

Exposing Visual Discipline: Amy Levy's *Romance of a Shop*, the Decay of Paternalistic Masculinity, and the Powers of Female Sight

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Amy Levy's New Woman novel *The Romance of a Shop* (1888) recounts the adventures of the four Lorimer sisters, Fanny, Gertrude, Lucy, and Phyllis, as they open a photography business following the death of their father. The narrative follows their adjustments to living and working in London within the context of important late-Victorian social developments, including the trials and triumphs of female professionals, the quickened pace of the city, and the proliferation of visual technologies and commodities. Levy's novel highlights the importance of vision to the daily routines of urban life.¹ She demonstrates how the Lorimers at once observe the ubiquity of visual activity in the modern city and deploy their own powers of sight to participate in the dynamic visual culture of the late nineteenth century. Their growing awareness of vision(s) promotes their success as aspirant photographers, and it also helps them to recognize the disciplinary functions of sight. Levy draws particular attention to the sisters' understandings of the optical strategies of various men in the novel who use vision as a tool to objectify women, control their movements, and regulate their bodies. In addition, Gertrude, Lucy, and occasionally even Phyllis make such operations explicit by addressing men's various anxieties within late-Victorian society and identifying their attempts to regain their sexual confidence and cultural power. Elizabeth Evans, in her recent essay on *The Romance of the Shop*, argues that the Lorimers "are the producers of spectacles, not the subject of them" (26). In Levy's tale, Frank Jermyn, Fred Devonshire, Sidney Darrell, and Lord Watergate become spectacles before female eyes, and the sheer visibility of their assumed privileges, exposed social/sexual insecurities, and desperate subsequent reclamation projects reveals the fragility of their male identities and the effects of the New Woman on viable late-Victorian masculine behavior.

Levy's insecure male characters participate in what John Tosh and other scholars discuss as a turbulent period of gender instability in which the emergent New Woman figure alters traditional gender relations and challenges assumed male privileges.² Tosh initially notes that "the New Woman's professional ambitions trespassed on male preserves of employment." This revolutionary female subject compelled men to compete openly for jobs and promotions, and her ambitions likewise affected the cultural role and status of men. Tosh specifically explains that her "insistence on appearing in public and private without a chaperon was a rejection of men's protection." The New Woman pursued professional, intellectual, and sexual opportunities that, as Tosh concludes, "conflicted with deeply held assumptions about women's inferiority—the more so when it took an advanced feminist form" (153). The historical New Woman, in effect, forced men both to acknowledge women's potential and to explicitly exert authority to claim privileges that were previously presumed to be natural. As numerous critics note, however, the fictional New Woman is rarely successful in her rebellion, and while she often asserts strong desires, enjoys some social success, and challenges male characters, the supremacy of patriarchy is usually safeguarded and reasserted by the close of the narrative.³ Susan David Bernstein considers the importance of this ambivalence in New Woman literature to both Levy's biography and her writings. She concludes that Levy's life and works illustrate "the pleasures and perils of a young woman in late-Victorian London, caught between new and old, between opportunities and social disabilities, between privileged and outsider status." *The Romance of a Shop* dramatizes this ambiguity, what Bernstein terms a "structure of in-betweenness," as the four sisters navigate new opportunities, difficult challenges, and various social spheres ("Introduction" 12).

But the novel also displays the precarious status of male subjects who are at once threatened by the Lorimers and eager to reclaim control over public and private spaces, their own sexual desires, and women's bodies. And it is the Lorimer sisters' optical activity—at times skillful and at times questionable—that frames the efforts of Lord Watergate, Fred, Darrell, and Frank to combat their insecurities, including their discomfort with their own emotions, women's sexual desires, and the changing visual marketplace. The novel effectively makes visible many of the patriarchal strategies of late-nineteenth-century culture, and this requires Levy's

fictional male characters to negotiate the anxieties of “in-betweenness” that we often associate with the upstart female figures of New Woman fiction. Frank, Darrell, Fred, and Lord Watergate audition new, desperate, or exaggerated kinds of masculine behavior in response to the Lorimers’ visual skills and activities, and while the narrative ultimately provides strange reassertions of male privileges, it also encourages us to see its men’s anxieties, insecurities, and exaggerated masculine performances through the eyes of women. Levy’s novel ultimately makes clear that late-Victorian men will no longer be able to retain either their dominant vision or their dominant social status without taking steps to deal with women’s visual activity or romantic fictional techniques—or both.

Late-Century Visuality, Discipline, and Exposure

Levy’s coupling of fictional depictions of successful New Women professionals, the critical state of late-Victorian masculinity, and the eventual re-establishment of conventional patriarchal roles and behaviors is at least in part due to her creative use of the distinct traditions of realism and romance. As Bernstein points out, “*The Romance of a Shop* reorients the conventional opposition between romance and realism, between imagining artistic resolutions that transcend the prosaic limitations of everyday life on the one hand, and an insistence on the gritty liabilities of social, economic, and physical survival on the other” (“Introduction” 32).⁴ Levy’s novel provides us with a rather neat and clean conclusion that has earned the ire of critics, but it also documents the daily “prosaic” realities of London, including the despair of its struggling inhabitants, its classed system of public transportation, and the shifting marketplaces for art and journalism.⁵ *The Romance of a Shop*, moreover, presents the omnipresence of vision as a banal reality of late-Victorian culture. The novel is obsessed with seeing and being seen, as both artistic processes and everyday occurrences. Levy pays careful attention to exchanges of glances, casual observations, and viewing positions, especially for young unmarried women. When Phyllis looks upon the city from her favorite window above the street, Lucy chides: “I wish you wouldn’t do that . . . any one can see right into the room” (105). Lucy’s comment suggests the pervasiveness of vision and viewers within 1880’s London; it is a space in which people are always looking and being *looked at*. With the exception of Phyllis, the Lorimers understand the risks of these omnipresent visions, especially public visions that penetrate the

private world of the home. Despite such dangers, the Lorimers are active viewers, and their livelihood depends upon the quality of their sight, but it is their consciousness of the realities of vision and optical operations that makes them powerful participants in the novel's visual networks.

As aspiring photographers, the Lorimers enter a visual profession marked by rapid growth. The Victorians were extremely fond of photography, and Levy's novel references its popularity when Lucy voices her thought of "buying some nice little business, such as are advertised every week in *The British Journal*" (55). The Lorimers plan to enter a field that has burgeoned, or as Lady Elizabeth Eastlake notes in her early history of photography, "has become a household word and a household want" (40).⁶ Amateur and professional artists alike used the camera to capture ubiquitous images of their mundane experiences; they recorded everyday lives, printed family portraits, and bought and sold innumerable cartes de visites. Jennifer Tucker dubs early photography "a new wonder of its age," which she claims "conveyed an image of democracy," as more and more people memorialized, produced, and exchanged their visions (143). The Lorimers contribute to this heightened activity of the late-nineteenth-century visual field that Helen Groth and others identify. Groth specifically discusses photography's seductive capacity "to fix a moment, a famous face or favourite literary scene, to arrest time . . . in the face of the relentless pace of history" (18). The new technology framed people, places, and experiences as static artifacts that could be used as mementoes as well as instruments to manage modern culture. Groth's remark echoes Foucault's canonical explanation of "why discipline fixes;" he explains, "it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distinctions" (219). Photography, like Foucauldian discipline, offers a means to categorize, suspend dynamism, and enforce regularity; it becomes a prominent visual instrument of modern systems of control, capable of isolating, distinguishing, and ordering individuals.⁷ Photography—and the modes of vision it engendered—allowed individuals and institutions to record everyday experiences while simultaneously helping to generate a disciplinary society in which people, places, and activities were always already seen, documented, and archived.

