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# SEEMS A FATE IN IT

## Misdirection and Foreshadowing in *Bleak House* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes*

By Meredith Bradfield

Foreshadowing in a novel would seem to imply that that novel takes place in a world of fate, but Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* and Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* complicate this assumption. However, instead of directly arguing against a world of fate, their foreshadowing techniques present fate as a subjective experience, most likely shared by people who have been trained to read their own lives novelistically. While Dickens's novel shows readers a meaningful world in which all secret plot information will be revealed eventually, Hardy's novel stresses readers' inability to know the whole story and teases them with withheld information all the way to its end.

In this thesis, I attempt to explore foreshadowing in especially cryptic passages of *Bleak House* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. In *Bleak House*, I focus on the foreshadowing in the scenes leading up to Krook and Tulkinghorn's deaths. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, my focus is less chapter-centric, although I spend considerable time examining Henry Knight's near-death experience on the Cliff Without a Name. Much of the critical framework for my close readings comes from Peter Brook's *Reading for the Plot* and Michael André Bernstein's *Foregone Conclusions*. While *Reading for the Plot* supplements my commentary on repetition's relation to resolution in a plot, *Foregone Conclusions* gives me the vocabulary to discuss different types of foreshadowing and their effects.

Although these critics, and others, inform my work, I add my own perspective on the features of foreshadowing by examining how readers' experiences of foreshadowing change when they re-read a text.

## I. Introduction

All novels have two things in common: they have a beginning and they have an ending. Physically, at least, it seems an easy enough concept to understand. People begin reading books at page one and they end at the final page. It would be easy to assume from this physical reality that it is possible to read the same book twice. It is not, actually. When you return to the beginning of a novel, you become a time traveler, in a sense, because you, unlike the characters of the novel, know what is going to happen next. Your relationship with the characters around you is naturally different because of this fact. With a first-time reading experience, you might have access to some of this knowledge already because you might have contact with an omniscient narrator. However, absolute knowledge of plot events will only come after you have completed reading the novel and returned to the beginning.

With this knowledge, when you return to a novel, you may notice significant foreshadowing details that you missed the first time around. When you do, it may be hard not to judge the characters for missing the important plot details. It may also seem that the events you see unfolding in the world of the novel cannot happen any other way. You may stop asking yourself the question, “What comes next?”

Serial novels, especially novels like Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* and Thomas Hardy’s *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, hinge upon this question. Both novels contain an abundance of cliffhangers, mysteries, and moments of extreme suspense. In *Bleak House*, one chapter ends with the discovery that a character has died by spontaneous combustion. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, a chapter ends with a character hanging off of the side of a very steep cliff. There is a murder mystery plot in *Bleak House* and, though there is no similar murder-plot in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the novel raises more questions than it answers in its conclusion. These open-ended plot moments would have allowed people to imagine a variety of possibilities in the stories that do not actually happen, especially since readers in Hardy’s or Dickens’s time would have had to wait months for the resolution to their cliff-hangers.

When you read a book for the first time, it is almost like it is still being written. There is an illusion that the time which passes in a novel is passing in parallel with your own life. This perception is an illusion because the physical reality of the book is that it is confined and complete. The author of a book, particularly of a novel, most likely knew the ending of the story as it was being written and included a variety of clues that would point out the direction of the plot. If the foreshadowing is effective, readers will not really notice or understand these clues until the revelation of the event to which they refer. Foreshadowing can then make the world of a novel seem like a heavily fated universe.

It is fascinating, then, how rich *Bleak House* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* are in foreshadowing. When they use foreshadowing but also suspend knowledge of plot events until the last minute, they present a tension between the possibilities of what can happen in a story and the plot events that actually occur.

They also provoke questions about the relationship between the perception of fate in novels and the perception of fate in real life. It is not terribly hard to argue that all novel worlds are worlds of fate. After all, they are crafted by an author who knows everything that is going to happen in the story and, in fact, makes everything happen. Authors control characters. From a meta-perspective, the characters in novels have no free will.

However, though authors may be aware of the fated nature of the novel, they may not believe in the existence of fate in real life. If they want to exploit the fated nature of novel worlds for narrative effect, but do not necessarily believe in fate in real life, foreshadowing becomes

much more complex and ambiguous. Instead of confidently assuring readers that a character is doomed, for instance, an author might present this idea of fate through a qualified statement or narrative filter: “It seemed that he was doomed” or “He thought he was doomed.” It is unclear exactly what Dickens and Hardy believed about fate in real life. However, both authors seem to add this complexity to the foreshadowing in their works.

What results are stories that read completely differently from the first-time reading experience to the second and works that seem to misdirect our attentions in a variety of ways. One form of misdirection is the misdirection of plot events, like the perception that many first-time readers may have that Lady Dedlock instead of Madame Hortense shot Tulkinghorn. Another kind of misdirection might in fact be the foreshadowing of a plot event that actually occurs, and whether or not the reader should take that foreshadowing too seriously. Both authors tease us by encouraging us to read symbolically and then showing us the futility of attempting to understand what we see. Dickens includes symbols that might not actually translate to anything meaningful, while Hardy shows us a glimpse of a storyline but tells us that we have no way of knowing the entire story—even though Hardy knows everything that happens to his characters.

There is an important difference, however, in the type of universe that Dickens presents to his readers in *Bleak House* and that which Thomas Hardy presents to his readers in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Although Dickens seems to include a critique of reading the universe for symbolic clues and reading his books symbolically for foreshadowing, he presents a closed universe in which most questions are answered and meaning can be found. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Hardy seems to be more focused on showing readers how little they will know or understand about his story in its conclusion. The universe of *Bleak House* is complicated enough, but it is closed. Each storyline is resolved. The foreshadowing patterns, though they may not always make sense, at the very least find a cohesive end. The foreshadowing patterns in Hardy, however, could extend infinitely before and after the conclusion of the novel.

## II. Obvious Secrets

The chapter “The Appointed Time” in *Bleak House* holds different surprises with multiple readings. When Guppy and Weevle discover that Krook has died by spontaneous combustion, there is a mixture of implausibility and inevitability, which makes his death paradoxically both random and foreordained. Throughout the chapter, Dickens points to Krook’s death with numerous symbolic clues, which provide continuity but could not allow anyone to predict the ending without knowing the ending first. What results is a division between the readers who are “in” on the secret and the readers who only know that Dickens is keeping a secret from them. The real question, however, is whether Dickens favors the surprise of a first-time reading or the subtle recognition of narrative detail from a re-reading.

At the moment of revelation, there seems to be a shift in the narration from the perspective of a surprised viewer discovering Krook’s death for the first time to a viewer who has anticipated it. Shortly after the omniscient narrator exclaims, “O horror he IS here!” the narrator reaches the conclusion that, whatever the audience decides to call Krook’s death, it is “the same death eternally—inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humors of the vicious body itself...only—Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of the deaths that can be died.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House*, eds. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1977), 403.

The phrase “corrupted humors of the vicious body” might imply that Krook died because of an evil disposition or because of a diseased body. More problematic, however, is the phrase that follows: “none other of the deaths that can be died.” Though the narrator states that Krook died only of spontaneous combustion and nothing else, the tone of the claim also suggests that Krook could only die of spontaneous combustion. The title of the chapter, “The Appointed Time,” adds to this sense of inevitability because it refers to Krook’s appointed meeting with Mr. Weevle but also possibly to Krook’s appointed time to die. First-time readers may miss that Krook has actually died some time before the appointed hour to meet with Mr. Weevle, but re-readers pick up on this subtlety quickly.

This foreknowledge of Krook’s death allows Dickens to pointedly exclude first-time readers from inside jokes aimed at re-readers. One such inside joke appears when Tony Weevle grabs a taper and says to Guppy, “Here have I been stewing and fuming in this jolly old crib, till I have had the horrors falling on me as thick as hail. There’s a blessed-looking candle.”<sup>2</sup> The words “stewing” and “fuming” all suggest an internal build-up of heat or pressure. Mr. Weevle’s sudden distraction with a candle abruptly brings a flame into the heat imagery. Put together, the sequence of mental pictures leads to a tiny metaphorical explosion, progressing from “stewing” to “fuming,” and finally, to fire. The words mimic Krook’s death, and yet they do not provide an explanation as to why Krook died nor help a first-time reader predict his death before the end of the chapter. Mr. Weevle’s sudden preoccupation with a candle appears to come from nowhere. First-time readers might be amused at Mr. Weevle’s inattention, but also frustrated because they know that Mr. Weevle’s sudden distraction exists for a reason, but they do not yet know why. Re-readers, by contrast, might be wondering if Mr. Weevle’s distraction is proof that he too has already sensed Krook’s death on a subconscious level.

More of this dark humor about Krook’s death appears earlier in the conversation between Mr. Weevle and Mr. Snagsby. During this conversation, they remark both upon the strange grease covering Mr. Weevle and a “queer” flavor they notice in the air. Mr. Weevle concludes that the smell must come from “chops” cooking at a nearby inn, but Mr. Snagsby, after sniffing and tasting the air a couple of times, spits and wipes his mouth, and then remarks that the cooking meat must not have been very fresh.<sup>3</sup> The sick humor of this scene depends upon the fact that the grease and smell of badly cooked flesh most likely does not come from the inn, but from the rag and bottle shop where Krook has exploded. It is not chops that Snagsby tastes in the air, but Krook himself. The characters might even have been breathing him in since the beginning of the chapter. However, only re-readers would consider this possibility.

Though first-time readers of *Bleak House* might not understand all of Dickens’s foreshadowing, they might see enough patterns in the chapter to know where its foreshadowing is. Through the pathetic fallacy, the portrayal of human emotion through a fictional environment, Dickens displays his secret without giving it away to first-time readers. While setting the scene he writes, “It is a fine steaming night to turn to the slaughter-houses, the unwholesome trades, the sewerage, bad water, and burial-grounds to account, and give the Registrar of Deaths some extra business.”<sup>4</sup> Even without knowing that Krook has spontaneously combusted, it is hard to read “Registrar of Deaths” or “burial-grounds” without knowing that the chapter is moving to a macabre place. The word “steaming,” like Weevle’s “stewing and fuming,” mimics spontaneous combustion by implying pressure, moisture, and smoke. The term “slaughter-houses” calls to mind

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2 Ibid., 396

3 Ibid., 393-4

4 Ibid., 393

the later conversation with Weevle and Snagsby in that it makes a queasy connection between a bad scent of flesh and meat as a food product. The word “slaughter” also carries associations with grisly death. Again, though, it is hard to say that a first-time reader could know from this repetition that the scent of burning flesh is due to Krook’s death. Awareness of secrecy, without knowledge of the secret, sets first-time readers on a search for answers, but without Dickens’s revelation at the end of the chapter, the clues only point to themselves.

