The Lifted Veil Study Guide

The Lifted Veil by George Eliot

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Introduction

George Eliot's novella "The Lifted Veil" was first published in 1859. Eliot had written "The Lifted Veil" between the publication of her first novel *Adam Bede,* and that of her second novel, *The Mill on the Floss.* Eliot's publisher was hesitant to publish the story, because it was nothing like *Adam Bede,* for which she had gained critical acclaim. He was concerned that this tale of horror would be bad for her literary reputation, but reluctantly published it in a literary journal, albeit anonymously.

"The Lifted Veil" concerns themes of fate, extrasensory perception, the mystery of life and life after death. Eliot's interest in these themes stemmed partly from her own struggles with religious faith, as she was an extremely devout Christian as a child and young adult who later renounced Christianity completely. She also felt that she herself, like Latimer, the main character in "The Lifted Veil," had extrasensory powers of perception, which she referred to as "double consciousness."

While Eliot came to be considered one of the greatest novelists of the 19th Century during her lifetime, "The Lifted Veil" is one of her lesserknown stories, probably because it is so different from the realist novels for which she is so well known. Yet, while is does not seem to match the rest of her *ouevre,* "The Lifted Veil" does fit squarely into the Victorian tradition of Gothic horror stories, which began with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and included Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), as well as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1895). Such works of fiction were precursors of modern horror movies, such as *Psycho, Night of the Living Dead,* and *Nightmare on Elm Street,* as well as modern horror fiction, such as the novels of Stephen King.

Author Biography

George Eliot was born Mary Ann Evans in England on November 22, 1819. Her mother died when she was 16, and, apart from her time away from home in various boarding schools, she lived with her father as his housekeeper and caregiver until 1849, when he died. Her early schooling instilled in her a strong sense of Christian piety, and she was known to have dressed in rather severe, austere clothing. But exposure to free-thinking intellectuals eventually led Eliot away from her strict Christian faith, which resulted in a major conflict with her father in 1842. She eventually compromised by promising him that she would continue to attend Church in order to maintain a respectable appearance, although she would not be compelled to actually believe in the teachings of the church.

In 1851, Eliot moved to London to live as a freelance writer. There, she was further exposed to some of the leading intellectuals of her day, who maintained free-thinking attitudes about literature, politics, and religion. Through these connections, Eliot began to work as a journal editor and translator of some of the cutting edge essays and books emerging from this milieu. That year, Eliot was introduced to George Henry Lewes, a leading journalist and drama critic of the day. Lewes was married at the time, but his wife was notoriously unfaithful to him and had born two sons by another man. Although legal policies prevented Lewes from divorcing his wife, they eventually settled into a state of separation, during which time Eliot and Lewes became romantically involved. Although this was a happy union, which lasted over 20 years, Eliot suffered a loss of social status in maintaining a domestic partnership with a married man, including complete disaffection from her favorite brother, Isaac. Nevertheless, she and Lewes considered themselves to be husband and wife, living together in London and in Europe until his death in 1878.

Lewes was a strong influence in encouraging Eliot to write and publish essays, and it was he who first suggested she attempt to write fiction. In 1858, she began to publish under the pseudonym George Eliot. Although she published countless essays in contemporary journals, her most important literary legacy includes the novels *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861) and *Middlemarch* (1871-72), universally agreed upon as her masterpiece. Eliot was widely recognized as a successful novelist by the late 1870s, which helped to make up for the loss of social status she incurred as a result of her unconventional relationship with Lewes, and the two of them became well known for their Sunday afternoon social gatherings.

In 1880, Eliot, still in a state of grief over the death of Lewes, married her banker, John Walter Cross, who was only 40 at the time, while she was 60. It was only upon this legal marriage that her brother Isaac reestablished contact with her. On December 22, less than a year later, Eliot died and was buried next to Lewes in Highgate cemetery.

Plot Summary

Latimer is the first-person narrator of "The Lifted Veil," as well as the main character. The story begins, as he informs the reader, exactly one month before his death. "Before that time comes," he explains, "I wish to use my last hours of ease and strength in telling the strange story of my experience." The story thus comes as the confession of a dying man who entrusts his lifelong secrets to the reader's sympathy. "I have never fully unbosomed myself to any human being," he says.

Through a flashback structure, Latimer tells his "strange story," beginning with childhood, when he first discovered that he had what he refers to as "superadded consciousness." A sickly, unscholarly and dreamy child, Latimer is dominated by his father's wish to expose him to all of the subjects he hates most: math, science, etc. At the age of 19, recovering from a long illness, Latimer finds that he is capable of envisioning an event before it actually occurs. He first experiences this "clairvoyance" moments before meeting his older brother, Alfred's soon-to-be fiancee, Bertha Grant. When, moments after his vision, the exact same scene is played out in reality, Latimer is so struck with the sight of Bertha that he faints.

As Alfred's impending marriage to Bertha grows more and more certain, Latimer becomes utterly romantically fixated on her. Bertha, for her part, seems to enjoy teasing and flirting with Latimer, while maintaining a cool distance from him. One day, Latimer has a vision many years into his own future, during which Bertha, now his wife, suggests, with hatred in her voice, that he commit suicide. Yet, despite this presentiment of a horribly doomed marriage, Latimer is not swayed from his desire for Bertha. When Albert fall off a horse and dies, Latimer is left to marry Bertha himself.

As Latimer had foreseen, he and Bertha, once married, develop a deep hatred of one another. Once Bertha's mystery has been dispelled, and Latimer sees that she is shallow, selfish and hateful, he completely looses interest in her. Bertha, for her part, no longer the object of Latimer's devotion, seeks the company of other men, spending most of her time socializing outside their home. Latimer, now completely alienated from all human society, spends these years alone in his house. Once Bertha's mystery is dispelled, Latimer's life no longer has meaning, and he spends his time anticipating with dread the encounter he had foreseen before their marriage, in which she suggests that he go ahead and kill himself. Yet, when this scene finally occurs, years later, Latimer finds that it is thoroughly anti-climactic, and not a turning point or crisis in his life at all, but merely one more in a lifetime of cruel and horrible encounters with his wife.

When Bertha hires a new maid, Mrs. Archer, to the household, Latimer senses that he is beginning to loose his power to perceive the thoughts of other people. Furthermore, Bertha and the new maid seem to be conspiring together over some secret endeavor. Eventually, however, Latimer perceives that Bertha and the maid have begun to hate one another. Yet, when the maid, an older woman, grows sick, Bertha maintains a solicitous vigilance over her sick bed.

One night, Charles Meunier, an old grade school friend of Latimer, whom he hasn't seen in years, pays a visit to the household. As it becomes evident that the maid is just hours from death, Meunier, a world renowned medical doctor, asks Latimer if he may try an experiment on the corpse, as soon as the old woman is dead. When the time comes, Meunier conducts a transfusion of his own blood to that of the newly dead Mrs. Archer. The corpse then comes to life, opens its eyes, points an accusatory finger at Bertha, and confesses that she had been hired by Bertha to poison Latimer. The corpse then falls back to its permanent death.

This revelation having been made, Latimer and Bertha go their separate ways, she to remain in England, and he to travel throughout Europe. During these years, Latimer, increasingly ill, is made to suffer with the foreknowledge of the circumstances of his own death. Upon completing the final pages of his story, Latimer gives himself over to "the scene of my dying struggle."

Chapter 1, Introduction

Chapter 1, Introduction Summary

The Lifted Veil is a novella that is broken into two chapters. Due to the length of these chapters, we have broken each chapter into four sections each.

An English man, who we later learn is named Latimer, is the first-person narrator and main character of the story. Latimer tells us that he has been experiencing attacks of "angina pectoris" and that he can foresee his own death, which will occur in one month's time. He can also see all the details surrounding his death. He knows that he will have a heart attack late at night while sitting at his desk in his study, and he knows that no one will answer the bell when he pulls it because two of his servants, who are lovers, will have fought and left the house, while the remaining servant will be asleep.

Latimer tells us that he wants to record his life's story in this last month of his life - a story he has never told anyone, because he does not trust that anyone would be sympathetic to it. Since he knows the story will not be read until after his death, and all his relatives are dead, and since people are more sympathetic towards the dead, he feels comfortable relating it now. Then he begins to tell the story of his life through a series of flashbacks.

Chapter 1, Introduction Analysis

George Eliot chose an interesting way to narrate this novella, which allowed her to use many of the techniques that are now identified as postmodern. These include the breakdown of linear time, the removal of divisions between the self and the other, and the breakdown of boundaries between life and death. By giving Latimer psychic powers, she allows the reader to experience all the events leading up to Latimer's death, as well as the moment of death itself, all through the eyes of the person who is dying. Thus, we live the story through the character of Latimer. Not only do we live his entire life through his eyes, but we experience his death and into the beyond.

Eliot's choice of narrative blends the text and the voice of the narrator and supports one of Eliot's most strongly-held beliefs. Eliot believed that true art should unite humans by increasing their ability to empathize. She wanted her readers to step outside their own world to understand her characters and feel their pain. Latimer is gifted with abilities that make him the perfect example of Eliot's artistic position, pre-vision being the first.

This section of the novella also gives great insight into the issues that Latimer will face throughout the story. We know that he is alone and doomed to die alone. Further, we know that Latimer does not trust other people. Finally, we are given clues about Latimer's mental state because of the disease that Eliot chose for Latimer - angina pectoris.

In the nineteenth century, medical specialists focused on the heart palpitations that were symptoms of angina pectoris, but stressed the mental state that accompanied the disease, emphasizing the feeling of impending death and how this fear seemed to exacerbate the condition and contribute to the sufferer's demise. Thus, Latimer's belief in his impending death is given a scientific grounding, and Eliot suggests that Latimer's fear of death actually contributes to his death.

Chapter 1, Childhood

Chapter 1, Childhood Summary

Latimer's childhood was happy because he had not yet developed his power of pre-vision. In addition, his mother adored him and always kept him near, particularly during a brief period during which he was blind. Unfortunately, she died when he was seven or eight, and Latimer missed her terribly, more so than another child of the same age would have because he was so sensitive.

Due to Latimer's excessive sensitivity, his father thought Latimer strange and kept his distance, though he was careful to take care of him as a father should. Latimer's mother had been the second wife of his father, who was much older than she was. Consequently, his father already had another son named Alfred. Alfred was much older than Latimer and was away at school from the time Latimer was quite young.

Latimer's father was a stern and practical man. He was a banker who wanted to be a land-holding aristocrat and who had investments in mining. As a result of his aspirations to the aristocracy, he sent Alfred away to Eton and Oxford for a classical education. Before deciding upon an education for Latimer, Latimer's father had him examined by a phrenologist who determined that Latimer had an excess of bumps around the sides of his head (hope, wonder, ideality) and a lack of bumps over his eyebrows (order, number, time). Thus, Latimer was educated with a view to increasing the faculties that he seemed to lack, while suppressing those that he had in abundance. His father hired private tutors who focused on natural science, history, and modern language. To quell his artistic yearnings, Latimer read literature in secret.

When he was sixteen, Latimer went to Geneva, Switzerland to complete his education. He loved Geneva and particularly admired the landscape, as he believes most sensitive and poetic natures do. Latimer was lonely, however, and thought that other people would ridicule his sensitivity, so he consequently lived a fairly solitary life.

In Geneva, Latimer met the one friend he was to have throughout his entire life, Charles Meunier. Charles was quite the opposite of Latimer - he was a poor orphan with a genius for medical studies and a passion for science. Charles was also ugly and not accepted in society because of his appearance and poverty. Latimer understood Charles' isolation and befriended him. They spent much time talking and traveling on their holiday breaks.

Chapter 1, Childhood Analysis

In this portion of the novella, we receive some slight signs that Latimer may not be a reliable narrator. First, Latimer's early childhood is marked by an unexplained bout of blindness, which foreshadows his later desire to quiet his psychic powers, and

symbolizes a desire to not see. This suggests that Latimer may be partial and egotistical and calls into question the rest of his views.

Further indications of this are given when Latimer describes his mother. Latimer describes his mother as a protective barrier, which, when removed, leaves Latimer susceptible to the outside world, expressed as a series of invasive noises and uninvited whir of activity. At the time that Eliot wrote *The Lifted Veil*, she was deeply involved with the work of her partner, George Henry Lewes, who was a noteworthy scientist. Lewes believed that no organic life could be self-contained. Instead, all interaction between an organism and its surrounding environment would modify the organism's sense of self. Latimer, then, rejects anything that he can learn from the outside world - he prefers to remain in his own self-contained world and maintain his narrow viewpoint.

Latimer displays some of this narrow viewpoint and some paranoia when he describes his father and his education at his father's hands. When Eliot wrote *The Lifted Veil*, the established education for aristocratic gentlemen was a classical one - a great deal of the curriculum was devoted to the arts and dead languages, including Latin and Greek. Although there was some pressure to add the natural sciences to the classical curriculum, this had not yet been done in many schools. As the heir to the family fortune, Alfred would have been expected to advance the family reputation and naturally would have been sent away to receive the standard classical education. Conversely, Latimer, as the second son, would have been expected to perform some sort of useful function in society. Thus, by emphasizing the natural sciences in his curriculum, Latimer's father is actually trying to help Latimer, rather than suggesting that Latimer is somehow less capable than Alfred. Latimer's belief that his form of education is a slight betrays his paranoia and early jealousy of Alfred.

Even thought Latimer's education was not uncommon, Eliot's treatment of it suggests that she did not support it. Rather than improving upon Latimer's strong points, his education demolished his self-esteem and led to an unhappy adolescence. Eliot believed that a good education was one that adapted itself to the needs and wants of the student, and Latimer's total educational failure and subsequent insecurity supports her conclusion.

Because of his education and because the poetic and literary parts of his nature were always suppressed and degraded, Latimer holds a poor opinion of himself and of those around him. He believes that others will scorn him for his talents, and, thus, he is paralyzed. Though he has the gifts that Eliot believed were necessary in order to create great art, Latimer cannot be an artist because of his lack of faith in others. Here, Eliot suggests that the creation of art depends largely on the belief that there is an audience for one's art. Artists must believe that an audience will listen and respond. If they lose that belief, they lose their ability to create.

Chapter 1, Changes

Chapter 1, Changes Summary

Latimer's time in Geneva ended when he contracted a severe illness, and his father arrived to help nurse him back to health. The family's neighbors, the Filmores, had also come to Geneva, and Alfred intended to join them all at Basel when Latimer was well enough to travel.

One day, while Latimer was listening to his father list the places to which they intended to travel, he suddenly had a vision. In his vision, he saw a city with a long bridge, flanked by statues of saints, over which a castle was looming. His last memory of the city, which he believed to be Prague, was of "a patch of rainbow light on the pavement, transmitted through a colored lamp in the shape of a star."

When Latimer awoke from his vision, he began questioning his mental state. He knew that he had not been dreaming, as he was aware that his father had left the room and that the servant, Pierre, had entered it. He also knew that he had not been recalling a drawing of Prague, since he had never seen a drawing of that city. He tried to force himself to have another vision, this time of Venice, but was unable to do so. Over the course of the next week, he did not have any more visions.

As Latimer recovered, his father took him out riding each day. Finally, Latimer improved to the point where his father agreed to take Latimer shopping with him, but didn't arrive at the arranged time. While Latimer was waiting, he suddenly realized that three people were in the room with him - his father, Mrs. Filmore, and a young blond woman with a slight figure, sharp features and sarcastic grey eyes. When his father began to speak, the group suddenly vanished.

Latimer realized that he must have had another vision and, after asking Pierre to find his father, went into his bedroom to wash his face and shake off the strange feeling that accompanied the vision. When he returned to the other room, his vision had come true - his father, Mrs. Filmore, and the strange young woman were there. Overcome, Latimer fainted. When he woke, his father explained that the young woman was the orphan niece of Mrs. Filmore, who had adopted her. The young woman's name was Bertha Grant, and she and Alfred were expected to marry.

From then on, Latimer became aware of another strange occurrence - he could sometimes read other people's thoughts. He could not avoid hearing these thoughts, and the pettiness that this exposed in those who surrounded him revolted him. There was only one person whose thoughts he was not able to hear--Bertha.

Chapter 1, Changes Analysis

Latimer has developed the final gift that makes him the perfect example of Eliot's artistic position - he can now experience the thoughts and emotions of others in a way that no one else can. Instead of this ability provoking empathy in him, however, it revolts him. What he sees in the other characters disgusts him. Thus, his gift becomes a torment, which he refers to as a "diseased participation in other peoples' consciousness."

An undercurrent of science runs through this section of the novella. Latimer does not immediately accept his abilities for what they are. He doubts himself and proceeds to analyze his gifts scientifically, systematically stepping through a series of possibilities. Latimer finally concludes that his double consciousness is real and diagnoses it as a psychological manifestation rather than a psychic one. His caution and anxiety about his abilities gives him credibility.