Levy's tale shows us such a disciplinary culture and its importance to producing and maintaining established systems of power such as

paternalism, but it also demonstrates the disruptive potential of visual consciousness and quotidian vision, especially female vision. In Foucault's famous description of the panopticon, he notes the unilateral nature of sight; the prisoner "is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (200). Levy certainly treats the visual objectification of women by men, institutions, and even other women, but she also illustrates how the Lorimers become aware of and deliberately participate in processes of visual discipline. Indeed, the sisters identify and complicate visual activity; they develop sophisticated understandings of late-Victorian vision and at times Gertrude and Lucy even reverse what Laura Mulvey theorizes as the oppressive male gaze.⁸ While the presence of other urban viewers (as well as our own observations as readers) certainly complicates the Lorimers' use of such a gaze, their abilities to return aggressive optical activity challenges the authority of men's sight and disrupts the cultural work of visual discipline. Foucault concludes that modern discipline must include systems of examining and supervising individuals, but it "must also master all the forces that are formed from the very constitution of an organized multiplicity." He adds: "it must neutralize the effects of counter-power that spring from them and which form a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate it: agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions" (219-20). Effective disciplinary structures, according to Foucault, must contain and counter even the possibility of dissent or disruption; they must monitor and re-train individuals and groups before their radical ideas or sentiments become manifest, or before they expose the stratagems of visual control. Levy treats the Lorimers as members of a disciplinary society who learn to identify the prominent role of vision in maintaining its transparent continuity. While Gertrude and Lucy are undoubtedly the most optically powerful sisters, Phyllis and even the elder Fanny (whom Levy describes as "a large and superannuated baby") learn to recognize the work of vision, and it is the initial recognition that may be most disruptive of scopic control (52).⁹ The Lorimers see the oppressive functions of vision that Foucault theorizes, but they do not validate its righteousness or passively accept its legitimacy; in addition, Gertrude and Lucy take steps to avoid and redirect its regulatory effects, and use their own powers of sight to showcase the anxieties of male characters as well as their efforts to compensate with different forms of hyper-masculine behavior. These two Lorimers ultimately make visible the

attempts of Fred, Lord Watergate, Frank, and Darrell to mend their insecurities through sentimental, pathetic, and even aggressive performances. And although each of these men ultimately reverts to the safety of traditional male identities and behaviors, Levy displays their reversions as desperate attempts to regain social/sexual stability within the context of the ambition, energy, and visual powers of the Lorimers.

The novel foregrounds the Lorimers' powers of sight vis-à-vis paternalistic masculinity. As they sit for one of their final meals at their family home,

they all seemed to see the dead father, as he had been wont to sit among them; charming, gay, *debonair*, the life of the party; delighting no less in the light-hearted sallies of his daughters, than in his own neatly-polished epigrams; a man as brilliant as he had been unsatisfactory; as little able to cope with the hard facts of existence as he had been reckless in attacking them. (57)

The young women's hallucinatory vision—a staple of the romance tradition—highlights their ability to see—and see through—men. They make visible the decay of their father's masculine identity; they recall his charm, his intelligence, and his love for social situations, but they also note his faults, specifically his inability to see and manage the changing realities of late-Victorian culture. His daughters, moreover, are able to identify their father's artifice; they expose his fears and failures, as well as his attempts to compensate for each with paternalistic benevolence.¹⁰ The patriarch tried to mask his insecurities with conventional masculine behavior, and apparently this tactic was reasonably effective, but the young women recognize this behavior as a performance designed to cover his anxieties and failings. His loss of fortune and subsequent death ironically force his daughters to transform their amateur hobby of photography into a professional practice in which they will now engage other paternalistic men with their ambitious independence, their sexual desire, and most importantly, their vision.

Young Men, Benevolent Masculinity, and the Visibility of Paternalism

Frank Jermy is the most prominent object of the Lorimers' sight; he lives opposite their studio-home, and the sisters consistently observe his

actions. While occupying her familiar location by the window, Phyllis announces: "there goes Conny's impetuous friend. I have found out that he lodges just opposite us" (79). Later, while in the same viewing spot, Phyllis remarks: "There is a light in Frank Jermyn's window—the top one . . . I suppose he is dressing" (105). The sisters monitor Frank, even in his private residence. They watch him and note his body. Their early observations of Frank remind us of Mulvey's notion of the objectifying male gaze, as they glimpse him, presumably dressing, behind a window; but Levy's portrayal is complex, as we effectively watch the Lorimers watching Frank, who creatively capitalizes on this visual attention. While Frank initially appears unaffected by such surveillance, as his friendship with the Lorimers develops, he takes what Levy terms "a deep and unconcealed interest" in the Lorimers' emergent photography business, and he begins to monopolize their visual activity (98). He and his fellow artist Mr. Oakley repeatedly employ the sisters to photograph their work, and the narrator informs us that they "kept [the Lorimers] so busy over models, sketches, and arrangements of drapery, that the girls' hands were full from morning till night" (98). Frank quickly becomes comfortable with the Lorimers, and the narrator reports that "no one quite knew how it came about, but before a month had gone by, it became the most natural thing in the world for Frank to drop in upon them at unexpected hours, to share their simple meals, to ask and give advice about their respective work" (99). He acts as a compassionate mentor, and it is significant that Levy suggests his behavior becomes naturalized; i.e. Frank's ever-increasing presence is accepted as normal, and he appears unaffected by the sisters' objectifying visions. He is at ease in their presence, and this comfort enables him to direct their vision and even rehearse conventional male behavior.

The narrator dramatizes his naturalized presence—and the risks of such a presence—during an oft-discussed scene in which he passes by the sisters' studio in his "painting-coat and sombrero" (99). The narrator reports: "[he] plucked the latter from his head and waved it in exaggerated salute." He acts as a gallant man who is confident in his relationship with the Lorimers, and his behavior "evoked a responsive smile from the person [Gertrude] for whom it was intended" (99). Gertrude recognizes his gesture as a performance and responds accordingly, suggesting her acceptance of Frank's embellished action, but she also identifies her potential vulnerability as the object of this man's gaze, as well as the supervising

gaze of others in a public space. Levy notes how his affected gallantry “acted with quite a different effect” on Aunt Caroline, “who chanced to witness it, and for whom it was certainly not intended” (99). Gertrude’s aunt is shocked by this exchange of pleasantries between her niece and the young artist, and the narrator reports “a look of speechless horror on her handsome, horselike countenance” (99). The visual interactions of this scene prompt Aunt Caroline to chastise her nieces for maintaining an open relationship with Frank. Gertrude confidently responds to her Aunt’s charges: “We have taken life up from a different standpoint, begun it on different bases. We are poor people, and we are learning to find the pleasures of the poor, to approach happiness from another side” (101). She employs the language of vision and perspective to emphasize their distinct social position; Gertrude and her sisters fundamentally see the world differently, and from different spaces. She concludes, “You say we ‘follow Mr. Jermyn to his studio;’ we have our living to earn, no less than our lives to live, and in neither case can we afford to be the slaves of custom” (101). Gertrude experiences shame when she realizes that her aunt has observed her interaction with Frank, but she refuses to accept her critique or its disciplinary effect; while Gertrude is clearly cognizant of her aunt’s visual surveillance, she and her sisters reposition their public vision as a both a pleasant experience and a financial necessity. They enjoy their views of Frank and his art, and they must continue to take such views to support themselves, even as they are watched by others in their urban community.

Fred Devonshire is one of the many family friends who maintain consistent surveillance over the Lorimers. He is the brother of Constance Devonshire, a close confidant of Gertrude, who enjoys the privileges of wealth and behaves as a dandy throughout much of the narrative. Levy describes him as “a tall, heavy young man, elaborately and correctly dressed, with a fatuous, good-natured, pink and white face” (61). Her quick sketch emphasizes his physicality; his size is commanding and perhaps intimidating, and like the Lorimer patriarch, he is a jovial individual who assumes the powers and privileges of paternalistic masculinity. Early in the novel, he actively attempts to objectify Gertrude and her sisters. The narrator explains, “he had long regarded the Lorimer girls as quite the most astonishing productions of the age” (62). He casts his sister’s friends as spectacles, and he is amused by their plan to open a photography shop. He expounds: “Oh come now, Miss Lucy . . . that really is too much for one to

swallow" (61). Fred cannot fathom the Lorimers as independent professional artists; instead, he, like Frank, actively tries to focus their vision. He announces to Lucy: "I'll come every day of the week to be photographed, if I may, and so shall all the fellows at our office!" (62). He is a controlling man who assumes the right—or perhaps the duty—to regulate the Lorimers' visions by making himself the subject of their work. He even lends his assistance to the young women as they search for a home in the city, and he works diligently to ready their new residence. He acts as an ersatz guardian, but Levy highlights and even objectifies this pretentious performance. The narrator recounts: "Fred, revealing an unsuspected talent for carpentering, occupied his leisure moments in providing the household with an unlimited quantity of shelves. Indeed, the spectacle of that gorgeous youth hammering away in his shirt sleeves on a pair of steps, his immaculate hat and coat laid by, his gardenia languishing in some forgotten nook, was one not easily to be overlooked or forgotten" (78). Levy puts Fred on display, and again emphasizes his body. She invites us and the sisters to gaze upon his frame, identify its beauty, its material accoutrements, and its lasting effect upon the viewer. The narrator's reference to Fred's physical skill, beauty, and attire recall standard visual objectifications of women; he is fleshly, nubile, and partially-clothed. In addition, his movements are tracked and recorded, reminding us of the active voyeurism of late-Victorian London.