However, that the cryptic clues Dickens drops may be more for the suspense of first-time readers than for the amusement of re-readers. Possibly to make his setting more ominous or possibly to misdirect the attention of first-time readers, Dickens slips in a description of the temperature, which seems to both create and express feelings of paranoia. Just a sentence before the “fine steaming night” passage, Dickens writes, “It is a close night, though the damp cold is searching too.”<sup>5</sup> The word “close” is odd in this context because it would seem to describe a claustrophobic kind of space like a closed building, and yet the scene Dickens actually depicts is outside with no walls more concrete than the “night” itself and no ceiling but the sky. To inhabit this space is to have one’s space violated. Tension also comes through in the description of the cold because steam implies warmth, and that contrasts turbulently with the cold, which seems to be everywhere. That the cold is “searching” may be another way of saying that it permeates through everything, making comfort impossible. The use of the word “searching” also imbues the cold with agency. Instead of just increasing tension by making the scene an uncomfortable place to inhabit, the cold, as a character, might sense that something is amiss and go “searching” to find out what it is. Even the weather is on the lookout.

If the watching weather were not enough to make a first-time reader suspicious, lamps also survey the territory. In the opening of the chapter, Dickens writes, “Clogged lamps, like the eyes of Equity, bleared Argus with a fathomless pocket for every eye and an eye upon it, dimly blink at the stars.”<sup>6</sup> The word “Equity,” synonymous as it is with “justice,” carries with it not only the legal overtones of other parts of the novel, but also an air of divine judgment because it is capitalized like a proper noun. According to the footnotes, in Greek mythology, Argus is a “herdsman with a hundred eyes” whom Hera set “to watch her rival.”<sup>7</sup> Together, the lamps in the windows, then, are like the deep eyes of one monstrous entity, watching the scene for an antagonist who never appears. The lamps contribute to the growing imagery of fire leading to the spontaneous combustion scene, along with the mention of snuffed out candles<sup>8</sup> and smoking pipes. Mrs. Perkins, a minor character in the background of this chapter, mentions “lucifers” at one point.<sup>9</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary points out that a “lucifer” is another name for a match, evoking both fire imagery and hell.<sup>10</sup> If first-time readers are careful enough to notice all of these references to fire without knowledge of their significance, they may take on some of the paranoia of Dickens’s environment.

Yet Dickens also seems to demonstrate to readers their own excessive suspiciousness by including a number of characters in the chapter who poorly investigate the scene. This paranoid ineptitude appears in the beginning of the chapter in the form of the policeman who “begins to push at doors; to try fastenings; to be suspicious of bundles; and to administer his beat on the

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5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 392

7 Ibid. footnote 4

8 Ibid., 391

9 Ibid., 393

10 “Lucifer, n.” OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11084?redirectedFrom=lucifer> (accessed November 23, 2013).



hypothesis that every one is either robbing or being robbed.”<sup>11</sup> The policeman is suspiciously searching everywhere for a thief, but there is no one to arrest. The only thieves in this chapter are Guppy and Weevle, who never carry out their robbery, and Krook, who is dead. Mentioned elsewhere in the novel, Mrs. Snagsby mistakenly believes her husband to have fathered a child out of wedlock.<sup>12</sup> In this chapter, she is stalking him. Shortly after Mr. Snagsby announces that she “will be looking for [her husband],” Dickens reveals that she has “had her eye on him . . . all this time,” and she gives Mr. Weevle “a searching glance” as she rushes past him with a handkerchief around her head.<sup>13</sup> Though Mr. Weevle is certainly shifty in behavior, their shiftiness is in no way related to the conspiracy that Mrs. Snagsby thinks exists.

In fact, Mr. Weevle does not know in what conspiracy he is involved, but considers himself suspect nevertheless. Guppy only wants to steal from Krook to prove that the late man who lived in Weevle’s room was the father of Guppy’s intended sweetheart.<sup>14</sup> Weevle, however, believes that they are up to something more sinister, accusing Guppy of “plotting about a dead man” with him.<sup>15</sup> Throughout his conversation with Guppy, he oscillates between accusing Guppy of acting too secretly<sup>16</sup> and urging Guppy to speak in a lower voice.<sup>17</sup> His fluctuating demands show a conflict of curiosity: his desire to investigate Guppy’s plan pitted against his fear of being investigated.

Mr. Snagsby also seems to be caught between curiosity and dread of conspiracy. There is an uncomfortable moment when Mr. Snagsby and Mr. Weevle unexpectedly meet by the rag and bottle shop and try to inconspicuously part ways. While they converse, Mr. Weevle nervously “glances up and down the court,”<sup>18</sup> and Mr. Snagsby “cast[s] about for any means of escape.”<sup>19</sup> Mr. Snagsby, however, knows even less about conspiracy than Mr. Weevle does and has even less reason to need “escape.” He is not there for an appointment. He is merely restless and curious. Though he feels like he is “under the oppressive influence” of a secret,<sup>20</sup> he does not actually know what that secret is. Despite acting guiltily, he is only in front of the rag and bottle shop because he is “impelled by the mystery of which he is a partaker, and yet, he is not a sharer.”<sup>21</sup> Like Weevle, he considers himself an accomplice to a conspirer, but if he knew what lay behind the “mystery” he senses, he might implicate himself further in the conspiracy, and so, he is hesitant about sating his curiosity.

Regardless of how his curiosity might drive him on, he does not succeed in solving the “mystery.” During the end of his conversation with Mr. Weevle, Mr. Snagsby remarks upon the coincidence that Mr. Weevle lives in the same room in which one of his law writers died. He says, “It is a curious fact, sir, that he should have come and lived here and, been one of my writers, and then that you should come and live here and be one of my writers, too.”<sup>22</sup> The way that he lists the similarities, as well as his choice of the word “fact,” makes it seem as though he is trying to formulate some kind of a hypothesis about the mystery that drove him there. However,

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11 Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House*, eds. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1977), 393.

12 Ibid., 318

13 Ibid., 395

14 Ibid., 363

15 Ibid., 400

16 Ibid., 396

17 Ibid., 399

18 Ibid., 394

19 Ibid., 395

20 Ibid., 393

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 395

he eventually just concludes, “Seems a fate in it” (Dickens 395). Instead of explaining why the pattern is significant, he falls back on the opinion that there must be significance to Mr. Weevle’s situation because there is a pattern to it.

In many ways, this shift in Mr. Snagsby’s reasoning seems to describe the transition from a first-reading experience to a re-reading experience of the chapter. First-time readers are themselves “impelled by [a] mystery,” of which they are partakers, yet not sharers. The “oppressive secret” appears in patterns throughout the text, but searching yields no explanation, only paranoia. When readers go back to the text another time, the patterns take on a tone of inevitability. All of the lamps and matches and all of the jokes about death point to the sense that Krook has died in the only way that he could ever have died. It is hard to know which reading Dickens would have favored, but it is possible that his ideal was a combination of the two readings. While re-reading allows Dickens’s audience to pick up on details they missed the first time, the suspense of the first reading sparks the interest needed to bring the audience back to the beginning.

### III. Silent Symbols

But what if a secret never speaks? What if a symbol in a text never reveals an underlying meaning? In the end, can that secret tell readers anything at all? By acting out plot events through symbols, Dickens would seem to suggest that the story of one’s fate could appear in everything from the glare of a lamp to the creeping of fog. Yet, like Snagsby’s comparison between Mr. Weevle and his old employee, there often “seems a fate” in events when viewed in retrospect or in association. Meaning may be more interpretative than inherent, and fate may have nothing to do with it after all. In the buildup to Tulkinghorn’s death, an excess of self-referential symbols presents a headache to those on the lookout for foreshadowing. The question that this symbolic buildup presents is whether Dickens included these silent secrets as a way to frustrate readers attempting to read his works symbolically, or as a way to teach them a deeper level of interpretation.

On the surface, it would seem that Dickens lets all readers in on the obvious secret of Tulkinghorn’s demise when his narrator imagines the objects around Tulkinghorn telling him “Don’t go home!” on the night of his death. This happens for the first time when Tulkinghorn stops to observe a clock in Chensey Wold. The narrator ponders that if the clock “said now, ‘Don’t go home!’ What a famous clock hereafter, if it said to-night of all nights that it has counted off, to this old man of all . . . men who have ever stood before it, ‘Don’t go home!’”<sup>23</sup> The narrator does not say that Tulkinghorn will be killed, but it is clear that a plot event will happen at Tulkinghorn’s home and that whatever happens at his house will turn out poorly for him. The phrases “to-night of all nights” and “this man of all . . . men” suggest the narrator’s foreknowledge that the warning “Don’t go home!” has more significance for Tulkinghorn than for anyone else because the narrator already knows that Tulkinghorn is going to die. That the narrator already knows of Tulkinghorn’s death suggests that the narrator is either recounting events from the future or using precognitive knowledge, which would imply that fate is at work.

The idea that Tulkinghorn’s death is somehow fated comes through in symbolism surrounding the clocks, which by remaining silent refuse to allow Tulkinghorn to avoid his death. In the example of the Chesney Wold clock, the idea of fate appears in the description of the clock “count[ing] off” Tulkinghorn’s nights. The word “off” suggests that for every second the clock



ticks, Tulkinghorn has less time in his life. In other words, Tulkinghorn's days are numbered. A moment later in the story, this idea of the clock ticking away the hours of Tulkinghorn's life is played out more strongly when he compares his watch to the clock and mutters the reproof, "Two minutes wrong? At this rate you won't last my time."<sup>24</sup> This scolding is a joke in that Tulkinghorn's time will almost certainly be over for quite some time before his watch ceases to function. Tulkinghorn, however, has no way of knowing this. The narrator has allowed both re-readers and wary first-time readers to see the irony of Tulkinghorn's statement by allowing the audience to suspect that his life may be in danger once he returns home. Much like the previous instance with a clock, the narrator responds to Mr. Tulkinghorn's statement with, "What a watch to return good for evil, if it ticked in answer 'Don't go home!'"<sup>25</sup> It is almost as though the narrator is encouraging the watch to interfere in Tulkinghorn's walk home by suggesting that it would be a good watch if only it would return Tulkinghorn's reproof with a warning.

At this point, it might be useful to step aside for a moment and think about how this narrative speculation relates to foreshadowing. Michael André Bernstein, in collaboration with Gary Saul Morson, developed a study and a terminology of different types of foreshadowing. In *Foregone Conclusions*, Bernstein claims, "At its extreme, foreshadowing implies a closed universe in which all choices have already been made."<sup>26</sup> The claim that Krook has died "none other of the deaths that can be died," as has been discussed already, certainly seems to imply such a universe, but can the same be said of the lead-up to Tulkinghorn's death? The earlier implication that the clocks in the previous passages are counting down to the time of Tulkinghorn's death, as well as the narrator's foreknowledge of Tulkinghorn's impending death, would seem to suggest that Tulkinghorn's death is unavoidable. Yet, the narrator's speculations about an alternate course of events in which an object like a clock warns Tulkinghorn to stay away from home make this foreshadowing more complex than the foreshadowing leading up to the discovery of Krook's death.