By specifically grounding Latimer's abilities within science, Eliot removes the supernatural element from her story and shows that we all experience a similar form of double consciousness. The difference in Latimer's situation, however, is that most people maintain control over their double consciousness, while Latimer cannot. His interactions with his surrounding environment and the modifications he makes to his sense of self are completely uncontrolled - the thoughts of the other characters enter his mind despite his attempts to shut them out. Latimer becomes a conduit for other streams of consciousness. In essence, Latimer as an entity is dead.

Latimer's vision of Prague further displays his state of living death. Like Latimer, the people that he sees in his vision of Prague do not grow or experience renewal. They also experience a sort of death in life. They are "a dusty, weary, time-eaten grandeur of a people doomed to live on the stale repetition of memories." Latimer, too, is forced to live on the repetition of memories - memories that are not his own and memories of a future that has not yet arrived.

Latimer's vision of Prague also displays Eliot's views on religion. Raised a Protestant, Eliot experienced a loss of faith early in her life, which caused a rift with her father when she stopped attending church. Accompanying her loss of faith was a loss of belief in the afterlife. In Latimer's vision of Prague, the dusty statues of the saints represent religion, and rather than preventing spiritual death, the saints seem to cause it. In this vision, there is no hope for any kind of future. Instead, the past repeats itself over and over again.

Chapter 1, Travels

Chapter 1, Travels Summary

As planned, Alfred joined the group at Basel, and Latimer immediately felt a rivalry with him. Alfred was handsome, confident, and extremely friendly, and evidently did not feel any rivalry with Latimer. However, Latimer hated Alfred and began to pick up more of Alfred's thoughts than of any other member of their group. In this way, Latimer determined that Alfred was conceited and was offended to realize that Alfred held a "half-pitying contempt" for him. In this way, Latimer could also tell that Alfred had not and would not guess that Latimer's primary motive as a rival was to obtain Bertha's attention because Latimer had fallen in love with Bertha on first seeing her.

A large part of the attraction that Bertha held for Latimer was because he could not read her mind. His desire for her was enhanced by the state of uncertainty he was in around her. He tended to assume that she had thoughts that were similar to his own, even though their temperaments were very different. Because of this, he would watch her to see if she would indicate any interest in him. Although he knew she was sarcastic, cynical, unimaginative, and very different from his romantic notions of the ideal woman, he still wanted her attention and her good favor, perhaps because she did not bestow it frequently.

Although Bertha continued to make fun of Latimer's poetic nature and ridicule his favorite poems, Latimer was still convinced she loved him. She seemed to think that his fainting at their first meeting was caused by his immediate love for her, and she seemed to like to fantasize that the brother of her future husband was dying with love and jealousy over her. In public, Bertha treated Latimer as someone too young and too sickly to be a lover. When alone, however, Bertha was somewhat less distant and sometimes say things to lead Latimer on.

For instance, while in Vienna, Bertha celebrated her twentieth birthday, and each member of the group purchased her a piece of jewelry as a gift. Latimer bought her a gift that had a deep, symbolic meaning, but was the least expensive - an opal. He related the symbolic meaning to Bertha when giving it to her, but assumed that she did not like it when she appeared for dinner later that night wearing every gift but his. Hurt, he asked her about it the following day. In response, she pulled a gold chain that she always wore out from her dress and showed him that his ring was on it. She told him that it hurt her to wear it there, and since he was so silly as to want her to wear it publicly, she would do as he asked and no longer endure the pain.

Latimer believed that Bertha not only loved him, but that she enjoyed the power she had over him. He did not believe that Bertha would ever marry Alfred since there was no formal engagement, and since Bertha seemed to secretly ridicule Alfred, even while accepting his attentions. He thus held out hope that she would be his and would shut

himself away in his room whenever Bertha was not present, so he could be uninterrupted and dream of her.

During the group's travels, Latimer's ability to read minds had become much stronger, though he had not had any more visions. One morning, however, while the group was at the Lichtenberg Palace, he decided to take a walk on the terrace while he waited for everyone to finish looking at paintings. While walking, he suddenly felt Bertha slip her arm into his, and then he was in his father's library chair at home. Bertha was entering the room with a candle in her hand, and he realized that though Bertha was his wife, they hated each other. When he awoke, he was so disturbed by the vision that he became ill, which caused the group to extend their stay in Vienna.

Though disturbed by his vision, Latimer was still in love with Bertha and rejoiced at his triumph over Alfred. He began to wonder how his marriage to Bertha would come about since he was still too timid to ask Bertha whether she loved him. He finally decided to wait until the group traveled to Prague. Then, if his vision of Prague turned out to be true, he would ask her about her feelings.

The party arrived in Prague at night and planned to leave shortly thereafter, which relieved Latimer since he was not sure if he really wanted to know whether his vision of Prague was true. If it were true, he would know that his vision of his marriage to Bertha was true, which would please him, but then he would also know that Bertha would grow to hate him.

Although he was given a valid excuse to avoid the bridge when the group was late starting the next morning and decided to return to the hotel early, Latimer had a sudden desire to know the truth and resolved to go to the bridge alone. As he passed through the archway and onto the bridge, he realized that the bridge was, in fact, the one he had seen in his vision, but refused to stop until he found the last small detail of the vision - the patch of rainbow light in the shape of a star on the pavement.

Chapter 1, Travels Analysis

In this section, Latimer gives more insight into how he believes others perceive him. He also gives more clues about how he feels about himself. Latimer's jealousy towards Alfred is based not only on his attraction to Bertha, but also on his perception of Alfred. Latimer believes that his father favors Alfred and cannot help seeing that he himself does not possess any of the traits for which Alfred is praised. Alfred is handsome, confident, virile and good-humored; Latimer is insecure, moody and sickly. Though Latimer states that he has a "half-womanly, half-ghostly beauty," and points out that the portrait painters in Geneva had often asked to paint him, he also states that he does not like his appearance but tolerates it because he believes that his physique is a "condition of poetic genius."

The emphasis on Latimer's feminine qualities continues in his description of his interactions with Bertha. Bertha displays many of the traits afforded to men in the

nineteenth century. She is sarcastic and cynical and betrays a lack of sensitivity to romance. In fact, Bertha seems to lack any real emotion. She toys with Latimer mercilessly and seems to secretly hold disdain for Alfred. She is vain and conceited and only values that which holds monetary worth or gives her power over others. By contrast, Latimer is weak and given to fainting fits and becomes emotionally aroused by romantic poetry and images of nature.

Upon first meeting Bertha, Latimer compares her to a character in German mythology, the Water-Nixie, a water sprite that lures men to their deaths. This image of Bertha is reinforced in his vision when she fades to an image of a green serpent, which provokes comparisons of Bertha and Cleopatra, the serpent of the Nile. Latimer also references Cleopatra in this vision, linking Cleopatra to the treacherous Water-Nixies.

Given their differences in temperament, it seems strange that Bertha would hold any kind of attraction for Latimer. In fact, Latimer himself cannot understand the attraction because Bertha does not even physically conform to his ideal of the perfect woman. Eliot, however, indicates that the attraction lies in Latimer's inability to read Bertha's mind. Eliot uses the relationship between Latimer and Bertha to question one of the premier principles of Lewes.

As stated in an earlier analysis section, Eliot had lost her faith in religion early in her life and firmly doubted the existence of an afterlife. Lewes contended that science could fill the void left by religion because, "Science gives the power to foresee, and foreseeing leads to action." Here, however, the power to foresee leads to paralysis instead of action. Latimer's ability to know the inner workings of other peoples' minds leaves him impotent, both literally and figuratively. Not only is he powerless to create his own sense of self, he also lacks desire. By emphasizing Latimer's attraction for Bertha, Eliot suggests that there must be space in a successful relationship. Latimer's relationship with Bertha is the only one in which he has a chance to construct a sense of self and is the only one that can mentally and emotionally stimulate him:

"...no matter how empty the adytum, so that the veil be thick enough. So absolute is our soul's need of something hidden and uncertain for the maintenance of that doubt and hope and effort which are the breath of life, that if the whole future were laid bare for us beyond to-day, the interest of all mankind would be bent on the hours that lie between..."

Due to the challenge that Bertha presents and the hope she offers, and due to his jealousy of Alfred, Latimer is overjoyed when he has a vision of his own marriage to Bertha. Though he knows that she hates him, he still feels that the match between them will be one of the most beneficial of his life because it will give him the chance to define himself. As he travels closer to Prague, however, he begins to have doubts concerning the marriage, perhaps because he realizes that for him to know that Bertha hates him, and for him to hate her in return, there may have to be some breakdown of the barrier between his mind and hers.

The misfortune to come is foreshadowed by Latimer's choice of gift for Bertha. He selects an opal, which is a stone that is generally associated with bad luck. By giving this stone to Bertha, Latimer foreshadows not only their doomed relationship, but also Bertha's own future unhappiness.

Chapter 2, The Engagement

Chapter 2, The Engagement Summary

The second part of *The Lifted Veil* occurs after a few months have passed and Latimer has returned to England with his father. Bertha and Alfred became formally engaged in the fall and decided to wed during the following spring. Latimer had still not asked Bertha about her feelings for him, and, although he was confident that the actual wedding would not occur, he was still nervous about the engagement.

When Latimer was not with Bertha, he took long walks and despaired for his future. One morning, Latimer ran into Alfred who had going hunting. Alfred invited Latimer to come hunting with him occasionally in order to cheer up Latimer. Latimer deeply resented this because he felt it betrayed Alfred's narrowness and conceit since Alfred evidently could not understand Latimer's suffering. Although Latimer had earlier been afraid that his triumph over Alfred would be due to some tragedy, he decided that instead he would succeed with Bertha because Alfred would selfishly have found something better for himself.

Since Alfred was off hunting, Latimer decided to walk over to the Filmores' house and see Bertha. He found her alone, and they went on a walk. During their walk, he fitfully asked her how she could love Alfred. Bertha implied that she did not love Alfred and told him that love would ruin their marriage by causing her to be jealous of Alfred, which would cause them to quarrel. Shocked, Latimer moodily asked her if she would love him (Latimer) even for a little while when Latimer and she were married. Bertha became subdued by his comment and Latimer, panicked at having possibly given an indication of his powers of prevision, apologized. Bertha jestingly referred to his apparent momentary lapse as a "mad fit," and returned to her house.

Chapter 2, The Engagement Analysis

Again, we see that Latimer remains paralyzed by knowledge. Even though his vision of Prague turned out to be true, he has still not asked Bertha about her feelings for him and continues to have others' thoughts intrude upon his consciousness. He also continues to hate Alfred.

Ironically, Latimer is repulsed by the baseness he sees in others' characters but disregards the baseness in himself. He is well aware that his own selfishness is on par with Alfred's but excuses himself because of his own suffering. Alfred's lack of suffering and consequent empathy causes Latimer to view Alfred as narrow, superficial, and arrogant. Latimer simply does not recognize that he has these same traits, choosing instead to fashion himself as a martyr.

Eliot's choice of the name "Latimer" for this character is thus called into question. Latimer's most famous namesake was Hugh Latimer, a martyr of the English

Reformation, who was burned at the stake in 1855. Hugh Latimer, however, was a true martyr and possessed many of the qualities that Eliot's Latimer lacks - he was communicative and deeply religious. Eliot's Latimer is sullen and lacks faith in everything - himself, others, and God.

During their walk in the garden, Bertha supports the view of Latimer as martyr and tortured artist, when, after his outburst concerning his vision of their marriage, she refers to him as "Tasso." Torquato Tasso was a sixteenth-century writer who began showing signs of paranoia and melancholy and was confined to an insane asylum. He became the symbol of the suffering artist to many Romantic poets because he continued to write impressively and because many people erroneously thought that he had been confined because of his love for a woman he was not meant to have. Latimer is similar to the legendary Tasso in many ways - he is paranoid and melancholy; he sees himself as a suffering artist, and he is attracted to a woman who belongs to someone else. These similarities further contribute to doubts concerning Latimer's reliability as a narrator.

Chapter 2, The Marriage

Chapter 2, The Marriage Summary

When Latimer returned home after his walk with Bertha, he found that Alfred was dead - he had been thrown from his horse while hunting and was killed immediately by a concussion. Latimer felt that Alfred's death formed a bond with his father since they had finally both experienced true sorrow.

Latimer began to feel affection towards his father, which grew over the next few months, even though his father continued to regard him with bitterness. Eventually, Latimer's father warmed to him and tried to make him successful at filling his brother's place in society. His father also suggested that he marry Bertha and the two of them live with him.

After Alfred's death, Bertha treated Latimer somewhat cautiously. Latimer was torn between wanting to be respectful of his brother's memory and wanting to know what Bertha was feeling. He was particularly worried about what her reaction was to the comment he had made about the two of them marrying. He believed that Bertha encouraged him, however, and, over time, decided she loved him and always had loved him better than Alfred. He believed that the reason she had become engaged to Alfred was because she had liked the idea of being loved by and married to a man who was as admired in society as Alfred was.

Latimer and Bertha were married eighteen months after Alfred's death on a morning in April. His father was happy because he thought that Bertha would rule over Latimer and mold him into anything she wanted him to be. With Bertha's help, Latimer's father was certain Latimer would eventually be able to step into Alfred's role in society. Bertha was unsuccessful in her attempts to manipulate Latimer, however, and Latimer felt a growing coldness from her.

After their wedding, Latimer and Bertha were launched into society in a very ostentatious manner. Latimer's father had been holding back a portion of his wealth so that his son could show off after his marriage. As a result, they were very welcome in society and were always attending dinner parties and other social functions, which meant that they were rarely alone together.

Bertha's thoughts were still a mystery to Latimer, and he wondered if what he said and did pleased her, although he doubted that they did. This crushed Latimer, but he still clung to her, hoping to get all the happiness he could out of the days before they were over forever.

Chapter 2, The Marriage Analysis

The death of Alfred induces a closeness between Latimer and his father, which Latimer interprets as stemming from his father's newfound ability to understand Latimer's suffering. This interpretation reinforces both Latimer's view of himself as martyr and his belief in his own importance.

Ironically, his power to read his father's mind, though making him unable to define his own sense of self, causes him to be impervious to Bertha's manipulations. If Latimer is aware of a premeditated attack on his self, he can defend himself. It is only when he becomes conscious of others' thoughts that he is unable to create a protective barrier.

To a certain extent, Latimer is still at the mercy of Bertha, however. He cannot read her mind, and thus convinces himself that everything he has always wanted to believe is true. He thinks that she loves him, and though he knows that she will not love him forever, he believes that the feeling of love does exist in her heart and thus, attempts to prolong it.

Chapter 2, The Decline

Chapter 2, The Decline Summary

Latimer's father's health declined shortly after his son's marriage, so Latimer and Bertha stayed at home more and, consequently, saw each other more. A chill still existed between them, which became even greater on the night of Latimer's father's death. Just after his father died, Latimer joined Bertha in her sitting room and discovered that he was suddenly able to read her thoughts. What he read in her mind terrified him.

Latimer discovered that Bertha thought of him as a weak, silly man and always had. He suddenly realized that he was hated and alone. He saw that Bertha was petty and reveled in causing pain to other people. He also learned the cause of the coldness he had been feeling from her - Bertha had been disillusioned. She had believed that Latimer's weakness would make him her slave.

From then on, Bertha became even more powerless in their marriage. Latimer could read her thoughts, and she was unable to manipulate him. She tried to appeal to his ambitions and to his vanity, but he was unmoved, and her powerlessness began to gnaw at her. Bertha began to hate Latimer even more when she began to suspect that he could read her mind. This frightened her and made her defiant, and she began to wonder how she could be rid of him. For a time, she hoped that he would commit suicide, but then realized that suicide was not in Latimer's nature

Bertha and Latimer continued to hate each other, living in the same house, but apart, though they never fought outright. On a January evening, many years later, Latimer sat in his father's library chair at the desk when Bertha came in carrying a candle. This was the fulfillment of the vision that Latimer had had those many years ago, and immediately made Latimer worry for his safety. Despite her thoughts of hatred, Bertha merely told Latimer that she had had to hire a new maid because the old one was getting married. Then she left.

Because Latimer connected the maid, Mrs. Archer, to his vision and memory of Bertha in the library, Latimer was afraid to meet her. He was distant from the other servants in the house because they thought he was strange and pitied Bertha for having such an odd husband. When he finally did meet Mrs. Archer, he decided that he also did not like her because of her coldness.

Mrs. Archer quickly became Bertha's favorite, though Latimer detected that the favoritism was marked by a strange fear of Mrs. Archer and a dependence on her. Latimer's power of reading minds began to weaken, and Bertha stayed away from him more and more, so he could not define his impressions more. He only could see strange candlelit scenes in Bertha's dressing room involving the maid and something locked in Bertha's cabinet.

As Latimer's ability to read minds became weaker, he began to see more scenes of cities and of giant ruins. Finally, he was completely unable to read minds. Bertha sensed a change in him, and as he became more and more withdrawn, began to seek him out. Latimer was pleased that he could no longer read her hateful thoughts, but wondered about the subtle sense of excitement and expectation that she seemed to have about her. She seemed to revel in his weakness, and Latimer wondered whether she spent time with him as a test of whether he could discover her secrets.

