

“ANXIOUS TO KNOW”: EMERGENT EPISTEMOLOGY IN *THE WOMAN IN  
WHITE*

by

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## ABSTRACT

Scholars understand legal shifts and growing industrialization of mid-Victorian culture as combining to give rise to sensational forms in journalism and fiction. Circling taboo topics (murder, forgery, adultery), sensation fiction's narratives engage cultural struggles concerning new and old ways of knowing. The foundation of characters' ability to acquire objective knowledge through sense perception becomes unstable while verification systems such as legal reliance on reputation and testimony are proving inadequate both inside and outside the novels. Populated with characters and events drawn from news reports of criminal activity, Victorian sensation fiction relentlessly calls epistemological discourse into question. Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), often pointed to as registering the genre's birth, encodes cultural anxieties about knowing that sensation forms register. The centrality of knowledge and concern over its acquisition in *The Woman in White* demands an approach that adequately confronts the novel's progressive epistemological dimensions, making the novel fit to demonstrate the productivity of reconceptualizing "philosophy and literature" approaches. My analysis of *The Woman in White* shows literature's philosophical capacity through recourse to two so-called Gettier problems, which mark milestone developments in twentieth-century epistemology. I then show the literary critical potential of concepts from responsibilist virtue epistemology, a later, post-Gettier development. My thesis forges a "philosophy and literature" approach practiced as a conjunctive subdiscipline and characterized by disciplinary reciprocity. In deploying this approach, a detailed portrait of Marian Halcombe's cognitive behavior emerges, and the ways in which her powers of intellection propel the novel's resolution in restored "epistemic community."

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	v
INTRODUCTION: A SENSATIONAL PICTURE OF PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE .....	1
What Should a Philosophy and Literature Approach Accomplish?.....	3
CHAPTER I: NARRATIVE ELUCIDATION AND THE GETTIER PROBLEMS IN <i>THE WOMAN IN WHITE</i> .....	31
When $K \neq JTB$ in <i>The Woman in White</i> .....	50
CHAPTER II: RESPONSIBILIST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY AS NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN <i>THE WOMAN IN WHITE</i> .....	65
On Alternative Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology .....	66
Marian Halcombe's Cognitive Character.....	75
CONCLUSION.....	111
WORKS CITED .....	114

## INTRODUCTION

### A SENSATIONAL PICTURE OF PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

Frequently cited are the taboo or criminal topics—murder, bigamy, insanity, forgery, and blackmail—that Victorian sensation novelists absorbed from popular journalistic discourse and then fictionalized for entertainment (Pykett 50–1; Brantlinger 9); and scholars also partially credit significant legal shifts with sensation fiction’s literary assimilation of these taboo topics and the corresponding characters who perform or investigate crime. The Police Act of 1856 created a professionalized detective force in response to the increasingly intelligent modern criminal, a real-world change tangible in the fictional character of Count Fosco in Wilkie Collins’s novel (Sutherland 243–4). Formal elements that evince the complex epistemological anxiety of Victorian culture are also woven into the emergent genre’s narrative fabric together with the sensational content. Narrators in sensation fiction withhold information and conceal secrets from readers (Brantlinger 20), and the many discoveries requisite in elaborate plots reveal the inadequacies of attempting to construct objective knowledge or get at truth through new (evidence-based) or old (testimony-reliant) methods of knowing (Baker 48–9; Dunbar 98–9). Demonstrative of anxiety over both the antiquated legal reliance on testimony and the contemporary zeal of British empiricists for objective evidentiary knowledge, the sensation novel generally—and *The Woman in White* particularly—seems a space for epistemological experimentation, a testing ground for what it means to know.