Although the audience's awareness of Tulkinghorn's ignorance of approaching danger might at first seem to exhibit what Bernstein refers to as "backshadowing," the silence of the inanimate objects respecting Tulkinghorn's danger might actually be a commentary on the futility of relying on symbols to predict future events. Bernstein defines backshadowing as "a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come.*"<sup>27</sup> An example that Bernstein often uses to illustrate this concept is when a historical account encourages its audience to judge Jewish Europeans for not anticipating the Shoah.<sup>28</sup> When a story encourages re-readers to become frustrated with characters for not anticipating plot clues, that story uses backshadowing. The narrator of *Bleak House* seems to show a similar kind of frustration in that it, knowing future events, passes judgment on inanimate objects for not telling Tulkinghorn to stay away from home. This judgment, however, is in the realm of the ridiculous. Clocks, though they may tell time, cannot speak. Though in storytelling one may make an environment appear more menacing through the pathetic fallacy, in real life it

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Michael Bernstein. *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History*. (London: University of California Press, 1994), 2.

27 Ibid., 16

28 Ibid., 15

is unlikely that clouds gathering in the sky imply anything but precipitation. Tulkinghorn would have no reason to know when he looks at the clock that his time in the world is almost over.

By suggesting that something might happen that does not occur in the story, the narrator could actually be engaged in another concept described in *Foregone Conclusions*: sideshadowing. The term, originally coined by Bernstein's colleague Gary Saul Morson, in Bernstein's words "stresses the significance of random, haphazard, and unassimilable contingencies . . . it expresses . . . the absence of any predictive certainties in human affairs."<sup>29</sup> Rather than presenting an event as a reflection or warning about a future event in a linear representation of time, sideshadowing steps outside of the sequence of events that actually happen to speculate about how events might occur differently. Although the narrator seems to be presenting the audience with backshadowing in that the narrator judges the scene with knowledge of the future, the narrator also might be sideshadowing in that it presents the possibility that Tulkinghorn's storyline might go another way. The first interlude with the clock in Chesney Wold sideshadows an alternate storyline in which the clock tells Tulkinghorn "Don't go home," saves Tulkinghorn's life, and becomes famous. Dickens's use of sideshadowing, however, delivers mixed messages about how readers are supposed to react to foreshadowing. That the sideshadowing possibilities Dickens presents are improbable add to the feeling that there is nothing to stop Tulkinghorn from dying and make his death seem even more strongly fated. On the other hand, the fact that the clocks say nothing could reinforce the sense that there is nothing actually coded in the environment that can determine one's fate.

This sense becomes increasingly apparent as the narrator's attempted intervention continues on Tulkinghorn's walk home. As Tulkinghorn passes a number of brick buildings, the narrator claims "the high chimney-stacks telegraph family secrets to him. Yet there is not a voice in a mile of them to whisper, 'Don't go home!'"<sup>30</sup> Dickens establishes that Tulkinghorn has an exceptional ability to collect secrets when he first introduces Tulkinghorn as being "surrounded by a mysterious halo of family confidences; of which he is known to be the silent depository."<sup>31</sup> However, the secrets that actually speak to Tulkinghorn in this scene are irrelevant to his fate. It is not precisely that the environment has no code or no secret, but rather that the secrets that the environment can tell may not always be driving towards any particular purpose. Even though the description that Tulkinghorn "is pitilessly urged upon his way"<sup>32</sup> may suggest that some unseen force compels him to his death, the second clause to the sentence in which this appears "and nothing meets him murmuring 'Don't go home!'"<sup>33</sup> suggests that the force urging Tulkinghorn homeward may simply be the absence of external forces intervening on his walk home.

The last of these non-interfering objects and the greatest puzzle of foreshadowing symbolism leading up to Tulkinghorn's death is the painting of Allegory on the ceiling of Tulkinghorn's sitting room. This painting, which depicts a Roman reaching down from the clouds and pointing at the floor, appears so insistently throughout Tulkinghorn's storyline that it is easy to assume that the painting is in some way a foreshadowing device for Tulkinghorn's death. However, when Tulkinghorn finally arrives at his home the night of his murder, "there is

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29 Ibid., 4

30 Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House*, eds. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1977), 583.

31 Ibid., 13

32 Ibid., 583

33 Ibid.

no new significance in the Roman's hands . . . to give him the warning, 'Don't come here!'"<sup>34</sup> The painting is static. It cannot react to its environment. It does not interfere with the plot.

Yet, at the same time, the audience and some of the characters seem inclined to think that it can. When Inspector Bucket begins his search into the circumstances surrounding Tulkinghorn's death, he seems to mimic the painting of Allegory as a way of gaining perspective on the case. In one scene, Mr. Bucket is described as being like "a man in the abstract," and he compares his own "fat forefinger" with that of the painting of Allegory.<sup>35</sup> It is almost as though Bucket temporarily takes on the characteristics of the painting in order to determine a motive. In imputing the painting with some kind of hidden knowledge or involvement in Tulkinghorn's murder, Bucket is not alone. Upon the initial investigation of Tulkinghorn's death, when people search the rooms of Tulkinghorn's house, "all eyes look up at the Roman, and all voices murmur, 'If only he could tell what he saw!'"<sup>36</sup> This wish is a retrospective rephrasing of the desire that the narrator expressed before Tulkinghorn's death that the objects in Tulkinghorn's environment would become more involved and say something to alter his fate.

The ambiguity over whether or not the painting of Allegory has any hidden meaning to communicate appears in the suggestion that, after Tulkinghorn's death, many of the painting's viewers see the Roman as if he were a "paralyzed dumb witness" to the murder.<sup>37</sup> A "dumb witness," or a "mute" witness in other words, is unable to give spoken testimony. A paralyzed witness who cannot speak would have even less ability to communicate because the witness could not write or use sign language. The witness, however, would be party to information to which others are probably not party, like the identity of the person who shot Tulkinghorn. If Bucket is struck by the feeling that the painting of Allegory is like such a witness, it is only natural that he would try to determine the perspective of the painting. However, Dickens also suggests that this perception could be a misperception, or an attention to the wrong details, in that he presents it through the filter of the painting's viewers. The painting is not actually a "paralyzed dumb witness." People only perceive it that way.

The painting's viewers seem to think that the Roman points to tell them something about the evidence of Tulkinghorn's murder, but they fail to interpret a purpose just as they fail to separate the actions of the Roman from their own perspective angle. At one moment, the viewers see the painting pointing at a table, the next at a bottle, then at some candles, and after that an empty chair, before concluding at a stain on the floor.<sup>38</sup> The painting, as has been said before, cannot actually move. If the Roman points one moment at a bottle and then at a chair, someone has either moved the objects into a different position underneath the painting or the audience has changed its point of view in looking at the painting. If the Roman has any significance in pointing to an empty chair, it is only the significance that the audience externally attributes to it.

If one decides that the painting of Allegory can actually point to objects of significance through the pathetic fallacy, the number of objects that the Roman points to leads to an excess of possible meanings. If one wanted to attribute meaning to the objects, one might think that the empty chair signifies that Tulkinghorn will be sitting there no more. The stain on the floor could come from either Tulkinghorn's blood or the wine, possibly what Tulkinghorn was drinking the moment he was shot. That this symbolism could extend itself almost indefinitely appears in that, at the end of the description of possible referents to the painting, the narrator comments that "an

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34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 626

36 Ibid., 585

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

excited imagination might suppose that there was something in them so terrific, as to drive the rest of the composition . . . in short the very body and soul of Allegory, and all of the brains it has—stark mad.”<sup>39</sup> It must take a lot of meaning for a symbol of symbols to become overwhelmed with reading symbols. This excess of meaning may still be the product of “an excited imagination” reading too much into external objects.

Starting off the question of whether or not the painting of Allegory has meaning is the question of whether or not the painting of Allegory is itself an allegory. Two of the definitions of allegory in the Oxford English Dictionary might show some of the problems with understanding the painting. The first definition states that allegory is a symbolic representation that “conveys a hidden or ulterior meaning” The second defines allegory as a “character or figure that symbolically represents someone or something else.”<sup>40</sup> On the surface, there could be enough from these definitions to support the sense that the painting is allegorical. A Roman is not an allegory in real life but in this painting a Roman represents the idea of Allegory. The Roman even acts out the process of Allegory by pointing to objects outside of itself. The problem with the requirement that an allegory represent “something else” is that in order for the Roman to truly be an allegory, it has to mean something aside from Allegory. Its pointing must communicate a meaning. To state the problem in another way, if I said, “All the world’s a stage,” I would be making an allegory, courtesy of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. If I said, “All the world’s a metaphor,” someone would probably retort, “For what?” Without an answer to that retort or the question “How is the world a metaphor?” I have failed to implicitly express meaning and have failed to make a fully developed allegory. Because it is difficult to find meaning in the objects to which Allegory points, it is hard to interpret Allegory as a whole.

If any aspect of this meta-metaphor seems confusing, it appears that Dickens was well aware of the fact and played upon the confusion to great effect. At the first appearance of Allegory, Dickens writes that “Allegory, in Roman helmet and celestial linen sprawls among the balustrades and pillars . . . and makes the head ache—as would seem to be Allegory’s object always, more or less.”<sup>41</sup> Within this description there is a joke that rests upon the ambiguity of the representation of Allegory and the abstract concept of allegory. If a reader chooses to think that ‘Allegory’ refers to the painting of the Roman on the ceiling, Allegory could give its viewers a headache because one must crane one’s neck and look up to the “balustrades and pillars” in order to see it. If the reader chooses to think of Allegory in its abstract sense, that reader could imagine that Allegory makes the head ache because allegories take mental effort to understand. Dickens uses the pathetic fallacy very often in *Bleak House*, but note the difference between the previous statement and his statement in “The Appointed Time” that “the damp cold is searching too.”<sup>42</sup> By saying that a headache “seems to be Allegory’s object,” Dickens does not say that Allegory wants to cause headaches, but rather that Allegory *looks* like it wants to cause headaches. Allegory, if it has the same kind of agency as the searching fog, might have a different object than its viewers believe. Moreover, its viewers only sometimes believe that Allegory wants to create headaches, because the phrase “more or less” suggests that there are times that Allegory seems to have a different object altogether.

That Allegory would appear to have an object or agency comes through in Dickens’s frequent descriptions of Allegory as pointing with determination. At one description of

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39 Ibid.

40 “allegory, n.” OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/5230?rskey=GMyn6L&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed November 23, 2013).

41 Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House*, eds. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1977), 119.

42 Ibid., 393

Tulkinghorn's rooms, Dickens writes, "That importunate Roman...is at his old work pretty distinctly."<sup>43</sup> The phrase "old work" and the earlier allusion to Allegory having an "object" make it seem like Allegory has a specific task that it is set on carrying out. The epithet "importunate," as it is synonymous with "unrelenting," adds to this sense that Allegory wishes to achieve some end. In other parts of the novel, Dickens tags Allegory with the similar epithets "pertinacious"<sup>44</sup> and "persistent,"<sup>45</sup> which all suggest that Allegory is set on, or possibly against, something with the force of willpower. On the evening of Tulkinghorn's murder, this determination takes on the color of a more menacing and more human hue, as Allegory is not only continuing to point but "eagerly" so.<sup>46</sup> In this appearance, in which Dickens also describes Allegory as "persistent," the narrator muses, "Once pointing, always pointing—like any Roman or Briton with a single idea. There he is . . . pointing unavailingly all night long. There he is still eagerly pointing."<sup>47</sup> Disregard that the painting is not alive; he is a Roman or a Briton and it is natural to him to point when he has been struck by "a single idea." Yet, though Dickens establishes a great resolve in Allegory, at least in terms of appearance, he simultaneously undermines this resolve by saying that the painting points "unavailingly," which is another way of saying that he points pointlessly. One way of reading Dickens's claim that Allegory points "unavailingly" is that Allegory, as it is represented, is frozen in the midst of carrying out its "single idea" and, because it is frozen, the audience never sees the completion of its object.