Unlike Fred, the Lorimers are unfamiliar with Lord Watergate at the beginning of the novel, and their initial encounters with the widower are more complex, as he often appears not as a chauvinistic youth but as a modern man who appreciates the confidence and ability of New Women. He assists and comforts the Lorimers through some of their most difficult trials as aspiring artists, and Levy even suggests his ongoing attempts to adapt to shifting gender dynamics of late-Victorian London. It is, however, difficult to assess whether Lord Watergate actively supports the attitudes and activities of New Women or merely reacts to their innovative ideas and revolutionary actions. Lord Watergate has been hurt by his wife's ostensibly reckless behavior, and yet he presents a gentlemanly demeanor of compassion and respect toward the Lorimers. Gertrude, however, notes both his vulnerability and his extant paternalism when she first encounters him upon her visit to photograph the recently deceased Lady Watergate. While she captures the image of the lifeless woman, the narrator references

“another figure, that of a man, [who] was seated by the window, in a pose as fixed, as motionless, as that of the dead woman herself” (87). Lord Watergate is at first withdrawn and static; he showcases neither the arrogance of Fred nor the ambition of Frank. Gertrude only notices “for one brief, but vivid moment . . . the glance of two miserable grey eyes, looking out with a sort of dazed wonder from a pale and sunken face” (87). His is not an active or objectifying male gaze; nevertheless, “he formed a picture which imprinted itself as by a flash on Gertrude’s overwrought consciousness, and was destined not to fade for many days to come” (87).¹¹ Levy’s language affirms Gertrude’s impressive powers of vision. She frames Lord Watergate as a pathetic and disoriented figure, and it is important that this sight strongly affects Gertrude. Despite her active gaze, it is the wounded sentimental male who remains as a powerful image in her mind, and Lord Watergate effectively capitalizes upon his lasting effect when he later encounters Gertrude.

At Frank’s exhibition, the older man is more comfortable with his vision, and Gertrude draws specific attention to his sight; “the grey eyes looked straight into hers, and a deep voice said — ‘We have met before. But I scarcely ventured to regard myself as introduced to you’” (114). Lord Watergate slowly reestablishes the ability to gaze upon young women, but he acts with a politeness that belies the confidence of Frank or the arrogance of Fred or Darrell. He takes special notice of Phyllis, and Gertrude recognizes his growing visual interest in her younger sister. She “notes that he was looking at her [sister] with all his eyes,” and even Phyllis, “had been aware of the brief but intense gaze which the grey eyes had cast upon her from the other side of the room” (115). His intense and explicit vision suggests his paternalistic concern for Phyllis, whose beauty makes her the focus of many eyes in the novel, but Lord Watergate’s visual activity is also objectifying and disciplinary. He continually watches her, suggesting both his knowledge of the social vulnerability of women and the avarice of male sight. Levy concludes, “he . . . adopted, unconsciously, a protective attitude towards the Lorimers; their fearlessness, their immense ignorance, appealed to his generous and chivalric nature” (151).¹² Lord Watergate sees the sisters as inexperienced women in need of his guidance; he acts as a concerned patriarch who must watch and supervise their movements, but his optical activity is both recognized and quickly reversed. Gertrude and Phyllis are explicitly aware of his sight; they see him watching them, and Lucy even

employs conventions of the male gaze to report how she “like[s] his face . . . there is something almost boyish about it” (118). Lucy employs visual strategies common to the oppressive male viewer as she objectifies the widower, isolates his face, and highlights its puerility. She and her sisters recognize his paternalistic behavior throughout much of the novel, and they slowly discern his lingering insecurities and vulnerabilities.

Like Lord Watergate, Sidney Darrell invites the Lorimers to his house to take photographs. Although both Frank and Lucy acknowledge Darrell’s credentials as an accomplished artist with a well-trained eye, when Gertrude arrives at his studio, Levy instead foregrounds her heroine’s visual powers. She observes “a man of middle height, and middle age, with light brown hair, parted in the centre, and a moustache and Vandyke beard of the same colour. He was not, strictly speaking, handsome, but he wore that air of distinction which power and the assurance of power alone can confer” (107). Levy again allows one of her female characters to visually frame a male figure; Darrell is not attractive, but he is ordered and confident, especially in his vision, and Gertrude notes how his grooming and status facilitate his domineering behavior and objectifying gaze. She recognizes the force of his sight, but she also realizes such sight is contingent upon the assumption of his naturalized privileges. In a carefully narrated moment, Levy notes how Gertrude, “looking up and meeting the cold, grey glance, became suddenly conscious that her hat was shabby, that her boots were patched and clumsy, that the wind had blown the wisps of hair about her face” (107). She questions: “What was there in this man’s gaze that made her, all at once, feel old and awkward, ridiculous and dowdy; that made her long to snatch up her heavy camera and flee from his presence, never to return?” (107). Gertrude’s reaction bespeaks the oppressive power of Darrell’s vision; he is an aggressive male viewer whose vision is able to make others, especially young women, self-conscious and self-critical. Yet Gertrude’s comments also point to her awareness of the artist’s visual strategies; she knows he is attempting to objectify her and her body, and this knowledge eventually helps her to analyze and critique his patriarchal performances.

During Gertrude’s visit, Darrell tries to control her optical activity. Levy even remarks how “with his own hands . . . [he] set up and fixed the heavy camera on the tripod stand” (108). The narrator notes how “Gertrude found herself rather cowed by the man and his indifferent politeness, through

which she seemed to detect the lurking contempt" (108). Darrell attempts to manage Gertrude's vision; he handles her camera, patronizes her with affected politeness, and after making minor adjustments to the shoot, he "cast himself into a lounge, where the leather screen shut out his well-appointed person from Gertrude's sight" (108). Although he is presumably a commanding male viewer, he retreats from Gertrude's vision, prefiguring his fear of female visual activity. He is an assertive viewer, but he is also threatened by Gertrude's eyes, which penetrate his paternalism. When she rejoins her sisters, Gertrude openly derides the artist and his objectifying vision. She reports, "He was odious . . . I will never go there again" (110). She redefines his affected courtesy as "worse than rudeness, a politeness which says so plainly: 'This is for my own sake, not for yours'" (110). She adds: "He is this sort of man; — if a woman were talking to him of—of the motions of the heavenly bodies, he would be thinking all the time of the shape of her ankles" (110). Gertrude presents Darrell as an arrogant individual who dismisses women's artistry and, à la Mulvey's theory of the male cinematic viewer, parses their bodies with his gaze.¹³ But again, Gertrude recognizes the young man's oppressive vision, and as she develops her own powers of sight, she learns to counter its disciplinary effects.