This project predicates that central claim—the possible epistemological progressiveness of sensation fiction—on the notion that cultural production (music, literature, film) self-consciously responds to contemporary anxieties around what is



known. Such production incorporates both regressive and progressive discourses that ameliorate, confront, and even (perhaps especially) exploit for economic gain such widespread anxiousness. *The Woman in White*, as the progenitor of Victorian sensation fiction, places both formal and thematic emphases on epistemological considerations in Walter Hartright's attempt to recount the unmasking of a veiled conspiracy by communicating events and evidence through the testimony of multiple first-person narrators. The ultimate insufficiency of Hartright's narrative strategy in telling the whole truth (Perkins and Donaghy 396–7; Bachman 93), though, substantiates the idea that mid-Victorian epistemological anxiety is encoded in the genre, making the novel a good candidate for both philosophical and literary critical exploration. In using Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White* as a representative of Victorian sensation fiction, I recognize that posterity's categorization of certain novels and stories into this genre can perhaps at best adumbrate the exact origins and conventions that may or may not structurally bind such fiction. I maintain, however, that one can appeal to the observations and groupings of twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars as a heuristic for identifying the type(s) of cultural anxiety with which the genre, emerging in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, would have been concerned.

Given the epistemologically progressive character of *The Woman in White*, then, my thesis explores the possibility of reading Collins's novel against modern-day analytic epistemology to fulfill the conjunctive “two-headlight” methodology for the philosophy and literature approach described in the following section of the current chapter. In short, I argue that treating the conjunct “philosophy and literature” as reciprocally productive—that is, treating both disciplines as a potential source of advancement for one another—

appropriately mobilizes such an interdisciplinary approach. Holding that the new, emergent genre that *The Woman in White* registers the birth of carries the potential for epistemological foresight, Collins's novel is appropriate to analyze for demonstrating that literature can be philosophically productive and that modern-day philosophy can—and often must—add to critical understanding of literature. Specifically, I will show how the narrative of *The Woman in White* contains two so-called “Gettier problems,” developments marking a twentieth-century milestone in epistemology; and I will show how responsibilist virtue epistemology, innovative work primarily of the twenty-first century, offers a theoretical vocabulary that accurately encapsulates the character and social influence of Marian Halcombe. The remainder of this introductory chapter will first detail this philosophy and literature approach by differentiating it from similar approaches; I will then turn to providing a more detailed overview of the two body chapters that take as their object the relationship between *The Woman in White* and modern-day analytic epistemology.

#### What Should a Philosophy and Literature Approach Accomplish?

Two immediate answers to the question of what a philosophy and literature approach might do come to mind. The first is simple, though vague and insufficient: doing philosophy and literature will involve philosophy in some way, and it will involve literature in some way. Such an answer, however, lays down no guidelines, bars few possibilities, and inspires little reflection or contemplation. But the second of these immediate answers is more promising: philosophy and literature is an inherent result of its respective, “parent” disciplines. This answer holds that a conjunct binding the two

disciplines is a byproduct of form: the form of the philosophical treatise is to some extent literary; the form of the work of literature is to some extent philosophical.

This latter answer has notable backers. Martha Nussbaum, for example, has famously argued this claim. Perceiving a relationship between, primarily, moral philosophy and literature, Nussbaum positions literature as an indispensable component of inquiring after the mysterious and veiled truths of this world. Intriguingly, Nussbaum does not attribute fiction's indispensability to the content of a literary narratives—that is, fiction's indispensability is not due to characters or narrators espousing nameable moral principles and following them to some end. Instead, this indispensability is due to an inextricable tie between form and content, a tie that entails a given literary form's providing access to truths *inaccessible* through other forms, “embodying them in its shape and setting up the reader in the activities that are appropriate for grasping them” (Nussbaum 6–7). Literary forms present the only form capable of articulating a certain subset of views about nature, the world (Nussbaum 7). Nussbaum's argument problematizes the reductive, totalizing theories of moral philosophy and adds literary works as integral supplements to philosophical practice. Literary forms provide “sources of insight without which the [philosophical] inquiry cannot be complete” (22–4), with contributions through narrative that are superior to the schematic (also fictional) examples formulated by traditional moral philosophers (46).

