes, “despite overt attempts to separate” the two, “the epistemological was latent with ethical force.” In Levine’s telling, scientific inquiry requires dispassion, but the force driving the inquiry must be passionate, and the ethical is necessarily bound up in that drive. “Can those self-interested organisms usually identified through the hermeneutics of suspicion, in fact act in the interest of others at the possible sacrifice of themselves?” he asks. “To deny the possibility of objectivity, the capacity to be in that nowhere from which truth at last will be visible, is, logically speaking, to deny the possibility of altruism.” It is a sentiment echoed in another aspirational model of Victorian narrative—the form that Andrew Miller terms “moral perfectionism.” These analyses of Victorian works demonstrate that accounting for altruism within the realist text is, even in its most simple incarnation, a complicated endeavor.

Levine’s description harkens to Anderson’s “detachment,” as he notes that the writers he addresses find “that some mode of detachment, some way to move beyond the personal and to recognize a responsibility to community and to knowledge, is essential both to the work of knowing and to the work of living meaningfully.” Anderson accounts for this responsibility by describing always the “aspiration” to detachment, rather than working out whether it is even possible, while Levine frames the problem by constantly questioning the absolute. To be sure, the work of much postmodern and critical theory asserts that there is no such absolute. But Levine, echoing his introduction to *Realism and Representation*, points out that such critiques are themselves totalizing. Within these critiques, questions of power and hegemony arise. That is, because power is at play, definitive pronouncements about the nature of realism, or the truth, are generally created by and in favor of those controlling the power.

Anderson and Levine thus describe the realist project in terms that emphasize its drive toward an inevitable impossibility: the aspiration to detachment or to an epistemological perspective that depends on objectivity. Yet their accounts do not present realism as a failed project. Realism demonstrates its inherent limitations through depiction; this is a constructive, even necessary component of its aesthetics and form, and not a negation of its goal that can only be understood as a pretense or as exhibiting bad faith. For Eliot to consider this process of representa-
tion as the “raw material of moral sentiment” does not do away with Levine’s claim that true objectivity would eliminate the potential for true altruism.

I argue that realist works depict both elements of the complicated relationship between detachment and an ethics: realization of the radical alterity of the individual is necessary because in its absence, relationships fail, misunderstandings abound, or communities fracture. The other is beyond the conception of the self, is the ultimate unknowable, and the limit case of objective rendering for an author or painter, for the other cannot be rendered completely. And yet if one can appreciate the fundamental difference between the self and the other, if one can aspire to an escape from solipsism and set even an idea of the other free from the bounds of that solipsism, the result can be rife with potential for positive (or negative) affective possibilities. Escape from solipsism arises not from the belief that one understands the other, but rather that one ultimately cannot know what it really is to be the other. It is a movement toward an understanding of the other completely outside of the self. It requires an empathic extension born of detachment.

This formulation requires a departure from descriptions of self-extension, whether called sympathy or empathy, that involve the merging of the self and the other—this merging is common in criticism of Victorian literature.41 Audrey Jaffe describes sympathy as an undoing of the recognition of alterity, describing Victorian scenes evoking sympathy as those that involve a “spectator’s (dread) fantasy of occupying another’s social place.”42 And if this fantasy can—should—be used to altruistic ends, it can offer an “affective solution to the problem of class alienation,” and can “ameliorate social differences with assurances of mutual feeling and universal humanity.”43 This version follows on the heels of the predominant eighteenth-century notion of sympathy articulated by David Hume and Adam Smith, and described by David Marshall as “experiences of compassion, commiseration, pity, and identification.”44 Such sympathy is expressly predicated upon identification with another. Hume conceived of sympathy as a means to uniting people through fellow feeling; because “the minds of men are mirrors to one another,”45 through mirroring the other, one can come to knowledge of that other. Adam Smith’s description of the process of sympathy opens up some room for the distinction between the self and other, though ultimately he maintains the solipsism of the sympathizer that characterizes Hume’s descriptions. In the opening of Smith’s The Theory of Moral Sentiments, he writes, “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by
conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.” 

Here Smith acknowledges the untraversable gulf between the self and the other, and since our senses “never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person,” if we are to experience what the other experiences, we must rely on our imagination. “It is the impressions of our own senses only,” Smith concedes, “not those of [the other], which our imagination copies.” 

Smith’s version of fellow feeling thus depends on solipsism, but a solipsism necessitated by the fundamental inability of one person to experience what it is to be another. Imagination might be an imperfect tool for understanding the feelings of another, but it is nonetheless the basis for sympathy, and the limitlessness of imagination creates the possibility for rich engagements with the other. Sympathy in the eighteenth century, Marshall describes, is thus “not just feeling or the capacity for feeling but more specifically the capacity to feel the sentiments of someone else,” a capacity that “[suggests] the act of entering into the sentiments of another person.” 

Under this schema, “entering into the sentiments of another person” is both possible and edifying. While not refuting the enormity of the influence of Smith and Hume’s thinking on the Victorians, I want to suggest that realists ultimately depict the limitations of this kind of fellow feeling. They recuperate the original terms of Smith’s construction, terms that emphasized the inability of the senses to “carry us beyond our own perception.” They describe scenes and instances where that mirroring does not and cannot suffice because it is predicated on assumption and projection.

Catherine Gallagher’s work on Humean sympathy in relation to the eighteenth-century novel is helpful here, as she so clearly renders the paradox of Hume’s version of sympathetic extension: ultimately, Hume’s sympathy forecloses any increase in knowledge of the other because it is predicated entirely on the self subsuming the other. She asks an important question: “What happens to the otherness of the other people in this process, an otherness already blurred by the relationships described?” 

It is certainly not retained. Gallagher links Hume’s sense of property or ownership—that the closer a person is to the other who deserves sympathy, the easier sympathy is—with the intervention of fiction. Because no one owns the characters in a novel, they are, she suggests, “universally appropriated.” Sympathy, Gallagher writes, “is not an emotion about someone else but is rather the process by which someone else’s emotion becomes our own,” a construction that models the kind of appropriation Gallagher sees in Hume’s articulation of sympathetic extension: to take the sensibility of the other and make it my own. For those followers of Hume (and I mean temporally, not his acolytes), this reading makes
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good sense. But something shifts in the nineteenth century. This version of sympathetic extension is what the realists attend to amend, I think, by showing within their works that appropriating people, subsuming them into one’s self, does not increase one’s knowledge of the other. Gallagher gestures toward the significance of realist insistence on particularization, in that the more a character is rendered through particularities, the more he or she belongs to the overtly and formally fictional and therefore the more he or she is appropriable and thus fodder for sympathy. In realist works, I wish to say, authors are drawing out the distinction between the reader’s (the audience’s, in the case of painting) ability to appropriate the represented character and the relationships between people.

As is clear from Gallagher’s discussion, separating sympathy from empathy as depicted in nineteenth-century works is made difficult as identification—the feeling “like” associated with the empathy since the word’s early-twentieth-century coinage—is aligned so closely with sympathy. Given the influence of Hume and Smith on Victorians and on our understanding of Victorians, it should not surprise that their model of identification-based fellow feeling serves as the most common paradigm for attempts to explain mechanisms of fellow feeling in the nineteenth-century novel. Nor is it surprising that Smith’s subtle insistence on insurmountable alterity is overwhelmed by his descriptions of identification from which fellow feeling springs; similarly, the limitations of identification are overwhelmed by its (positive) affective possibilities. Studies of both sympathy and empathy in the novel most often consider the reader as the figure who stands to grow into a state of increased fellow feeling in relation to the characters within. To that end, they consider the readerly identification with characters, as often measurable by the real-world altruistic action provoked by a text. Suzanne Keen’s recent Empathy and the Novel takes as a given that “character identification often invites empathy, even when the fictional character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways,” even as Keen notes that complex identification is not required for empathy to arise in a reader.52 Rachel Ablow develops her arguments on sympathy and the Victorian marriage plot from a similar starting point. While making the distinction between the action- or pity-inducing sympathy she notes in the work of Janice Carlisle and Martha Nussbaum and the fellow-feeling version of sympathy that she describes, Ablow allows that identification is fundamental to both drives and considers sympathy, “as a mode of relating to others and of defining a self,” in contrast to those others.53 In descriptions of both sympathy and empathy, emblematic as they are of the broader critical literature, affective extension or fellow
feeling emerges from identification. Despite their prevalence in critical literature, these descriptions do not account for the representations in Victorian literature and painting that depend on alterity. And if these versions of sympathy and empathy guide our engagement with realism, since they both depend on the enmeshing of the other into one’s self-conception, aren’t we bound to ignore the meticulous representations of alterity on display in nineteenth-century art and literature?