Contested Visions, Sentimental Desperation, and Aggressive Masculinity

As Gertrude and Lucy heighten their consciousness of the disciplinary effects of vision, they exercise their visual powers to confront the gazes of Fred, Frank, Darrell, and Lord Watergate, and subsequently expose their antiquated and paternalistic masculine behaviors. These men, in turn, become desperate and take explicit steps to regulate the optical activity of the Lorimers; they ultimately adopt familiar strategies of male sentimentality in attempts to lessen the vulnerability of their social/sexual subjectivities, but their sentimentalism is ineffective and at times comic, and they soon take more aggressive measures to counter the visions of the Lorimer sisters. Fred is perhaps the most obvious example of this process, as he attempts to position his visage prominently within the Lorimers' new home. We learn that "in the doorway was displayed a showcase, whose most conspicuous feature was a cabinet portrait of Fred Devonshire . . . looking, with an air of mingled archness and shamefacedness" (79). Fred maintains a visual presence within their studio; his portrait seems to watch

the Lorimers' entry, as if to monitor the young women and their visitors. But Lucy and her sisters soon grow tired of his surveillance and his narcissism. Lucy specifically chides him: "Mr. Frederick Devonshire, I positively refuse to minister any longer to such gross egotism! You've been cabinetted, vignettted, and carte de visited. You've been taken in a snowstorm; you've been taken looking out of window, drinking afternoon tea, and doing I don't know what else. If your vanity still remains unsatisfied, you must get another firm to forge it for you" (88). Lucy outs Fred as an arrogant, insecure young man; her rebuke likewise affirms her ability to manage her own eyes as a photographer, as she insists "our business . . . is conducted on the strictest principles. We always let a gentleman know when he has had as much as is good for him" (88). She upholds her integrity as a visual professional, and she ridicules the young man as a self-centered fool. Fred responds to her critique with paternalistic cheer that reminds us of the tactics of the Lorimers' dead father, as he "gave vent to an unearthly howl of merriment" (88). He clearly understands Lucy's harsh critique, and he tries to dismiss its efficacy by reverting to benevolent laughter.

Fred subsequently turns to more explicit optical strategies, including adopting the conventional male gaze that strives to objectify and belittle women. While waiting for a cab with his sister, he reports: "I'll tell you what it is . . . Gertrude may be the cleverest, and Phyllis the prettiest, but Lucy is far and away the nicest of the Lorimer girls" (91). He differentiates and categorizes them with his own criteria, as if he were generating a taxonomy for ranking and evaluating women. In addition, we soon learn that he has continued to affect their home life, as Levy informs us that Fred has given the Lorimers a five-barred gate, which Phyllis dubs "the White Elephant," a gift that limits the sisters' movements and blocks their vision (97). At the public exhibition of the art of Frank and Mr. Oakley, Fred again works to (re)direct the Lorimers' gaze, as he instructs Lucy to "come and look at the pictures . . . That's what you're here for" (112). He behaves as an obnoxious docent, but Levy is careful to observe that he "was looking the very embodiment of Philistine comeliness" (112). While Fred tries to act as an art expert, he *looks* like an alluring but uncivilized individual. As he grows more nervous about his dwindling influence, he grows more desperate, and after Lucy refuses his proposal, he becomes pathetic and even antagonistic.

The narrator ominously presents the scene: "There was no mistaking the situation. At one of the red-legged tables sat Fred, his arms spread out before him, his face hidden in his arms; while Lucy, with a troubled face, stood near, struggling between her genuine compunction and an irrepressible desire to laugh" (142). As a rejected young man, Fred is a deplorable and humorous sight, and his vision is completely blocked by his own hands. His various attempts to control Lucy and her sisters through antiquated paternalism have failed; he is now seen as an ineffective man who is compelled to abandon his strategic benevolence for sentimentality: "You shouldn't have encouraged a fellow all these years" (142). He blames the young woman for arousing his desires, admitting his inability to direct his emotions as well as his poor visual skills; the beautiful young woman has supposedly deceived Fred into making a futile offer of marriage, but it is clear that Fred's sight has been flawed and Lucy's visual response defies his charge. She refuses to accept Fred's condemnation and responds: "how can you be so silly, Fred?" (143). She infantilizes her suitor, whom Levy now describes as "a wounded thing with a rancorous cry," but when Fred accuses Lucy of loving another man, she turns irate (143). Levy writes: "Back started Lucy, as if she had been shot . . . 'What has that to do with it?' she cried, stung suddenly to cruelty; 'what has that to do with it, when, if you were the only man in the world, I would not marry you?'" (143). Lucy's strong words reveal her frustration and her strength; she denies Fred's attempt to manage the scene by deflecting his own responsibility and forces him to adopt a rather hostile stance. He ends the uncomfortable exchange by reverting to anger, announcing: "perhaps one of these days you will be sorry for what you have done . . . you won't find many people to care for you as I would have cared" (143). He abandons both his jovial benevolence and his ridiculous sentimentality for resentment; he fails to garner Lucy's affection, but his reaction may help him to recoup a viable masculine identity by the end of the novel.

Fred's competitor for Lucy's affection, Frank, likewise struggles to sustain his benevolent influence over the Lorimers. Despite his ability to gain the attention of the sisters' eyes with ongoing professional work, as they become more active in the London arts community, he must act more explicitly to attract their vision in both private and public areas. For example, at the art show featuring the work of Frank and Mr. Oakley, "Frank shot across the room, like an arrow from the bow, as the Lorimers

entered" (112). He immediately attends to them, as if they required his personal assistance to tour the exhibit, but Levy quickly notes how the Lorimers reverse the male artist's gaze. Phyllis observes "How pretty Frank looks . . . I like to see him flying in and out among the people, as though his life depended on it, don't you? And the daffodil in his coat just suits his complexion" (112). The youngest sister identifies Frank as a pleasant spectacle, highlighting his appearance and observing how he, like other artists, must promote his work to consumers and critics of his art. Lucy, for her part, "refrained from smiling, but her eyes followed, with some amusement, the picturesque and active figure of her host, as he went about his duties with the usual air of earnestness and candour" (112). Lucy and Phyllis recognize the motives for Frank's actions at the exhibits; they objectify his body and see his attempts to market his skills to changing public tastes.

Following Frank's ineffectual attempt to guide the Lorimers through his exhibit, he too becomes more aggressive, and he even sits for a portrait before Lucy's camera. Gertrude returns to the photography studio to see "Lucy engaged in focusing Frank, who was seated, wearing an air of immense solemnity, in the sitter's chair" (119). While this scene allows Frank to garner the visual attention of Lucy and Gertrude, it also points to his growing desperation, as he exposes himself and his body to the sisters' vision. In addition, Levy reveals his "air of immense solemnity" as an artificial addition to his identity; he dons this appearance as if it were a garment designed for a specific event or appearance. Lucy reverses the male artist's gaze, as she fixes Frank's visage, and Levy notes that "Gertrude, laughing, retreated to the waiting-room; where . . . she stared vaguely at the little picture of youth and grace which the parted curtains revealed to her" (120). Gertrude is amused by the scene; she transforms the male artist into a mere "youth," and her laughter suggests how his attempt to control the sisters' visual attentions has become something of a joke. Frank's willingness to sit before Lucy's camera, moreover, ultimately deepens his insecurities, as he soon reverts to anxious or even paranoid optical strategies. He becomes nervous about the intimacy he has observed between Fred and Lucy, and shortly after one of Fred's visits to the studio—the visit in which Lucy rejects his proposal—the narrator records that

they had seen scarcely anything of Jermyn, beyond the glimpses of him as he lounged up the street, with his sombrero crushed over his eyes, all the impetuosity gone from his gait. That he distinctly avoided them, there could be little doubt. Though he could be seen looking across at the house wistfully enough, he made no attempt to see them, and his greetings when they chanced to meet were of the most formal nature. (144)

Levy's narration is laden with the language of vision; Frank removes himself from the sight of the Lorimers, and he restricts his own vision under the sombrero that he previously used to perform as a confident man. And the Lorimers are conscious of both his recent withdrawal from visual networks and his altered demeanor.