Going one step further, Amir Jaima, though appreciative of her overall project, has argued that Nussbaum's support for literary narratives' potential to contribute to moral philosophy could have been even more adamant. Nussbaum could have challenged the philosophical discipline as a whole rather than viewing literature as supplemental to

its project (Jaima 17–8). Jaima, too, favors taking literature seriously as philosophy, describing literature’s long-standing disciplinary subordination as due to its narratives’ particularities, a subordination analogous to the relegation and even exclusion of non-dominant (non-white, heterosexual male) voices in current philosophical debates (20–1). Moreover, Jaima’s analysis of the philosophical nature of literature and the literary nature of philosophy offers conclusions with practical implications for philosophy as a discipline. Jaima argues that (1) all texts have numerous voices; (2) the temporality that belongs to all texts has narrative-like structure; (3) “Examples are Universals”; and (4) “[t]he quality of our language matters” (18-20). These claims, Jaima points out, are literary considerations that demand philosophy account for its methodology to prove its rigor (18). On my reading, Jaima’s conclusions (1) and (2) point to the inherent literariness of philosophy (long recognized but little accounted for). Rather than be shrouded, the facts of Jaima’s claims should be confronted, while conclusions (3) and (4), which relate to the philosophical strengths of literature, should be equally emphasized. If literature’s particular examples encode universals, and the quality of language that brings these examples to life matters, then literature likely philosophizes quite well.

But despite the strength of Nussbaum’s and Jaima’s positions, and despite the fruitful ways in which they empower literature as philosophy, their work does not offer the methodology that I propose here. Instead, Nussbaum and Jaima offer thorough and thoughtful arguments for the claim that literature *is* philosophy and philosophy *is* literature, but equating the two disciplines is markedly different than an outline for what one does when engaging in “philosophy and literature” as a distinct subdiscipline and critical practice.

For a disciplinary conjunction that combines two influential fields with rich academic histories, there are curiously few attempts at describing what “philosophy and literature” as a subdiscipline *does*. Without guiding principles or appropriate boundaries, the work of this disciplinary conjunction faces inherent challenges, not the least of which are to establish what to achieve and how to achieve it. Recognizing this, and so referring to many attempts at philosophy and literature as “sketches,” Melvin Chen has made an important contribution to clearing the fog over how to do philosophy and literature. Seeing that the “field lacks coherence and appears fragmented,” Chen believes that philosophy and literature will become a more valued and respected subdiscipline if its boundaries become less blurred (472). The problem, however, is that defining the two fields even as separate entities already poses enormous difficulties, so defining the conjunction of the two must be near impossible. This leads Chen to instead take up the question, “What is *not* philosophy and literature?” (473). Certainly, by eliminating what the subdiscipline is not, its picture sharpens.

Chen identifies two candidates with enough conceptual proximity to philosophy *and* literature that they could be mistaken for it: philosophy *of* literature and philosophy *in* literature. Neither, he believes, are philosophy *and* literature, but their conceptual proximity to the subdiscipline renders them good candidates for elimination for the purpose of sharpening our understanding of philosophy and literature. The former holds literature as its object, using philosophical methods to interrogate and better understand its aesthetic forms, features, and ontological status, among other things. This purview results in questions such as the following (raised by literary theorists from Plato and Aristotle on): what makes a text literary? how should literature be read as literature?

where does a work of literature exist? Philosophy *of* literature, then, might be best understood as an endeavor for the metaphysician, aesthetician, and indeed, the writer.

The latter candidate for elimination, philosophy *in* literature, occurs when a literary work “recast[s] philosophical ideas, issues, and themes in literary form” (475). This recasting may occur at a single moment in a literary work—say, a character espousing materialism in a particular dialogue—or this recasting may be the main feature, such as in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Nausea*. According to Chen, philosophy *in* literature is similar to philosophy *of* literature in the sense that they both subordinate the literary to the philosophical:

What both philosophy of literature and philosophy in literature have in common is the sense they convey of literature being put in the service of philosophical ends. Whether it be the ideas, issues, and themes of literature being mined for other philosophical subdisciplines or the form of literature being used as decorative ornament for philosophical ideas, issues, and themes, these close relatives inevitably cast literature as subordinate to philosophy. (475)

The conjunction in philosophy *and* literature does not seem to imply such subordination, Chen notes, so these other two subdisciplines must be distinct from it.