For it is in the depiction of distinctiveness, the sovereign individual, the different, that realism excels. In her often-quoted description of the ethical work that novels make possible, George Eliot emphasizes difference as being a necessary prerequisite of the enlargement of affective extension:

If art does not enlarge men’s sympathies, it does nothing morally. I have had heart-cutting experiences that opinions are a poor cement between human souls; and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is, that those who read them should be better able to imagine and feel the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being suffering, erring human beings.\(^5^4\)

At the same time that she’s encouraging readers to recognize the traits they share with others—that we are all “suffering, erring human beings”—she also emphasizes that shared experience does not and should not occlude difference. It is easy, when glossing the quotation, to focus on the italicized words “imagine” and “feel.” I suggest that we shift our focus to other terms of her statement: Eliot notes that people should be “better able to imagine and feel” the other’s emotions, and that improvement in ability to imagine and feel is predicated, at least in Eliot’s fiction, on first recognizing that you do not know the other’s emotions.

To be sure, identification is important for the expansion of men’s sympathies—what some see as enforced didacticism (in Middlemarch, one critic writes, “the moralistic tone of the narratorial voice” scorns and judges the characters within\(^5^5\)), others regard as nuanced depictions of characters that offer a way for the reader to be exposed to the intimate particularities of another individual, potentially resulting in the self-forgetfulness that leads to sympathy. Felicia Bonaparte makes such a claim about Eliot’s works, suggesting they “enlist that completely egotistical bias the reader feels on his own behalf in the forging of sympathy that undermines self egotism.” The reader, according to this model, “is surprised into perceiving about others” what he already perceives about himself.\(^5^6\)
Yet readerly self-forgetfulness or intimate connection with a character does not, cannot explain realist texts and images or—as noted above—the reactions they drew from contemporaries. For these works embrace and depict the limitations of what is knowable. Limits of representation, whether pictorial or textual, collide in the impossibility of representing the interiority of the human other. In Middlemarch, Eliot famously describes this choice as a fundamentally practical gesture: “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life,” she writes, “it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.”57 In Le Père Goriot, that foundational realist text and the same one in which Balzac wrote “All is true,” he qualifies the claim by noting that Paris is so vast, a “veritable ocean,” that no matter how extensive or comprehensive an attempt to describe it might be, “there will always be a virgin place, an unknown cavern, flowers, pearls, monsters, unknown, wonderful things, forgotten by literary divers.”58 Just as Paris cannot be fully described, so too the other remains perpetually and always irreducible on the page or canvas. In Le Père Goriot, longtime residents of the Maison Vauquer can live and eat next to each other for years without having any idea of their neighbors’ true emotions, pasts, or even their names.

So the realist must aspire to comprehensiveness while acknowledging that there are real limits to what is knowable, and thus what is representable. Another human individual is the ultimate unknowable. Applying Anderson and Levine’s aspirational model of knowledge to affective relationships shows that the attempt-toward is not nullified by the recognition or depiction of ultimate impossibility. In the case of interpersonal relationships, those limits may in fact be seen as constructive: ethics can offer a “configuration of meaning that strikes us as profoundly alien to our wants”; realist characters can capture “an individuality whose very strangeness” inhibits identification.59 Such perspectives point to a way of understanding the relationships depicted in realist texts and images through analysis of depictions of the alterity of the unknowable other. And because the other is necessarily central in these depictions, and because I wish to emphasize the inassimilability of that other, I will rely on the term “empathy” to describe the affective relationship between the self and that unknowable other.
Aspirational models of criticism credit a drive toward narratorial (and pictorial) detachment as one of realism’s primary achievements. The connection between detachment and the relationships depicted in realist works—relationships predicated on appreciable difference—are those that confound many readers, as they stymie an easy identification. These texts and images tell us that the alterity of the other cannot be overcome, yet their engagement with empathy is undeniable. The argument that an interpersonal ethics can be built on recognition of radical alterity is elucidated with the twentieth-century phenomenological models of Emmanuel Levinas. As I note in the preface, embracing that reading is difficult, in part because we are so conditioned to view alterity as a source of alienation, inhibiting productive interpersonal relationships, and as a block that must be overcome. Levinas’s work helps to explain, outside of the frameworks articulated by Smith and Hume, the tendency of realist works to depict failures of communion that arise from one’s inability to recognize sovereignty of the individual or inability to escape solipsism. He insists that “the other is alterity,” yet does not place the self and other in a dialectic, suggesting instead that the other remains always unknowable and that out of the unknowability arises ethics and, potentially, empathy. In his account, only another human is radically other and cannot be folded into one’s self-conception or made into an object of the self. And in his account, the encounter with that radical alterity of the other human opens up the space for ethical behavior. The chapters that follow are not, it must be noted, simply “Levinasian” readings of the works of Dickens, Eliot, Hardy, and Whistler. While Levinas provides a vocabulary to explain the interpersonal dynamics seen in these works, the texts and paintings tell us what Levinas cannot: that the process of recognizing alterity is hard and must be learned, and that the process of learning is akin to acquiring literacy (textual, visual, and otherwise).

Difficulty aside, Levinas does argue that literature can depict the state of the relationship between an individual and the other. Consider his reading of Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu, a story that, he
argues, develops from an “insatiable curiosity about the alterity of the Other that is both empty and inexhaustible.” Proust’s development of despair of solitude, Levinas argues, is “an inexhaustible source of hope”:

This is a paradox in a civilization which, in spite of the progress made since the Eleatic philosophy still sees unity as the very apotheosis of being. But Proust’s most profound lesson, if poetry can contain lessons, consists in situating reality in a relation with something which for ever remains other, with the Other as absence and mystery, in rediscovering this relation in the very intimacy of the “I,” and in inaugurating a dialectic that breaks definitely with Parmenides.

The other must be human because otherwise it could be appropriated by the self (as with objects, commodities, labor, etc.) and it cannot be known by the self—it is the limit case of knowability. If the other were knowable, or understood to be knowable, he or she would merge with the self. As James Mensch frames it, “In reaching the goal, I would not obtain knowledge of the other, but rather self-knowledge. Thus, the other’s mental life or consciousness is essentially hidden from me. It manifests an alterity that cannot be overcome.” Via this reading, the limit of the epistemological urge intersects with the ideal of detachment: the only true knowledge of the other arises from the recognition that knowledge of the other is an impossibility. Levinas’s construction of the unassailable alterity of the other renders impossible the kind of identification on which empathy is built in readings such as Keen’s and Bonaparte’s. Levinas revives the alterity that Adam Smith describes as being fundamental to human interaction, but where Smith encourages imaginative projection as the (only possible) means to overcome that alterity, Levinas retains the mystery of the other.

The inescapable alterity of the other person is a limit on which ethical action depends. In order to recognize alterity, one must not assume that the other is just like the self, or that oneself is just like the other, but must instead recognize that the gulf between the two is immense, inescapable. That is, before one can empathize, one must apperceive difference. Levinas’s descriptions of intersubjectivity are helpful in reconciling the depictions of humans-in-relation presented in artworks with the particular formal and content markers of nineteenth-century realism. Nearly all of the works studied here foreground observation, models of seeing and interpreting, and the variations of visuality include reading and writing.
Before proceeding, I must stop to clarify a point often overlooked when invoking Levinas’s philosophy for literary analysis. Levinas’s description of alterity and its concomitant ethical demand is a unique aspect of human interpersonal experience. Levinasian phenomenology precludes a text functioning as other; anything that can be commodified and appropriated to the self’s needs, such as labor or material objects, expressly cannot function as the radically other. The “lesson” Levinas attributes to Proust’s novel was contained within it and among its characters and did not result from a reader’s relation to the text. Novels, paintings, and other artworks exist firmly within the arena of the material: a book cannot be an other, nor can a painting. And the critical response to Levinas’s insistence that the artwork cannot function as other shows how stubborn we readers are in clinging to the belief that viewing the text or painting as other is the proper way to engage with art. That stubbornness is evident in the work of literary scholars who, even when explicitly employing Levinas’s philosophy as a foundation for criticism, argue that the text can function as the other and therefore as the basis for ethics. David Haney, for example, notes that Levinas does not allow for the relationship between individuals to occur between an individual and a work of art. Nevertheless, Haney advocates this very relationship between reader and text: “one’s relation to art can partake of Levinas’s own account of the ethical relation to the other.” To support this claim, Haney must grant the literary text the overwhelming power of the radically other, and he does: “[the literary text] overflows conceptual structures in a way that gives the conversation the asymmetry one finds in the Levinasian encounter, and thus it is at least structurally ethical.” Adam Newton, writing in Narrative Ethics, also frames his textual analysis on the idea that “certain kinds of textuality parallel [Levinas’s] description of ethical encounter in several obvious ways.” Newton suggests that the relationships between the “narrator and listener, author and character, or reader and text” often “precede decision and understanding”; fiction thus “translates the interactive problematic of ethics into literary forms.”