Frank's desperation reaches its height when he arrives at the Lorimers' studio to announce his plans to travel to Africa as an illustrator for the journalistic coverage of the wars.¹⁴ Levy reports, "he looked curiously unlike himself . . . his face was pale . . . tense and eager, with shining eyes and dilated nostrils" (145). Frank is no longer a supportive fraternal presence; instead, the gaze of the Lorimers has made him apprehensive, and his eyes, which were once "brilliant" and "steadfast," are now overwhelmed, frightened, and perhaps even angry (92). Before he can share the reason for his visit, Lucy "looked up, pale, with steady eyes, questioning him" (146). While Frank has lost confidence in his eyes, Lucy has become a much more assertive viewer. Frank informs Lucy and her sisters that he is traveling to Africa to document the wars—an opportunity he claims "makes . . . an immense difference in my prospects" (146). Lucy does not take well to his announcement; she confronts him and questions, "but why . . . have you been so unkind for the last fortnight?" Frank responds:

you women so often misjudge us, and think that it is you alone who suffer, when the pain is on both sides. When it dawned upon me how things stood with you and me—dear girl, you told me more than you knew yourself—I reflected what a poor devil I was, with not the ghost of a prospect. (I have been down on my luck lately, Lucy.) And I saw, at the same time, how it was with

Devonshire; I thought, he is a good fellow, let him have his chance, it may be the best in the end —. (146-47)

Frank's pathetic comments reveal both his suspicions about Lucy's relationship with Fred and his diminishing opportunities as an artist in London. Indeed, his diction confuses his business problems with his romantic pains; because he is "with not the ghost of a prospect," he offers to "let [Fred] have his chance."

Frank casts himself as a victim who has endured trials of the visual marketplace and the supposed insensitivity of New Women, and his language ultimately exposes his paranoid surveillance and faulty vision. He has incorrectly observed Fred's interactions with Lucy—as well as the young woman's response to such interactions. Frank has become at once an insecure lover and an ineffective viewer, and the Lorimers recognize both his jealousy and his defective sight. He now appears depressed and debilitated, as his attempts to regain his visual powers and privileges have failed. But despite such despair, his bold decision to travel to Africa provides him with an alternative male identity that rehabilitates his masculinity, as he becomes an active participant in England's colonial project. Frank's ambition to travel to Africa reminds us of common Victorian conceptions of the continent as a place of adventure and danger; it is a source of great intrigue and excitement, perhaps best exemplified by H. Rider Haggard's popular narratives, but the empire, and specifically Africa, is also an established site for the training and re-training of British men. Volland Waters notes that English manliness was in many ways dependent on "imperial tendencies," and specifically points out how "imperialism . . . extended to the British male . . . opportunities to become (or to appear to become) gentleman which they would not ordinary have offered to them" (48).¹⁵ Jeffrey Richards, likewise, discusses Britain's deployment of its imperial holdings as a locus for maintaining both the youth and the virility of its men; he explains how adventure fiction, public schools, athletic competition, and the myth of the "boy who never grew up" (106) all contributed to "the turning out of Empire-builders" (104). Frank's intention to work in Africa reminds us of this cultural practice; his imperial activity allows him to retrain himself as a popular artist who can provide journalistic images of foreign lands and crises, but it also enables him to solidify himself as a brave man who endures (and presumably conquers)

the untamed wild of the empire. And it is not coincidental that he quickly becomes engaged to Lucy following his announced intention to go to Africa; while his decision is clearly motivated by his desperation and anxieties, it ultimately offers him a useful strategy to secure a stable masculine social/sexual identity rooted in conventional ideals of the British man.

Like Frank, Sidney Darrell continues to see and interact with the Lorimers at art shows, and Levy relates his growing discomfort with these exchanges. At Frank's exhibition, Darrell is specifically unsettled by Gertrude. He affectedly tells Phyllis that Gertrude is "far and away too clever for me" and adds, "I am horribly afraid of her" (116). He later echoes this assessment in a brief conversation with Frank: "Oh, yes, Gertrude is the clever one; you can see that by her boots" (117). His comments exude both the benevolent paternalism of an obnoxious patriarch and the crass vision of a base critic. He speaks of Gertrude as a precocious little girl whose energy stirs him, but Gertrude sees the insecurity that underlies his behavior. When he "went over to the piano and sang a little French song, with perfect art, in his rich baritone," Levy reports, "Gertrude watched him" (116). She objectifies the artist as he performs, and Gertrude reports "a vague terror stole over her of this irreproachable-looking person, who did everything so well . . . who, she felt (indignantly remembering the cold irony of his glance) could never, under any circumstances, be made to appear ridiculous" (116). She credits Darrell with tremendous confidence, but her language likewise recalls the fabrication of his composure; he has carefully arranged himself to appear as an assured man, and Gertrude recognizes his self-fashioning and his attempt to visually affect women.

As Gertrude and others expose Darrell's various paternalistic strategies throughout the latter stages of the narrative, he both pursues more aggressive visual opportunities and is exposed as anxious and vulnerable. When the sisters and Conny attend his exhibition, Levy reports: "There were duchesses, beauties, statesmen, and clever people of every description galore. In the midst of them all Darrell himself shone resplendent; gracious, urbane, polished; infusing just the right amount of cordiality into his many greetings, according to the deserts of the person greeted" (129). He appears to act as a confident male; he commands the room of important people, and he adjusts his behavior according to an individual's relative value. Conny, however, detects his calculating strategy beneath his coolness; she

announces, “[I] never saw any one who possessed to a greater perfection the art of impressing his importance on other people” (129). Darrell differentiates people’s potential, adjusts his actions, and makes certain to communicate his own worth or significance when appropriate. He is crafty, and like Frank, always in search of new possibilities to market and sell his art. He soon fixes upon Phyllis as his next artistic opportunity, and explains to Frank that he “want[s] her for Cressida . . . The idea occurred to me this afternoon. It was the sight of the fair Phyllis, in fact, which suggested it” (130). As a well-known artist, Darrell announces his plans with great assuredness, but Gertrude does not willfully consent. She tells him “it depends on whether [Fanny] can spare the time to bring her to [his] studio,” and Levy adds that Gertrude “glanced up as she spoke, and met, almost with open defiance, the heavy grey eyes of the man opposite. From these she perceived the irony to have faded; she read nothing there but a cold dislike” (131). Gertrude’s vision strips Darrell of the paternalistic buffer that had allowed him to act with both benevolence and authority; he is no longer able to use a smile or ironic laughter to maintain visual authority and direct the views of others. Indeed, her refusal to grant his request to paint Phyllis prompts him to show anger.

As his anger grows, Darrell, not surprisingly becomes a more aggressive viewer, especially of Phyllis. We learn “he had abandoned the idea of the ‘Cressida,’ and was painting Phyllis Lorimer in her own character” (133). He eschews an artistic rendering for an opportunity to directly objectify the beautiful woman, but his attempt to regain visual authority backfires, as Gertrude again reverses his gaze and employs techniques of surveillance. While Darrell avoids the Lorimers at his own *conversazione*, Gertrude engages in pervasive optical activity; “as she stood talking to Lord Watergate, her eye, guided by a nameless curiosity, an unaccountable fascination, sought [Darrell] out. He was looking ill, she thought, as she watched him standing in his host’s place, near the doorway, chatting to an ugly old woman” (150). She surveys the room with the freedom of a voyeur and fixes upon the dilapidated artist, who now prefers the more predictable company of older women. Gertrude now also sees through Darrell’s presumed superior artistic talents. The narrator notes how her

acute feminine sense, sharpened perhaps by personal soreness, had pierced to the second-rateness of the man and his art. Beneath his arrogance and air of assured success, she read the signs of an almost craven hunger for pre-eminence; of a morbid self-consciousness; an insatiable vanity . . . she failed to detect in his work the traces of those qualities which, combined with far less skill than his, can make greatness. (150)

She identifies Darrell as something of a hack whose art is neither unique nor impressive; she suggests that his work is easily reproducible and she interprets his ostensibly impressive style as an indicator of his desperation. Levy concludes, "she was no longer cowed by his aggressive personality, by the all-seeing languid glance, the arrogant, indifferent manner. They stood on a level platform of unspoken, yet open distaste; which, should occasion arise, might blaze into actual defiance" (150). Darrell's male gaze has lost its intimidating force, and Gertrude has become his equal as a viewer. She meets his eyes with an assurance that compels him to abandon his confident paternalism and reveal his anger and bitterness.