Chapter 2, The Decline Analysis

Here, Latimer realizes that all of the flirtations that Bertha entered into with him while Alfred was alive were merely to tease and pain him. She had never felt any real regard for him, and he had mistakenly imposed his own thoughts on her. Though Latimer had often wondered what Bertha was thinking, he is now tormented by the reality of these thoughts and by the knowledge that he has married a stranger.

Latimer was previously unable to read Bertha's mind not because it is advanced and highly evolved, but because it is narrower and baser than those of their peers. She does not possess even the slightest bit of compassion for others. She truly is the Water-Nixie, luring men to their deaths.

In addition, Latimer has now lost his only outlet for anticipation and desire. Latimer's life has consistently been ruined by his knowledge of the future. Now that he can also read Bertha's thoughts, he is completely lost. He now knows no sense of hope or possibility. When his mind begins to close again, rather than being alarmed, Latimer feels a sense of relief.

Chapter 2, Rebirth

Chapter 2, Rebirth Summary

During Latimer's decline, Charles Meunier came to visit. Both Latimer and Charles had changed, but in very different ways. Charles was now famous throughout Europe, had elegant women attending to him, and noblemen who had befriended him boasted of him. Latimer had changed for the worse, but Charles refrained from mentioning this or questioning Latimer about it. Latimer considered talking to Charles about his mental condition in the hopes that Charles would know about some cure, but Latimer did not.

Near the end of Charles' visit, Mrs. Archer suddenly became severely ill, and Charles began to attend to her since the family doctor was away. The gravity of Mrs. Archer's illness panicked Bertha, and she refused to allow anyone else to nurse her. Latimer found this strange since he had heard Bertha and Mrs. Archer quarrelling recently. Mrs. Archer had been much ruder than would generally have been tolerated from a servant, but instead of dismissing her, Bertha had put up with the behavior.

Charles seemed to be more than professionally interested in Mrs. Archer's case and seemed preoccupied. Picking up on this, Latimer asked Charles whether Mrs. Archer's case of disease was unusual, and was told that it was simply a fatal case of peritonitis, or inflammation of the abdominal lining. Charles then asked Latimer to assist him in performing an experiment on Mrs. Archer. When Mrs. Archer died, Charles planned to transfuse blood into her. He had performed the experiment on animals with peritonitis with good results and did not believe that it would hurt her. To keep any kind of rumor of the experiment from getting out and being misinterpreted, however, he made Charles promise to keep it secret from Bertha or any of the local doctors or nurses. Latimer agreed.

On the night that Mrs. Archer was expected to die, Charles tried to get Bertha to leave for the night, but she refused. Charles made frequent visits to the sickroom and noticed something strange. He asked Latimer whether Mrs. Archer might have any reason for disliking Bertha. Charles said that Mrs. Archer had lost the power of speech, but he had noticed that since she had realized that she was dying, she kept looking meaningfully at Bertha and seemed to want to say something.

When the moment of Mrs. Archer's death arrived, Charles brought Latimer into the sickroom. Bertha seemed startled, but believed Charles when he told her that Mrs. Archer would not regain consciousness and started to leave. As she was leaving, however, Mrs. Archer opened her eyes, so Bertha refused to go.

Bertha allowed herself to be led from the room after Mrs. Archer finally died, but sent two older nurses in to take over. Charles began his operation, and Latimer dismissed the nurses, telling them that the doctor was performing an operation because he was unsure about the death. As the operation progressed, Mrs. Archer began to breathe

again and her lips began to move. Apparently the nurses had spoken to Bertha about the operation because Bertha returned, looking alarmed.

As Bertha entered the room, Mrs. Archer's eyes opened and met Bertha's. Mrs. Archer accused Bertha of poisoning Latimer with a poison that she kept in the cabinet in her sitting room, and which she had forced Mrs. Archer to acquire for her. She also accused Bertha of telling lies behind Mrs. Archer's back to make people hate Mrs. Archer and asked whether she was sorry for what she had done. Then Mrs. Archer died for the final time.

Since then, Latimer and Bertha lived apart. He gave her half of his wealth and left her in England, while he wandered through foreign countries, stopping until he began to be able to read the thoughts of people around him and then moving on. He made Charles promise not to tell anyone about what had happened, so Bertha maintained her reputation in society, and everyone still thought Latimer was odd. Finally, Latimer became ill and returned to Devonshire to die where he was surrounded by servants whose thoughts he could not escape.

Latimer's account then trails off after he tells us it is now September 20, 1850, the day he is to die. He has read his account of his life each time the vision of his death came upon him and has read it so often that he now knows all of the words by heart.

Chapter 2, Rebirth Analysis

In the nineteenth century, an interest in transfusion was revived after having been banned after several deaths had occurred during experiments in France in the seventeenth century. Here, Eliot uses transfusion to meld the themes of religion and science that are at the heart of *The Lifted Veil*.

Charles' experiment overturns the final boundary that defines humanity. Previously, in the story, the boundary of time had been removed and the division between the self and the other had been erased. Here, Eliot removes the final boundary - that between life and death.

Though the coexistence of life and death is flirted with through the character of Latimer, the only true coexistence occurs when Mrs. Archer is revived. Latimer has experienced a sort of spiritual death during life as a result of the lifted boundaries and hopes that Charles can give him a sort of symbolic resurrection. Instead, Mrs. Archer is actually resurrected.

The vision of resurrection that we are given, however, is extremely disturbing. The transfusion itself is not pretty, involving the slicing of neck arteries and a sort of rape of Mrs. Archer. Just as the thoughts of others intrude into Latimer's consciousness, so both Charles and Latimer invade Mrs. Archer's body. Charles' blood flows into her, and Latimer, who is usually passive, breathes the air into Mrs. Archer's corpse in a scene that depicts the most intimate physical contact that occurs in the entire story.

This rebirth, then, is a symbol of the struggle between male science and female nature and underscores some of the misogynistic undertones of the novella. Here, males take over the traditionally female role as giver of life. In this scene alone, Bertha is revealed as a potential murderess and is depicted as an inhuman monster, and Mrs. Archer enters the afterlife, only to be ripped out of it by men. Even in death, she is not safe.

Finally, the ultimate result of Mrs. Archer's rebirth is despicable. She is revived but is only able to curse before dying again. She can only vent her hatred for Bertha and does not do this to advance the cause of justice but instead to get revenge for the wrongs that she feels Bertha has committed towards her.

The Lifted Veil, then, can clearly be seen as a meditation on the relationship between art, religion, and science during a time when the definitions of life and death were being removed from the realm of religion and newly defined by the sciences. Eliot even named it accordingly, in reference to one of Lewes' ideas regarding the existence of the soul: "It is a topic on which no man will wisely dogmatise. The veil of mystery will never be lifted. We who stand before that veil, and speculate as to what is behind it, can but build systems; we cannot see the truth."

Characters

Alfred

Latimer's older brother Alfred is his opposite. Latimer describes him as "a handsome, self-confi- dent man of 6 and 20 a thorough contrast to my fragile, nervous, ineffectual self." Alfred is their father's favorite, as he embodies all that the father desires in a son. When Latimer is introduced to Bertha as a probable future wife to Alfred, his natural dislike of his brother turns to envious hatred. Right before he is to be married to Bertha, Alfred dies from falling off a horse, leaving Latimer free to marry Bertha.

Mrs. Archer

Mrs. Archer is the new servant Bertha hires, a woman whose arrival Latimer dreads: "I had a vague dread that I should find her mixed up with the dreary drama of my life that some new sickening vision would reveal her to me as an evil genius." Latimer describes her as "a tall, wiry, dark-eyed woman, this Mrs. Archer, with a face handsome enough to give her coarse, hard nature the odious finish of bold, self-confident coquetry." Latimer remains wary of Mrs. Archer, as he perceives that she and Bertha share some dark secret from him. On the night of Mrs. Archer's death, Latimer allows Charles Meunier to perform a blood transfusion on her dead body. As a result, the body comes to life and points an accusatory finger at Bertha. In this brief moment of life after death, Mrs. Archer reveals that Bertha had hired her to concoct a poison to kill Latimer. This revelation made, the body once again assumes the posture of death.

The Father

Latimer's father is cold, distant and disapproving of his sickly, unmotivated child. He hires a tutor to school the young Latimer in all of the subjects which he most dreads, and in which he is least capable. After Latimer's older brother Alfred, the favorite, dies, his father becomes more endeared to Latimer, who becomes sympathetic to his father, and is careful to please him as much as possible, as well as to care for him in his sorrow and old age.

Bertha Grant

Bertha is first introduced to Latimer as his brother's future fiancee. She is described as "no more than twenty, a tall, slim, willowy figure, with luxuriant blond hair." Because she is the only person whose mystery Latimer's powers of "double consciousness" cannot penetrate, Latimer becomes fixated on her as an object of his devotion. But after Arnold's death and their subsequent marriage, Bertha becomes for Latimer an object of hatred. Once Bertha's inner thoughts have been revealed to him, and she is no longer a mystery, Latimer finds that she is evil, heartless and shallow. Bertha, for her part, hates

Latimer because of his unwillingness to maintain his former devotion to her. As their marriage develops into one of mutual hatred, Bertha seeks the company of other men. Years into their marriage, Bertha hires a new servant, Mrs. Archer, to poison Latimer. After Mrs. Archer dies, and is then momentarily brought back to life, she points an accusatory finger at Bertha, revealing Bertha's evil plan. Latimer and Bertha then separate for life.

Latimer

Latimer is the main character and narrator of "The Lifted Veil." He is a sickly child and a grave disappointment to his father. When Latimer is introduced to his older brother's soon-to-be fiancee, Bertha, he becomes hopelessly infatuated with her. At the same time, Latimer discovers that he has the mysterious power to foresee certain events before they happen. This supernatural power, which Latimer refers to as "double-consciousness," also gives him the ability to read the thoughts of those around him. After Arnold, his older brother, falls off a horse and dies, Latimer is left to marry Bertha. But already Latimer has seen a future incident which indicates that he and Bertha will come to despise each other. After their marriage, Latimer's powers of "double-consciousness" make the development of this mutual hatred between husband and wife that much more horrible to him. When it is revealed to Latimer that Bertha had been scheming to poison him, the two of them separate for life. At the story's end, Latimer is waiting for the dreaded moment of his own death, a moment he had perceived in exact detail a month earlier.

Charles Meunier

In the first half of "The Lifted Veil," Charles Meunier is the young Latimer's only childhood friend. Latimer describes the young Meunier as almost his opposite, one "whose intellectual tendencies were the very reverse of" his own. Of poor origins, Meunier pursues medical studies "for which he had a special genius." In the second half of the story, Meunier, now a renowned physician, comes to visit Latimer, whom he hasn't seen in years. One night of his visit, Mrs. Archer, the servant, is on her deathbed, and Meunier asks Latimer permission to perform an experiment on her corpse, the minute she is dead. He subsequently performs a blood transfusion from his own body into that of the dead servant. She instantly comes to life, opens her eyes, and points an accusatory finger at Latimer's wife, revealing a deadly secret which uncovers evil intentions. At the end of the story, it is suggested that this incident jolts Meunier into a contemplation of the spiritual, rather than the scientific; upon the corpse's revelation, "Meunier looked paralyzed: life for that moment ceased to be a scientific problem for him."

Themes

Science versus the supernatural

"The Lifted Veil," like many Gothic tales, interrogates the boundaries between scientific knowledge and the supernatural, between the rational and the irrational. This set of dichotomies is laid out in the differences between Latimer and his friend Meunier. Latimer describes their childhood friendship as an attraction of opposites, a meeting of minds between "the dreamy and the practical." As a doctor, Meunier is schooled in the field of science, the epitome of rational thought. Latimer, on the other hand, has no practical occupation, but possesses supernatural powers, associated with the irrational. Toward the end of the story, however, when Meunier performs the blood transfusion which brings Mrs. Archer momentarily back to life, this distinction is put into question. It is through Meunier's scientific experimentation that this episode of life after death produces an effect which allows a glimpse into the supernatural or spiritual realm. Thus, for Meunier, "life ceased to be a scientific problem for him," upon witnessing this evidence of the spirit world.

Playing God

"The Lifted Veil" shares a similar theme to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* in that it questions the morality of scientific inquiry which threatens the boundaries of the spiritual realm. Dr. Frankenstein "plays God" by endeavoring the create human life, using scientific methods. In "The Lifted Veil," Meunier's transfusion brings the dead Mrs. Archer momentarily back to life, bringing into question the morality of such an endeavor.

Clairvoyance

"The Lifted Veil" is about a man who suffers from his powers of clairvoyance. In the 19th Century, as now, many people believed that some humans may possess what we now refer to as "psychic" powers, to see into the future or past, or read the minds of other people. "The Lifted Veil" explores this theme in centering around a main character, Latimer, who possesses such powers. Yet, Latimer does not make good use of his clairvoyance. Rather, he only causes himself and those around him to suffer because of it. He does not use his powers to any creative or spiritual end, or to help people in any way. He is almost selfish in his "double consciousness." What he sees when the daily thoughts of those around him are revealed is a world of pettiness and selfishness.

The Mystery of Life

"The Lifted Veil" suggests that human beings are better off when kept from seeing beyond the "veil" of mystery which shrouds the human condition and the boundary between life and death. For Latimer, life becomes drained of almost all mystery. He is

drawn to Bertha before their marriage because she is the only person who remains a mystery to him. After their marriage, when her selfish, petty thoughts are revealed to his supernatural powers of perception, she no longer holds any interest or romance for him. The poem at the beginning of the story comes in the form of a prayer to "Heaven" not to be granted extrasensory powers beyond those of common humanity. The story very clearly sug gests that the powers of clairvoyance only drain the mystery from life, and do no earthly good.

Life after Death

In the climactic moments of "The Lifted Veil," Mrs. Archer, Latimer's maid, is momentarily revived from death by means of blood transfusion. In these brief moments of life after death, Mrs. Archer points an accusatory finger of Bertha, revealing that she had been hired by Bertha to poison Latimer. Latimer's exclamation at this point is telling: "Great God! Is this what it is to live again.... to wake up with our unstilled thirst upon us, with our unuttered curses rising to our lips, with our muscles ready to act out their half-committed sins?" This message simultaneously unburdens the soul of the dead woman of her sins, and exacts a revenge upon Bertha for drawing her in to such a deed. This story suggests that human beings are better off with a limited knowledge of what lies beyond the "veil" of death.

Fate

Fate is the idea that human destiny has been predetermined by some supernatural force and cannot be altered. "The Lifted Veil" explores the theme of fate because it questions whether or not Latimer would have been able to escape the painful events he foresaw in his own future. Latimer's suffering is in part focused on his vision of a moment in his marriage with Bertha during which she bitterly suggests that he commit suicide. Yet, despite this prevision of suffering, Latimer does nothing to alter his fate—he marries Bertha anyway, and spends years anticipating with dread this moment in their marriage. The reader is presented with the implied question: Would Latimer have been able to avoid this scene, had he tried? Or was it his fate to follow this course in life, and any effort to alter it would have failed anyway?

Style

Narration

"The Lifted Veil" is written in the first person, meaning that the story is told entirely from the perspective of one individual, the main character, Latimer. "The Lifted Veil" is Eliot's only story written in the first person. Because the reader sees the events of the story only through the eyes of the main character, the narrative creates the effect of an internal, psychological flow of ideas. Because the story is told as it is written by Latimer over the course of the month before his death, and recalls the events of his life, beginning in childhood, it takes on the form of an intimate confession, of a dying man's last effort to clear his conscience.

Narrative Structure

The story is structured in "flashback" form, as Latimer begins the story exactly one month before he knows he's going to die, then takes the narrative back to his childhood and adult experiences, and then ends the story once again in his sitting room, as he writes the last words of the story, before dying, as he knew he would. This flashback structure takes on another dimension, however, due to the fact that Latimer is a clairvoyant, who can see events in the future before they occur. In that way, several key events of the story are told in a "flash forward," as Latimer describes events which then occur in the future.

Setting

"The Lifted Veil" is set in Victorian England, in the early-to-mid 19th Century. Latimer's father's house, later his own, is a country estate. In his childhood, Latimer lives in Switzerland, and travels to Prague. After his separation from Bertha, he travels the world, staying in inns, but never too long in any one place. Latimer's visions of future events include scenes which take place in Switzerland, Prague and England.

The Epigraph Poem

Eliot attached an epigraph poem to the beginning of "The Lifted Veil" after she had completed the story. These four lines are written in the form of a prayer, "Give me no light, great Heaven," which essentially asks Heaven to grant the speaker no powers or knowledge beyond those of the everyday human world. In other words, it asks not to be granted the clairvoyant, or extrasensory powers with which Latimer is plagued, and which causes him such suffering. This epigraph is in some ways suggestive of the "moral" of the story, which is that perhaps it is better *not* to "lift the veil" of the mystery of life and death.