I diverge strongly from such approaches, retaining instead the distinct difference between the object (the work of art) and the human other and engaging with the ways that prose fiction and paintings are not like persons. I don’t mean to deny that readers or viewers engage with texts or images as if they did have “lives of their own,” to use W. J. T. Mitchell’s phrase. And Haney is not unique in demonstrating the propensity to regard an artwork as an other. Social formalism, particularly as defined by Dorothy Hale, depends on a conception of the novel as a
unique form that allows readers to access alterity. The novel functions as a way to mitigate the “radical relativism” of pure subjectivity because it can “instantiate both the identity of its author and the identity of the subject the author seeks to represent.” By reading a novel, readers can “come to know sympathetically persons who are substantially different from themselves” because the novel functions as that other, “instantiating” both author and subjects. When Hale wonders how much weight to grant “the supposition that the novel as a genre is specially able to represent alterity,” it is with the hope of clarifying the longstanding theoretical assumptions that define social formalism. Yet neither she nor Haney recognizes that the very way a novel or a painting can best describe radical alterity is by demonstrating that the formal qualities of art inhibit alterity on all levels. Their readings demonstrate the power of the desire to know the other and to overcome the alterity of the other, and they therefore demonstrate the difficulty that the realist text and image is up against.

My turn to Levinas should not be construed as an unqualified endorsement of his phenomenology, nor can his phenomenology explain the full impact of the realist work (as I discuss below, the artwork tells us something about the recognition of alterity that Levinas’s philosophy cannot). Simply put, Levinas’s work presents a way to reconcile two seemingly opposing currents in realist works: the insistence on representing the limits of knowledge and the limitation of knowledge embodied in the individual other, and the working toward (the aspiration to) that knowledge. The ultimate end of that aspiration does exist, in a sense, but true knowledge—the hard-learned lesson—is precisely the truism that one cannot know the other. These works teach us, as it were, not how to overcome the alienation of the radical alterity of the other, but rather that we cannot overcome that alterity. It is a lesson, it seems, that we resist as readers and indeed as critics, and if the formulation seems reductive, I can only insist that what may be so simply stated is not nearly—to judge from our reading and critical practices—easily learned. Levinas’s staunch devotion to the belief that the artwork cannot function as other articulates a dynamic that these Victorian artists were constructing.

To the degree that these works depict unknowable human characters, the works themselves are emphatically knowable. Further, the very form of these works insists that the artwork is not the other. For while analysis of the text might expand the power of a narrative beyond the structures of the novel, each iteration of a novel remains permanently static. It can be held and sold. The same is true for a painting. These
finite objects may offer the means to access structures or ideas beyond their boundaries, but they must not be regarded as an other. This is not to say that realist works cannot do the work so often ascribed to them—increasing other-awareness or expanding the extension of sympathy—but rather that their insistence on the unknowability of the other is elemental to that work. Within the novels, characters’ stories can be learned and manipulated, comprehended and misunderstood, adopted or rejected. While characters may be unknown to other characters within the diegesis of text or image, that relationship is not analogous to the relationship between the reader or viewer and the artwork. The story of a character is not the same as the character herself, just as a painting of a subject is not the same as the subject herself. Though novels might represent the wages of alterity between the actors within its covers, or paintings might depict alienation, those are only representations of an encounter with alterity, not the encounter itself. The character within a book may be an other only to other characters within that book, never to the reader. To the reader, those characters are “beings that are shut up, prisoners.”

In my analysis of the novels and paintings, this distinction between a human and his/her story is critical, as the works that I examine attest repeatedly that knowledge of another’s story does not ensure appreciation of his or her alterity. The failure to make that distinction leads to interpersonal difficulties. According to Levinas’s descriptions of interpersonal ethics, the asymmetrical relationship between self and other need not be learned; it simply is. Human existence is already obligated, and that obligation “places the center of gravitation of a being outside of that being.” And here is where the Victorian works demonstrate the limitation of Levinas’s formulation of interpersonal ethics: as repeatedly demonstrated by the subjects of realist works, apprehending the other (as described in Levinas’s phenomenology) seems more often not to precede interaction with others. If it is a truth, it nevertheless requires discovery. This process of developing the discernment—and indeed it is a process, born of trial and error, mistakes and missteps—bears much in common with the process of learning.

In light of that process, and in light of the frequency with which these works utilize learning to read as a parallel model for the movement into understanding the other’s alterity, I turn to the ideas of “learning” and “literacy” as a way to describe the process of becoming aware of the limits of the self and the resulting awareness. These terms capture the sense of moving-toward that is modeled in the aspirational gestures of the realist works this book considers. The paintings and novels that
describe or represent the limits of knowledge through their devotion to accuracy and comprehensiveness parallel the efforts of their viewers or readers, moving into a knowledge whose ultimate goal is the realization of the limits of that knowledge.

I OPENED this introduction with the words of Miss Betsey Trotwood and Turner. Trotwood insisted to her nephew that he did not know what or whom he was seeing, and Turner encouraged his students to adjust their focus so they might learn from what they see. These two moments serve as touchstones for the study that follows: first recognize the limits of your vision, and then learn and work to adjust and improve that vision. The ethical relationship with the other is predicated on the recognition of alterity, though one’s focus might preclude that vision, in which case refocusing must take place. One must learn a new means of seeing or understanding. Similarly, shifting focus onto the limits of representation, empathy, and alterity in the novels and paintings that are the focus of this study, texts that have been discussed and analyzed by so many, reveals new ways of understanding them as well.

Given Dickens’s extraordinary command of his characters, his remark early in *A Tale of Two Cities* that “every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other” may seem to be unwarranted. I argue in chapter 1 that Dickens’s work demonstrates this truism with a kind of compulsion that belies his preoccupation with the idea, if not its veracity. That every other is a profound secret is not cause for misery, nor does it preclude effective relationships. *A Tale of Two Cities* peels back the layers of awareness within a family unit, showing that those closest to us may be most impenetrable. Dr. Manette’s case further reminds readers that one may be a stranger even to himself, while Sydney Carton serves as an example of a most unknowable man who demonstrates the greatest acts of empathy in the novel. *Great Expectations* adds textual literacy as a paradigm for understanding other people. Pip and Joe both learn to read in the course of the novel, but their respective educational journeys serve as contrasts. *Bleak House* wraps identities and relationships in volumes of paper. Documents in Jarndyce versus Jarndyce serve as a wedge to separate people, clouding judgment; Mrs. Jellyby’s obsessive letter writing for Africa shows that she has no empathic response to her own family (precisely because they are her own, and not foreign); recognition of handwriting unlocks Lady Dedlock’s long-held secrets; and Sir Leicester’s three-word message on a slate reveals a man
unknown to those who loved him best. Chapter 1 details Charles Dickens’s construction of textual literacy as an ability that must be tempered with other versions of literacy: personal, interpersonal, and emotional.

If Dickens’s works describe the unknowability of the other, in George Eliot’s novels, characters proceed from that opacity toward a position of interdependence or even of recognition, with varying levels of success. The second chapter considers empathy in terms of difference, which allows for a radical reconsideration of some of Eliot’s heroines. Hetty Sorrel of *Adam Bede*—consistently labeled a narcissist in opposition to Dinah Morris’s altruistic and saintly goodness—is a prime example. Through her late recognition of her inability to “feel anything like” Dinah, Hetty is in fact far more appreciative of the difference of the individual experience than even Dinah Morris. Like Dinah, Dorothea Brooke of *Middlemarch* treads a delicate line between self-abnegation and masochism, so thoroughly imagining herself into others that she fails to define herself as separate. In fact, both failed marriages in *Middlemarch* are the result of one partner’s (Lydgate, Dorothea) failure to realize the other (Rosy, Casaubon) as having desires and priorities that are distinct from his or her own. In accordance with her heroines’ ambivalent empathy, Eliot insists throughout her oeuvre that empathic extension is not merely ideal but essential to human community, and this chapter reconciles that empathy with Eliot’s depictions of both narcissism and altruism.

The third chapter turns to Thomas Hardy’s works, which amplify the theme that was only suggested in Dickens’s and Eliot’s works: that the split between the knowable text and the unknowable person exists not only for the reader of the novel but also within the novel itself. That is, one’s identity cannot be conflated with one’s story. While personal narratives can be learned, molded, told, and retold, the individual other is and must always be essentially out of reach. Tess Durbeyfield, for example, is separate from the story of her past: the facts of her story may be known, but she cannot be reduced to that narrative alone. Michael Henchard, the Mayor of Casterbridge, cannot distinguish himself from his history once it becomes known, and he cannot trust others to make the distinction; this inability is his tragedy. An explicit consideration of Levinas is crucial to this reading, as his constructions illustrate that we cannot as readers regard the text as embodied or materialized humanity. Because of this, we cannot relate to the text in terms of its difference; there is no face-to-face with a novel, or—as to be seen in the fourth chapter—with an image.