This idea of impeded progress appears very often in the tension between stasis and movement in many of the descriptions of Allegory. Very often it seems that Allegory moves at the same time that it remains perfectly still. Think of Allegory "for ever toppling . . . and pointing."<sup>48</sup> "Toppling and pointing" would suggest a heavy amount of action, but "for ever" suggests that little progress in Allegory's movement has come or will come with time. Think also of the other descriptions of time pitted against the descriptions of determination and action. Allegory's aim is "old work," implying that it has been pointing for a very long time. By the time of Tulkinghorn's death, it has been pointing "for many years."<sup>49</sup> Allegory is "always pointing . . . pointing . . . all night long. Moonlight, darkness, dawn, sunrise, day. There he is still, eagerly pointing."<sup>50</sup> There may be action and force in the repetition of the verb "pointing" and in the synonyms for "persistence," but the repetitions may also be somewhat plodding. It is almost as though something or someone outside has trapped Allegory in a mode of perpetual exertion. The reoccurrence of the word "always," both in the passage just mentioned and in the claim that headaches "seem to be Allegory's object always,"<sup>51</sup> suggests the paradoxical thought that, though Allegory seems to have been frozen in movement, it appears that it was in a mode of stasis from its creation.

Much of this idea that Allegory has been halted in some way appears in the recurrence of the description of the painting as being "foreshortened." This particular description appears twice: the first occurrence in Allegory's first scene,<sup>52</sup> and the second occurrence in the chapter

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43 Ibid., 517

44 Ibid., 520

45 Ibid., 585

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 517

49 Ibid., 585

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., 119

52 Ibid., 120



“Tom-all-Alone’s” as Lady Dedlock walks by Tulkinghorn’s house to see Nemo’s grave.<sup>53</sup> Before looking at these passages more closely, it will be useful to return to the Oxford English Dictionary for a couple of different ways of looking at the word “foreshorten.” Foreshortening is a perspective technique in art that causes something “to be apparently shortened in directions not lying in a plane perpendicular to the line of sight.”<sup>54</sup> If Allegory is “foreshortened,” one end of Allegory is painted in a smaller size to make it appear that it is further away. Because Dickens emphasizes Allegory’s reaching down and pointing so much, it seems likely that Allegory’s finger is of an unusually large proportion and his legs or lower torso much smaller. If the foreshortening were particularly pronounced, Allegory might appear especially menacing appearing to reach down outside of the bounds of his painting. This reaching beyond the bounds of the painting also supports the inclination to believe that the painting of Allegory has some meaning that extends beyond itself into Tulkinghorn’s room. However, this extension of meaning may also be undercut by another definition of allegory: “to shorten or curtail in advance.”<sup>55</sup> Allegory has been extending towards an object of meaning but has failed to develop enough to reach it. Allegory is stunted.

The painting of Allegory embodies this double sense of “foreshortening” in its first appearance in that the Roman seems to be both reaching forward and halted by an external force at the same time. Some of this reaching forward and being obstructed appears on a syntactical level, as the description of foreshortened Allegory runs ungrammatically into an introduction about Tulkinghorn. Dickens writes, “Here, beneath the painted ceiling, with foreshortened Allegory staring down at his intrusion as if it meant to swoop upon him, and he cutting it dead, Mr. Tulkinghorn has . . . his house.”<sup>56</sup> The sentence would be much easier to read if Dickens had omitted the vague phrase “he cutting it dead,” but omitting this phrase would also omit some important symbolic meaning. Much of this meaning corresponds to the similarity between the words “cutting” and “shortening,” implying that the painting of Allegory’s “foreshortening”—distortion or halted movement—might bear some relation to the actor of the cutting, Tulkinghorn. The painting seems to want to attack Tulkinghorn “to swoop upon him,” but Tulkinghorn has apparently impeded the Roman’s progress just by existing. Yet, if Tulkinghorn is responsible for halting the movement of Allegory, it seems implied that the removal of Tulkinghorn might allow for Allegory to break free. It is from that hint, subtle though it is, that Dickens begins to use Allegory as a signpost in the plot for Tulkinghorn’s death.

The second time that Dickens refers to the painting as “foreshortened Allegory,” a theme begins to develop in the narration, a speculation that suggests that if Tulkinghorn would pay attention to the painting Allegory, things might turn out differently for him. In this instance, “foreshortened Allegory” points toward the window by which Lady Dedlock walks. Then the narrator begins to speculate on what might happen if Tulkinghorn would look up from his work: “Why should Mr. Tulkinghorn, for such no-reason, look out of [*sic*] window! Is the hand not always pointing there? So he does not look out of [*sic*] window. And if he did what would it be to see a woman going by?”<sup>57</sup> The question “Is the hand not always pointing there?” is an interesting one, because it seems to anticipate the response, “Of course the hand is always pointing in that direction. Paintings can’t move.” Though Dickens would hardly claim in a non-metaphorical sense that the painting is magical and moves when no one is looking, it does seem that Allegory,

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53 Ibid., 199-200

54 “foreshorten, v” OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73163?redirectedFrom=foreshorten> (accessed November 23, 2013).

55 Ibid.

56 Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House*, eds. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1977), 120.

57 Ibid., 199-200



while completely still, somehow manages to point at a variety of things, from Mr. Tulkinghorn himself to a bottle of wine.<sup>58</sup> It seems that, aside from the addition or removal of objects from Mr. Tulkinghorn's room, the only thing that can make the painting of Allegory appear to point at so many different things is the changing perspective of the viewer.

The idea that Allegory the painting acquires some new meaning after Tulkinghorn's death appears most strongly at the time of the discovery of Tulkinghorn's body. In this scene, the narrator pronounces that for many years, "the Roman, pointing from the ceiling, shall point . . . with far greater significance than he ever had in Mr. Tulkinghorn's time and with a deadly meaning."<sup>59</sup> This "deadly meaning," however, remains undefined. The best explanation, which the narrator provides for the painting's sudden increase in "meaning" is the pronouncement, "For, Mr. Tulkinghorn's time is over for evermore; and the Roman pointed at the murderous hand uplifted against his life, and pointed helplessly at him, from night to morning lying face downward on the floor, shot through the heart."<sup>60</sup> The change in "significance" makes sense. A new audience of the painting could look at where the painting points and know the exact location of Tulkinghorn's body. The change of "meaning" is unclear. It is almost as though the painting now 'knows' some new piece of information. Both the painting and the body of Tulkinghorn have been discovered, yet at the time of the reveal the secret is not out. At the end of the chapter "The Appointed Time," the narrator makes it clear that Krook has died of spontaneous combustion. Here, it is clear that Tulkinghorn has been shot through the heart. What remains unsaid is the meaning of the painting and the identity of Tulkinghorn's murderer.

However, Allegory is not the only symbol of secrecy. In many ways, it seems that everything surrounding Tulkinghorn portrays the state of hiding. Dickens titled the chapter of Tulkinghorn's death "Closing In," but it appears that Tulkinghorn's life has been collapsing and retreating for a long time. Tulkinghorn's house, for instance, seems a maze of "roomy staircases, passages, and antechambers."<sup>61</sup> Who knows what secret passages Tulkinghorn's house might conceal? His apartment is described as "withdrawing from attention."<sup>62</sup> His books have titles that have "retired into the binding," which no doubt makes them much more challenging to read.<sup>63</sup> Since many of the settings in *Bleak House*, like Krook's rag and bottle shop, are cluttered with legal documents, Tulkinghorn's house is exceptional in that it has "very few loose papers . . . about."<sup>64</sup> These papers were most likely securely stored away for safekeeping because the oddest thing about Tulkinghorn's house is that "everything that can have a lock has got one [and] no key is visible."<sup>65</sup> When Tulkinghorn wishes to retrieve a bottle of wine from the cellar, first he "takes a small key from his pocket, unlocks a drawer in which there is another key, which unlocks a chest in which there is another, and so comes to the cellar key."<sup>66</sup> It is understandable that Tulkinghorn might have wanted to have extra security measures in place if the wine was expensive, but at that level of secrecy one wonders if Tulkinghorn only had so many precautions in place because he liked keeping secrets. Such a thought actually is rather close to the truth, as he is often described as "an Oyster of the old school whom no one can open."<sup>67</sup>

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58 Ibid., 585

59 Ibid., 587

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 119

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

As the comparison of Mr. Tulkinghorn with an Oyster points out, if Tulkinghorn lives in a closed-in space, it may be because he is a quiet, closed-in person. In the introduction to Tulkinghorn's character, the narrator states that Tulkinghorn "never converses, when not professionally consulted."<sup>68</sup> During the first description of Tulkinghorn's home, the narrator mentions that Tulkinghorn resides there "when not speechlessly at home" in country-houses like Leicester Dedlock's. He may not be very talkative at Chesney Wold, but do not think that his behavior is remarkably different at home. In this scene, he also sits "quiet" at his table and "silently" works out a mental problem.<sup>69</sup> To further exclude sound from his residence, he also "muffles" the floor with a carpet beneath where he sits.<sup>70</sup>

But then, maybe there is meaning in a silent symbol after all. If Tulkinghorn's chief characteristic is to be quiet and secretive, his environment may actually express his character by keeping secrets and remaining quiet. Tulkinghorn died for blackmail, in a sense, when he involved Mademoiselle Hortense in his plans to control Lady Dedlock's behavior with the secret of her past relationship with Captain Hawdon. If the metaphor of the painting of Allegory seems to remain incomplete, so do the circumstances of Tulkinghorn's death at the time of its last appearance. In the end, silent symbols can tell readers something. They tell readers that they cannot yet know what is to happen in the story. Meaning, if it is to be had at all, will only come at the end.

#### IV. Mirrored Images

If the revelation of meaning at the end of a story sends readers back to the beginning, the process of discovery in narrative inevitably involves repetition. Hence, readers must experience the chapter "The Appointed Time" twice in order to see the full significance of little details like Mrs. Perkins's matches. Repetition within plot allows readers to gauge the significance of an event by reminding them of details that will be important later and letting them forget the less important information. In Thomas Hardy's novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, foreshadowing appears primarily in repetitions of events. While these repetitions may create cohesion by connecting past and future, after multiple readings it becomes difficult to know if Hardy would rather reflect past or future events.