Like Frank, Darrell takes bold actions to avoid the optical activity of the Lorimers and regain his identity as a powerful man; he ultimately arranges to elope with Phyllis, and while his plan fails, it demonstrates his anxiety and his aggression. When Gertrude unexpectedly confronts him at his house, Darrell is alarmed and asks in fear: "By God, what brings that woman here!" (172). He is discomposed, sincerely frightened by her gaze, and responds defensively. The narrator highlights the animalistic behavior in the scene: "his face was livid with passion; his prominent eyes, for once wide open, glared at her in rage and hatred. Gertrude met his glance with eyes that glowed with a passion yet fiercer than his own. Elements, long smouldering, had blazed forth at last. Face to face they stood; face to face, while the silent battle raged between them" (172). Darrell's discomfort moves beyond fear to outright anger—an anger that Gertrude objectifies and returns with her eyes. The young woman's sight exposes the frustration and ire that have festered as his masculinity has weakened, and she recognizes her strength and his insecurity within this visual exchange. Levy concludes: "Gertrude knew that she, not he, the man of whom she had once been afraid, was the stronger of the two" (172).¹⁶ Darrell's demise is perhaps the most startling in the novel simply because he has the farthest to fall; as

an accomplished artist, he enjoys both a popular reputation and critical recognition, but Gertrude's visual powers cripple his confidence, force his aggressive optical strategies, and ultimately showcase him as a broken man. His plot to abscond with Phyllis suggests both his desire to avoid the Lorimers and the desperation that leads him to take such extreme measures. And like Fred and Frank, Darrell must also leave England to reestablish his social/sexual security; he travels to India "at the invitation of the Viceroy and remained there nearly two years" (194).

Lord Watergate is already a rather weakened man when he encounters the Lorimers, and while he tries to recast himself as a valiant male, Gertrude and her sisters refuse to support or sanction his efforts. When Phyllis's intention to elope with Darrell is discovered, Lord Watergate accompanies Gertrude to the artist's grand residence and tells her, "I cannot let you go alone. You do not know —." Gertrude interrupts him to explain, "I am prepared for anything. Lord Watergate, spare my sister's shame" (171). He speaks as a gallant man, who must confront Darrell, but Gertrude calls him off. She denies him this opportunity for public heroism and fatherly guidance, but Lord Watergate does not abandon his paternalistic concern for the Lorimers. He makes frequent trips to the photography studio following Phyllis's death, displaying a "kindness [that] had been as unremitting as it had been unobtrusive" (181). Unlike the other male suitors in the novel, Lord Watergate becomes seemingly less aggressive, but his actions still reveal insecurities, especially before the vision of Gertrude. He visits her to preempt the rumor of Frank's possible survival of a revolt in Africa, and the narrator announces, "it was no personal favour that he offered. To stretch out one's hand to a drowning creature is no act of gallantry; it is but recognition of a natural human obligation" (182). Levy does not present Lord Watergate as a brave champion; rather, she casts him as a sentimental figure, who demonstrates a "natural" sense of human feeling and duty. He graciously comes to assuage the sisters' reaction to the shocking gossip, and it is noteworthy that he attempts to temper rather than excite young women's emotions.

As a young widower, Lord Watergate often appears confused about his social and sexual status, and while he may try to appreciate the talents of New Women and remain an active male viewer, he ultimately employs familiar masculine behavior, especially following Frank's miraculous return. He instructs Gertrude that she "must do something to get well," and

cautions, "you will break down altogether if you don't" (187). He adopts the rhetoric of a meddling over-protective father, and Gertrude is nonplussed by his language—"she rose involuntarily; then stood rather helplessly before him" (187). Levy continues: "For once, [Gertrude] found Lord Watergate's presence disturbing and distressing; she was confused, unhappy, distrustful of herself; she wished when she turned her head that she would find him gone. But he was standing near her, a look of perplexity, of trouble, in his face . . . she was overwhelmed, astonished, infinitely agitated" (187). He seems to act as a compassionate and concerned father-figure, but Gertrude's response suggests the aggression of his benevolence. She attempts to wish away her sight of the widower, but she is unable to conjure this technique of romance. Levy concludes that the heroine's "soul shrank back afraid" (187). Gertrude previously dismissed Lord Watergate's chivalric manliness with ease; she now visually and physically shuns his attempt to merge fatherly counsel with sexual desire, and she responds to this matrix with shock and aversion. Gertrude discerns his de facto proposal and the narrator notes, "some blind instinct within her prompted her words, as she said, lifting her head, with the attitude of one who would avert an impending blow—'Oh, it is too soon, too soon'" (187-88). Levy's narration reminds us of the aggression in Lord Watergate's apparently sensitive behavior; Gertrude must avoid him as if he were physically striking her. He "stood a moment looking at her with his deep eyes;" and when he states, "I shall come back," Gertrude immediately responds, "No, oh, no!" (188). She rejects his entreaties—now and in the future. His gaze fails to impress, affect, or contain the heroine, whose words suggest confusion and perhaps even fear. Lord Watergate has audaciously tried to synthesize paternal male behavior with sexual desire, and Gertrude exposes the horrible result of this strategy. Like the other men in the novel, he will have to rely upon conventional models of masculinity and hackneyed male behavior to rehabilitate his social/sexual identity.

Rehabilitating Men, Rehashing Convention, and the Future of Women's Vision

Gertrude and Lucy see the desperation, sentimentality, and aggression of the novel's main male characters, but *The Romance of the Shop* also allows the repair and rehabilitation of these exposed men through both conventional fictional strategies and rather traditional patriarchal behavior.

Levy, for example, simply removes Fred from the acute sight of the Lorimers. After his pathetic performance following his rejection before Lucy, Conny instructs her friends: "Oh, don't pity him too much. He'll get over it soon enough. His is not a complaint that lasts" (157). She casts Fred as something of a playboy, who does not linger long in dejection and is quick to recover. We learn near the end of the novel that he has departed for France, the epicenter of late-nineteenth-century decadence and indulgence, and in Conny's concluding letter to Gertrude, she informs her that when Fred heard of Lucy's engagement, he "got crimson and choked in his coffee . . . However, he is all right by now, playing tennis with a mature lady with yellow hair, whom he much affects, and whom papa scornfully denominates a 'hotel hack'" (189). Fred is visibly affected by the news of Lucy's impending marriage, but Levy suggests that his relocation may allow him the chance to refurbish some sense of secure masculinity. He now spends his time with older women, as he has proven incapable of handling the creativity, assurance, and visual skill of younger women. Fred cannot function effectively among the New Women of late-Victorian London, but he is apparently socially confident and even sexually comfortable with the women of a previous generation who do not exercise the same visual powers.

Frank, likewise, must leave England as part of the remedy for his damaged masculinity, but his rehabilitation actually begins prior to his departure for Africa. Once Lucy chastises him for his poorly-discerned suspicions about Fred, they quickly become engaged, and Lucy assumes an active role in preparing Frank for his trip. Levy remarks that Lucy, "displaying a truly feminine mixture of the tender and the practical, packed his bag, strapped his rugs, and put searching questions as to his preparations for travel . . . she had taken him under her wing, and henceforward the minutest detail of his existence would be more precious to her than anything on earth" (148-49). The narrator suddenly casts Lucy as a well-trained domestic woman, readying her husband for his travels into the colonial frontier; she obsesses over the preparations for his journey as a dutiful domestic wife who diligently cares for her adventurous husband and anxiously anticipates his return. She even decides to finally print Frank's portrait and explains, "I never felt that I had a right to do it before" (149). She places Frank's picture in a fixed form, allowing her to memorialize her fiancé's image as stable even as he travels into the distant,

unstable regions of Africa. Lucy's actions effectively help to recreate Frank as a valiant man who courageously explores the empire; and upon his return, he will be both secure as a brave married man and better adjusted to the new visual marketplace of the nineteenth century. Frank's trip facilitates his reformation as a man, and it also allows him to market his name and his art for the popular press. He ceases to function as an academic painter and becomes a full-fledged journalistic illustrator.