In the fourth chapter, I move from texts to the image plane to focus on the distinction between the object/surface and the subject depicted. The
narrative structure common to fiction helps to obfuscate the obstinate alterity of the human other; Victorian narratives insist on teleology, suggest movement toward resolution. Painting, however, does not necessarily suggest movement at all, and Whistler’s canvases in particular insist on capturing and perpetuating the tension between subjects. Through aversion and obfuscation in landscape (a trope that connects Whistler’s landscapes to Turner’s landscapes) and through the use of profile in portraiture, James McNeill Whistler paints images that force viewers to consider the lack of mutuality of their gaze. These methods were used by many realist artists, including Courbet and Manet in France, to create a similar dynamic in their works and for their audience. While not reducing realism to pure convention, these pictorial strategies allow the painter to refuse the viewer access without undermining verisimilitude. Through this refusal, Whistler accomplishes a feat parallel to that of the realist authors: he depicts images of people and places that are profoundly moving, yet profoundly unreachable, all the while emphasizing through form the necessity of connection.

As part of their effort to depict life and its processes accurately, realist authors and painters recognize the limitations of their depictions. The author cannot make her characters something other than they are; the painter cannot represent every mystery hidden in his subjects. Rather than being a flaw in the realist doctrine, these limits attest to the realities of life in community with others. That there are others outside of oneself, and that those others exist as the center of their own individual universe, are conclusions earned through experience. Novels and paintings may be utterly knowable, but those they depict—as shown in the works I examine—cannot be completely understood by others within the works. Through their depictions of the appreciation of difference, nineteenth-century British realist works demonstrate that empathic relationships are the result of an awareness of alterity, of the limitations of one’s subjectivity and the other’s lived experience that rests wholly outside, and not simply the result of identification or similarity. Because empathy may be seated in difference, these works show that it is possible for one to be empathic toward another without being altruistic. This is not a hopeless state, for as the texts examined in Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference repeatedly show, inscribed in the very movement toward an appreciation of alterity are the seeds of mutuality.
I end this study with moments from two very different novels, one an exemplary Romantic text, Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), and the other an exemplary realist text, George Eliot’s *Middle-march* (1871–72). The contrast between these works throws into relief a distinction threatened by the reductive definitions that have come to plague realism and, indeed, Romanticism, definitions that set the objectivity and comprehensiveness of realism in opposition to the emotional subjectivity of Romanticism. In the preface to *Werther*, Goethe prepares his readers for the story that is to follow. He adopts the tone of a mere editor who has collected Werther’s letters; who cares deeply about the novel’s subject; and who expects readers to share a uniform, predictable, emotional response to the novel:

> I have carefully collected whatever I have been able to learn of the story of poor Werther, and here present it to you, knowing that you will thank me for it. To his spirit and character you cannot refuse your admiration and love: to his fate you will not deny your tears.

> And thou, good soul, who sufferest the same distress as he endured once, draw comfort from his sorrows; and let this little book be thy friend, if, owing to fortune or through thine own fault, thou canst not find a dearer companion.¹

Goethe enfolds the reader into the story by declaring the value of Werther’s “spirit and character” and positioning the reader as admirer and friend. In addition to framing the reader’s relationship to Werther, the preface also frames the reader’s relationship to the novel. “The little
book” itself can function as a friend to the reader, in moments when the reader is in need.

The novel’s structure works hard to enact the relationships detailed in this preface. With its one-sided epistolary form, The Sorrows of Young Werther situates its reader as the recipient of Werther’s letters, and Werther addresses the reader as “dear friend” in the first lines of the first letter. Further, Werther’s narrative focuses almost exclusively on his interactions with others; he falls in love, he endears himself to the locals, he offends his employer, he goes mad when his love rejects him. When he believes he has lost the relationships that were most important to him, and feeling himself quite alone, Werther commits suicide. The Sorrows of Young Werther ends with his lonely burial, and the novel’s last, stark line reads “No clergyman attended.”

One hundred years later, George Eliot opens Middlemarch with a prelude in which she describes her heroine Dorothea Brooke in terms of what she is not: no Saint Theresa, defined by indefiniteness, “foundress of nothing.” Not only is there no “coherent social faith and order” in which women such as Dorothea could locate an outlet for their yearnings and ambitions, there is no community of friends to which they belong: “a cygnet is reared uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond, and never finds the living stream in fellowship with its own oary-footed kind.” The central figure is introduced not as a heroine to be admired or loved, but rather as an odd creature, out of place in her own time, and lost among a sea of others who bear no resemblance to her.

Middlemarch ends, as it begins, considering Dorothea’s relation to the world and those around her:

Her finely touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs. (838)

In Eliot’s construction, the “hidden life” and “unvisited tomb” are not signs of rejection, alienation, or abandonment. Rather, they are a necessary consequence of the realities of a social order that is not ideally suited to the temperament and desire of every individual. And still, in spite of or perhaps because of the mysteries that define human existence,
the effect of an individual on those around her is incalculable, diffuse. Dorothea might not be a celebrated martyr, but the “growing good of the world” depends on the unknown acts of Dorothea and those like her.

For Goethe’s novel presumes a universal response to its content, and it affects so thorough a portrait of an individual that merely reading his letters can serve as the basis of friendship. Eliot’s novel, on the other hand, asserts from beginning to end the strangeness of Dorothea, a woman who does not even know herself fully. And so in a narrative of infinitely greater complexity and length than *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Eliot frames *Middlemarch* by reminding readers not what they know or what they will know, but rather what they do not know and cannot know. This is the work of realism: to describe alterity through the recognition, representation, and reification of the limits of the self. The unknowable other serves to check the expansive knowledge of the external world that is the other central concern of the realist enterprise.

Indeed, the vast historical and stylistic differences between the works (and there are many) do not overwhelm the shift in conception of the relationship between the individual and the other, or between the book and the reader, evident in these novels. Goethe defines the relationship between reader and text as one of identification and admiration. We will admire and love Werther; we will feel his pain. The text that tells his story will be our companion in loneliness, itself a friend. And though no clergyman attends Werther’s funeral, and though his suicide is intended to pain those who were his friends by completing a long cycle of attraction and repulsion, we readers are there at his burial, faithful to the end of the narrative. *Werther* thus demonstrates—perhaps unintentionally—the precarious separation between identification and empathy. If we feel all of Werther’s feelings with him, if we experience his joy and his sorrow, how can we distinguish our joy or pain from his? When are we being empathic toward the radical other, and when are we simply being aware of our own feelings?

Eliot uses a prelude and finale to structure her insistence not on identification but rather on mystery, diffuseness, and the hidden. Dorothea’s is a story of not fitting in; her assumptions even about herself are constantly assailed. If Dorothea can’t know herself, could the book claim to know her? Could its readers? Eliot escapes from this potential bind by foregrounding the lack of knowledge and uncertainty of situation that defines Dorothea’s life. Eliot places that uncertainty at the center of the novel, and what results is a generous vision of the unknown and unremarkable. The beauty of the hidden life and unvisited tomb is precisely that we may never know exactly the greatness of the impact of
those lives. And in that recognition of a true alterity exists the space for empathic extension.

The goal of this study was to establish the ways that alterity arises in realist texts and images, and to consider how depictions of unique individuals test the limits of representation. I have further attempted to work through the tension that underpins the realist project: how empathic extension can occur in light of those limitations. If we recognize that the radical alterity of the other is a feature of lived experience, it becomes clear that realists’ strategies for representing the unknowability of the other do not undermine their project but rather enhance it. By emphasizing the impossibility of knowing a character purely by knowing her story, and the impossibility of regarding the novel or the painting as an other, realists break away from the literary and pictorial traditions that preceded their own. This condition of not knowing the other does not damn the individual to a life of solitude or misery, a fact that distinguishes realism from other movements that follow. Perhaps it took Levinas to articulate a vocabulary that could account for both the ethical imperative that drives the realist project and the insistence on the limitations of representation that define its aesthetics. His descriptions of intersubjectivity construct the relationship between the self and the other as one of insurmountable difference, yet he asserts that the potential for an ethical engagement with the other exists in and only in the recognition of that difference: the lesson of realism that we might come to know is that we can never fully come to know the human other. Realist works temper the starkness of radical and insurmountable alterity with the awareness that such recognition requires work, which is itself edifying. Learning to read realist novels and paintings depends on the realization that we might never know the other fully, but that as a consequence of that inherent mystery, “things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been.”
NOTES TO PREFACE