One of the most apparent examples of this foreshadowing through the repetition of events occurs in the scenes of Elfride's fall from the old tower of West Endelstow Church and Henry Knight's fall from the Cliff without a Name. In each instance, Elfride and Henry find themselves alone together at a dangerously high altitude. In both scenes, one falls after a careless action and is rescued by the other. On the tower, Henry Knight catches Elfride after she attempts to walk on the parapet and trips.<sup>71</sup> At the cliff, Henry Knight topples over the side of the precipice while attempting to explain the high altitude wind eddies, and Elfride eventually saves him by making a rope out of her undergarments.<sup>72</sup> Though the scenes occur in different places and show a different character in peril, they are similar enough that, in a re-reading, it would be difficult to think of one scene independently from the other.

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68 Ibid., 14

69 Ibid., 119-20

70 Ibid., 119

71 Thomas Hardy. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986), 220.

72 Ibid., 279

Some of this difficulty stems from the sense that novels exist in two temporal realities at once. Especially with an initial reading experience, time, as expressed through the plotted events of a novel, seems to progress in a linear fashion. Yet, because all of the plot events have already been written into the novel, there is another sense that everything that happens occurs simultaneously. When readers revisit a novel that they have completed, they inhabit both temporal realities of that novel. It is almost as though they become time travelers, experiencing the past with knowledge of the future. Peter Brooks discusses exactly this effect of repetition in his work *Reading for the Plot* when he says:

[R]epetition speaks in the text of a return which ultimately subverts the very notion of beginning and end, suggesting that the idea of beginning presupposes the end, that the end is a time before the beginning and hence that the interminable never can be finally bound in a plot.<sup>73</sup>

The basic question to take away from this analysis is one of reference: when an event repeats in a plot, where does the novel direct our attention? Once readers finish reading a work and look back at these repeated events, can they read them as anything but anticipations of what is to come and reflections of what has already happened?

One of these many cross-referencing connections between the tower and the cliff scenes appears in the repetition of the improvised use of clothing as a tool for rescue. When Elfride falls from the tower, she severely cuts her wrist. Then Knight uses his handkerchief as a bandage, binds her wound, and carries her down the tower.<sup>74</sup> Aside from establishing the romantic tension between Elfride and Knight, this brief moment of heroism is also a reflection of the future. It is a greater yet very similar action by the edge of the cliff, when Elfride takes off her undergarments, “hurriedly . . . rending the linen into strips” which she “knot[s] end to end, and . . . twist[s] . . . like the strands of a cord” into a rope.<sup>75</sup> With this rope, Elfride manages to pull Knight to level ground.<sup>76</sup>

There is, of course, a difference in magnitude between the actions that could lead readers to privilege the cliff scene as the more important in the novel. It is easier to wrap a handkerchief into a bandage than it is to twist underwear into a rope that is sturdy enough to support a man’s weight. Knight remains in greater peril in this scene, and for a longer space of time. There is also a role reversal of which character performs the rescue and which needs to be rescued. From the perspective of rather sexist Victorian gender politics, the stakes might have to be considerably higher for a grown man like Henry Knight to appear vulnerable. However, the action of saving a life by ripping fabric remains the same. It also appears that, once readers have finished reading the novel and can anticipate the cliff scene, it could be very difficult to read the tower scene without thinking of the cliff scene.

That Hardy wishes for readers to mentally connect the two events is evident in the similarities of the descriptions of the two settings for each scene. One manner in which this comparison takes place is through Hardy’s repeated use of the word “tower” throughout the build-up to the cliff scene. When Elfride turns to face the hill leading to the ‘Cliff without a Name,’ Hardy describes that hill as “towering still higher than themselves.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, the

73 Peter Brooks. *Reading for the Plot*. (New York: Knopf, 1984),109.

74 Thomas Hardy. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986), 219.

75 Ibid., 276

76 Ibid., 278

77 Ibid., 263

hill dwarfs Elfride and Knight so much that the hill is as large in comparison to them as a tower would be. The suggestion implied by this comparison is that Knight and Elfride both nearly fall from the same distance and that their peril and their near-death experiences are the same.

The second use of the word “tower,” which appears when they have finished climbing the hill, also reinforces the connection between the tower and the cliff scenes, but does so through a particular recurrence of motion in the scenes. This time, the word appears when Knight throws a scrap of shale over the cliff and the wind catches it so that it “tower[s] into the air like a bird” before “turn[ing] back and alight[ing] on the ground behind them” (Hardy 264). In this case, “tower” refers not to a concrete object but to a movement upwards as the wind carries the shale. The motion of the shale mirrors the momentary peril and return to safety experienced by Elfride and Knight. Though they each have a moment of suspense above the abyss, they do not fall into its depths. In looking at events that shake the plot, this little detail about the flying shale is like the foreshock of the cliff scene and the aftershock of the tower scene. It is a slight disturbance in the rhythm of the plot that simultaneously reenacts a past event while anticipating a future one. However, this symbolic cycle does not end once they return to physical safety.

Even when Elfride and Knight have returned safely to the top of the hill, a bank note repeats the flying action of the shale and leaves the chapter of Knight’s rescue with unsettled tension. After Elfride saves Knight and leaves for home, Knight notices an envelope on the ground. When he tears open the envelope, the bank note within is “seized by the wind in falling from Knight’s hand . . . [was] blown to the right, blown to the left . . . twirled in the air, and then [it] flew back.”<sup>78</sup> The bank note, like the piece of shale, seems to defy gravity by rising into the air instead of falling. It also appears to act like a bird, and by extension the piece of shale, in its twirling throughout the air. The bank note, then, exhibits that same cyclical movement of suspense and return-to-level-ground that the piece of shale, Knight, and Elfride each experience at one point in the novel. In a way, this repetition is a symbolic aftershock of both the cliff scene and the earlier tower scene.

However, like the piece of shale flying through the air, the flying bank note could be a little tremor of foreshadowing in that it might be an allusion to the return of Elfride’s fiancé, Stephen. When Knight meets Elfride before their walk up the cliff, she is actually secretly awaiting Stephen who is coming home from India.<sup>79</sup> The bank note is a receipt showing that Stephen has deposited two hundred pounds into Elfride’s account as proof that he is now earning enough to marry her.<sup>80</sup> That Elfride leaves the bank note behind for Knight to read shows that she has been distracted substantially from her anticipated meeting with Stephen by Knight’s accident. There is a high level of tension in this chapter ending because Knight, as Elfride’s new suitor, is exactly the worst person to receive a note from Elfride’s fiancé.

Though Knight does not glean much information from the bank note, this crossed line of communication foreshadows Knight’s eventual discovery of Elfride’s previous love through Mrs. Jethway’s mail. At the time of Knight’s discovery, Knight has found the body of Mrs. Jethway, who apparently died when the tower of West Endelstow Church fell on her.<sup>81</sup> After Knight carries Mrs. Jethway’s body back to her house, he happens upon a correspondence between Elfride and Mrs. Jethway in which Elfride begs Mrs. Jethway not to tell Knight about an earlier attempted elopement with Stephen.<sup>82</sup> Both the tower scene and the cliff scene would seem to be

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78 Ibid., 280

79 Ibid., 260

80 Ibid., 254

81 Ibid., 389

82 Ibid., 395-6

prefigurations of this moment of discovery and, by extension, Knight's subsequent decision to leave Elfride. In the first sentence of the chapter in which Elfride falls from the tower, the narrator states "The old tower of West Endelstow Church had reached the last weeks of its existence."<sup>83</sup> By the time that Knight catches Elfride on the tower, the plot event that will end their relationship has already been written. Though Elfride's rescue of Knight from the cliff has united the two characters romantically, there are already reflections of the discovery that will separate them.

So, what is the point of having so many repetitions between these scenes? Peter Brooks has some enlightening input about the significance of repetition in his theoretical work, *Reading for the Plot*. Brooks claims, "Narrative . . . must make use of specific perceptible repetitions in order to create plot, that is, to show us a significant interconnection of events."<sup>84</sup> In other words, plot can be thought of as a sequence of events arranged in a particular order in a narrative. Repetition of an event, when the repetition is noticeable, allows for the doublings of that event to take on a higher level of significance in the story at large than it would have if the events stood by themselves. Repetition also encourages readers to form connections between separate important moments of a story. To place this analysis within the context of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the similarities between the cliff scene and the tower scene allow the cliff scene to be read as a direct development of a plot point established in the tower scene.

To see how these repetitions may function as a means for development instead of as a simple reinforcement of earlier plot points, one must recognize that these repetitions are not exact duplications. Brooks elaborates on his earlier statement about the role of repetition in narrative: "An event gains meaning by its repetition, which is both the recall of an earlier moment and a variation of it: the concept of repetition hovers . . . between the idea of reproduction and that of change, forward and backward movement."<sup>85</sup> Plot events are more important when they build from patterns established earlier in a text. However, for a plot event to develop the story in any meaningful way, there must be at least a slight alteration to the pattern. Because of the difference in the place of the fall and the person falling, the plot moves forward. If the repetition remains uniform—that is, if the repetition of the earlier pattern does not change—*A Pair of Blue Eyes* would be a dull story about a girl who keeps falling from a tower. Alteration of events, like the role reversal of Knight and Elfride, are also a formative aspect of plot importance. In the last example, in which the entire novel consists of Elfride falling from a tower, the significance of Elfride's fall would tend to decrease with each fall. The peril becomes less shocking the more we see her come through the ordeal unscathed and unchanged.

In order to understand why Hardy would choose to emphasize a connection between the tower scene and the cliff scene, it is worthwhile to look at what each event changes in the development of the story. The scene on the tower to a certain extent exists to establish the means of Mrs. Jethway's death later in the story, when the same tower collapses on her (Hardy 390). However, Elfride's spill off of the tower also marks a moment of character development, which is more relevant in relation to the cliff scene. It is one of the initial moments in which Elfride exhibits symptoms of romantic attachment to Knight. As he tends to the wounds from her fall, a blush creeps on her face: "[H]er face changed . . . from pained indifference to something like bashful interest . . . In the centre of each pale cheek a small red spot the size of a wafer had now

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83 Ibid., 217

84 Peter Brooks. *Reading for the Plot*. (New York: Knopf, 1984),99.

85 Ibid., 99-100



made its appearance and continued to grow larger.”<sup>86</sup> Because this blushing happens as Knight attends to her wounds, it seems that much of her growing romantic feeling has been triggered by his behavior after her fall.

The fall from the cliff necessarily resembles the fall from the tower because it also develops the romantic attachment between Elfride and Knight. It is only natural that Knight and Elfride’s roles should be reversed on the cliff scene because this is one of the first scenes in which Knight appears to feel a romantic attachment to Elfride. When he sees Elfride return with her linen rope, “his eyes pass . . . all description in their combination of the whole diapason of eloquence, from lover’s deep love to fellow-man’s gratitude.”<sup>87</sup> This depiction of feeling as shown through facial expressions is a slightly less feminine reflection of Elfride’s rising blush. It is worth noting that this scene is not only a romantic development on Knight’s behalf. It is the fervor of emotion after Knight’s near-death experience that makes Elfride decide to abandon her relationship with Stephen.<sup>88</sup> It is also worth noting that in her initial attempt to help Knight back up the cliff, she temporarily spills over the precipice as well.<sup>89</sup> Within these scenes of peril is a metaphor so direct that it is almost easy to miss. In the tower scene, Elfride falls in love with Knight. In the cliff scene, they fall for each other.