Gothic Horror

"The Lifted Veil" can be categorized as Gothic fiction, also referred to as Gothic horror. Gothic fiction is characterized by suggestions of supernatural occurrences, and often contains scenes of horror, including the appearance of ghosts and other forms of life after death. This literary genre, associated with 19th Century England, began with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* and includes Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* as well as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The Gothic elements of "The Lifted Veil" include Latimer's supernatural ability to read the thoughts of others and to see into the future. The climactic scene in which Mrs. Archer's body is momentarily brought back from the dead is the key Gothic scene in the story, because it includes elements of Gothic horror such as the gory scene of the blood transfusion and the dead body coming back to life to point an accusatory finger at Bertha. These Gothic elements of the story are what caused Eliot's publisher at the time to hesitate in publishing it.

Historical Context

The Victorian Era

Alexandrina Victoria (1819-1901), Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1819-1901) was born in the same year as George Eliot. Victoria's reign lasted from 1837 until her death. Because her life span and reign came to characterize this period in history, it came to be known as the "Victorian" Era. Victorian England is associated with restrictive moral attitudes and repressive standards of social behavior. There was, however, a strong element of criticism of these standards among many prominent writers and intellectuals of the time.

The Industrial Revolution

The 19th Century can now be seen as a period of transition from a pre-industrial economy to an industrial economy in most of the Western world. In England, the Industrial Revolution was accompanied by great political and cultural changes, as well as scientific advances. The development of railroads was seen by many to indicate a major change, while various reform bills marked a shift in the political, economic and social structure of the culture. These changes produced new class formations and a new class consciousness in England. The Great Exhibition of 1851, which brought visitors from all over Europe, showcased industrial machines by way of celebrating England's lead in the industrial revolution.

Charles Darwin, On the Origin of Species (1859)

In 1859 (the same year "The Lifted Veil" was published) Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published *On The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection,* in which he put forth his theory of evolution through natural selection, known as Darwinism. Theorizing that humans are descendants of apes, Darwinism was controversial, in that it posed a challenge to existing Christian ideas about the origin of life. However, among most scientists, Darwinism was readily received and quickly accepted. Herbert Spencer, a close friend of George Eliot, was an influential thinker and leading proponent of Darwinism.

Mesmerism, Phrenology and Clairvoyance

There were many areas of "pseudo-science" which piqued the interest of intellectuals and others in Victorian England. *Phrenology* was a theory that one could determine a person's character and ability based on a close examination of the shape and size of their head. (Phrenology has been debunked in the 20th Century as a pseudo-science, used to support racist ideas). *Mesmerism,* based on the practices of the physician Charles Mesmer, was the precursor to modern practices of hypnotism. *Clairvoyance*

referred to having knowledge beyond that of everyday thought and perceptions, a phenomenon now commonly referred to as extrasensory perception (ESP).

Women in Victorian England

The rights of women in Victorian England were severely restricted. Women writers and novelists often chose a male penname, for fear that public knowledge of their sex would either restrict their publication options, negatively effect the response of critics or cause social disgrace. The rights of women were also severely restricted in terms of marriage laws. Divorce was difficult or impossible to obtain legally and looked down upon socially. A woman and man living together out of wedlock resulted in severe social stricture, often cutting off ties to family and friends. In the realm of higher education, women had few, if any, options.

Literary Trends

The mid-1850s saw two distinct trends in English literature—realism and Gothic romance. Eliot is widely considered to have mastered the realist novel through most of her works of fiction. Anthony Trollope, a contemporary of Eliot, is also known for his style of realist novel. The Gothic novel, meanwhile, was developed through such works as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre,* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Gothic fiction, which borrowed its name from the style of medieval architecture, was characterized by dark tales, often delving into the realm of the supernatural, and grotesque images. In the United States, Gothic fiction was mastered by Edgar Allan Poe, in such short stories as "The Fall of the House of Usher," and Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his collection of stories, *Twice-Told Tales*.

Critical Overview

After years spent as a journal editor, critical essayist and translator of the books of others, Eliot's unoffi- cial husband, George Henry Lewes, encouraged her to try her hand at fiction. In 1857, she first assumed the penname George Eliot, and began to write her first novel, *Adam Bede,* which was published in 1859. *Adam Bede* brought Eliot immediate critical acclaim, suggesting to some critics that she posed a challenge in literary accomplishment even to the well-established Charles Dickens. Close on the heals of *Adam Bede,* Eliot published her second novel *The Mill on the Floss* in 1860. The following year, her third novel, *Silas Marner,* was published. Her masterpiece, *Middlemarch,* was published in 1871-72.

Publishing "The Lifted Veil"

Eliot paused between the publication of *Adam Bede* and completion of *The Mill on the Floss* to write her (long) short story, "The Lifted Veil." Blackwood, her publisher, was reluctant to publish the story, because it didn't fit in with her previous novel, and because he feared the controversial nature of its supernatural subject-matter would not be well received. Blackwood wrote her that, although it was "a very striking story, full of thought and most beautifully written," he "wished the theme had been a happier one." Eliot herself described "The Lifted Veil" as "a slight story of the *outré* kind[,] not a *jeu d'esprit,* but a *jeu de malancholie."* "The Lifted Veil" was, nevertheless, published anonymously in a literary journal in 1849. But Blackwood's opinion of the story remained negative, as he advised Eliot not to include "The Lifted Veil," as well as another of her stories, in his 1866 edition of her works.

"The Lifted Veil" has remained to this day one of Eliot's lesser known works, perhaps because it is an anomaly among her more famous novels. As biographer Rosemary Ashton has remarked, "The Lifted Veil" is "indeed an uncharacteristic story for George Eliot to have written." Ashton explains that it was her only story written as a first person narrative, and the only one to include elements of the occult or pseudo-science. However, it's place in literary history fits snugly into the category of the Gothic tale of horror, published between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), both of which integrate themes of scientific inquiry which, as in Eliot's story, borders on the edge of the supernatural.

The Height of Success

Biographer Frederick Robert Karl has stated that, by 1876, Eliot was "regarded as England's greatest living novelist." He goes on to say that "she was respected as a national treasure." Karl has stated that Eliot was "the voice of her century." According to Gordon S. Haight, by her contemporary critics she "was acknowledged the greatest novelist of her time." Biographer Elizabeth S. Haldane notes that Eliot "indeed took her place among the great figures of the Victorian Era." Karl concurs that, "At the peak of

her achievement, she was one of the three most famous women in England, along with Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale."

Despite her socially unconventional domestic arrangements (living as husband and wife with a married man), Eliot's literary reputation by the 1870s had become so highly acclaimed that her position as a socially disgraceful woman was largely overlooked. She and Lewes hosted popular Sunday gatherings in their London home, and she was even privileged to dine with royalty.

Post-Humus Reputation

Eliot died at the height of her literary career. Karl states that, "At the time of her death, despite her detractors, Eliot was something of a cult figure, a legend." However, this reputation quickly declined in the years following her death. Although her funeral was attended by an impressive list of her surviving contemporary writers and intellectuals, her questionable social standing during life immediately came back to haunt her. Despite her widespread fame and recognition, she was denied the right to burial in the "poet's corner" of Westminster Abbey, where the graves of many notable figures can be found. However, Eliot was buried near her lifelong companion, Lewes, in Highgate cemetery.

The first biography of Eliot to appear was written by John Walter Cross, the husband of her brief marriage at the end of her life. Cross's biography has since been widely criticized for its disingenuousness in attempting to paint a picture of Eliot which would leave her a respectable woman in the eyes of posterity. Subsequent biographies have revealed the more interesting and scandalous elements of her relationships with men, as well as the less flattering but more psychologically complex elements of her character. Despite, or perhaps due to, Cross's efforts to normalize the story of Eliot's life, her literary reputation went into rapid decline after her death, and was not revived until over 40 years later.

By the turn of the century, Eliot had fallen out of favor with literary scholars and critics, and, according to biographer Ina Taylor, "by the end of the century her work had become too *démodé* (out of fashion) to be read." But writers Virginia Woolf and F. R. Leavis came "to recognize that her novels ranked among the greatest in the language." They were both instrumental in ensuring that "by the middle of [the 20th] century George Eliot was accorded the recognition and immortality she had always sought." Thanks to the efforts of Woolf and Leavis, Eliot's reputation as one of the greatest novelists of the 19th Century has been, and continues to be, fully revived. In 1980, during the centenary celebration of her death, she was given a monument in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American Culture, with a specialization in cinema studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in American cinema. In the following essay, she discusses the "curse" of clairvoyance in "The Lifted Veil."

Critical Essay #2

The "veil" in George Eliot's novella "The Lifted Veil" symbolizes the boundary between the natural world and the world of the *supernatural,* which in this story includes the realm of the spirit and of death. The words "shroud" or "curtain" also appear throughout the story as references to the image of the "veil." Latimer's powers of clairvoyance, his ability to both see into the future and hear the internal thoughts of people around him, is described in terms of his ability to see beyond the "veil" which separates the natural world from that of the spirit world. While these powers of clairvoyance would seem to be a gift, Latimer experiences them as a "curse," which drains life of all pleasure, bringing him only misery and suffering.

The "veil" or "curtain" which separates human beings with ordinary powers of perception from foreknowledge of the future is lifted for Latimer, allowing him to see events before they actually occur. But this "superadded consciousness" which allows him to see into the future deprives him of all human pleasure in the present. He recalls his childhood, before the "curtain of the future" had been lifted to him, as a happy one, "For then the curtain of the future was as impenetrable to me as to other children." For Latimer, the "hope" of his childhood was a result of possessing, like other children, no knowledge of his own future, "I had all their delight in the present hour, their sweet indefinite hopes for the morrow." Once he has seen into his own future, however, there is no basis on which to harbor any sense of "hope." Also, because he becomes preoccupied with these visions of the future, he no longer experiences "delight in the present hour."

Latimer describes his only pleasures in life as a child, before acquiring his powers of clairvoyance, in terms of *nature,* both in association with the mystery of life and with his memories of maternal love. Latimer's love of nature is specifically associated with his fond early memories of his mother, who died when he was quite young. Although generally a lonely child, Latimer describes his "least solitary moments" as occurring in the presence of nature, which he describes in terms of the "cherishing love" of his mother's embrace: "It seemed to me that the sky, and the glowing mountain-tops, and the wide blue water, surrounded me with a cherishing love such as no human face had shed on me since my mother's love had vanished out of my life." Latimer further describes his experience of nature in terms of a spiritual, heavenly or godlike quality, as "the sight of the Alps, with the setting sun on them seemed to me like an entrance to heaven." He goes on to describe his experience of nature in terms which suggest religious fervor; he finds himself in a state of a "perpetual sense of exaltation," or almost religious awe "at the presence of nature and all her awful loveliness." Latimer's delight in the mystery and spiritual properties of nature are lost, however, when the "entrance to heaven" is in effect opened for him, in the form of his powers of clairvoyance. Once he is able to see beyond the realm of life and nature to the realm of death and the soul, this reverence for, and awe in the face of the mystery of nature is no longer a part of his experience.

Once both his future, or "destiny," and the thoughts and souls of other human beings are revealed to him by the lifting of the "veil" of life's mystery, Latimer no longer takes

pleasure in the natural world. He thus comes to the conclusion that it is the *mystery* of life and of death which is the sole cause of pleasure in human life. In fact, he comes to believe that human beings thrive on that which is unknown to them.

So absolute is our soul's need of something hidden and uncertain for the maintenance of that doubt and hope and effort which are the breath of its life, that if the whole future were laid bare to us beyond to-day, the interest of all mankind would be bent on the hours that lie between.

Because of Latimer's powers of clairvoyance, life for him contains nothing "hidden and uncertain" and is drained of any "interest," and therefore of any "doubt and hope and effort."

Critical Essay #3

Latimer's instant fixation on Bertha as an object of his adoration is thus due both to the fact that she is the only person whose inner soul remains a mystery to him, and because he associates her with images of nature. Latimer describes Bertha, upon his first introduction to her, as if she had emerged directly from the world of nature: "The pale-green dress, and the green leaves that seemed to form a border about her pale blond hair, made me think of a water-Nixie, —for my mind was full of German lyrics, and this pale, fatale-eyed woman, with the green weeds, looked like a birth from some cold sedgy-stream, the daughter of an aged river." In describing Bertha on their wedding day, Latimer again describes her in terms of nature imagery, which is also endowed with a spiritual element: "Bertha, in her white silk dress and pale-green leaves, and the pale hues of her hair and face, looked like the spirit of the morning." In Bertha, Latimer sees both the spiritual mystery and the maternal love he associates with his childhood experience of nature.

Latimer's fixation on Bertha is described most emphatically, however, in terms of the fact that she is the only person in the world who remains a mystery to him. Because Latimer is denied the human pleasures of *not* being able to see beyond the "veil" of life's mystery, of the spiritual world, Bertha, "my oasis of mystery in the dreary desert of knowledge," becomes the only source of pleasure in his life. It is what he *doesn't* know about Bertha that fascinates him. His fascination with Bertha is attributable to the fact that she is the only "enigma" left in his world, "amidst the fatiguing obviousness of the other minds around me." He explains that the overpowering "effect" Bertha had on him "was chiefly determined by the fact that she made the only exception, among all the human beings about me, to my unhappy gift of insight." Because Latimer's ability to see into the future spoils his sense of hope, Bertha's mysteriousness becomes his only source of pleasure in life, since "she had for me the fascination of an unraveled destiny."

He goes on to describe the "closed secret" of Bertha's face in terms of religious iconography; her face to him was the "shrine of a doubtfully benignant deity which ruled his fate." It's as if Bertha, being the only remaining mystery in Latimer's life, takes on all the power of the mystery of a "deity," or god, which Latimer had previously attributed to nature. She comes to represent for Latimer the realm of the unknown which, for him, is the source of all human delight in life. Bertha thus becomes for Latimer a mysterious godlike presence to which he blindly devotes himself.

In the beginning of their marriage, Bertha continues to be a mystery to Latimer, and therefore continues to capture his attention: "Bertha's inward self remained shrouded from me, and I still read her thoughts only through the language of her lips and demeanour." While her "inward self" is "shrouded" from Latimer, he is still able to "find in her alone among my fellow-beings the blessed possibility of mystery, and doubt, and expectation." Eighteen months after their marriage, however, upon the death of Latimer's father, the "veil which had shrouded Bertha's soul" from Latimer is lifted: "The terrible moment of complete illumination had come to me, and I saw that the darkness had hidden no landscape from me, but only a blank prosaic wall." Once this veil is lifted,

and Bertha no longer a mystery to him, Latimer loses all interest in her, and she loses all power over him: "Before marriage she had completely mastered my imagination, for she was a secret to me. But now that her soul was laid open to me, now that I was compelled to share the privacy of her motives, to follow all the petty devices that preceded her words and acts, she found herself powerless with me"

Latimer's "curse of insight" into life's mysteries has the result of causing him such suffering that it has "annihilated religious faith within me." His only "deity" had been that which he imagined to have been enshrined in Bertha's face, and, once that shrine is shown to be empty, there is no longer any possibility of faith for him. Latimer spends the remainder of his life, after the revelation of Bertha's maid that she had been trying to poison him, fleeing from "my old insight" into the "Unknown Presence."

Critical Essay #4

Fifteen years after the initial publication of "The Lifted Veil" George Eliot added a short epigraph to the story.

Give me no light, great Heaven, but such as turns To energy of human fellowship; No powers beyond the growing heritage That makes completer manhood.

This poem is written in the form of a prayer, whereby the speaker asks Heaven to give him "no light"—meaning, no knowledge or insight— "but such as turns to energy of human fellowship." In other words, the speaker asks to be granted no special powers of knowledge or insight ("light"), such as clairvoyance, which would turn his "energy" (thought or intention) away from "human fellowship." The speaker asks to be granted only those ordinary powers of knowledge and perception which direct his "energy" toward "fellowship" with humans in the natural world. This clearly refers to Latimer's supernatural powers of clairvoyance— as if the heavens had granted him the "light" by which to see beyond the "veil" which shrouds the future, the spirit world and the realm of death from most human eyes. The poem goes on to pray for "no powers beyond the growing heritage that makes completer manhood." The speaker asks to be spared any supernatural power beyond the wisdom endowed to a natural development of "manhood," or human experience. In other words, the "speaker" of the epigraph sends up a prayer to "heaven" to be spared the curse of supernatural powers of clairvoyance.

Given that Eliot chose to add it fifteen years after original publication, it may be that the epigraph functions as a sort of "moral" to the story of "The Lifted Veil." Because Latimer experiences his powers to see beyond the "veil" of life's mystery as a "curse," the epigraph functions almost as a warning to the reader not to wish for such powers, but, rather, to turn the "energy" of his earthly knowledge and insight ("light") to "human fellowship," to the natural world of humanity, for it is the mystery itself of the "Unknown Presence" which gives meaning, "hope" and "interest" to human life.

Source: Liz Brent, for *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay, Ashby interprets "The Lifted Veil" in light of the "transcendent ego" standard of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine *as well as the magazine's treatment of such character types as the spasmodic poet and the uncertain scientist*.