3. Ibid., 63.

INTRODUCTION

7. See Peter Brooks’s Realist Visions for a thorough analysis of these intersections (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).
11. Later, surrealists would playfully reject this boundary: Magritte’s La trahison des images (1929) is an excellent example, with its “ceci n’est pas une pipe” written beneath the image of a pipe.
13. Think of George Eliot’s anticipating readerly reaction in the seventeenth chapter of Adam Bede.
17. Michael Boyd, The Reflexive Novel (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1983), 18. Boyd argues that the “reflexive” novels of Joyce, Woolf, Nabokov, and others are “anti-realist.” He thus cannot allow that the realist writer was similarly reflexive, and that the reflection was in fact constitutive of realism itself.
22. Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (London: Penguin, 1985), 34. Later in the preface, Dickens concludes about his novel that “It is true”; written in all caps, it echoes Balzac’s claim in Le Père Goriot that “All is true.”
24. A few years after Zola’s works were first translated into English and published, a “National Vigilance Association” was formed to quell the spread of “pernicious literature,” and Zola’s publisher, Henry Vizetelly, was tried for selling obscenity. Ernest Vizetelly, Émile Zola, Novelist and Reformer (London: J. Lane, 1904), 242–99.
25. England was not alone in its outrage at Zola’s novels: many in his own country (Brunetiere included) concurred with British assessments, and German critics (for example) responded in kind: Naturalism was called “pig literature [Ferkel-literatur],” in the German press, and Zola’s novels in particular ignited the following sentiments: “it is impossible to read a single page of [L’Assommoir] aloud before respectable people”; “one does not know how to take up this work critically without dirtying his fingers”; “the author wallows, and the reader with
him, in the vilest muck”; and “La Joie de vivre is an olla-porrida of blood, mucus, and stomach secretions.” Such reactions, from wherever they arose, did little to discourage the public from reading the novels, as Zola’s sales naturally increased as a consequence of the court’s attention. Winthrop Hegeman Root, *German Criticism of Zola, 1875–1893* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 7.

26. See also Lawrence Schehr in *Figures of Alterity: French Realism and Its Others*: “Since the text is that which is woven and unwoven [. . .], realism would be that which most clearly shows the incompatibility of the real (or even the Real, in the Lacanian sense) with the literary. Narrative can inscribe the absence of the real, so that anything that rewrites this act of inscription is rewriting the primary gestures of literature” (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.


29. Ibid., 6.

30. Ibid., 6 (author’s italics). Cf. Levine: “Perhaps in part because of this kind of danger, Evelyn Keller has sought to preserve an idea of objectivity as ‘the pursuit of a maximally authentic, and hence maximally reliable, understanding of the world around oneself.’” “Looking for the Real,” 11.


33. Ibid., 35.

34. Eliot’s resistance to wholesale detachment brings into focus perhaps the most investigated alterity of Victorian fiction: the colonized other, whose very difference amplifies or defines the Britishness of the novelist or a novel’s characters. Obviously, studies on Victorian engagement with colonization are myriad. If, as Regenia Gagnier writes, “the masked Other” functions “as the self, building itself through opposition to Others and undoing itself in the isolation of its own hard-bounded ego,” then the relationship between the British and the colonized exists outside of the radical alterity required of interpersonal relationships. “Review of *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* by Patrick Brantlinger,” *Modern Philology* 87, no. 3 (February 1990): 316. Those relationships to the physically distant stranger are based not on a real apprehension of distinctive and individual alterity but on a wholesale dialectic that inhibits an ethical relationship. Focusing on the Realists’ relationship with the colonized in relation to Eliot’s nuanced formulations of representation allows Nancy Henry, for example, to explore “a disjunction between the expressed politics of a realist aesthetic that did not permit Eliot to represent what she had not seen, and life in a society that encouraged practical decisions based on abstractions—the colonies.” *George Eliot and the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9. While not dismissing this important work, I must note that my interest is in another kind of relationship depicted in these works—not with those whom characters assume are the wholesale other, but with those whom characters do not accord alterity.


38. Ibid., 271.

39. “As I conceive it, this moral perfectionism is a particular narrative form (rather than a concept, theory, or disposition) capable of great variation and extension. At its heart is the complex proposition that we turn from our ordinary lives, realize an ideal self, and perfect what is distinctly human in us—and that we do so in response to exemplary others. How exactly do we become better? Certainly we often imagine ourselves improving through following rules, commandments, laws, guidelines. Without denying this, moral perfectionism stresses another means of improvement, one in which individual transfiguration comes not through obedience to such codes but through openness to example—through responsive, unpredictable engagements with other people.” Andrew Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 4, 25.

40. Ibid., 272.

41. I do not claim to offer a comprehensive overview of notions of sympathy and empathy as understood from the eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries, as others have done that work far more effectively than I can here. See David Marshall’s *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), Rachel Ablow’s *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), and Suzanne Keen’s *Empathy and the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), for clear overviews of the tradition.


43. Ibid., 15.

44. David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*, 1. Ethical literary criticism arises from the knowledge that readers do attempt to enter into the sentiments of characters within fiction. Wayne Booth’s description of the ethics of fiction is even less invasive, as one need not “enter into” a character’s sentiments but can learn from a character’s actions, the text itself serving as a “relatively cost-free offer of trial runs.” Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 485. As Jil Larson notes, the recuperation of ethical criticism begun by Booth and Martha Nussbaum sought to avoid the essentializing tendency of reductive moralizing without completely excluding ethics from literary analysis. Larson follows in their path, and her work along with the work of others reinvigorating ethical criticism paved the way for studies such as this one. *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).


47. Ibid., 4.


50. Ibid., 168.

51. Ibid., 169.


63. Ibid., 164–65.


65. “[. . . ] labor in its possessive grasp suspends the independence of the element: its being. The thing evinces this hold or this comprehension—this ontology. Possession neutralizes this being: as property the thing is an existent that has lost its being. [. . . ] Possession masters, suspends, postpones the unforeseeable future of the element—its independence, its being [. . . ] Labor in its primary intention is this acquisition, this movement toward oneself; it is not a transcendence.” Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 158–59.


67. “the structure of the reader’s interpretative relationship to a literary text has affinities with a person’s ethical relationship to others.” Ibid., 38.

68. Ibid., 40.

69. Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univer-
Newton goes on to make the parallel between the story and the person explicit: “Stories, like persons, originate alogically. As ethical performance, in Levinas’ sense, they are concussive; they shock and linger as ‘traumatisms of astonishment.’” Ibid., 13.


CHAPTER ONE


3. Bodenheimer argues that these moments are typical of Dickens’s anxiety to convince the reader who might not otherwise believe him, a hyperexertion of truth, but one that is overdetermined by his desire.

4. Forster, 23, 24, 27.


6. These failures are nevertheless constructive and instructive. John Fenstermaker addresses the often overlooked role of the failure of language in Bleak House: “The central symptom of much of the sickness Dickens examines is the failure of words, written and spoken, to express truth and to communicate genuine human fellow-feeling. Too often language is used, as the narrator says, ‘under false pretences of all sorts’ to effect ‘trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation [and] botheration,’ creating ‘influences that can never come to good.’” “Language Abuse in Bleak House: The First Monthly Installment,” in Victorian Literature and Society, ed. James Kincaid (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1984), 241.


9. Barbara Lecker, “The Split Characters of Charles Dickens,” Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900 19, no. 4 (Autumn 1979): 698. Later, Lecker argues, Dickens will unite the heart and head in single characters, such as the “happily schizoid” Wemmick in Great Expectations. Ibid., 699.

10. Some examples: “don’t heed me any more than if I was a speaking machine” (25); “I am a mere machine” (25); and, as repeated several times, “I am a man of business” (25, 83, 101, 151, 210, 212). Its fullest iteration is uttered at the peak of the
Parisian drama, when Lorry is in danger of losing the only family he has known: “I have been a man of business, ever since I have been a man. Indeed, I may say that I was a man of business when a boy” (322).

11. A critique that applies regardless of the class of the perpetrator. Foulon’s dismissive “let them eat grass” is matched by the brutality of the mob’s attack and decapitation of Foulon.


14. The resonance between this statement and Eliot’s description of learning to read is impressive; see my discussion in chapter 2.

15. Monique Morgan contrasts this scene of misinterpretation with Pip’s last interaction with Magwitch, at the convict’s death. There, she argues, physical intimacy trumps written declarations, and Pip is able to understand Magwitch through just a squeeze of his hand. “Conviction in Writing; Crime, Confession, and the Written Word in *Great Expectations,*” *Dickens Study Annual* 33 (2003): 87–108.


18. See, for example, Q. D. Leavis’s “How We Must Read *Great Expectations,*” in *Dickens the Novelist* (London: Pantheon, 1970).


20. For example, handwriting serves to identify Dedlock’s former lover and Esther’s father. Here the issue is being able to discern the familiar shapes that identify an individual; the words written are, for this enterprise, meaningless. Much as Pip attempted to make out his parents in the shapes of the letters on their tombstone, character and personhood can be interpreted from the literalization of the writing.


22. Graham Hough, “Language and Reality in *Bleak House,*” in *Realism in European Literature,* ed. Nicholas Boyle and Martin Swales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 59. Hough also echoes the formulations of Cowles and Humphreys cited above, noting that Dickens’s appeal in Esther’s narration is “not to experience, the conventional wisdom, or the social order; it is to the wisdom of the heart.” Ibid., 65.