The most obvious way that Hardy implies that the cliff scene and the tower scene are connected through fate appears in a premonition Elfride has after she falls from the tower. After Knight makes Elfride promise to never climb the tower again, she says, “You are familiar of course . . . with those strange sensations we sometimes have, that the moment has been in duplicate, or will be.”<sup>90</sup> Knight essentially asks her if she is speaking of *déjà vu*. In her response, Elfride partially assents, but clarifies that she also means that she refers to the feeling that a moment will be experienced again. She adds, “I felt on the tower that something similar to that scene is again to be common to us both.”<sup>91</sup> It should be clear at this point that Elfride’s intuition is spot-on in this instance. Knight and Elfride will indeed have a very similar experience on the edge of the ‘Cliff without a Name.’

Elfride manages to read the fate of events when she and Knight both hang from the cliff. In this scene, when Knight tells her to climb back onto the ground, she says, “This is the moment I anticipated when on the tower. I thought it would come!”<sup>92</sup> Though Knight chastises Elfride for her inconvenient superstition, she has actually achieved a rather tremendous feat in terms of reading the clues of her own plot. With her premonition, she is both a creator and interpreter of foreshadowing in the novel. Her premonition does not change the course of events, but it shows that she has been granted a privilege of insight not granted to most other characters in heavily foreshadowed plots.

Think of Elfride’s knowledge of future events in contrast to characters like Mr. Snagsby or Tulkinghorn. Throughout the previously mentioned surprises in *Bleak House*, the narrator grants readers the ability to predict the plot through clues, while his characters remain ignorant. Re-readers can see the humor when Mr. Snagsby smells Krook’s burning remains and thinks that that he smells “chops” cooking at a nearby inn. Even first-time readers are more aware of

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86 Thomas Hardy. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986), 220

87 *Ibid.*, 275-6

88 *Ibid.*, 278

89 *Ibid.*, 265

90 *Ibid.*, 220

91 *Ibid.*

92 *Ibid.*, 267



Talkinghorn's fate than he is, when the narrator imagines clocks that say "Don't go home!" Despite the audience's enhanced ability to sense doom in most of these examples, the characters about to experience a plot event remain ironically ignorant of the ominous storm clouds gathering overhead. In this case, however, Elfride can sense that she is experiencing an event that will set up a future plot point. If there is any irony, it lies in Knight's dismissal of her superstitious silliness. Knight does not know it, but Elfride is far better at predicting their futures than he is.

On the subject of storm clouds, parallel weather patterns between the scenes add doubt to the thought that these events are happening by chance alone. Both the tower scene and the cliff scene take place throughout the course of a storm. As Elfride and Knight climb to the top of the tower, "a large livid cloud, palpably a reservoir of rain, thunder, and lightning, [is] seen to be advancing overhead from the north."<sup>93</sup> Shortly before Elfride climbs the parapet, Knight is distracted by the gloomy weather "watching the rise of the cloud."<sup>94</sup> When he makes Elfride a bandage out of his handkerchief, the cloud he had been watching "shed[s] some heavy drops of rain" and the storm only ceases after Elfride vows not to climb the parapet again.<sup>95</sup> The timing of this change seems almost too perfect. It is as though her promise causes the weather to change and allows Knight and Elfride to descend from the tower.

The sense that the two events are fated appears even stronger in that the exact same weather pattern appears in the cliff scene. Before the fall from the cliff, as Elfride looks through her telescope for Stephen's steamboat on the shore, a storm approaches the coast.<sup>96</sup> The wind picks up while Knight approaches the edge of the cliff, and then, a moment after Knight topples off the edge of the cliff, "a few drops of rain [fall], then a sudden shower."<sup>97</sup> Knight continues in a state of misery, hanging from the cliff in the rain, until he has a moment of revelation about his feelings for Elfride. In the midst of his struggles he wonders, "Had he any faith in Elfride? Perhaps. Love is faith, and faith, like a gathered flower will rootlessly live on."<sup>98</sup> The very next moment, the sun appears, Knight "welcome[s] life" and Elfride appears to his rescue.<sup>99</sup> Yet again, it seems that the weather is changing in response to their reactions to each other. It is strange, moreover, that each event appears so neatly within the course of a storm.

But like the painting of Allegory, which only seems to point at different objects depending upon the perspective of the viewer, the narrator also suggests that this instance of the pathetic fallacy may have merely been the fancy of Knight in his moment of peril. The previously mentioned narratorial comment is actually filtered heavily through Knight and as such is subject to unreliability. In fact, the comment about the "cosmic agency" of the weather arises out of the narrator's statement, "To . . . musing weather-beaten West-county folk . . . Nature seems to have moods . . . She is read as a person with a curious temper."<sup>100</sup> It is only because Knight himself is "weather beaten" like the West-county folk that he views the environment this way.

This personification of external force takes on other forms in the two scenes, with similar complications of subjectivity. When Elfride manages to fall into the short drop inside of the tower instead of the steep descent outside, the luck "seem[s] the special interposition of a considerate Providence."<sup>101</sup> In other words, it appears that the personification of Providence saved Elfride

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93 Ibid., 217

94 Ibid., 218

95 Ibid., 219

96 Ibid., 262

97 Ibid., 264

98 Ibid., 274

99 Ibid., 275

100 Ibid., 273

101 Ibid., 218

out of kindness. At the darker end of the spectrum, Elfride and Knight seem to experience this connection to large events through the personification of death. After Elfride falls, “The close proximity of the Shadow of Death had made her sick and pale as a corpse.”<sup>102</sup> Note that both Providence and Death are capitalized, implying that they are proper nouns for deities (or forces) of those names. In the way that Hardy writes it, this moment of peril is not only a near-death experience, but also a literal near-Death experience. It is almost as though Elfride accidentally brushes her shoulder on the angel of Death when she falls. Knight has a similar experience when he hangs from the cliff. His denial breaks down and he wonders if “Death [were] really stretching out his hand?”<sup>103</sup> The presence of such personifications heightens the importance of these events to epic proportions.

At first it appears that Hardy’s claim about the subjectivity of perception in moments of crisis undermines his implication of destiny and this divine interference. It could be, for instance, that Hardy includes this interaction of Providence and the Shadow of Death through the light narrative filters of Elfride and Knight and, in so doing, suggests nothing more than that they personally feel like their lives have been externally shaped by fate. In other words, in the same way that Knight imagines that he is under attack by Nature, Elfride and he make sense of their moments of peril by mentally describing their situations with the overdramatic language of an epic rife with divine interference. At least, with reference to Knight, the question “Was Death really stretching out his hand?”<sup>104</sup> seems to come from Knight’s excited imagination.

Yet again, though, there are limits to the subjectivity of Elfride and Knight’s observations. It is not due solely to Elfride’s imagination that Elfride falls off of a tower one day and Knight falls off of a cliff another. Even though there is a correspondence between changes in Knight’s mood and changes in the weather, it does not mean that those weather changes were solely due to Knight’s fancy. There are some repetitions between these scenes that seem too closely paralleled for them to have been an accident.

Of course, considering that Thomas Hardy carefully plotted the story *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the previous statement is obvious. From the perspective of a writer, nothing that happens within the novel is an accident. If a text has relatively small economy of characters and events it is all the better if the events that take place in the text have some inner cohesion. Repetition and, to some extent, foreshadowing provide that cohesion. As Peter Brooks again points out, “Repetition . . . may . . . work as a ‘binding’ of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into . . . useable bundles within the economy of the narrative.”<sup>105</sup> In many ways, stories seem to have more depth if they multi-task. When one scene in a novel can reflect and help readers anticipate several other scenes at once, that scene is much more complex and interesting than one that stands alone.

Depending upon the readers’ perspective, the tower scene may be foreshadowing for the cliff scene and the cliff scene may be a reflection of the tower scene. The ideas are not mutually exclusive. Instead, differing opinion rests upon which scene a reader decides to think is more important. The more one reads and re-reads the novel, however, the more difficult it becomes to think of the plot as moving forward in a clear linear progression to a specific end. The experience of re-readers is then much like a journey through a house of mirrors. As reflections bounce off each other, the panes of glass expand infinitely within a tiny space, and the way out is hard to find.

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102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., 272

104 Ibid.

105 Peter Brooks. *Reading for the Plot*. (New York: Knopf, 1984), 101

## V. Inexorable Circumstance

With all of this heavy foreshadowing and unusual replications of events, it would seem that destiny has a close grip on Thomas Hardy's universe. However, it can sometimes be difficult to know exactly what stance Hardy himself takes on the predestination that appears in his own writings. A part of the confusion comes from the fact that Hardy often seems to dismiss the idea of some supernatural agency directing his world at the same time that he uses foreshadowing extensively. When reading *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, then, the reader has to interpret Hardy very closely in order to know when Hardy uses plot devices to point out the nature of the novel and when he uses them to make distinctions between the novel and real life.

Early in the novel, when Elfride hears the sound of a kiss at the same time that she mentally relives her kiss with Stephen, the narrator remarks:

Strange conjunctions of phenomena, particularly those of a trivial everyday kind, are so frequent in an ordinary life that we grow used to their unaccountableness, and forget the question whether the very long odds against such juxtaposition is not almost a disproof of it being chance at all.<sup>106</sup>

This is a tricky sentence to read. For an aphoristic aside, it's long and wordy. This aside includes a parenthetical remark and a rather confusing one at that. Without another example to illustrate the narrator's point, it is hard to know exactly what the narrator means by "strange . . . trivial everyday" phenomena.<sup>107</sup> There are a number of statements within this sentence that almost seem like contradictions. Is it actually possible, for instance, for phenomena to be strange if they happen "frequent[ly]" in "ordinary life"? This sentence is also full of qualifications and double negatives, which disguise the position of the narrator and the position of Hardy by extension.

In order to extract any coherent interpretation from this phrase, a reader has to skim over some phrases and pay attention to others selectively. Trimming down the verbiage a little, we have the narrator's first claim: "[S]trange conjunctions of phenomena . . . are so frequent . . . that we grow used to their unaccountableness." The meaning of "accountable," negated in the word "unaccountableness," seems to express the definition of the word that means the ability to be explained.<sup>108</sup> Phrased another way then, this passage says that odd combinations of events happen so often that we become accustomed to their inexplicable nature.

As the passage continues, however, it becomes increasingly more challenging to understand what the narrator proposes as an alternative to this norm and what that says about fate. The narrator goes on to claim that by getting used to inexplicable phenomena, we "forget the question whether the . . . long odds against such juxtaposition is not almost a disproof of it being chance at all." The phrase "long odds against such juxtaposition" is especially difficult to interpret. The word "juxtaposition" seems to refer to the "strange conjunctions of phenomena" mentioned earlier, which could also be thought of as odd combinations of events. The phrase "long odds" implies statistical improbability. It would seem then, that the phrase "long odds against such juxtaposition" is another way of saying "improbability of the combination of events."

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106 Thomas Hardy. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986), 119

107 *Ibid.*, 199

108 "accountable, adj.": OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/1198?redirectedFrom=accountable> (accessed December 15, 2013).