How may "The Lifted Veil" throw light on the subject of regionalism and George Eliot? As Barbara Hardy has pointed out, the tale is, in part, about the intersection of the homely and the exotic. Half the action takes place during a fateful two months in Europe, half in the shires. In this case, however, the play between local and cosmopolitan experience is not one between embedded and enlarged sympathies. Latimer's imaginative "gifts" originate on the continent, but withdrawal and isolation are their result.

In fact, "The Lifted Veil" takes as its subject the *marginal* role played by centrifugal humanistic pursuits. In Latimer's discourse, traditionally central relationships are the site of comically squandered intellectual and emotional energies. Narrowhorizoned and ephemeral affairs predominate as fathers hunt for musical snuff-boxes, wives give dinner-parties and brothers recommend hunting as an existential cure-all. Grander discourses, representing human solidarity and progress, are also ineffective. Connubial love is roundly bemocked and education decided by a phrenologist. Latimer, sensitive, "artistic," compassionate (he says), is a mere puzzle to his associates. Meunier, for all his "European reputation," far-sighted interests and large-minded character, can make of life only a "scientific problem." Even consciousness is a tissue of "frivolities, ... suppressed egoism, ... puerilities ... and make-shift thoughts. "

This is a pessimistic picture. It depends, however, on reading the tale out of context. If we restore the story's originary frame of reading—the flagship Victorian periodical Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine*— some pertinent complications emerge. At one level, the pessimism is confirmed. The discourse of the magazine exposes more substantial problems of value with Latimer and Meunier than absorption by the *arriviste* families of provincial England. At another level, it provides a situation in which that pessimism may be partially reduced. There is no effective civilised activity in "The Lifted Veil" itself. There is in the kind of reading the story expects to receive.

The implied hermeneutic activity is signalled by adaptions of certain character types known in Blackwood's in the 1850s, namely, the Spasmodic poet and the unsound scientist and his experimental subjects. The context is important because the magazine attached a curious mixture of sympathy and mistrust to these cultural figures. Their epistemological status was ambiguous, their discourse full of partial insights but no overall authority; and Blackwood's recommended particularly self-conscious handling of them. One could enjoy a certain kind of interesting but unsolid figure while not deviating from the knowledge of its partial nature. This was a work at once of sustained intellectual clarification and strenuous moral resistance. For Blackwood's it was a kind of work which confirmed a person's essential and productive humanity, re flecting its central standard of the "transcendent ego." In evoking it, "The Lifted Veil" could be said

to nurture not merely the surface reception of humanistic concerns, but their experiential investigation. The former would have been served by an omniscient narrator doling out careful moral disquisition— Eliot's more typical form. Here, readers are asked to identify Latimer *unaided,* actively making themselves a civilised community.

Let us examine these relations more fully, beginning with Latimer's connection to the socalled Spasmodic Poet. "Spasmodic" was an epithet coined by the magazine's main literary reviewer during this period, W. E. Aytoun. It covered the practitioners and products of a mode of poetry fashionable in the 1840s and 1850s, of which James Bailey's *Festus* (1839), Alexander Smith's *Life Drama* (1853) and Sydney Dobell's *Balder* (1853) were the most celebrated examples. Tennyson's *Maud* (1855) and Barrett-Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) also show the influence of Spasmodic preoccupations. As Aytoun's epithet implies, commercial success did not bring critical acclaim in Blackwood's. The terms of the attack are illuminating.

According to the magazine, what is wrong with the Spasmodic poet is his mode of consciousness. This is realised throughout a Spasmodic work. Metric eccentricity, imagery, subject matter and the typical character of its hero all reveal the same problem: deficient intellectual and moral control over the streams of sensibility which are the materials of art. W. H. Smith, another regular contributor, called *Festus,* "poetic rant, a mere farrago of distracted metaphors, and crude metaphysics and bewildering theology." The terms are repeated. For Aytoun, *Maud* lacked "simplicity" of style— "when all false images and far-fetched metaphors" have been removed. Its politics were "ill-conceived ... distorted and indistinct." Aytoun refers later to "hyperbole" and a "violent style of writing," words Smith had also used. The source of these faults, however, is not lack of talent. Bailey has "ardent imagination and ... strong passion"; Tennyson, even in *Maud*, "such extraordinary rhythmical music, that the sense became subordinate to the sound." The difficulty is rather one of excess and lack of consideration. The poets have failed to exert their forming and clarifying intellectual powers. Tennyson "formerly bestowed great pains upon his style," according to Aytoun, to attain the "utmost degree of lucidity combined with energy." "Imagination ought not to be divorced from sense," said Smith. Bailey had better have "waited till his own opinions ... had settled into something approaching consistency and harmony." Carelessness, not infacility, caused the "hideous cacophony" and "discord" of both poets' verse.

The poets' abandonment to the "torrent" of thought, sensation and image in their own minds, then, is the root of the matter. It is fixed by comparisons of Spasmodic verse to "monomania," "hypochondriacal brilliancy," or "maudlin imitations of passion, such as a tragedian ... might utter, when the effects of [an] overdose of gin ... were beginning to wear off." Delirium, staginess, inebriation, the terms add to the typology. They associate the "headlong career" of "unregulated," poetry-like thought with a risible delinquency. The same association with insipidity also connects the Spasmodic hero's turbulence and alienation. *Maud's* speaker is "morbid and misanthropical," by turns "abusive" or "silly" and "namby-pamby." The suicidal despair of the hero of *Life Drama* is premature and faintly ridiculous. Festus (that is, Faust), pouring out his cosmological vision, is a muddle-headed bore, while his Lucifer is "at one time the grand Personification of the Principle of Evil, ..., at another, ... a very slave to the passions of an amorous swain."

The descriptions make the traits indivisible, mutually reinforcing. Indulging "poetic" trains of thought without a corresponding exercise of intellect means indulging extravagant, muddled, anti-social, sickly and weak-willed consciousness.

Latimer exemplifies this experience of consciousness and these traits. His timidity and lack of exertion is commented on many times. Misanthropy, however much disguised by later "pity," looms admittedly through his contempt for brother and father. The narrative begins with a global condemnation of human unkindness. Alienation and unhealthiness, though it is a "horror" to bemoan, is also something to pique oneself on. "I believe I was held to have a sort of half-womanish, half-ghostly beauty; ... But I thoroughly disliked my own physique, and nothing but the belief that it was a condition of poetic genius would have reconciled me to it."

More important than these, however, are the general condition of alienation and "unregulated" imagination. The young Latimer enjoyed poetic "reveries." Rather than learn about water, he would watch it "gurgling among the pebbles and bathing the bright green water plants, by the hour together ... [with] perfect confidence that there were good reasons for what was so beautiful." This experience of natural inspiration continues in Geneva. The whole condition is described in terms which verbally echo the strictures about Spasmodic poetry. Latimer has "the poet's sensibility without his voice" along with the attendant misery. He is "humiliated" by his dreams because they are "utterly disjointed and commonplace." When he tries to 'imagine' Venice "I was only colouring the Canaletto engravings that hung in my old bedroom at home; the picture was a shifting one, my mind wandering uncertainly in search of more vivid images." Imitation and lack of coherent form are familiar designations of a secondary mode of imagination.

The visions after his "terrible illness" also relate to the Spasmodic prototype. Latimer cannot control either the premonitions or the mind-reading. The insights are extraordinarily vivid, but either fragmentary—as in the case of Prague and the visions of Bertha—or reducible to no coherent form—as in the streams of others' thoughts which invade him. Later, after marrying Bertha, the visions— " of strange cities, of sandy plains, of gigantic ruins, of midnight skies with strange bright constellations etc." —are so frequent he "live[s] continually" among them. It is as if his consciousness is always full of the material of poetry, but he has no power to shape it. We already know he lacks "intellectual" capacity. This combination leads to his calling the condition at first an "intermittent delirium," "a diseased activity of the imagination," then an "abnormal sensibility." As if to compound the associations, the second-sight begins during "the languid monotony of convalescence."

The combination of disease, alienation, negativity, feebleness and an untrammelled stream of poetry-like insight are all present. The reference is not an idle one. It alerts readers to a specific kind of hermeneutic activity. Says Smith of *Festus:* "Read it by all means, and with the pencil in your hand; for the probability is, that you will not work your way through it twice, and there are many things in it you will not be content to have caught a glimpse of only once." Aytoun on *Maud* clarifies the kind of attention required, when he tells us of the relief from it afforded by "Come into the garden." "[It is] the one

passage we can read ... with a perfect conviction that it is the strain of a true poet ... we feel that our hands are bound, like those of Thalaba, when the enchantress sang to him as she spun." In effect, readers of Spasmodic verse must be productive. They cannot passively rely on a Spasmodic's discourse, but may not lazily reject it either. Sympathetic suspicion must be exercised instead. Alert for true poetic ore, one shovels away the "Sacramento mud" of rant and befuddlement.

This process, none other than what a successful poet would do while composing, has contradictory implications for Latimer's narrative. On the one hand, it casts doubt on the authenticity of his clairvoyance and exponentially degrades his character. The incessantly petty, egotistic voices in the poor man's head may be only his sickly, wretched, jaundiced projections. If this is so, the story is bleaker than we thought: there is no centrifugal voice at all. On the other hand, regardless of the hero's status as a seer, the reader's activity now quickly supplies what his discourse lacks. An unequivocally artistic—thus socially unifying— endeavour now shapes it. The reader progresses through the text, discarding as dross the narrator's weaklier judgements, retaining the purer and more clear-headed ones. For instance, we may question claims of paternal indifference. Latimer's father drops whatever his business was to be at his son's bedside when the latter falls ill—day after day, for months, in a foreign land—and does not leave him for the convalescence. We note, "My diseased consciousness was more intensely preoccupied with [my brother's] thoughts and emotions than with those of any other person," but that Latimer always envied and disliked his brother. Conversely, we applaud the son's eventual access of love and compassion for his father.

Two objections might be raised to the foregoing. Latimer dismisses his own capacities, exercising the self-recognition a Spasmodic did not. "I saw in my face now nothing but the stamp of a morbid disposition." This suggests that his reports of second sight, which "provisions of incalculable words and actions proved ... to have a fixed relation to the mental processes of other minds," are not consciously deceptive or unreflectively recorded. "Morbidly sensitive," yes, but "self-distrustful" enough to suspect himself "diseased." What evidence is there, besides, that the premonitions were hallucinatory?

Another typology familiar to Blackwood's readers sheds some light. Investigations with supernatural implications were the subject of two articles of the early 1850s, "What is Mesmerism" and "The Night Side of Nature." The latter reviewed two recent publications. In one, "Researches on Electricity, Magnetism etc. In Relation To The Vital Force," translated by Dr. Gregory, Professor of Chemistry at Edinburgh University, Karl, Baron von Reichenbach, reported a series of experiments made with magnets upon human subjects. The Baron claimed to have discovered a new force of nature, the "odylic" force, which could produce sensory effects at distance. While emphasizing his thorough belief in Reichenbach's "good faith, perfect integrity and unwearied industry," the reviewer was sceptical. "All his deductions are founded on certain vague, indescribable sensations, in persons either morbidly sensitive or very peculiarly sensitive." (The more trustworthy witnesses are "artists.") All the effects arise from the mind's subjective effort, from "causes within the patient herself" (sic). This psychological explanation was repeated in the comments about Catherine Crow's "The Night Side of

Nature." This deals directly with clairvoyance, which the reviewer equates with the visions of sleep-walkers. Both clairvoyant and somnambulist live inside an illusion which only convinces them. The sleepwalker's world is particularly curious. One stage on from dreaming, it is a vividly projected simalcrum which the victim tours while simultaneously perambulating a real place (his bedroom, house etc.). The former adapts itself to the changes of the latter but the illusion is never broken. Latimer, let us recall, says his visions are dream-like but "more distinct" than dreams; and while undergoing them he does not lose consciousness of the real place he is in.

The typology concerns willingness to take paranormal experiences at their face value. It is the oversensitive and quasi-artistic who do so: but they find themselves in a seductively life-like parallel reality which is only a "coinage of the brain." In our terms, they take off at a tangent from the commonsense, consensual human world. The Mesmerism article offers a more censorious version of the paradigm. It is in the form of a letter, answered by an editorial postscript. Eagles, the author, impersonates an interested, concerned but inexpert reader of the magazine who has investigated "mesmeric in- fluence." His theory is that mesmerism, if it actually occurs, consists of a spiritual force, involving omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence in the mesmeriser. It would be an objective effect, whereby the mesmeriser travels outside his own body, causes inanimate objects to arrest people's movement and changes their moral natures. After complete initial scepticism, Eagles's character's observations lead to him to express horrified conviction that at least some of the mesmerist's claims may be true. The mesmerist can enter another mind, read it and use it to be in two places at once. In the editorial postscript, however, written by the then Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University, this conclusion is reversed. As with the real Reichenbach, the mythical correspondent's "candour and becoming gravity" are acknowledged. Nevertheless, mesmerism is decidedly a subjective phenomenon. The mesmerist is a cunning charlatan; the mesmerised "weak," "credulous" and "infatuated." The latter self-indulgently wish to be deprived of their own will and collude in "degenerate" fashion in hallucinatory experiences.

Whether clairvoyance, somnambulism or mesmerism is its source, claims to extrasensory perception cut no ice in the magazine. Even where an investigator adopts the tones of a disinterested observer, no credence can be given. Experience of these subjects itself signifies a reduced human centrality, "a *physique* and a *morale* greatly below the average" (Ferrier's italics). What chance for Latimer, then, who is decidedly interested and whose personality mirrors that of the experimental subject of this unsound science? Even his great friend Meunier may not be so admirable. *His* interest in resurrection place him within the sphere of charlatan investigation, or at best that of the industrious but misguided von Reichenbach and the "excellent" Eagles character, dabbling in the supernatural. His other great interest, "the psychological relations of disease," also makes him suspect. In an article about the trial of Edward Oxford, failed assassin of Queen Victoria, there was criticism of the medical evidence presented by the defence. Lack of self control, of motive, eccentricity and involuntary giggling in the dock were given as symptoms of insanity, responsibility reduced by disease. They define criminal irresponsibility, said Blackwood's. The medical profession had not fully considered the common-sense implications of its ideas.

We may now consider the internal evidence of the hallucinatory nature of Latimer's powers. Despite his own desperate belief, Latimer says of Prague only that it was "of a piece" with his premonition. The bridge in the vision was nightmarishly "unending" not the prosaic thing Latimer rushes across. A star-shaped point of light would not be difficult to find in a city's Jewish quarter. Similarly, it is significant that the premonition of Bertha occurs after Latimer has glanced out of his hotel window. Could he not have seen her and his father out of the corner of his eye? They enter only a few minutes later, so they must already be in the hotel's environs. We have only Latimer's word that the scene with a married Bertha is in fact repeated. As for the mind-reading, we have already pointed to the way it concentrates on a brother Latimer is peculiarly anxious about, reflecting his "antagonism." That Bertha is at first immune also questions the reality of the power: it only works to confirm what he wants to know. (Latimer deliberately denies his awareness that he and she are incompatible.) In addition, Latimer's self-pitying misanthropy is linked from the beginning with madness. He quotes Swift's epitaph as a mirror of his own case—but Swift is by no means a healthy precedent. One need not take all these signs as marks of delusion for the main point to be grasped. Latimer too may be a von Reichenbach—simply misguided. But there is enough in the text to make the reader's work of anti-credulity necessary. The further effect of that work is worth pondering. Speaking of a "terribly interesting chapter entitled 'Doppelgangers and Self-Seeing"' in "The Night Side of Nature," Blackwood's remarked "as a repertory of marvellous matter ... read it through to the end," but do not take the reports as factual. Disbelief, in other words, does not preclude the extension of sympathy to the enjoyment of the impossible. As with a Spasmodic poem, the injunction seems to be— "Take whatever significance you can. Let such tales illuminate and extend your mind but never forget the boundaries of your own identity and your own standards."

If this is the case, the reader is meant to provide the civilising thrust ostensibly lacking in the tale in more ways than one. It is not merely the epistemological matter we noted earlier. The reader is asked to avoid certain moral failures that the credulous Latimer or his scientist prototypes succumb to. The knowledge Eagles's correspondent, Catherine Crow and von Reichenbach proffer is suspect because its field is contaminated by self-indulgent, morbid natures. Some of that morbidity and lassitude rub off on the poor investigator, who lets his enthusiasm better his sobriety. Reichenbach should have rejected a line of observation "which can yield no satisfactory result." That he did not indicates a loss of will, a chasing of personal chimeras.

This is the same failure as that of the Spasmodic poet, led astray by "theories" and caprice from consideration of consensual truths. It is a moral question because it involves a damaging abandonment of the "transcendent ego" which I earlier identified as the core of the magazine's ideological project.