23. The duality of the novel’s narration supports these distinctions, alternating as it does between Esther’s retrospective rendering of the tale and unnamed omniscient narrative voice. The narrative oscillations help to render distinctive language patterns in a uniquely Realist way. Realism, as Graham Hough writes
with particular attention to *Bleak House*, “speaks in the language of fallible human beings who have lived too close to the events they describe for the completeness of an inventory or the precision of a diagram.” Ibid., 51.

24. Harold Skimpole is another, and his aesthetic embrace of suffering and concomitant lack of action form a complement to Mrs. Jellyby. Connecting representations of such characters with altruistic action is a cornerstone of Dickens’s writing and the criticism of his works. “A Christmas Carol” is perhaps his best-known work devoted (ostensibly) solely to the promotion of altruistic action in his readers by depicting characters whose primary fault is a lack of empathic action. This dynamic is undeniable in Dickens’s work, but it is not my focus. Cf. Mary-Catherine Harrison’s “The Paradox of Fiction and the Ethics of Empathy: Reconceiving Dickens’s Realism,” *Narrative* 16, no. 3 (October 2008): 256–78.


26. Her problem, then, is not one of blindness, but of focus.


30. “Among the many issues *Bleak House* explores is that of eloquence, of one person’s ability by means of language to persuade another to act in the world of gesture, a world which may contain, but does not necessarily depend on, language.” Sandra Young, “Uneasy Relations: Possibilities for Eloquence in *Bleak House,*” *Dickens Studies Annual* 9 (1981): 67.


32. Ibid., 44.


34. Ibid., 99–100.


9. “... her mind had glanced over the possibility, which she would have preferred, of finding that her home would be in a parish which had a larger share of the world’s misery, so that she might have had more active duties in it.” Ibid., 78. Perhaps equally problematic is the fact that she accepts the curate’s description as accurate.


12. Ibid., 19.

13. Critical assessments have begun to unseat Eliot’s heroines from these binaries. Nina Auerbach’s analysis of Hetty as a “fallen woman” hinted that Hetty and Dinah have more in common than is evident at first glance. “The Rise of the Fallen Woman,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, no. 1 (January 1980): 29–53. Marina van Zuylan’s later *Monomania* breaks new ground by arguing that Dorothea, a pious heroine like many others in Eliot’s fiction, is the monomaniac of interest in *Middlemarch* (not Casaubon with his *Key to All Mythologies*), as her commitment to the purely altruistic bettering of others’ lives compels her disavowal of her own desire, and indeed her own physicality. Van Zuylan’s argument thus removes Dorothea from the seat of piety and in turn considers her as more fully human by noting the limitations of her self-understanding. *Monomania* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). Caroline Levine similarly complicates our understanding of Dinah through her analysis of visual alterity in *Adam Bede*; she views Dinah and Hetty as contrasting examples used by Eliot to communicate a message of ethical viewing, concluding that Eliot endorses a normative heterosexuality through the novel’s repudiation of Hetty’s actions. *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003). I propose a further reconsideration of Dinah and Hetty by exploring not their differences (well-established both within the novel and in its criticism) but rather the similarities of their parallel journeys though the text by focusing not only on the way women see others or see themselves but also on the way they control others’ readings of their bodies. Eliot provides a useful paradigm for this consideration through the act of reading as defined in “Book Second” and throughout *Adam Bede*: learning to read offers a means of achieving humanity for the characters within the novel. See also Jennifer Uglow’s *George Eliot* (London: Virago, 1987) and Alan Bellringer’s *George Eliot* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1993). More current forays into Hetty’s plight include Neil Hertz’s *George Eliot’s Pulse* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press: 2003), Bernard Paris’s *Rereading George Eliot: Changing Responses to Her Experiments in Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), and


16. In chapter 3, I discuss a related dynamic in Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles,* where Tess’s similar complicity highlights the distinction between the individual and the narrative of her life.

17. This inability is mutual, as demonstrated by the marked use of animal or nonhuman metaphors to describe Hetty: her ears are like shells, her cheeks like rose petals, and her lashes like flower stamens (even the narrator describes her not as a girl, but as a “dear young, round, soft, flexible thing”). She is compared to a kitten no fewer than seven times through the novel, calling to mind not only the precocious cuteness of the animal but also its sharp claws: “It is a beauty like that of kittens” (92); “kitten-like maiden” (92); “this kitten-like Hetty” (403); “She was like a kitten, and had the same distractingly pretty looks” (228); “she put up her round cheek against his, like a kitten” (390); “kitten-like glances” (167); “as if he had seen a kitten setting up its back” (286).


19. Hetty’s most famous instance of being late is when, prior to marrying Adam, “she had waited and waited, in the blind vague hope that something would happen to set her free from her terror; but she could wait no longer” (396). Hetty is late; or rather, her period is late, as she is pregnant.


22. In this respect, my reading diverges from Miller’s in *Others.* While much of this chapter, and indeed much of this book, owes a debt to Miller’s unique analysis of alterities in Eliot’s (and others’) fiction, I want very much to suggest that the novel—through the narrator—insists on its own limits. Miller, on the other hand, sees a tension between the limitations of the characters and the omniscience of the narrator: “[ . . . ] the narrator of *Middlemarch* has precisely a ‘keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life’ and can deploy such vision at will. The narrator has the same kind of keen vision that destroys the protagonist of ‘The Lifted Veil.’ It is just such vision that the narrator of *Middlemarch* [ . . . ] says we are lucky not to have.” *Others,* 75.

23. Before she can love Adam and accept his proposal, Dinah must move into a space that is uncomfortable for her and that she has tried to avoid—a space where her conscious and psychical desire cannot be repressed. I discuss that movement more fully in “Learning to Read: Interpersonal Literacy in *Adam Bede.*”

24. In Marina van Zuylan’s characterization, Dorothea is intent on dulling the banality of a woman’s existence in rural England with an active devotion to causes that demand her selflessness. Via this active refutation of her self, the argument
goes, Dorothea manages to gain the very control that she is denied in most arenas of her life. *Monomania*, 99–119.

25. A typical example, from Sidney Colvin’s January 1873 review in the *Fortnightly Review*: “For the general lesson of the book, it is not easy to feel quite sure what it is, or how much importance the author gives it. In her prelude and conclusion both, she seems to insist upon the design of illustrating the necessary disappointment of a woman’s nobler aspirations in a society not made to second noble aspirations in a woman. And that is one of the most burning lessons which any author could set themselves to illustrate.” Cited in David Carroll, ed., *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 337.

26. The *OED* cites first figurative usage dating from 1874, relatively contemporary with the writing of *Middlemarch*.

27. This is, of course, Emmanuel Levinas’s formulation.

28. Here Eliot’s difference from Dickens is clear, as in his novels a character’s insistence on his or her own difference from the crowd or the usual is often enough to ensure empathic extension.

29. *The Lifted Veil* easily deserves extended analysis. Given that such analysis has been performed by Thomas Albrecht in his article “Sympathy and Telepathy: The Problems of Ethics in George Eliot’s *The Lifted Veil*,” it is not worth revisiting ground he has covered so well. My primary dissension from his argument, which otherwise directly anticipates my critical approach, is that he does not go far enough in addressing the significance of Latimer’s relationship with the unknown. *ELH* 73, no. 2 (2006): 437–63.


33. Ibid., 472.


35. Rae Greiner’s article on *The Lifted Veil* was published just weeks before this study was completed. In it, she gestures toward the idea that Albrecht articulates and that is the central focus of this study: empathic extension was not necessarily predicated on identification. She traces Eliot’s depiction of that idea to Adam Smith, emphasizing the narrative time in which sympathetic extension is always situated. She does not, however, go so far as to say that the other cannot be known, only that the movement into knowledge takes time and that Eliot acknowledges its limitation with regard to the reader: “Eliot had reservations about the degree to which such intimacy with others’ thought prompted ethical responses in us.” “Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel,” *Narrative* 17, no. 3 (October 2009): 306.

CHAPTER THREE


3. This is of course Brooks’s thesis in *Reading for the Plot*: “the absolutism of the desire from which narrative as narrating is born: it is in essence the desire to be heard, recognized, understood, which, never wholly satisfied or indeed satisfiable, continues to generate the desire to tell, the effort to enunciate a significant version of the life story in order to captivate a possible listener” (54); “desire comes into being as a perpetual want for (of) a satisfaction the cannot be offered in reality” (55) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).