Indeed Frank, who previously exhibited his paintings amongst the intelligentsia and sent his work to the Royal Academy, becomes fodder for conjecture and sensational writing when news breaks of the slaughter of British troops. When he finally does miraculously return, Levy employs the conventions of fantasy. She writes: "And one wonderful day, towards the end of March, Frank was with them once more: Frank, thinner and browner perhaps, but in no respect the worse for his experiences" (185). Although the sisters note that he looks different when he comes back from his adventure, he quickly displays the traits of a man conscious of his social/sexual security—"kind and cheery and sympathetic; with the old charming confidence in being cared for" (185). Frank's colonial adventures have successfully rehabilitated his masculine social/sexual identity; while Levy employs fabulous language to return Frank safely to England, his anxieties are now alleviated by Lucy's concern and compassion. And yet, his resurgence does not include the renewed superiority of his eye. In the epilogue, we learn that Lucy and Frank each enjoy success as artists; the former specializes in photographing young children, while the latter has "permanently abandoned the paint-brush for the needle" (193). Frank gives up his career as an elite painter to become a popular lithographer, and Levy ultimately presents the vision of Lucy as equal to that of her husband. Frank may regain the security of a married man upon his return from Africa, but he is just one of the many participants in the late-Victorian visual networks. Lucy has become as visually powerful as the (previously) established male artist, effectively dissolving the privilege of the male gaze and anticipating the ongoing rise of the amateur female artist.

Lord Watergate has also struggled to modify his social and sexual identity to the cultural developments of the late nineteenth century, and Levy must resort to something of a *deus ex machina* to resolve his role in the novel. When he makes his dramatic return visit to the Lorimers' studio, Levy frames the scene by placing Gertrude with "her face [hid] in her

hands" (188). Despite her powerful vision throughout the novel, the young woman now obscures her sight, and the narrator does not let the heroine speak at this point but instead usurps the dialogue to explain, "What he offered was not for her; for other women, for happier women, for better women, perhaps, but not for her" (188). Levy depicts Gertrude as an ashamed, self-deprecating woman and accentuates this strange regression at the novel's close, when the heroine envisions ghosts and shadows in the emptied studio. Her acute power of sight has transmogrified into the hallucinatory observations of a girl. But Levy concludes: "all these phantoms faded, and she seemed to see another in their stead; a man, tall and strong, his face full of anger and sorrow—Lord Watergate, as he had been on that never-forgotten night. Then the anger and sorrow faded from his face, and she read there nothing but love—love for herself shining from his eyes" (191). Gertrude momentarily remembers the pathetic image of her suitor, but she transforms this memory and his sadness into a wonderful picture of strong masculinity and romantic love that magically appears before her eyes.

Gertrude's "heart stood still" (192) as Lord Watergate announces, "I said I would come again. I have come in spite of you. You will not tell me that I come too soon, or in vain? . . . And I . . . Oh Gertrude, my poor child, and I have left you all this time" (192). Lord Watergate re-adopts the discourse of a patronizing parent as he infantilizes the young woman. Levy, moreover, inexplicably privileges his vision over the heroine's. The narrator notes how the "flickering light" of the solitary candle "had shown him her weary, haggard face; had shown him also the pathetic look of her eyes as they yearned towards him in entreaty, in reliance, —in love" (192). Gertrude now welcomes Lord Watergate's gaze of paternal love, and he "[takes] her in his arms, without explanation or apology, holding her to his breast as one holds a tired child" (192). He acts as a loving father who comforts a frightened prepubescent girl, and Levy concludes that Gertrude, "looking up into his face, into the lucid depths of his eyes, felt all that was mean and petty and bitter in life fade away into nothingness; while all that was good and great and beautiful gathered new meaning and became the sole realities" (192). This strange revival of paternalistic masculinity is excessive and fantastic. The narrator treats the scene almost as a dream vision or alternative reality that does not belong to the narrative world of the novel. Gertrude's assertive female vision is stultified by a fatherly ghost

from the past, but Levy makes clear that this resurgence of male vision is phantom.

The novel's final scene also offers a powerful image that recalls Levy's deliberate synthesis of the conventions of romance and realism. Gertrude and Lord Watergate attend "a big dinner, where the most distinguished representatives of art and science and literature were met" (194). The former amateur photographer now shares her meals with experts in the arts and sciences, including Darrell, who has returned from his extensive stay in India. The narrator reports, "Gertrude turned pale when she saw him, losing the thread of her discourse, and her appetite, despite her husband's reassuring glances down the table" (194). Gertrude is affected by the sight of Darrell; she is surprised, her previous assurance has waned, and it is her husband's sight that bolsters her confidence. It is perhaps tempting to read this scene as another example of the narrative's romantic rehabilitation of men and masculinity, as Darrell apparently regains his status within the intelligentsia, but it also points to important shifts in the late-Victorian visual culture. Unlike earlier in the story, Gertrude does not use her gaze to objectify Darrell, alert her husband, or even affirm her own security, but it is also noteworthy that the male artist never looks upon her. Instead, "Darrell went on eating his dinner and looking into his neighbour's eyes, in apparent unconsciousness of, or unconcern at, the Watergates' proximity" (194). He is no longer an active panoramic viewer, capable of surveying rooms; he has lost his optical force and his privileged standing as an elite artist. He, like Gertrude, is now one of many members of the London art community, and this image of multiple viewers around a table reminds us of the quotidian urban vision that the photographic arts help to foster. Levy clearly allows the return of Darrell as a legitimate participant in the late-nineteenth-century visual networks, but his vision is no longer dominating and Gertrude's is not confrontational; instead, she remains conscious of his sight even as he limits the scope of his eyes.

The Romance of a Shop dramatizes the ubiquity of vision in late-Victorian London: aspiring women are able to prosper as professional photographers, people engage in daily visual activity, and individuals become aware of ongoing social surveillance. While Levy shows how the Lorimers' creative sight challenges the presumed privileges of men, compels them to adopt desperate and aggressive actions, and forces them to rehabilitate their social/sexual subjectivities, the most powerful feature of the sisters' visual

acumen may be quite banal—i.e. their increased consciousness of vision and visibility. As Gertrude ponders the budding intimacy between Frank and Lucy, she muses: “their own position . . . was a peculiar one” (136). The narrator continues: “[Gertrude] could not but be aware of the dangers inseparable from the freedom which they enjoyed; dangers which are the price to be paid for all close intimacy between young men and women” (136). Gertrude recognizes that the public perception of herself and her sisters is crucial to their professional success; she internalizes this and accepts its realities. Her reflection reminds us of the ambivalent status of women in Levy’s corpus that Bernstein discusses; Levy’s female characters, like the vast majority of fictional New Women, encounter a “structure of in-betweenness.” Bernstein specifically explains that “Levy’s depictions of London public spaces capture this sense of temporal, spatial, and social discontinuities as the fluctuating edge between tradition and modernity” (“Introduction” 12). Gertrude and her sisters move between the lingering traditions of defined Victorian gender norms and the developing possibilities of modernity, and through these various experiences they learn both to use and enjoy their visions and to understand the dangerous and disciplinary effects of vision. Gertrude is aware that others are watching her and her sisters, and she realizes how such observations might influence their freedom, their happiness, and their personal and professional reputations. She knows how these visual networks operate, especially for the surveillance of women, and Levy shows the Lorimers as active members within such a society; they see and are seen, but they also deliberate upon the ramifications of this optical activity. They are enlightened participants within the late-Victorian visual marketplace, and their activity is particularly disruptive for men who rely upon vision to manage public spaces and regulate women. The Lorimers reveal men’s optical operations, and their reciprocal sight destabilizes the male voyeur, forces him to relinquish his privileged position, and compels him to become desperate and aggressive. And as Levy’s novel specifically demonstrates, once a man’s acts of looking are made explicit, he becomes merely one of the many participants in the late-Victorian visual culture.