The theory of this object was set out in a series of articles by James Ferrier in the later 1830s, whose standards remained valid throughout the period we are concerned with. "Ego" here means the basic sense of identity, one's feeling of being an autonomous, independent, conscious self. It is created in an act of will that is also an act of knowing. Originally, it is the act of understanding the meaning of the word "I," says Ferrier. A

baby's first use of the word is the founding act of will, a sheer decision to *be* an "I." As the founding act of will it is the basis of all active personality, all morality, all accountability and all human freedom.

This self-consciousness may be endangered in a number of ways. One may become absorbed in a particular state of mind—a passion, sensation or train of reason—and so lose the sense of self. This is dangerous because, no longer monitoring what is in one's head, one becomes enslaved, a mere "machine". The self can be nurtured, on the other hand, by detachment from the things which attract or affect one most. Freedom, responsibility and morality, then, the basis of "all that is good in or evil in man or society," depend on the denial of one's passionate interests.

In theory, such an ideal would reconcile a humanity with proliferating interests on the home ground of selfhood. Everyone would have to acknowledge the danger of absorption by their own pet theories and ideas. No doubt this is why it is the dominant concern of "The Lifted Veil." There the problem is the lack in every character of that kind of self-possession. Latimer's incapacity for "the sublime resistance of poetic production" is an index of his abandonment, as is Meunier's scientific obsession and the inability of father, brother and wife to see more than what boosts their own interests.

Yet Blackwood's readers are alerted to this condition by the constant references to other cultural figures with fallible egos. Spasmodic poets lost sight of their status as selves in passion. Mesmerised persons morbidly submitted to "prostration." Somnambulists were asleep. Such a person's discourse, unlike that of a "true poet," was not one a reader could lose themselves to. To be reminded of it was therefore to recall that it was *oneself* reading. Progressing at every point of Latimer's narrative with the pleasure due to a tale of the marvellous, one had to ask "Do *I* think this is meant to be true?" This is a morally self-confirming effort of sympathetic imagination. It is also a ground on which any reader could meet any other, whether they liked Latimer or not, whether they were Scot, provincial banker or metropolitan intellectual. Evoking in all readers an act of fundamental moral responsibility, however, "The Lifted Veil" also aligns itself rather well with the rhetoric of Blackwood's itself. This may be appropriate, for in many respects the periodical's cultural position was analogous to Eliot's. It spoke out of an "inferior" political position in the Anglo-Scottish Union, she out of an "inferior" gender position. Like her too, it was proud that its marginal origin masked attachment and contribution to national, even universal, culture. For instance, it supported the orthodox State Church, but without obscurantist rejection of new scientific and metaphysical discourses.

Blackwood's mix of intellectual elitism and common-sense Unionism was not entirely benevolent, however. The transcendent ego it theorised was, after all, rather a convenient excuse for inertia in the political domain. It eschewed Casuabonesque disdain for women's intellectual capacities, but in an article responding to the proposed Divorce Bill and Married Women's Property Bill, the transcendent ego was somewhat disturbingly deployed. "Pause," it warned in "The Laws concerning women," before you "break a lance upon the grand abstract tyrant, man." Judicious thought recognizes that "the law may be unnecessarily particular; but are its opponents on just ground?". It also

saw a return to moral freedom in the nationalistic, bellicose prosecution of the Crimean War.

Perhaps we should question then, by way of conclusion, the success of Eliot's experiment in reader-response. In "The Lifted Veil" she deplores the parochialism of a self-obsessed mind (Latimer's), who hijacks the discourse of pity and sympathy. Simultaneously, she deplores the parochialism of the materialistic mind (Bertha's, Latimer's family), which sees no gain of prestige in humaneness. To do both at once, she relied on a peculiarly attuned reader. But there are other kinds of parochialism, not least historical parochialism, an attachment to tradition that could see in militarism and institutionalised material inequity a test of true selfhood. Perhaps for this reason Eliot did not repeat the experiment. In practice, the sense of identity her tale fostered was not cosmopolitan enough. The transcendent ego of Blackwood's was too complacently bound to its historical locality.

Source: Kevin Ashby, "The Centre and the Margins in 'The Lifted Veil' and Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine," in George Eliot—George Henry Lewes Studies,* Vol. 24-25, No. 2, 1993 pp. 132-46.

Critical Essay #6

In the following essay, Wallace sees "The Lifted Veil" as demonstrating the "failures and delusions of memory," a challenge to "Wordsworth's assertion of recollection as the foundation of both poetry and human community."

Although *The Lifted Veil* is still little-read, influential critical evaluations by Terry Eagleton, Gillian Beer, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar offer us excellent points of access to this deeply pessimistic novella. Gilbert and Gubar, in particular, work to define the intersecting investigations of sexual and artistic identity that outline George Eliot's difficulties in being both woman and writer. All the extant treatments focus on Latimer's prescience and clairvoyance, and on the failures or dangers of his supernaturally enhanced perceptions. But Latimer has yet another mode of perception that lifts the veil of temporality, one commonly available to us all and one insistently identified as a crucial element of artistic vision during the nineteenth century: memory, the recollection and transformation of past experience. Most of Eliot's work appears to carry Wordsworth's assertion of recollection as the foundation of both poetry and human community steadily forward in the popular imagination.

Yet *The Lifted Veil* asserts not only the horrors of supernaturally acute perceptions of present and future, but the failure and delusions of memory as well. Through a narrator who aspires to be a Wordsworthian poet, a narrative which repeatedly calls attention to the failure of recollection in both life and art, and a structure which mimics the greater Romantic lyric but does not fulfill its expectations, *The Lifted Veil* runs explicitly counter to Wordsworthian poetics. Thus the novella constitutes a working-out of Eliot's artistic identity, not only in the terms already recognized by Gilbert and Gubar, but in terms of a direct and thorough contradiction of one of Eliot's "master voices."

Since the novella is seldom read, let me summarize what are, for our discussion, its most salient points. The entire story is told in first person by the protagonist. Beginning with the words, "The time of my end approaches," Latimer vividly describes his vision of his own death, noting the day, the time, the servants' indifference, the pain and terror of helplessness, and his final experience of "passing on and on through the darkness," his thought moving endlessly onward without sensation or sight. He then offers a memoir of his life from his childhood to the present, just a month before his death. Latimer describes a childhood happy only in its contrast to adulthood, lightened mostly by the memory of his mother's comforting love. While she still lives, he suffers an illness that temporarily blinds him; after her death he is subjected to a regimen of mechanical and scientific training designed to balance what his father perceives as an oversensitive nature. But Latimer remains much as he was, an older version of the boy thrown into "mingled trepidation and delicious excitement" by the echoes of hooves and voices and barking dogs in the resounding stable near his home. He regards himself as a poet in sensibility, aware of his surroundings to the point of agony, but lacking the crucial power of expression. Even after three years of education in Geneva, which he passes in "a perpetual sense of exultation, as if from a draught of delicious wine, at the presence of

Nature in all her awful loveliness," he is unable to describe the scenes around him or express the emotions he experiences:

A poet pours forth his song and *believes* in the listening ear and answering soul, to which his song will be floated sooner or later. But the poet's sensibility without his voice—the poet's sensibility that finds no vent but in silent tears on the sunny bank, when the noonday light sparkles on the water, or in an inward shudder at the sound of harsh human tones, the sight of a cold human eye—this dumb passion brings with it a fatal solitude of soul in the society of one's fellow men.

In this state of continuing isolation, Latimer falls ill again and, as he recovers, has the first of four fully recounted episodes of presentiment or previ sion: a vision of Prague; a vision of his first meeting with Bertha, whom he will fall in love with and eventually marry; a vision of the moment when he realizes Bertha's hatred for him and the cold shallowness of her soul; and the vision of his own death. Each of these is a true vision, later confirmed by his actual experience. He also develops clairvoyance or, as he calls it, "insight" into others' minds, into what he calls the "naked, skinless complications" of human thought. The only one immune to his capacity is Bertha, who temporarily becomes his "oasis of mystery in the dreary desert of knowledge."

With the sharp desire of beings that can imagine omniscience but cannot attain it, we humans long for Latimer's visionary gifts daily, almost involuntarily: "if I had known then what I know now ... " But Latimer's supernatural perceptions prove useless at best, curses at worst. His knowledge of the future does not enable him to avoid its sorrows; his knowledge of others only breeds contempt for the petty, disconnected consciousnesses that lie below the graceful drapery of social intercourse. Some of these incapacities and feelings, clearly, are due to Latimer's own natural passivity and misanthropy. But, the narrative asserts, the uselessness of vision derives mostly from the common human condition, one in which mystery and desire play an irreplaceable part. Here, in a voice that is unmistakably that of George Eliot teaching through her narrator's mouth, Latimer meditates on his inability to turn aside from the known horror of his future with Bertha:

So absolute is our soul's need of something hidden and uncertain for the maintenance of that doubt and hope and effort which are the breath of its life, that if the whole future were laid bare to us beyond to-day, the interest of all mankind would be bent on the hours that lie between; we should pant after the uncertainties of our one morning and our one afternoon; we should rush fiercely to the Exchange for our last possibility of speculation, of success, of disappointment; we should have a glut of political prophets foretelling a crisis or a no-crisis within the only twenty-four hours left open to prophecy.... Our impulses, our spiritual activities, no more adjust themselves to the idea of their future nullity, than the beating of our heart, or the irritability of our muscles.

So it is with Latimer, who, in knowing terror, lives through his courtship, marriage, utter disillusionment, and, finally, death. In a few closing sentences, he returns the reader to his opening vision, now (the open-ended construction implies) actually occurring: "It is the 20th of September 1850. I know these figures I have just written, as if they were a

long familiar inscription. I have seen them on this page in my desk unnumbered times, when the scene of my dying struggle has opened upon me.... "

Following and expanding upon the commentary of U.C. Knoepflmacher and Rudy Redinger, Gilbert and Gubar detail the parallels between Latimer and Eliot herself. Their familial relations, defined by a dead angel-mother, a strong pragmatic father, and an irritatingly successful and conventional brother, place each in positions of emotional and economic dependence and inferiority. Both display an initial distrust of strangers; both dislike their bodies, which in each case deviate from the culture's sexual ideals, with the result that physical illness and weakness is an everyday affair. In each case, too, illness coincides with the onset of extraordinary visions which either promise or precede literary expression; and in each case that expression is deferred or denied.

These parallels suggest, as Gilbert and Gubar indicate, that Latimer's case is in some ways Eliot's: given an artist's extraordinary vision, each is thwarted in the expression of that vision, Latimer by an unsuitable mind and temperament, Eliot by the external and internal constraints imposed by cultural representations of sexuality. In each case, in fact, the problem might be abstractly rendered as a conflict between apparent and experienced gender, the comparison enforce by Latimer's inverted mirroring of Eliot's "masculine" mind in an "unattractive" woman's body: he is technically male, but both his mental and his physical characteristics are traditionally "feminine." One of the primary issues of the *Veil*, then, is the interrogation of the conflicts between Eliot's gender and her artistry.

Gilbert and Gubar also thoroughly explore how the image of the veil traditionally functions in male representations of woman as angel/monster, noting that "the recording of what exists behind the veil is distinctively female because it is the woman who exists behind the veil in patriarchal society, inhabiting a private sphere invisible to public view." This image, clearly, is crucial to our understanding of Eliot's novella, particularly because it acts as a nexus for sexual and artistic identities. Without diminishing their emphasis, let me analyze "the veil" in a slightly different way.

There are at least three veils (not unrelated to each other) which would, under normal circumstances, both isolate Latimer and shield him from the terrific and deadening vision that afflicts him: the veil of individuality, the veil of sexuality, and the veil of temporality. The first lifts for extended and agonizing periods of time, as Latimer is exposed to the thoughts of others. As we have already noted, the narrative asserts that Latimer's clairvoyance does little but give him pain; and since Latimer lacks or will not wield the power of poetic expression, his understanding remains entirely one-sided. Until he begins to write this last memoir, Latimer tells us, he has "never fully unbosomed myself to any human being."

The second veil, as his choice of terms here suggests, remains drawn despite sexually ambiguous characterizations that imply difficulty in drawing hard lines between the male and the female. Latimer's traditionally female sensitivity and intuition are unmixed with the masculine talent for artistic expression, and remain trapped in an "effeminately" weak, sickly, hysterical body which nonetheless is read as "male." He cannot, indeed,

unbosom himself, not only because he cannot shed his passivity but because he is not gendered female. His potential femininity and any possible advantage that might carry are short-circuited by the nominal appearance of masculinity, an appearance that causes people to expect rather different behavior from him. In one sense Latimer's very existence tears the veil between man and woman, but neither he nor anyone else is freed from their gender roles by that involuntary act.

The last veil, that of temporality, is most clearly manifest as a veil of mortality, the "dark veil" of death. When this veil is drawn briefly aside, during the temporary resurrection of Mrs. Archer and in Latimer's vision of his own death, the results are once again active destruction or helpless pain: Mrs. Archer wakes only long enough to reveal Bertha's plan to poison Latimer, violently completing their growing disaffection and ending their married life together; and although Latimer sees his death, he can neither avoid it nor reconcile himself to it. Finally, the veil of death functions as the decisive limit to the narrative itself. Likewise, Latimer's foresight produces successful but inefficacious violations of the normal temporal bounds of knowledge. He does know the future, but often in unintelligible forms (as in his late visions of unknown places and persons), and can do nothing to alter even those aspects of the future he does fully comprehend.

But memory provides a third way to lift the veil of temporality (in this case the veil of the past), one naturally available to people, and which should, in Wordsworthian doctrine, stimulate individual moral growth, artistic expression and human community. Wordsworthian poetics, in formulas as familiar to Eliot as they are to us, establish memory as the foundation of poetic expression. Since "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," a poet must be "possessed of more than usual organic sensibility" ("Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* [1802]". But he must also have "thought long and deeply":

For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that ... we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated.

Thus poetry "takes it origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity," the process of remembering the past experience gradually causing the disappearance of the present tranquillity and the production of "an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation ... [which] does itself [that is, the kindred emotion] actually exist in the mind." The substance and form of Wordsworth's poems overtly enforce his declared poetics, as even a brief review of some of the bestknown poems ("Tintern Abbey," "Michael," "The Ruined Cottage," the Intimations Ode, "I Wandered Lonely," and so forth) quickly reveals. Narrative recollection of past emotion re-presents that

emotion and its original context, claiming to produce not only poetry but the achievement of or potential for the enlargement of the individual consciousness and of human community.

The most significant formal manifestation of Wordsworthian (and early Coleridgian) poetic is the development of the greater Romantic lyric, a form described to us by M. H. Abrams:

[Greater Romantic lyrics] present a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on, in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem round upon itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation.

In *The Lifted Veil,* Eliot offers us a narrator who aspires to be a Wordsworthian poet, communicating to us in a form which replicates the subjective circularity of a greater Romantic lyric but which completes itself with no alteration in the narrator's mood or understanding. Latimer's hyper-sensitivity, his intense emotional reliance on nature, and (as we shall see) his deliberate attempts to become a poet by the specific mechanism of recollection mark him not just as a poet, as he calls himself, but as a Wordsworthian poet. Certain telling details of his life buttress the theoretical identification. In Geneva, he finds his greatest solace in rowing his boat out into the center of the lake:

it seemed to me that the sky, and the glowing mountaintops, and the wide blue water, surrounded me with a cherishing love such as no human face had shed on me since my mother's love had vanished out of my life. I used to do as Jean Jacques did—lie down in my boat and let it glide where it would while I looked up at the departing glow leaving one mountain- top after the other ... Then, when the white summits were all sad and corpse-like, I had to push homeward, for I was under careful surveillance, and was allowed no late wanderings.

Latimer directly identifies his experience with Rousseau, an allusion explored in Hugh Witemeyer's 1979 article on "George Eliot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau." But at least two other echoes are present. In another tale exploring gender and creativity, Victor Frankenstein floats in his boat on Lake Geneva, trying to find comfort in the peace of nature (an allusion Gilbert and Gubar miss, although they do connect the *Veil* with *Frankenstein*). More to our present point, Latimer's experience also recalls the famous row-boat passage in Wordsworth's *Prelude;* the lake surrounded with mountains, the movement from initial delight and liveliness to deathly sadness (though here rendered in more anthropomorphic terms) the sense of being watched and of being out of bounds all resonate with the boy- Wordsworth's account.

Notice, moreover, the date of Latimer's death, a date named in the second paragraph of the novella and repeated in its last paragraph: "the 20th of September 1850". Although the day and month seem random (the "20th" only mildly pointing to a possible "23rd"), the year is momentous—it is the year of Wordsworth's death, and of the publication of his master-work on the development of a poet's mind. Without context, one might dismiss this as an arbitrary choice. But this apparently slight link between Wordsworth and Latimer takes on substance in the context of the latter's obviously acceptance of Wordsworthian poetics and the failure of his attempt to practice them.