5. “That Sue is enmeshed in Jude’s limited point of view, then, helps account for our sense of inconsistencies in her character. We attempt to judge as a personality in her own right a figure intended to serve merely to define another personality. Often, when Jude looks at his cousin, he in fact gazes into a mirror which reflects the image of his own ambivalence” (ibid., 15). “Most critics have seen Sue’s inconsistency in this sway. But as we have seen, the consequences of this perspective are a sense that the grinder of analysis is an inadequate tool for capturing Sue’s characters. A more radical inconsistency emerges when the character is inconsistent with her own personality; that is, the creator has failed to create a completely credible individual, or the creator finds those adhesive tapes of shopworn philosophy—this time about women—easier to apply than to reexamine the premise of his narrative framework” (ibid., 17–18). Sue is not the only focus of attempts to erase ambiguity from Hardy’s heroines. W. Eugene Davis tries his best to sort out plot gaps that would explain Tess’s purity or lack thereof in “Tess of the d’Urbervilles: Some Ambiguities about a Pure Woman,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 4 (March 1968): 397–401.


8. The critical searching for stability thus mirrors the analogous seeking among the characters within the texts.

9. “Although one would think the past would be more stable and determinate than an uncertain future, in Hardy’s fiction it is as subject to change, chance, and unpredictability as anything else,” writes Jil Larson. *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 71.


11. Hardy’s works also call forth this distinction through their pictorial appeal. Hardy was trained as an architect before he became a writer, and his attention to visuality further situates his work in the pictorial traditions that eschew narrative moralizing; that is, his interplay with visuality aligns his work with the Dutch genre painters or the French Realists and protoimpressionists. Ruth Bernard Yeazell describes Hardy, in contrast to George Eliot, as being “more engaged in looking at pictures than in theorizing about them,” an engagement that rises to the fore in his
Under the Greenwood Tree, which Hardy subtitled “A Rural Painting of the Dutch School.” It was Hardy’s desire to “retreat from storytelling,” Yeazell argues, that led him to the subtitle. She also notes that Hardy was “an artist who continued to sketch as well as write,” which gave him “more reason than most to be conscious of the difference” between image and text. Art of the Everyday: Dutch Painting and the Realist Novel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 134–35.

12. Larson, Ethics, 113.

13. See my introduction for a fuller exploration of this tendency. See also David Haney’s “Aesthetics and Ethics in Gadamer, Levinas, and Romanticism: Problems of Phronesis and Teché,” and Derek Attridge’s “Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other,” both in PMLA 114, no. 1 (January 1999).


15. Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge (London: Penguin, 2003), 127. Subsequent citations of The Mayor of Casterbridge will be given parenthetically in text.


17. Compare with Lady Dedlock’s insistence on applying the strictness of her self-evaluation to all others.


22. Note the connection to Emma Bovary, who fed her romantic illusions with novels. Reading more stories does not necessarily make one more aware of human nature. On the other hand, we see Tess’s desire for the stability and certainty provided by the never-changing novel, a desire she eschews in other places. We also see evidence of the desire to treat the novel as a behavior manual, offering trial runs for readers.

23. Narratorial and authorial constructions are included under this rubric as well; the novel’s insistence on the limitations of what is readable in the other invariably applies to the novel itself. Silverman provides a clear overview of the argument that Tess is always and only a construction of the gaze of others, as well as a useful complication of that model. Kaja Silverman, “History, Figuration, and Female Subjectivity in Tess of the d’Urbervilles,” Novel: A Forum on Fiction 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1984): 5–28.


25. Compare Tess’s anxiety about her genealogy and its permanence wrought through text with, for example, the confidence and authority conferred upon the
family lineage in Austen’s *Persuasion*. In that novel, the Elliots of Kellynch Hall find their sense of self in the very permanence that Tess finds problematic.

26. Hardy implicates the reader in this ambivalence by placing his characters in circumstances that consistently test the boundaries of the story’s believability. Is there a point when readers, like Angel Clare, will rebel against the events presented as a part of Tess’s plot? Those stretches—Angel and Tess stumbling across Stonehenge in the black of night, for example—demand of the assumed reader a generosity of vision very different from the suspension of disbelief often demanded of fiction’s audience.


28. Ibid., 129.

29. Ibid., 145.

30. Ibid., 149.

31. This characterization is true in both 1892’s *The Pursuit of the Well Beloved* and the later version. The “Well-Beloved” is Pierston’s ideal, which manifests periodically in women of all shapes and temperaments, only then to leave, and Pierston’s interest in these women coincides only with the duration of the Well-Beloved’s presence. He can thus argue that he has been ultimately faithful to the Well-Beloved, and if his devotion to her various incarnations falters, it is only because the ideal flees from these incarnations. He seeks a “repetition of one person in another” on three levels: his pursuit of the Well-Beloved, his pursuit of himself externalized, and his pursuit of multiple iterations of the same woman. His assessment, or even simple apprehension, of women is predicated on a mental project of matching the qualities of the existent to the qualities of the ideal and abstract. The sculptor’s seeming surprise at discovering the Well-Beloved incarnated in any individual is fleeting at best, and even he admits that these discoveries are overdetermined by his desire to find: “thus looking for the next new version of the fair figure, he did not consider at the moment, though he had done so at other times, that this presentiment of meeting her was, of all presentiments, just the sort of one to work out its own fulfillment” (219). The language Pierston uses to describe women once the Well-Beloved has abandoned them—“an empty caracase,” “a corpse”—suggests that the bodies of the women are simply containers for his idea, his ideal, the Well-Beloved. The one binding feature was Pierston’s ability to identify her; he was, in the final analysis, the determining factor, despite his attempts to project or exteriorize his desire. *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* and *The Well-Beloved* (London: Penguin, 1998).

32. Tess’s own solipsism is at the heart of this projection; men are not the only arbiters of this dynamic.

33. Clare’s is a tangled understanding, at times reducing her to archetypes, at times reveling in her individuality-as-he-understands-it-to-be. As Kathleen Blake puts it, “the crisis of their relationship reveals his habit of generalization when it comes to Tess and his commitment to her purity in the erotic sense and as being so summed up by his conception of her that she must remain pure of any particular experience worth mentioning. Seeing Tess as essence and type, Angel cannot admit the relevance of experience for her, and so he refuses to hear her confession about her past affair with Alec.” In “Pure Tess: Hardy on Knowing a Woman,” *Studies in English Literature: 1500–1900* 22, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 697.

34. Richard le Gallienne and Mowbray Morris cited in R. G. Cox, *Thomas Hardy:*
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35. In this sense, my reading complements Jan B. Gordon’s compelling reading of Tess’s relationship to her personal and familial past. In “Origins, History, and the Reconstitution of Family: Tess’ Journey,” Gordon suggests that the novel documents the characters’ various attempts to concretize a past, “filling the voids” that arise from incomplete family histories or interrupted family trees. While that desire pervades the text, it exists always in tension with the impossibility of doing so, and—even more importantly—that desire leads only to failed relationships or, more figuratively, to death. Gordon is concerned with the influence that characters’ relationships with their pasts have on those characters’ present actions. What Angel Clare, in Gordon’s telling, learns in the course of the novel is that “the history of man is not dead people or dead facts but the history of man’s imagination.” ELH 43, no. 3 (Autumn 1976): 366–88.

36. Whereas in George Eliot’s novels, recognition of alterity can be developed through education and experience, Hardy’s novels suggest that recognition depends not on education or development but instead on the relative cultivation of one’s sensitivity, represented by interpersonal literacy as well as kindness or affection. Means of literacy—handwriting or reading faces—indicate levels of achievement of that sensitivity, but, as Jude learns, education itself is not salve enough, and no book learning can account for the individual sitting across the dinner table from you.

Chapter Four

1. The catalogue at the Freer Gallery lists the title as The Miser (F1898.310), though the provenance of this title is murky, and it is possible, if not likely, that Whistler himself did not name the piece, especially as the title specifies the content in a way that is atypical of Whistler.

2. “Much of his work came to be anchored within restricted collections, with all the difficulties that ensured for the distant public to see the range of his work [. . . ]. Published catalogues of his work were limited to those of his etchings (in 1910) and lithographs (in 1914) compiled by his much-forgiving friend E. G. Kennedy; a catalogue of his paintings did not appear until 1980, and the ink has only just dried on the catalogue of his works on paper, published in 1995. All this has meant that, except for a continuing appreciation of Whistler’s graphic art, Whistler’s fame has rested largely on his notoriety.” Nigel Thorp, “The Butterfly Takes Flight: A Whistler Revival Is Launched,” Archives of American Art Journal 34, no. 3 (1994): 16–25; 17.


went to court in November 1878; Ruskin himself was ill and psychologically unfit to appear. After two days of evidence from the plaintiff and several witnesses, the jury declared a verdict in Whistler’s favor, but awarded him only a farthing in damages.” Merrill, 1.