The last part of the sentence, with the largest amount of double negatives, seems to say multiple contradictory things at once. This part of the sentence includes the phrase “not almost a disproof of it being chance.” Much of the ambiguity of this passage lies in the first two words: “not almost.” The word “almost” suggests a state that is near completeness but lacks something. If I were almost a graduate student, I may have been accepted to graduate school but may have not begun my schooling there. However, the statement “I am not almost a graduate student” is more ambiguous. A part of the interpretive problem is that the word “almost” is actually very specific. A negation of “almost” calls to mind all possible states of completeness except “almost” and that “not almost” area encompasses a wide range of meaning. If I am “not almost a graduate student,” it could be that I have already become a graduate student and fit a complete definition of the term. Yet I could be a middle school student who has many years of schooling before I am “almost” in graduate school.

So, in saying that odd events are “not almost a disproof . . . of . . . chance,” the narrator could be saying many contradictory things at once. If “not almost” is taken to suggest a state of completeness, then this passage shows people forgetting to ask if the improbability of certain events disproves the existence of chance occurrence. If “not almost” is taken to suggest anything else, however, this passage could very easily be read with a polar opposite interpretation: the question people often forget to ask is if the odd conjunction of events is just chance. It’s an ambiguity about what the narrator believes that people overlook too often. With the first reading, people are so accustomed to strange occurrences that they overlook the proof right in front of them that fate exists. With the second reading, people are so used to strange things happening inexplicably that they assume that events are destined and overlook the possibility that events might happen more randomly than they think.

It is interesting with each reading of the passage that the narrator seems to posit that people forget to question the unaccountable events in their lives. By definition, if an event is unaccountable it cannot be explained. One would think that the narrator and Hardy encourage us on a futile task. Yet it is possible that Hardy does not view the conclusions we eventually reach as important as the questions asked. The lack of an answer to this cryptic question about fate could very well be Hardy’s point.

After all, the novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes* ends with a kind of climatic anticlimax in which resolution only comes from the acceptance of unanswered questions. Over a year after Knight has broken off his engagement with Elfride, Knight meets Stephen travelling abroad. After the suitors have a few conversations about Elfride, the plot takes an almost comical turn as Elfride’s old suitors secretly decide to return to England to win her back but awkwardly end up boarding the same train. As they tersely snipe at each other about which man Elfride loves best, their behavior sets up an expectation that Elfride will eventually choose one suitor in favor of the other or possibly reject both of them. When they arrive in England, however, they soon discover that she has just died of a miscarriage and that, in the time Stephen and Knight were abroad, she married the arguably minor character Lord Luxellian.

This speculation about events that do not occur appears in the concept of an if-plot. In his article “Accident and Fate in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*,” Arthur K. Amos defines an if-plot as “an alternative plot in which characters make different choices and are rewarded instead of punished.”<sup>109</sup> We can think of an if-plot in this context by imagining the possibility that either Knight or Stephen eventually ends up with Elfride. However, because neither possibility ends up

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109 Arthur K. Amos. “Accident and Fate: the Possibility for Action in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*.” *English Literature in Transition* 15(1972): 163.

occurring in the novel, Amos argues, “this suggests the novel means something different from what it says, that the argument it presents about the world is different from what happens to the characters in the novel.”<sup>110</sup> In other words, if readers come to believe that Elfride will eventually end up with Knight, the novel, in a way, lies to us and then, at the conclusion, reveals how we have been wronged by misdirection. In this case, the revelation of the truth only reveals a fraction of the full truth to the audience.

Near the end of the story, Knight openly states that it is impossible for either him or Stephen to make an accurate judgment of Elfride because they can never fully understand her actions or motives with the information left to them. Knight says:

She is beyond our love, and let her be beyond our reproach. Since we don't know half the reasons that made her do as she did . . . how can we say . . . that she was not pure and true in heart . . . Circumstance has, as usual, overpowered her . . . fragile . . . as she is—liable to be overthrown in a moment by the course elements of accident.<sup>111</sup>

Knight is telling Stephen that it is useless to question Elfride's motives because, especially after her death, her motives are impossible to know. Yet because Hardy writes no more chapters from Elfride's perspective after Knight's departure, it seems that Hardy would like readers to be curious about Elfride's motives. It's the same kind of near contradictory discourse that seems to arise in Hardy's discussion of fate.

Anna Henschman briefly comments on this cryptic aspect of Hardy's writing in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in her essay “Hardy's Cliffhanger and Narrative Time,” when she writes:

When Key information is kept from the reader, possibilities proliferate and a desire for epistemological certainty drives the narrative forward. Hardy refuses that push by frustrating his reader's desire for knowledge and letting them feel the chasm that opens up in the narrative.<sup>112</sup>

The primary example Henschman uses to illustrate this frustration of reader desire through withheld knowledge is the chapter that ends with Knight hanging from a cliff. The principle, however, also applies to the end of the novel as well. Because readers do not have absolute knowledge of Elfride's last actions, there is much more room for the curiosity and imagination of readers than if they are explicitly told her feelings.

Hardy's use of foreshadowing, and particularly his granting certain characters prophetic abilities, make it appear that his characters live in a world of fate, but there are many moments in which Hardy seems to suggest that this is a product of his characters' imagining. Recall that shortly before Knight is rescued from the Cliff without a Name, the narrator remarks:

A fancy some people hold, when in a bitter mood, is that inexorable circumstance only tries to prevent what intelligence attempts. Renounce a desire for a long-contested position, and go on another tack, and after a while the prize is thrown at you, seemingly in disappointment that no more tantalizing is possible.<sup>113</sup>

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110 Ibid.

111 Thomas Hardy. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986), 445-6

112 Anna Henschman. “Hardy's Cliffhanger and Narrative Time.” *English Language Notes* 46(1) (2008): 133.

113 Thomas Hardy. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986), 275



In this passage, Hardy leaves the reality of fate ambiguous. This ambiguity appears at the most basic level in word choice. Hardy does not actually use the word “fate” in this passage. Instead of “fate” the narrator mentions “inexorable circumstance,” which is used in a similar manner but is not exactly the same idea. The adjective “inexorable” describes something that is determined or unchangeable.<sup>114</sup> The noun “circumstance” relates more to a situational context or an “occurrence.”<sup>115</sup> In a situation with an occurrence that cannot be avoided, it may be that that occurrence cannot be avoided because it is destined to happen. Fate does not have to be the reason, though. If I drop a penny, the occurrence of the penny hitting the floor might be unavoidable, but that would be because of gravity—not fate. However, the narrator imbues “inexorable circumstance” with agency, describing it with motives to thwart intelligence and disappointment at resignation. Indeed, it seems that “inexorable circumstance” in this passage is a personification for some other powerful force shaping our lives. That force could be a kind of fate.

In an odd sort of way, the “inexorable circumstance” passage does describe what occurs in the cliff scene and seems consistent with other passages nearby, which seem to show some fate-like personification in nature. It is only when Knight resigns himself to death that Elfride happens to return for his rescue. This description of some fate-like power that is toying with us is consistent with many of the descriptions throughout this scene. As Knight hangs from the cliff, he can “only look sternly at Nature’s treacherous attempt to put an end to him, and strive to thwart her.”<sup>116</sup> This sense that the storm is a personal attack appears later in the same scene in the description, “The rain increased, and persecuted him with its cause to the fact that he was in such a wretched state already.”<sup>117</sup> The narrator mentions that the opposition of nature often is viewed as indifferent, but counters, “Here . . . hostility did not assume that slow and sickening form. It was a cosmic agency, active, lashing, eager for conquest: determination; not an insensate standing in the way.”<sup>118</sup> The narrator literally imbues Nature with “agency.” It feels emotion and acts of its own will. If the claim is to be taken seriously, important forces are indeed at work.

However, the heavy layers of narrative filters and qualifications make it difficult to interpret this external shaping force objectively. In the “inexorable circumstance” passage this filtration system occurs in the first phrase: “A fancy some people hold.” If the narrator had begun this passage without a filter—that is, if the narrator had said something like, “Often inexorable circumstance tries to prevent what intelligence attempts”—there would be much less narrative doubt because the narrator is omniscient and would seem to speak with more authority than unnamed other characters. The narrator with an omniscient perspective may also be viewed as an ideological stand-in for the author and readers might naturally assume that the narrator is intended to be read with more trust than a normal character. It is not just the existence of this filter, though, which detracts from the credibility of the claim. If the narrator had introduced the statement with “many people have observed,” the claim would still have more credibility. Much of the problematic nature of this introduction lies in the word “fancy,” which has connotations of the imagination. A person who experiences a passing fancy experiences a kind of momentary daydream. In an earlier mentioned passage, during the cliff scene, the narrator observes Knight’s apparent struggle against the elements and comments: “To . . . musing West-county folk . . .

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114 “inexorable, adj. and n.” OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/95088?redirectedFrom=inexorable> (accessed December 15, 2013)

115 “circumstance, n.” OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/33377?rskey=E1bX7J&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed December 15, 2013).

116 Thomas Hardy. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986), 271

117 *Ibid.*, 273

118 *Ibid.*



Nature seems to have moods . . . She is read as a person with a curious temper.”<sup>119</sup> It is only because Knight himself is “weather-beaten” like the West-county folk that he views the environment this way. The narrator actually explicitly states that Knight’s perception of the weather is not a representation of reality. When Knight says that he has never experienced such a “heavy and cold rain on a summer day,” the narrator counters: “He was . . . mistaken. The rain was quite ordinary in quantity; the air in temperature. It was, as is usual, the menacing attitude in which they approached him that magnified their powers.”<sup>120</sup> If Knight were not hanging for his life on the cliff, we might get a very different description of the weather. It seems that Hardy intends for readers to view his weather descriptions subjectively. This the narrator again makes clear when it continues, “We colour according to our moods the objects we survey. The sea would have been a deep neutral blue had happier auspices attended the gazer.”<sup>121</sup> Any implication of divine interference in Hardy’s writing must then be taken with an ounce of skepticism.

This slippery nature of Hardy’s position becomes even more slippery when it seems that he uses some of the same words to describe possibly contradictory ideas. With the previously mentioned passage about “inexorable circumstance” in mind, Knight’s claim that “Circumstance has, as usual, overpowered [Elfride]” becomes more complicated. In Knight’s description, Elfride is a person whose life has been shaped by external force, but Knight refers to this source of shaping power as the “course elements of accident,” which would imply a kind of randomness to the events in Elfride’s life that made her suffer. Circumstance at times in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* appears to be the argument against fate. At other times, however, circumstance seems to be the mechanism by which fate operates.

A part of the argument against the idea of a single predetermined fate comes through in that everything that happens to Elfride seems to have been destined that way, even when she avoids an event that seems to have been predetermined. In the first scene, which takes place in the Luxellian family vault, Simeon, one of Stephen’s father’s friends, comments on what he perceives as a strong resemblance between Elfride and her grandmother.<sup>122</sup> He also reveals that both Elfride’s mother and Elfride’s grandmother came to financial ruin by running off and eloping with a suitor below their rank. The grandmother is Elfride’s namesake.<sup>123</sup> Simeon does not know it, but the young Elfride also almost experiences this fate earlier in the novel when she attempts but hesitates to elope with Stephen.