For Latimer, in fact, remembering almost never resurrects past experiences or enables the renovation of human feeling and community, but instead obscures original perceptions and deadens feeling. The one exception is his memory of his mother and her love, an exception which may, by its very isolation, further substantiate Gilbert and Gubar's identification of Latimer and Eliot. At every other point the narrative's overt insistence falls on the inefficacy of memory. When Latimer gains the power of clairvoyance, he describes the horrors of seeing in other people's minds "all the struggling chaos of puerilities, meanness, vague, capricious memories and indolent makeshift thoughts, from which human words and deeds emerge like leaflets covering a fermenting heap." Again, as Latimer strives to see what Bertha has been hiding in her cabinet (it is the poison with which she plans to kill him), he finds that memory obscures rather than preserves her experiences: "[t]he recollections of the past become contracted in the rapidity of thought till they sometimes bear hardly a more distinct resemblance to the external reality than the forms of an oriental alphabet to the objects that suggested them." Not only does his insight reveal that memory, far from transforming present experience or preserving the past, drains the substance from what is remembered, but the terms of both metaphors suggest that verbal or written expressions based on recollection function either to obscure the truth, as in the deceptive leaflets covering the chaos of human minds, or to render them unintelligible, as in the translation of "reality" into an "Oriental alphabet"— actually a system of characters, completely illegible to Westerners used to an alphabet.

Nor can his visions of the future grant power by means of his recollection of them. As Latimer relates his fascination with Bertha despite his knowledge of their future, he asks us to imagine "this double consciousness at work within me, flowing on like two parallel streams which never mingle their waters and blend into a common hue": "my visions, when once they had passed into memory, were mere ideas—pale shadows that beckoned in vain, while my hand was grasped by the living and the loved." In every case, memory, this commonly human, canonically approved source of consciousness, knowledge and community functions to desubstantiate, to deaden, so that the veil of the past, too, remains unlifted.

A particularly telling case of the failure of memory appears in Latimer's recounting of his first vision, in which he sees Prague as a city

unrefreshed for ages by the dews of night, or the rushing rain-clouds; scorching the dusty, weary, timeeaten grandeur of a people doomed to live on in the stale repetition of memories ... urged by no fear or hope, but compelled by their doom to be ever old and

undying, to live on in the rigidity of habit, as they live on in perpetual mid-day, without the repose of night or the new birth of morning.

In part, no doubt, it is Latimer's pessimism that darkens this vision. But the agent which he perceives as the deadening force here is "the stale repetition of memories," the dead hand of a past that, in the process of recollection into the present, stifles new life.

Immediately after this, hoping that his vision is "a picture that my newly liberated genius had painted in fiery haste, with the colors snatched from lazy memory," Latimer tries to perform an act of Wordsworthian recollection: "I stimulated my imagination with poetic memories, and strove to feel myself present in Venice, as I had felt myself present in Prague." But this is a complete failure: Latimer can only recall, uncertainly, old engravings on his walls at home: "It was all prosaic effort, not rapt passivity." He continues to perform this experiment for some time, always watching and hoping for the flowering of his poetic gifts under the stimulus of deliberate recollection, and always disappointed.

These overt narrative assertions of the failure of memory appear in a prose version of a poetic form designed to celebrate the power of recollection. The entirely first-person point-of-view, a most uncharacteristic choice for Eliot, has a plot-based explanation: Latimer has never before communicated his crucial experiences of prescience and clairvoyance to anyone, and so only he can tell his story and verify the truth of his visions. Formally, however, Eliot's choice follows the formula of the greater Romantic lyric, the speaker moved by a particular vision to recollection and expression. Latimer's narrative [is just] such a circular memoir, told in his own voice to the silent auditor, his readers, beginning with the vision of his death and ending with the death itself.

Classically, the scene the narrator of a greater Romantic lyric contemplates at the beginning and end of his story should be "a localized, outdoor setting," so that the impressions of natural forms give rise to recollection. In this *The Lifted Veil* appears to deviate from our expectations. But I would argue that Latimer does contemplate a "landscape" here, the landscape of the mind. To think in such terms is, after all, most Wordsworthian: the whole point of contemplating a natural scene is not to explore that scene (although that is an analogous process to what follows) but to explore the landscape as it is remembered, the landscape in the mind and the "landscape" of the mind. In "Tintern Abbey," for instance, the outdoor scene appears only briefly at the beginning of the poem, with the narrator then turning to descriptions of his own feelings as they are elicited by the landscape remembered, thus entering into a wholly psychological process. Latimer's account moves directly to that interior scene which is the primary concern of the greater Romantic lyric.

That Eliot's narrator thought in these terms, conceiving of mind as landscape, is signaled by his comments on the moment when Bertha's hatred and shallowness are revealed to him:

I saw myself in Bertha's thought as she lifted her cutting grey eyes, and looked at me: a miserable ghost-seer, surrounded by phantoms in the noon-day, trembling under a

breeze when the leaves were still, without appetite for the common objects of human desire, but pining after the moonbeams ... The terrible moment of complete illumination had come to me, and I saw that the darkness had hidden no landscape from me, but only a blank prosaic wall: from that evening forth, through the sickening years which followed, I saw all round the narrow room of this woman's soul ...

Not only does Bertha envision Latimer as a figure in a landscape, imagining his deficient psychology in terms of natural forms, but Latimer figures his expectation of Bertha's mind as an exterior, natural landscape, full and poetic and offering continued opportunities for exploration, only to discover a narrow interior scene bounded by "blank prosaic walls." With the mind or character understood as landscape, then, only two things are missing from this greater Romantic lyric: its "altered mood and deepened understanding," the quickening of moral sense in narrator and (by implication) reader, and the achievement of the poetry (as opposed to prose) which might bring this about. Although the form is fulfilled, the expectations set up, there is no transformation, no learning or shift, no renewal of the individual or of human community, and there is no elevation from the common understandings of prose into the sympathetic feeling of poetry. Despite memory, despite the representation of the past, all remains as Latimer first envisions it, bounded absolutely by the death of the individual consciousness.

There are many reasons for the increasing distrust of memory as an artistic and spiritual source in the Victorian period, most importantly the increasingly obvious permanence of the loss of agrarian life and values to industrialization, and that never lifting, always accelerating sensation of inevitable change. To look back in one's search for stable values becomes irrelevant, as the past itself becomes a series of changes. But for George Eliot, in particular, the search for value and verification in memory is dreadfully problematic. When a woman writer seeks her grounding in tradition, where will she find it? The influence of the Brontes and Mary Shelley, as Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate, is palpable. But when Eliot consciously thinks about her antecedents, she must of necessity think mostly of men—of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Goethe, and most of all, of Wordsworth. One remembers her continual rereading of Wordsworth, and her comment to John Blackwood that she wonders that anyone other than herself will be interested to read *Silas Marner* "since William Wordsworth is dead". At this crucial moment, in the midst of writing her second novel and faced with increasing demands for the public revelation of her identity, Eliot must have felt the extreme pressure of Wordsworth's valorization of the past—which now included the traditions of his own writing—and needed a means by which to question its demands, even if she finally chose to accept them. I suggest, then, that *The Lifted Veil* not only investigates the common conflict between artist and woman, but confronts Wordsworth, Eliot's own master voice, and denies the fundamental premise of his power.

Source: Anne D. Wallace, "'Vague Capricious Memories': 'The Lifted Veil"s Challenge to Wordsworthian Poetics," in *George Eliot—George Henry Lewes Studies,* Vol. 18-19, September, 1991, pp. 31-45.

Critical Essay #7

In the following essay, Taylor re-evaluates Bertha Grant as the product of Latimer's creative interpretation of her as woman as subject."

In the conclusion of George Eliot's novella, *The Lifted Veil,* Bertha Grant's maid, Archer, is brought back to life momentarily by a blood transfusion. This revivication, brief as it is, is long enough for Archer to reveal in her second death-bed scene, that Bertha has plans to "poison" her husband. Archer's eyes meet Bertha's in "the recognition of hate" and she says in a gasping voice, "... the poison is in the black cabinet ... I got it for you.... " Of the witnesses to the "poison" plot: Dr. Meunier is sworn to secrecy; Bertha is mute, forever silenced by Latimer's narrative; Archer is dead, presumedly for the last time. Latimer, the speaking subject, narrates the entire story from his first clairvoyant vision of a young woman he will later learn is Bertha, to his last scrawled words as he awaits his own foreseen death.

Criticism of *The Lifted Veil* in the past three decades has given primacy to the text's position within Eliot's canon, to her exploration of narrative structure, and according to individual analytic agenda, to the possibilities of conflicting ideology in the tale's extended metaphors.

Regardless of theoretic approach, when Bertha is mentioned at all, she holds the distinction of having more chilling adjectives affixed to her name than any other female character in fiction who comes to mind (with the possible exception of Lady Audley). For example: "evil," "wicked," "vampire- like," "sinister." Of course all of these quotes are used out of their context for my own purposes.

What is curious is that while critical evaluations of *The Lifted Veil* seek to find meaning hidden behind Eliot's multi-layered veil, Bertha Grant is most often given an analytic reading based on Latimer's creation of her. As narrator it is his story. But, also as narrator, he is empowered; Latimer and the critical enterprise surrounding the tale have glossed (or omitted) Bertha Grant. Charles Swann's compelling article, "Deja Vu: Deja Lu: 'The Lifted Veil' As An Experiment In Art," points to the story's "rather sideways look at some of the problems raised by determinism," but, more importantly, to Eliot's extended and often uncomfortable confrontation with her consciousness of what it means to be an author. Swann notes that Eliot experiments with the reader's expectations of narrative form and "challenges two of her dearest values: sympathy and memory as the bases of moral action." To do this, according to Swann, she creates an obvious fiction, and turns narrative form and Latimer's means of "Knowing" up-side-down, both reversing and questioning conventional modes of transmission.

In addition, Latimer's personal failures which he interprets and inscribes, such as his physical weaknesses, and his inability to voice his poetic impulses, are analogous to his failure to discern the larger issues, such as his lack of sympathetic feelings for human beings. This failure of insight (in the intuitive sense) into self and other also isolates him from his own text. Bertha Grant is his fantasy: a fiction which he creates, reads and

inscribes. Seen from this perspective, Latimer's creation of Bertha Grant as an evil enchantress invites a re-reading of his possible mis-reading.

The lengthiest and most thorough critical appraisal of Bertha Grant appears in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. This reading places Eliot in the role of a Miltonic "dutiful daughter," Bertha, a "Satanic Eve," and the poison in the cabinet a metaphor for the complicity of women, "offering the apple of death to their man". Whether the "poison in the cabinet" metaphor is interpreted as a complicitous and lethal injection of hemlock into the apple, as Gilbert and Gubar posit, or, in an anti-Edenic version, simply as Bertha's contempt for Latimer locked and seething within the "cabinet" of her body and mind, becomes immaterial seen in the light of subsequent event which Eliot dictates. What critical appraisals of Bertha Grant have appeared to overlook is that nothing happens. Bertha never actively unlocks the cabinet, either literally or metaphorically, although she has ample opportunity to do so. A vague span or suspension of time is indicated in Latimer's narrative between his notation of the "locking up of something in Bertha's cabinet" and the letter from Dr. Charles Meunier which announces that he will visit. If Bertha's release or activation of the "poison" is to be an actual event, this interim before Meunier arrives provides the temporal space in which to act. The "poison" in any sense, remains in suspension, deferred; a desire which may play the role of intent through the action of possessing and "locking," but remains unclear and lacks momentum.

My purpose is not to refute Gilbert and Gubar's reading, but to inject new blood into their resolution of Bertha as "fallen" in perpetuity: "doomed to live on in stale repetition." In short, I will attempt to give Bertha a transfusion that allows her the possibility of revivication, but without the necessity of re-creating her into a paragon. 'Granted,' both pernicious hatred or intent to "poison" are corruptive. Neither would function to justify valorizing Bertha. But, the weight that the "poison" metaphor carries with it has served to obscure other readings of Bertha which are counterpoint to Latimer's creation and narration of her. The severity of the charges which Archer makes against Bertha, in concert with what Latimer tells us about her all along, secure his reading and his control over her. Latimer's text has become yet another veil.

Entries into Latimer's creation and textualization of Bertha are numerous. Bertha's "birth" into Latimer's text as a "spectre of Romantic myth" and his consistent objectification of her as seen in the concluding passages of the story will serve. In addition, Eliot's provisions for Bertha, the fiction within the fiction, are of interest.

As Latimer's story begins by telling the reader how it will end, I will also begin (in the middle of this essay) with the end, and circle back to the beginning. At Archer's first deathbed scene, when Latimer tells us that Bertha wants Archer to die, without "lifting the veil" which would reveal the "secret," he appraises Bertha's appearance and attire. She was:

fit to figure in a picture of modern aristocratic life: but I asked myself how that face of hers could ever have seemed to me the face of a woman born of woman, with memories of childhood, capable of pain, needing to be fondled?

Latimer's question is rhetorical; it may be seen as Eliot's ultimate irony and a transparent example of Latimer's inability to comprehend himself, Bertha or his text. Just as Latimer continues to objectify Bertha, this time into a picture, (and not even that; she is "fit to figure" in a picture) his authorship of her never allows her human birth, but creates an enchantress from his own fantasy. Bertha is never allowed a childhood or memories of it; if she suffers pain, Latimer silences it efficiently throughout his text; her touch is never returned, her sensuality never answered. What Latimer claims is his passion for her is "locked" within his own "cabinet" and replaced by his fear of her as subject.

At the onset of Latimer's first illusory experience, a vision of an unrefreshed dry city of Prague, doomed to repetition, he is recovering from a serious illness. When he "sees Bertha for the first time, in his second visionary episode, he has been looking from the window of a hotel suite in Geneva at "the current of the Rhone just where it leaves the darkblue lake." What Latimer "sees" is a face without:

a girlish expression ... the features were sharp, the pale grey eyes at once acute, restless, and sarcastic. They were fixed on me in half-smiling curiosity, and I felt a painful sensation as if a sharp wind were cutting me.

Bertha's gaze confronts Latimer directly, and he reads into her eyes both her subjectivity and her appraisal of him. The sharp wind that he feels cutting him, his terror of the other who demands subjectivity, demands his denial or figurative killing of the subject. It begins with his first illusion of Bertha.

Latimer's description of Bertha continues. Her image, he says,

made me think of a Water-Nixie—for my mind was full of German lyrics, and this pale, fatal-eyed woman, with the green weeds, looked like a birth from some cold sedgy stream, the daughter of an aged river.

Bertha is not born from woman, but emerges from a cold stream, the daughter of an aged river. Carroll Viera and Jennifer Uglow, among others, have commented on the mythological, watery spirit of Bertha. Uglow writes that Bertha "represents the opposite of his loving, life-giving mother," but Bertha's watery entry "is one which contains the promise of death, not birth". At the same time Bertha may also represent an opposition to Latimer's first vision of the scorched and thirsty Prague with its people "doomed" to live on in a "stale repetition of memories." Latimer's earlier associations with watery images comprise his most pleasant memories. These textual recollections are immediately followed by his re-creation of his first illusion of Prague, "unrefreshed ... by ... the rushing rain-cloud.... "

Gillian Beer in a footnote to her article, "Myth and the Single Consciousness: *Middlemarch* and "The Lifted Veil," attributes elements in both Bertha and Rosamond Vincy Lydgate to Friedrich de la Motte Fouque's *Undine*, published in 1811. This tale is of a beautiful and willful water sprite who marries a mortal in order to find love and gain a soul. The two women who vie for Huldbrand are Undine, the water sprite, and the

selfish, spiteful Bertalda. What is problematic is that Undine, the water sprite, does gain a soul through her marriage to Huldbrand, and it is she who is the nurturing, lifegiving woman. Mistreated and forsaken in favor of the scheming Bertalda, the water gods consign Undine back to the deeps, but she returns and is reconciled with her husband. Huldbrand, the waverer, recognizes his love for Undine, and drowns, as he knows he will, in her tears. If Latimer's head is full of German Water-Nixies as he looks from his window onto the Rhone, and if, as Beer states, *Undine* is a possible source, then Latimer from the beginning synthesizes the two fictional women, Undine and Bertalda, and creates a third fiction, Bertha Grant—in the image of the water sprite, Undine, but with the depraved soul of the calculating Bertalda.

As Gilbert and Gubar point out, Bertha has no voice. Neither does she have a history. Latimer reports that she is an orphan, adopted by her uncle and aunt, and that the uncle "means to provide for her ... as if she were his own daughter." This is Bertha Grant's personal history in its entirety. Nothing is ever told of her beginnings, her family, her memories. How can she, unlike Prague, be doomed to live in repetition of a past which doesn't exist? When Latimer asks how her face could have seemed to him the face of a woman with memories of childhood, the only possible response is that it never did.

As Eliot intended, a good case may be built for reading Latimer with sympathy. The second son of a capitalist, he has been raised without expectations as a physical weak and feminized "other." Though he blames his misfortune on seeing the evil within men's hearts, his foresight does not foster a raised consciousness which might allow him to see that he himself instigates his alienation from other people. He cannot penetrate Bertha's mind. He says that this mystery is the reason that drives his passion. U. C. Knoepflmacher states that "he has willfully deluded himself by loving a creature incapable of love," and that George Eliot implies that while Latimer's contempt for his fellow beings is excessive, "she also makes it clear that it is warranted by his unusual predicament."