9. Teukolsky points to Whistler’s formal emphasis and especially his use of synaesthesia as indication of his Modernist proclivities, noting that his “modernist doctrine” is “epitomized in his musical titles” (155). Teukolsky does not overlook Whistler’s French connection entirely, and suggests that his use of musical titles and organizing ideas was inspired by mid-century symboliste poetry; and though she associates Whistler’s later painting with the work of the French impressionistes, his Realist roots do not figure in her analysis. The Literate Eye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

10. Michael Fried, “The Generation of 1863,” in Manet’s Modernism: Or, the Face of Painting in the 1860s (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Fried cannot resist narrativizing Whistler’s work. In his analysis of Whistler’s 1865–66 The Artist in His Studio, the author employs parenthetical suggestions with direct narrative statements to describe the scene: “Behind the painter and seemingly unaware of what he is doing, two women are conversing: one, standing, in a light robe (she has perhaps just been posing for the painter), the other, seated, in a white frock (it’s possible she too is a model, but the impression we get is that she is a visitor). The implicit narrative of the picture therefore reads as follows: . . . ” (392).


13. NB: “The history of art is more than a succession of stylistic and iconographic conventions modified by occasional ‘comparisons’ with perceived reality”; “But important though it might be, fidelity to visual reality was only one aspect of the Realist enterprise; and it would be erroneous to base our conception of so complex a movement on only one of its features: verisimilitude.” Linda Nochlin, Realism (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1971), 17, 22–23.

14. Prettejohn, Art for Art’s Sake, 194.


16. Francis Frascina, Nigel Blake, Briony Fer, Tamar Garb, and Charles Harrison, Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century (New Haven,
17. Clark: “He has given us, in an almost schematic form, the constituents of a particular ritual, but not their unison [. . . ] It is not exactly an image of disbelief, more of collective distraction; not exactly indifference, more inattention; not exactly, except in a few of the women’s faces, the marks of grief or the abstraction of mourning, more the careful, ambiguous blankness of a public face.” T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 81.

18. The community gathered for Thias Bede’s funeral in *Adam Bede* forms a nice complement to the community gathered in Courbet’s *Burial at Ornans*.

19. “Are they mother and daughter? The woman is Victorine Meurent, Manet’s often used model, and the girl is purportedly the daughter of Manet’s neighbor; in short, no” (National Gallery of Art, http://www.nga.gov/feature/manet/intro.shtml, accessed December 19, 2008). In this friendly introduction to Manet’s oeuvre through *Chemin de Fer*, the text repeatedly refers to Manet’s uniting of high and low, wealthy and poor, dandy and ragpicker, as an indication of his modern impulse and his embrace of the Paris of that day. One risk of such readings is that they tend to blur the disconnection of such scenes. The gentleman may walk across the same bridge as the workman (as in Caillebotte’s *Le Pont de l’Europe*, 1877), but shared space does not ensure communality.


22. Manet did meet constantly with a critical reaction that was less than approving and often hostile; he remained befuddled by this response. Those paintings that caused the most furor—*Déjeuner sur l’herbe* and *Olympia*—both feature a kind of triangulation of gazes, wherein the paintings’ subjects do not look at each other, but instead cross gazes. They have neither the voyeuristic security of an image in which the subjects are completely unaware of the viewer’s gaze nor the ease of a conventional image that is oriented toward the viewer, even if not directly responding to him. But it is clear that critical response then, as now, insisted on reading into his paintings. Written in the 1990s, Michael Fried’s astute analyses of Manet’s works still depend on this reaching beyond the image. Fried argues that Manet’s incorporation of visual allusions situates his work within a global art-historical context while also asserting the innate French quality of his artistry. In addition to this interpainting relationship, some argue that Manet’s work depends on the assumption that his works enter a knowledgeable community; that is, finding the paintings meaningful depends on placing them in an art-historical context. As Fried suggests, that criticism and art-historical writing on Manet’s work do not adequately read the allusions in his works amounts to misreading his intentions. Fried, *Manet’s Modernism*, 4. These trends in painting and the art-historical constructions that insist on interpretation lead to the situation against which Whistler railed so strongly (and his response came even before art historians would considerably fortify their devotion to the strategy); such tendencies were contemporary with Whistler and have continued to flourish since that time.

23. One must imagine that Whistler fully anticipated his audience connecting his *White Girl* with Wilkie Collins’s immensely popular *The Woman in White*, which would still have been fresh in their collective imagination. NB: Robin Spen-


28. Compare with T. J. Clark’s reading of Manet’s *Olympia* above, wherein the decorative additions—the cat, the necklace, and so forth—are simply “lures” that work against a narrative. Here, those similar details are actually constitutive of that narrative, and nearly literal in their meaning.


31. Despite Whistler’s clearly articulated views on these points, some still insist on pressing the point. Dan Nadaner, writing about the potentially fruitful pedagogical engagement of visual and textual intersections, suggests that both Whistler and Turner were painters who “write their images.” “On Relatedness between the Arts: Crossovers between Painting and Poetry,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 31–39.


34. Ibid., 192.


36. Ibid., 8.


41. See Manet’s *Mme. Manet at the Piano* (1868) and Degas’s *M. and Mme. Manet at the Piano* (1868–69) for reworkings of this element of Whistler’s work.

43. “With the exception of photographs.” Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1992), 116. Crary goes on to link the development of stereoscopic imagery to some of the strategies of depiction used by Realist painters: “A range of nineteenth-century painting also manifests some of these features of stereoscopic imagery. [ . . . ] I am suggesting that both the ‘realism’ of the stereoscope and the ‘experiments’ of certain painters were equally bound up in a much broader transformation of the observer that allowed the emergence of this new optically constructed space.” Ibid., 126.

44. This most important aspect of the painting is merely glossed in the Taft’s gallery notes, which suggest that her blurred face might indicate motion (as if it were a photograph).

45. “The new canvas again utilized the music room [ . . . ]. The impact is curious, for the massively black Miss Boot is almost surreal amidst the chintz-curtained and picture-hung fussiness of the quiet nineteenth-century room.” Stanley Weintraub, *Whistler: A Biography* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974), 67. “Nearly a third of the area is occupied by the cream, green, and deep pink chintz drapery.” McMullen, *Victorian Outsider*, 88. “The focus of the house was the music room, where filtered sunlight and shaded gaslight managed to unify maroon carpeting, green-tinted walls, pictures in heavy gold frames, a large mirror, a grand piano, and a profusion of chintz drapery, cream colored with a floral pattern in green and deep pink.” McMullen, 81.

46. Manet, too, would capitalize on the claustrophobic setting of an image. His *Le Balcon* of 1868 reveals a similar setting of three figures, each facing a different direction, each contained in a small, cluttered space, and all appearing as if they were plucked from three disparate canvases and collaged onto this balcony by the artist. Whistler also painted a balcony scene, similarly cluttered; *The Balcony* (1864–70) is seen from the inside, and the sitters are united in their japonisme trapings, but it is otherwise quite similar to Manet’s.

47. Writes Florence Nightingale Levy in *Paintings in Oil and Pastel by James Whistler*, “The first title of the picture was The Morning Call” (New York: The Gilliss Press, 1910), 1. Weintraub writes that the original title was *The Music Room*. *Whistler*, vii. The title is satirized in *Punch*: a “Matron in Search of a Subject” likes the painting, thinking it pretty, and asking her daughter to see what it is called so as to clear up her confusion as to what it is about, what it depicts: “Do see what it’s called. ‘The Morning Canter,’ or ‘Back from the Row’—something of that kind, I expect it would be.” When her daughter replies that “all it says is, ‘A Harmony in Green and Rose,’” her mother retorts disappointedly, “Now, why can’t he give it some sensible name, instead of taking away all one’s interest!” “Wrestling with Whistlers,” *Punch* 102 (April 16, 1892): 181.

48. “There may be a narrative content once one brings to mind Whistler’s family relations. It then turns out that the most important figure in terms of visual presence is the least important one, i.e., Miss Boott [sic], a long-standing family acquaintance but without any apparent emotional ties. . . .” Gisela Schmidt, “I see, I see, said the Blind Man,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 4, no. 2/3 (2005): 151–65.

49. When Whistler sought to cancel a plate that had reached the end of its
printing run, he covered it with cross-hatchings that are remarkably similar to the markings in these dockland scenes.

50. “These three figures are sitting on the balcony of the Angel Inn in London’s docklands. The woman is a prostitute, and is apparently taunting the sailor on the right; the man in the middle may be a pimp.” “Thames Views: Wapping,” Tate Britain, http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/turnerwhistlermonet/thamesviews/wapping.htm (accessed December 17, 2009).

“[Whistler’s] Wapping was painted at a ‘dive,’ the Angel Inn, Cherry Gardens, Rotherhithe. Its indecency was toned down, after a friend warned Whistler that the extreme décolletage of the prostitute (a ‘jolly gal’ with a ‘superlatively whorish air,’ as Whistler described her, modeled on his fiery mistress, Jo Hiffernan) would prevent the painting’s acceptance by the R.A. jury.” Alan Robinson, “Aesthetes, Impressionists, and Parvenus: Some Early Trials of Modern Painting in London,” in Aspects of Modernism, eds. Andreas Fischer, Martine Heusser, and Thomas Hermann (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1997), 24.

51. Whistler, Ten O’Clock, 9. Emphasis in the original.

CONCLUSION


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