Yet even if she avoids completely repeating the history of her mother and grandmother, she repeats the history of Lady Luxellian. Fairly early into the story, Hardy plants clues that Elfride will at one point become the new Lady Luxellian. The place where this foreshadowing is perhaps the most noticeable appears when the Luxellian children call Elfride their “little mamma.” This nickname first appears in the story when Elfride visits the Luxellian mansion with Stephen and the Luxellian children embrace her. Attempting to explain the nickname, Elfride says that they coined the term one day after she “wore a dress . . . something like one of Lady Luxellian’s.”<sup>124</sup> This similarity in dress between Elfride and Lady Luxellian sets up a comparison between the characters which grows later in the story when Elfride replaces her as the new Lady Luxellian.

The parallel between Elfride and Lady Luxellian also appears in both characters’ decline in health after marriage to Lord Luxellian. Lady Luxellian’s character seems to be entirely defined by

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119 Ibid.

120 Ibid., 274

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid., 313

123 Ibid., 312

124 Ibid., 88

her illness. Simeon calls her “drowsy-like.”<sup>125</sup> When Elfride and her stepmother, Mrs. Swancourt, go for a boat ride through a park, Mrs. Swancourt criticizes Lady Luxellian for wearing a bracelet that is too large for her wrist and Elfride retorts, “It’s not that thin on her account . . . her arm has got thin, poor thing. You cannot think how much she has altered in this past twelvemonth.”<sup>126</sup> Later in the chapter, Mrs. Swancourt gossips that Lady Luxellian is “very sickly.”<sup>127</sup> Near the conclusion of the story, Elfride’s former maid reveals that Elfride had fallen ill after Knight left her.<sup>128</sup> Like the previous Lady Luxellian, Elfride “grew thinner.”<sup>129</sup> and the maid said that she had once told Elfride that she did not look so well as she used to.<sup>130</sup> There are a lot of real reasons why Elfride falls ill. After all, she has experienced much emotional trauma with the combined effect of Knight’s departure and her father’s snobbery against her. However, there is also an element of her illness that strangely seems to affirm her new identity as Lady Luxellian. It is almost as though the sickness comes with the Luxellian title as she spends the entire relationship sick.

Elfride’s marriage also seems to be repeated history when one looks at her ancestry. She already has ties to the Luxellian family, though she herself does not have a title. Simeon also points this out when he remarks, “[I]f the Lord’s anointment had descended upon women instead of men Miss Elfride would be Lord Luxellian—Lady, I mean.”<sup>131</sup> There is a sense in Simeon’s comment that Elfride is meant to become Lady Luxellian. This has significance not only on the level of duplicating the experience of Lord Luxellian’s first marriage, but also on the level of replicating the experience of her ancestors in the Luxellian family.

The ironic twist, however, is that many times these characters seem to be almost conscious of the fact that they are in a story. A part of what lends them a strange credibility is that, in fact, they are all characters in a story and someone—Thomas Hardy—has planned out their lives in a meticulous fashion. Though Elfride is arguably the most naïve character and is the one who writes a romance, Stephen and Knight both talk about their lives as though they are a part of a novel. When reassuring Elfride that she is not a failure, Knight says, “Anybody’s life may be just as romantic and strange if he or she fails as if he or she succeed. All the difference is, that the last chapter is wanting in the story.”<sup>132</sup> When Stephen attempts to impress Elfride’s father by reciting Latin, he seems to come close to asking about his own fate when he translates the recitation: “*What will be the end . . . or . . . what fine awaits me.*”<sup>133</sup> In a moment, Stephen seems to articulate a question that many readers ask as they read the novel.

Because of the lack of reassurance or resolution that Hardy provides, many readers may still be asking Stephen’s question. Some might even see their opinions reflected in Knight’s comment about the “last chapter.” In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks writes, “The end that narrative seeks, in its anticipation of retrospection, may disappoint and baffle. Yet this may only make it the more necessary to construct meaning *from* that end.”<sup>134</sup> Applied to *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, it could be that Hardy leaves questions unanswered so that readers may examine his work more closely and independently reach conclusions of their own.

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125 Ibid., 447

126 Ibid., 194

127 Ibid., 198

128 Ibid., 447

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid., 448

131 Ibid., 313

132 Ibid., 241

133 Ibid., 100

134 Peter Brooks. *Reading for the Plot*. (New York: Knopf, 1984), 323

In the end, Hardy's aim in presenting a novel that blasts the expectations it builds and leaves us with questions could be to make a statement about how reality might be different from the world of a story. When we read a novel that we have read before, we have the ability to see the future in the world of the story. The physical reality of a novel is finite. By alluding to past storylines and stories that are never told, Hardy points out to us the boundlessness of our own lives. What the ending of our stories will be, we may never know.

## VI. "The Last Chapter"

Although there are moments when Dickens problematizes his own foreshadowing system in *Bleak House*, the feeling that one gets from reading foreshadowing in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is of a much less resolved or contained universe. There are plenty of occasions in Hardy's work that make it seem that fate controls the world of his novel. However, unlike Dickens's use of foreshadowing, which seems to build up the significance of an event or a symbol, Hardy's foreshadowing often seems to make a statement about how much more of the story we're not getting. He may build up some moments to a high level of importance, like the cliff scene. However, this buildup of significance is a sleight of hand to encourage us to think novelistically and then challenge our own novelistic thinking, because no matter how fated Elfride's relationship with Knight is, there are more suitors in her past and her future. This is not to say that Dickens answers all questions by the end of *Bleak House*, but rather to point out that Dickens leaves *Bleak House* with significantly fewer loose ends. Even the chapters of *Bleak House* are much easier to see as distinct compartments or episodes, which can almost stand alone. Hardy's chapters, by comparison, seem like a fine thread of story, which extends outside our vision: past the beginning and beyond the end of the novel.

This difference between the novels has greatly affected the way that I have structured this thesis. In my writing about Krook's spontaneous combustion, for instance, it was relatively easy to focus my attention on the symbolism in the chapter in which Krook dies, "The Appointed Time." With my analysis of Tulkinghorn's death, I did need to widen my scope a little, but I could still confine most of my analysis to one chapter, "Closing In." This has not been the case with my study of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. The cliff scene extends across two chapters, and the foreshadowing of Elfride's eventual marriage to Lord Luxellian is spread out across the entire novel. I also could not maintain the same focus on symbolism in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* either because, although Hardy does use the pathetic fallacy and seems to personify the environment with agency, he does not do so to the almost-paranoid level that Dickens shows in his environment. Hardy's foreshadowing appears much more often in endlessly repeated scenes or echoes in the plot.

To point out this difference of plot resolution, try to imagine a version of *Bleak House* written by Thomas Hardy. It would probably not end on as happy a note as Dickens's version does. This narrative might stop after Richard loses all of his assets in the Chancery court and dies. In this scenario, Esther Summerson's romantic attachment to Alan Woodcourt remains in a place of disappointment and the novel ends with a reinforcement of the theme of blasted hopes and expectations. Hardy might even choose to end the novel at an earlier time, like the death of Lady Dedlock, which would leave the Chancery case Jarndyce and Jarndyce unresolved. Readers would be left to imagine that the case goes on indefinitely and that the Chancery orphans will have children who become entangled in the case.

Now imagine that Dickens wrote *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. All events in the novel could potentially remain the same, but he would be much more likely to present the end from Elfride's perspective and, in so doing, leave us with more resolution about her motives. It could even become a bittersweet ending, as we see a possible return to happiness in Elfride's last romance. As a heroine, instead of an antagonist like Krook or Tulkinghorn, Dickens might even grant her time to reflect on her life and find acceptance before peacefully and prettily passing away.

My main point from these illustrations is that the novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes* seems to present a world that is much more brutally random than the world of *Bleak House* because the revelation of meaning at the end of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is that there is never going to be a great revelation of meaning about the events that take place in the novel.

Hardy's implications of fate, however, do add some complications to this premise. There are some moments of foreshadowing in which it almost seems that Hardy sets up destiny as a kind of straw man to be torn down as the plot takes a different turn in the future. Consider the variety of alternate destinies for Elfride's future that seem to be foreshadowed throughout the novel. Hardy also adds in a significant amount of doubt about fate through narrative filters that seem to imply that fate is a trick of perception only visible in retrospect. However, when he gives Elfride and Stephen psychic visions and events repeat in strange patterns, it is difficult to deny the existence of some kind of fate at work in the universe of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. A description of Hardy's world that takes these considerations into account, then, could be that Hardy presents a world in which people's lives are controlled by external forces, but people are denied the ability to understand those forces.

Though Dickens would take a different tack in terms of plot resolution, he seems to express exactly this same idea in *Bleak House* when he plays upon his characters' inability to read plot secrets in the world around them. The omniscient narrator's warnings to the audience seem to suggest that everything that happens in the story is destined and has, in a sense, already happened, even though action occurs in the present tense. When the narrator laments that Tulkinghorn's watch could not tell him of his impending doom, it suggests fate exists but the knowledge of one's destiny is inaccessible.

In asking why Dickens and Hardy chose to write about fate in this way, it might be helpful to consider the moral implications of looking for destiny outside of a novel. Aside from theological implications, when people attempt to read fate in their own lives, they imagine themselves in a novelistic world. They see themselves as main characters in a story that has been entirely written by someone else. In so doing, they might deny the responsibility of their own actions in deciding their fate. Or they might even imagine that if they learn how to read the signs and symbols in the environment around them they can somehow improve their own lives and avoid disaster. Dickens and Hardy remind us that, in real life, no one has access to the knowledge of an omniscient narrator. Sometimes a horrible event will happen without warning and it is ridiculous to expect yourself or others to have anticipated it. The world will not tell us the ends of our stories. The clocks will not cry out for us.

When Dickens shows us bad detectives like Mrs. Snagsby, or when Hardy shows us clever but naive characters like Stephen Smith and Henry Knight, they point out to us our failure to grasp the complexity of the world around us, and our tendency to assume that the world revolves around ourselves. Mrs. Snagsby is so convinced that her husband is hiding an infidelity from her that she cannot imagine the truth that his late night walk is innocent. Stephen and Knight are so

self-absorbed that it never occurs to them that Elfride might have married anyone after they left her. The main problem with these characters' understanding of the world is that they assume that everyone else around them is a secondary character whose actions can only relate to themselves.

Although this interpretation might seem like a depressing put down to readers ("you are not as important as you think you are"), this contrast of reality with our perceptions may actually be read in a positive light. Destiny may seem fixed at times, but that constraint may be a simple matter of perspective. The stories imagined by Dickens's and Hardy's naïve characters would not make for stories as interesting as the events that actually take place in the novels. The worlds that their characters imagine are clichéd, trite even. What happens in the novels and what Dickens and Hardy might argue happens in real life is less predictable. More possibilities exist than these characters can even imagine. The real world is much bigger and much stranger and much, much more interesting.

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