It is my contention that it is Latimer who is incapable of love. Bertha remains at least partially an unknown, but she is capable of affection and sensuality. Early in the story on two occasions when they are alone, Bertha initiates physical contact, first by her arm slipped through his and then by grasping his wrist. Both times Latimer escapes by going into a trance. He gives her an opal ring and chides her for not wearing it. She draws a gold chain from her bosom. The ring hands upon it. She says, "it hurts me a little, I can tell you ... to wear it in that secret place.... " Latimer can only blush like the opal and he can't ask her to keep it where it was.

Their marriage takes place "on a cold and clear morning in April, when there came hail and sunshine both together.... " Latimer admittedly hurries through the rest of his story, "leaving ... feelings and sentiments to be inferred." Their life is a round of social engagements, a whirl which leaves their "solitary moments with hastily snatched caresses." Latimer is less reticent about the growth of his own wretchedness, despair, and passivity and Bertha's escalating coldness. What can be "inferred" is that their marriage has sealed a bond of physical and mental alienation. Latimer can now "see" into her soul, and he sees "repulsion and antipathy harden into cruel hatred." The

hostility which he had envisioned between them has become reality. Latimer continues to objectify her, and he tells the reader more than he himself knows. He says, "For Bertha too, after her kind, felt the bitterness of disillusion." He attributes her disillusionment to her failure to achieve mastery over him, and he claims that she had had mastery before their marriage because she was a secret to him, mastering his imagination.

Whose passions consume whose? Is Bertha a Water-Nixie seeking her soul through love? Is she a siren/enchantress, created evil without reprieve? What Latimer's text says is that she is curious and acute, aggressive and confrontational, affectionate and sensual. She is capable of selfishness, anger and hostility, of "hail and sunshine both together." She is, in Victorian terms, everything which is evil. She is woman as subject.

At the conclusion of my injection, I offer a textual citation which follows Archer's death-bed revelation.

Since then Bertha and I have lived apart—she in her own neighborhood, the mistress of half our wealth, I as a wanderer in foreign countries, until I came to this Devonshire nest to die. Bertha lives pitied and admired; for what had I against that charming woman, whom every one but myself could have been happy with?

However we choose to read Bertha as metaphor: as evil; as a product of Latimer's created fiction; as a stand-in for Eliot's created fiction; subjectively as woman; or as all, with or without irony, George Eliot, who had experience in being self-created, jointly created, and as creator, leaves Bertha Grant admired by friends in her own neighborhood, wealthy, and free.

Source: Marcia M. Taylor, "Born Again: Reviving Bertha Grant," in *George Eliot—George Henry Lewes Studies,* Vol. 18-19, September, 1991, pp. 46-54.

Critical Essay #8

In the following essay, Carroll describes the important character of Latimer as a masochist attempting to change by going "into the sadism" that dominates him.

Give me no light, great Heaven, but such as turns To energy of human fellowship; No powers beyond the growing heritage That makes completer manhood.

Through her altruistic epigraph to a painful story, George Eliot suggests that the journey to greater human fellowship often requires a passage through suffering. In *The Lifted Veil,* Eliot explores the form of pain that shackles sado-masochistic relationships, and the roots of that pain—buried in the misperception that punishment is deserved. This paper will explore Latimer's attempt to change by moving through his masochistic stance into the sadism which has bound him.

The masochistic need for the sadist is captured by Eliot when she has Latimer moan:

While the heart beats, bruise it— it is your only opportunity; while the eye can still turn towards you with moist timid entreaty, freeze it with an icy unanswering gaze; while the ear, that delicate messenger to the inmost sanctuary of the soul, can still take in the tones of kindness, put it off with hard civility, or sneering compliment ...

Although Latimer's lament rings with self-pity, it also illustrates the tightness of the trap. Latimer's response at the onset of his heart attack represents a last resistance to change:

I make great effort, and snatch at the bell again. I long for life, and there is no help. I thirsted for the unknown: the thirst is gone. O God, let me stay with the known, and be weary of it: I am content.

Latimer's cry for help is understandable, but surges through entrenched psychological or social structures usually have to be finalized in solitude. The courage to engage in the solitary completion of the journey arises from earlier accomplishments and future promises.

Eliot presents a bleak picture of Latimer's early experiences and his response to them. As a result of his eye complaint, his mother kept him "on her knee from morning to night." It is doubtful that an eye complaint would require such a symbiotic hold, but assertable that it would have a crippling effect on a child's growth. And it is in the crippling of the drive toward self-sufficiency that sadism finds its ready target. Bereft of his mother's knee and left with a father described as: "one of those people who are always like themselves from day to day, who are uninfluenced by the weather, and neither know melancholy nor high spirits" Latimer is helplessly alone.

Latimer's development is also blocked vocationally: "hungry for human deeds and human emotions," he is forced to study mechanical science. The murderous impulses

emanating from such an environment and their self-destructive acceptance by the victim is captured by Eliot when she has Latimer say: "my nature was of the sensitive, unpractical order, and ... it grew up in an uncongenial medium which could never foster it into happy healthy development."

Away from the oppression of his home environment, Latimer forms a friendship with the orphan science student, Meunier. It is a friendship that arises from mutual isolation and develops into a spansion of poetry and science. Strengthened by his friendship with Meunier, Latimer falls ill:

This happier life at Geneva was put an end to by a severe illness, which is partly a blank to me, partly a time of dimly-remembered suffering, with the presence of my father by my bed from time to time.

Latimer's prevision of Prague, as he recovers from his illness, may be taken as a metaphor for his life: "a city under the broad sunshine, that seemed to me as if it were the summer sunshine of a longpast century arrested in its course ... " He emerges from the dream full of creative energy having focused on the rainbow light rather than the bleakness of the scene and recognizing that he has changed: "Was it that my illness had wrought some happy change in my organization—given a firm tension to my nerves —carried off some dull obstruction?"

Latimer has glimpsed a way out of his masochistic helplessness, but in order to turn his life around, he will have to understand his past from all sides. He will have to go into the sadism, if he is to leave his masochism. Latimer's journey begins with his response to his prevision of Bertha Grant: "I felt a painful sensation as if a sharp wind were cutting me." Upon meeting Bertha he faints at the prospect of the task ahead of him, but he continues.

Eliot gives Latimer clairvoyant abilities in order to demonstrate his mesmeric attraction to Bertha, and to show in conscious form the unconscious bond of sado-masochistic relationships. Latimer focuses on the negative as he enters the minds of others, and his pain increases as he proceeds from acquaintances to family members. He is blocked, however, from entering the mind of the woman he will marry. Externally, he perceives Bertha as:

... keen, sarcastic, unimaginative, prematurely cynical, remaining critical and unmoved in the most impressive scenes, inclined to dissect all my favourite poems, and especially contemptuous towards the German lyrics which were my pet literature at that time.

Yet he describes each day in her presence as "delicious torment," thus capturing the sexual energy that swirls through sadism and binds the masochist. Eliot recognizes the nature of control in such relationships when she has Latimer state: "there is no tyranny more complete than that which a selfcentred negative nature exercises over a morbidly sensitive nature perpetually craving sympathy and support."

Latimer's conscious perception of his bind clears as he views the painting of Lucrezia Borgia: "I felt a strange poisoned sensation, as if I had long been inhaling a fatal odour, and was just beginning to be conscious of the effects." He marries Bertha stating that: "The fear of poison is feeble against the sense of thirst."

The marriage follows a surge toward maturity. Prior to Alfred's death, Latimer had realized "my selfishness was even stronger than his—it was only a suffering selfishness instead of an enjoying one." And he is able to empathize with his father's feelings of loss at the death of Alfred.

Strengthened by his maturity, Latimer lifts the veil and penetrates Bertha's mind after the death of his father. His knowledge renders Bertha helpless, and Latimer grows increasingly sadistic toward her. He is not, however, able to leave the relationship:

Towards my own destiny I had become entirely passive; for my one ardent desire had spent itself, and impulse no longer predominated over knowledge. For this reason I never thought of taking any steps towards a complete separation, which would have made our alienation evident to the world.

A public proclamation means there is no turning back, but it cannot be made until the essence of the tie is penetrated.

Bertha hopes Latimer will commit suicide, but that is not in his nature even though he is preoccupied with thoughts of his own death. As Latimer withdraws, Bertha shifts her focus to Mrs. Archer, a servant whose name implies a masochistic orientation. Latimer also obtains a new partner. Meunier, the scientific man, arrives to visit Latimer, ends up caring for Mrs. Archer, and saving Latimer from Bertha's poison. Latimer penetrates Bertha's essence as she refuses to leave the sick room of her dying servant:

The features at that moment seemed so preternaturally sharp, the eyes were so hard and eager—she looked like a cruel immortal, finding her spiritual feast in the agonies of a dying race. For across those hard features there came something like a flash when the last hour had been breathed out, and we all felt that the dark veil had completely fallen.

Death lies under the veil. The spiritual death of sado-masochistic relationships, and the death of the old that must be faced in change. The motivation of the sadist, unperceived by the masochist, is expressed by Mrs. Archer as she reveals Bertha's scheme:

You meant to poison your husband ... the poison is in the black cabinet ... I got it for you ... you laughed at me, and told lies about me behind my back, to make me disgusting ... because you were jealous ...

Eliot ends her story with Latimer and Bertha poles apart, but remaining as halves of a whole until Latimer dies of a heart attack.

A relationship between the blossoming of George Eliot's writing career and the story of *The Lifted Veil* has been clearly established chronologically, but dimly understood

metaphorically. Perhaps an analogy can be drawn between Eliot's success with *Adam Bede* followed by her writing detour in *The Lifted Veil,* and Latimer's journey into pain after seeing the rainbow in Prague. The difference, however, lies in George Eliot's survival and triumph.

Source: Mary Carroll, "The Painful Challenge of George Eliot's Epigraph," in *The George Eliot Fellowship Review*, 1991, pp. 57-60.

Adaptations

George Eliot's novel *Silas Marner* was recorded on audiocassette by Recorded Books in 1988.

George Eliot's novel *Adam Bede* was recorded on audiocassette by Books on Tape in 1994.

George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch* was recorded on audiocassette by Blackstone Audio Books in 1994.

George Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss* was adapted to the screen in 1939, directed by Tim Whalen and starring Geraldine Fitzgerald and James Mason.

George Eliot's novel *Silas Marner* was adapted by BBC-TV in 1985, directed by Giles Foster and starring Ben Kingsley.

George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch* was adapted as a 3-part mini-series by PBS in 1994, directed by Anthony Page.

Topics for Further Study

At the time of writing "The Lifted Veil," George Eliot was interested in various forms of supernatural experience, including mesmerism (hypnotism) and clairvoyance. Yet, she was not alone. Interest in the supernatural abounded in the 19th Century. Research and write about some of the trends in seeking out supernatural experiences during the 19th Century. Compare to current trends in extrasensory perception (ESP) and other forms of belief in the supernatural?

George Eliot's "The Lifted Veil" can be categorized as Gothic fiction of the 19th Century, which was a precursor to the modern horror film, from *Psycho* to *Night of the Living Dead* to *Halloween* to the *Friday the 13th* to *Nightmare on Elm Street* and beyond. Watch a modern horror film and discuss what elements it has in common with Gothic fiction such as "The Lifted Veil." In what ways does the movie portray a different perspective on the phenomenon of the supernatural from the perspective portrayed in "The Lifted Veil."?

In addition to George Eliot, a number of notable female novelists were successful writers during the 19th Century, such as Charlotte and Emily Bronte and Jane Austin. Research the biography and writing of one of these novelists. What were the conditions under which these women were able to achieve literary notoriety despite their position as women in Victorian society?

George Eliot's life spanned a good portion of the 19th Century, referred to as the Victorian era in British history, because it was characterized by the reign of Queen Victoria. Research life in the Victorian era. Focus on one element of Victorian culture, such as advances in science, medicine, political reform, intellectual trends, the conditions of women or other trends in literature and art, such as Romanticism.

Eliot's "The Lifted Veil" was published in 1859, the same year that Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species,* in which he put forth his theory of evolution. Find out more about the impact of Darwin's theories on Victorian ideas about science and religion.

American writer Edgar Allen Poe wrote short stories in the genre of Gothic fiction during roughly the same era in which Eliot wrote. Read one of Poe's short stories for comparison.

Compare and Contrast

Victorian Era: Experimentation and curiosity about the human mind and the supernatural lead to several trends of inquiry and experimentation in Victorian England. Mesmerism (now referred to as hypnotism) was thought to create alternate states of consciousness. Clairvoyance, the ability to read the thoughts of others, see into the future, or describe scenes of distant cities, etc., was also a subject of experimentation and general interest.

1999: There is general interest in E.S.P., tarot cards, "new age" spirituality, astrology, etc. Hypnotism is now used in psychotherapy, as well as other, less scientifically accepted, practices, such as getting in touch with past lives or the dead. Clairvoyance, now commonly referred to as extrasensory perception, (ESP), or the people who have this power as "psychics," is doubted by many, but also believed by many, to be a real phenomenon. Police detectives have been known to call in psychics to help solve crimes.

Victorian Era: Phrenology is the study of the external shape of the human head as a means of determining intelligence and character.

1999: The study of phrenology has been completely debunked in the late 20th Century, and is associated with racist pseudo-sciences.

Victorian Era: Gothic fiction, or Gothic horror, was developed as a literary genre in the 19th Century. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is considered to be the first Gothic novel of note, followed by others, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* .

Late 20th Century: Gothic fiction in the late 20th Century has developed into two distinct genres. On one hand, the modern horror story flourishes, in both the novel form, with such prolific writers as Stephen King, and in film, with such films as *Psycho, Night of the Living Dead, Friday the 13th, Halloween,* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street.* On the other hand, the modern, mass-market paperback romance novel, often referred to as Gothic romance, is descended from the Gothic novel.

Victorian England: In Victorian England, blood transfusion was a subject of scientific experimentation. Scientists experimented with animals, reporting that dead animals had momentarily sprung to life, following a transfusion. Blood transfusion was also used on women during pregnancy and after birth.

1999: Blood transfusion is a standard medical practice during some surgeries and other medical procedures. Although it saves lives, it is not considered to be bring the dead back to life.

What Do I Read Next?

Middlemarch (1871-72) is considered to be George Eliot's masterpiece of provincial life in Victorian England.

Frankenstein (1818) by Mary Shelley is considered to be the first Gothic novel of note. Dr. Frankenstein creates a monster which he then seeks to destroy.

Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), by Robert Louis Stevenson, recounts how Dr. Jekyll concocts a potion which causes his person to split into one Mr. Hyde, a despicable creature who embodies all of the doctor's basest impulses.

Twice-Told Tales (1837), by Nathaniel Hawthorne, contains some stories with Gothic elements in an American setting.

The Dead Zone (1979), by Stephen King, portrays a man who is haunted by his ability to see into the future.

The Madwoman in the Attic (1979), by Sandra Gilbert and Gubar, is a landmark feminist critique of the place of women authors in the canon of English literature.

George Eliot: A Life (1886), by Rosemary Ashton, is a biography which discusses Eliot's life and work in the cultural and historical context of Victorian England.

The Lifted Veil: The Book of Fantastic Literature by Women, 1800-World War II (1992) contains a collection of stories by women which explore the realm of the fantastic.

Further Study

Ashton, Rosemary. *George Eliot: A Life*, New York: Penguin Press, 1996.

A recent biography of Eliot which approaches her life through her personal psychology, her writing and the political, social and intellectual context of Victorian England. Each of her major works is examined in detail.

Beer, Patricia. *Reader, I Married Him: A Study of the Women Characters of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot*, New York, Barnes and Noble, 1974.

Examines key female characters in the novels of prominent female writers of 19th Century England.

Dickerson, Vanessa D. *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural*, Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1996.

Examines Victorian Era fiction by women, such as Charlotte and Emily Bronte and George Eliot, which includes elements of the supernatural. Dickerson examines the relationship between the supernatural and issues of gender in the lives and work of these authors.

Haight, Gordon S., ed. *Selections from George Eliot's Letters,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Haight has selected some of the most interesting excerpts from the thousands of Eliot's letters to create a single chronological narrative of her life and work. This selection includes the details of the writing and publication of her work.

Haldane, Elizabeth Sanderson. *George Eliot and her Times: A Victorian Study*, New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1927.

Haldane examines Eliot's ideas and writing in terms of larger intellectual and social trends in Victorian England. An intellectual history of the writer, which explains her life and work in its broader cultural and historical context.

Karl, Frederick Robert. *George Eliot: Voice of a Century: a Biography*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1995.

Karl examines Eliot's life and work in terms of her role as the "voice" of her century, the Victorian era. Eliot expressed the sentiments of a Victorian England undergoing many historical changes and cultural conflicts.

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Project Editor
David Galens

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535