Notes

¹ Numerous critics have discussed the prominent role of sight and visual culture in *The Romance of a Shop*, a novel that depicts early photographic technologies and practices, the expanded marketplace of art, and urban voyeurism. Bernstein's "Introduction" to the Broadview Edition of *The Romance of a Shop* outlines the vast majority of these discussions in a useful manner. Deborah Epstein Nord indicates that Levy's work introduces us to the notion of a *flâneuse*—a female urban spectator who must view the city from behind her windows (*Walking the Victorian Streets* 201). Nord treats this young female voyeur as a cautious looker, "able to relish the 'London pageant' only in the safe position of hidden spectator . . . seeing but not being seen" (*Walking* 201). Women's viewing of London in the novel is most certainly compelling, and scholars have discussed how the Lorimers' mobility within the urban center creates a new kind of female identity in late-Victorian fiction. The public world of the street is undoubtedly a volatile space that exposes the vulnerability of young female viewers, and as Nord notes, "those who have theorized about the nature of public experience in the nineteenth-century city have always assumed that the walker of the streets—the observer in the crowd, the stroller, the spectator, the flâneur—was a man" ("The Urban Peripatetic Spectator" 351). For an extensive treatment of women's urban visibility in Levy's writing, see Susan David Bernstein, "Radical Readers at the British Museum: Eleanor Marx, Clementina Black, Amy Levy," Ana Parejo Vadillo's *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*, and Deborah L. Parsons's *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity*. In addition, Evans's essay, "'We Are Photographers, Not Mountebanks!': Spectacle, Commercial Space, and the New Public Woman," draws specific attention to the role of urban commerce and vision in the narrative. Kate Flint's groundbreaking study, *The Victorians and Visual Imagination* has helped us to appreciate the extensive visual activity of the nineteenth century. Flint begins, "The Victorians were fascinated with the act of seeing, with the question of reliability—or otherwise—of the human eye, and with the problems of interpreting what they saw" (1). Finally, Lynda Nead's interdisciplinary study, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London*, traces "the fashioning of London into a modern metropolis," focusing on the years 1855-1870, and provides fascinating and detailed discussions of the city's civic, artistic, and social developments (5).

² See also Karen Volland Waters, *The Perfect Gentleman: Masculine Control in Victorian Men's Fiction, 1870-1901*, especially 98-126 and James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity*, especially 7-12.

³ Many critics have long recognized this familiar narrative pattern in New Woman fiction. Kate Flint discusses this extensively *The New Woman Reader, 1837-1910* and

concludes, “even if such novelists did not reward such efforts with fairy-tale happy endings, thus emphasizing the struggles ahead, these fictions served, potentially, as confirmations of the fact that independently minded women readers were not without others who thought and felt along the same lines” (297). Ann Ardis also discusses this narrative feature of New Woman fiction in the introduction to her canonical study, *New Woman, New Novels*; see specifically 3-4.

⁴ For an extensive discussion on the importance of the romance to nineteenth-century Jewish women’s literature, see Michael Galchinsky’s *Origins of the Modern Jewish Writer*. Elizabeth Evans also discusses this in her recent essay on Levy’s novel; see specifically 37-39.

⁵ Nord, likewise, comments on Levy’s strange narrative techniques. She specifically points to her use of romance conventions in the conclusion of the novel and calls such strategies “marital dei ex machina,” and claims that the novel “begins to resemble a shoddy *Pride and Prejudice*, with all four sisters searching for an appropriate mate” (*Walking the Victorian Streets* 202). For further discussion of Levy’s narrative techniques, see Linda Hunt Beckman’s *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters*, 155-56.

⁶ Eastlake is photography’s earliest historian, and she claims that by 1857 photographers “are wanted everywhere and found everywhere” (41). She adds that important technological improvements, such as the collodion process and increasingly affordable cameras, have encouraged more artists to pursue photography as their livelihood; she writes: “where ten self-styled artists eked out a precarious living by painting inferior miniatures, ten times that number now earn their bread by supplying photographic portraits” (49-50). Indeed, as Helen Groth concludes, by the late Victorian era, “the idea and practice of photography had effectively become part of the visual vernacular of everyday life” (211). This expansion of photography, aided by the improved affordability and accessibility of the camera and development processes, spurred great interest and creativity. Historians of photography have consistently pointed to mid-Victorian period as a time of great technological advancement and aesthetic experimentation. Gillen D’Arcy Wood explains how “the rapid democratization of camera technology in the 1850s . . . [expanded] the market for photography . . . beyond those with any experience of or taste for such luxuries” (194). Grace Seiberling and Carolyn Bloore add, “between 1850 and 1860 there was a dramatic improvement in the technology of photography. Processes that had been very difficult to use and had yielded uncertain results had been refined by the later 1850s so that they were simpler and consistently produced good negatives and full-valued, richly toned, detailed positives that resisted fading.” Seiberling and Bloore conclude that “many of the technical advances were due to the experiments of amateur photographers” (18). For further discussion of the democratization of photographic technologies and rise of

the amateur photographer, see Seiberling and Bloore, *Amateurs, Photography and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*. Nancy Armstrong's *Fiction in the Age of Photography* provides a useful introduction to the importance of nineteenth-century photography to the development of Victorian realism; Daniel Novak's recent study, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* offers a more nuanced reading of this development, and challenges many of Armstrong's claims. Novak specifically questions the wide-spread critical assumption that Victorians invested the photograph with indisputable legitimacy as "real" or "authentic."

⁷ Numerous critics have pointed to the important role of photography in creating and maintaining such a disciplinary culture. Alan Sekula, for example, in his influential essay, "The Body and the Archive," concludes, "in serving to introduce the panoptic principle into daily life, photography welded the honorific and repressive functions together" (10). Isobel Armstrong's recent study, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830-1880* provides a rather nuanced reading of the Victorian scopic culture; see especially her treatment of the lens and optics (253-71). Chris Otter's compelling work, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910*, challenges many of the commonly-held assumptions about the disciplinary function of vision and visibility within the Victorian era.

⁸ British film scholar Laura Mulvey helped to establish a standard approach to voyeurism in which the male viewer isolates, objectifies, and differentiates the female body. Mulvey discusses this voyeuristic process as scopophilia, a term she borrows from Freud, to theorize the love and pleasure of looking, and encourage us to think specifically about the power of the male viewer to break down the female and her body into small and distinct parts. Mulvey's work has been both indispensable and widely criticized, but her work remains important to our understanding of the role of vision on gendered power relations.

⁹ Fanny is, most certainly, the least active viewer in the novel, but she does not completely abstain, nor is she ignorant of the role of vision in late-Victorian culture. She is explicitly nervous about the prospects of opening a photography shop within London (54). Later, Levy notes how she glances at Frank's clothes to discern his evening plans (93), and later draws conclusions about Frank's romantic affections based upon changes in his behavior (144).

¹⁰ Julian Wolfreys argues that this vision of the dead patriarch is "suggestively symbolic of a break with the past and the advent of a gendered urban modernity Death in this instance is productive" (112). This strange image initiates the sisters' movement from the past of their family home to their future of London, but it likewise portends the recklessness, insecurities, and even the desperate behavior of men throughout the novel.

¹¹ Kate Flint offers a compelling discussion of Levy's use of "flash" technologies as indicator of Victorian memory. See Flint, "Photographic Memory."

¹² Gertrude subsequently realizes that Lord Watergate's longstanding interest in Phyllis derived from his memory of his own wife, another "beautiful and frail . . . woman who had sinned. She had never seen the resemblance before; it was clear enough now" (179).

¹³ Mulvey refers to scopophilia as a "primordial wish for pleasurable looking" (836). She explains "the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation" (837). The male objectification of women has become a standard component of Western cinema and reifies the longstanding patriarchal assumption of the dominant male viewer. Mulvey concludes that the female figure "is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualized" (840).

¹⁴ For a discussion of Levy's representation of Britain's colonial enterprises in *Romance of a Shop*, see Iveta Jusová, 145-46.

¹⁵ In addition, Waters notes how the decline of the empire in the latter years of the nineteenth century had serious ramifications for the security of the British male subject (97-98). For a further discussion of the importance of the empire as a training and re-training ground for British men, see Jeffrey Richards, "'Passing the love of Women': Manly Love and Victorian Society."

¹⁶ Gertrude successfully manages to retrieve Phyllis, but it noteworthy that as she aggressively confronts Darrell, her vision and understanding may suffer, as she likely contributes to Phyllis's death by taking her home amidst a snowstorm.

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