What, then, must philosophy and literature accomplish? Chen argues that Socrates’s assault on the poets in Plato’s *Republic* has laid down the charge for philosophy and literature. Thus, the subdiscipline, in subordinating neither of the two parent disciplines, should prove the worth of literature to a just society by demonstrating the “forms of knowledge” that literature makes available to us and the ways in which literature might “contribute to our moral improvement” (478).

Chen's argument has an attractive authority—there is something both exciting and appealing about defining a modern subdiscipline's limits via an ancient argument. And the goals of the subdiscipline are plainly described; this is a strength. Moreover, Chen's descriptions of philosophy *of* literature and philosophy *in* literature seem accurate, at least insofar as they reflect the descriptions provided by Peter Lamarque in his book, appropriately titled, *Philosophy of Literature*. Lamarque explains in the preface that a philosophical investigation of literature “looks at the underlying conventions and assumptions that give the practices [of literary forms] what distinctive identity they have and seeks to find a coherent perspective that makes sense of them” (vii). Much like Chen, Lamarque accrues further focus by discussing what philosophy of literature is not: namely, philosophy in literature. Lamarque characterizes philosophy in literature as having three manifestations: the first reads a literary text to name the philosophical theme or idea therein; the second details how a literary text might clarify or expound upon an existing philosophical theme or idea; the third, which Lamarque claims does intersect with philosophy of literature, is “the level at which the very possibility of using fictional works to expound, develop, or challenge philosophical ideas is addressed” (2–4). Though Lamarque offers readers a clearer picture than Chen does of the activities of these two subdisciplines, his characterizations are broadly similar to Chen's, and the aims Chen puts forth for philosophy and literature remain both plausible and uncontradicted by Lamarque.

So, does Chen have it right? Is a direct response to Socrates—proving the worth of literature to a just society—the goal of philosophy and literature? It is hard to say. On the one hand, Chen's idea does have a magnetism that makes one want to accept it, and

the concrete aims are convenient for establishing the value and legitimacy of philosophy and literature as a subdiscipline. But, unfortunately, magnetism and expediency do not amount to soundness.

A handful of problems manifest after evaluating Chen's argument. The first is probed by questioning what about philosophy of literature or philosophy in literature subordinate literature to philosophy. There is no real argument that this is the case; Chen asserts it. Indeed, throughout Lamarque's book—one that takes philosophy of literature as its focus—there is never any sense of subordination, nor does that sense arise when Lamarque mentions the goals of philosophy in literature. Chen begins to argue the point of subordination when he says that these subdisciplines place literature as a means to a philosophical end, but this need not be true: if a philosopher of literature ever convincingly and incontrovertibly determines that which is essential to literature as literature or the true nature of authorial intention, then this conclusion likely bears more—and more interesting—consequences for the literary critic than for the philosopher.

Furthermore, means–ends relationships are equivocal and do not necessarily entail a relationship of subordination. Chen's use of the word “subordinate” carries hierarchical connotations—that which is “less important.” Stating that philosophy in literature subordinates literature to philosophy renders literature “less important” than philosophy. Chen appeals to a means–ends relationship to support this understanding of philosophy in literature: philosophy in literature renders literature less important than philosophy because it uses literature as a means for a philosophical end. But this point is open to simple counterexample. For instance, I am a writing tutor. Students often come to me and



other tutors to improve their writing skills; a tutor is thus means to the end of improved writing. Does this imply that the tutor is of less importance than a student's improved writing? Of course not. A means–ends relationship is therefore not necessarily indicative of a relationship of subordination, meaning the claim that philosophy of literature and philosophy in literature subordinate literature to philosophy is not sufficiently supported.

A final issue arises in the act of meeting Chen's charge: it appears necessary to engage in one or both of the practices—philosophy *of* literature or philosophy *in* literature—to reach the goal Chen names for philosophy *and* literature. The question as to how it is even possible for a fictional world to contribute to our real-world understanding of knowledge or morality is one for the philosopher of literature (or the writer) and would have to be answered before addressing either what forms of knowledge or contributions to moral improvement literature affords. If one does accept Chen's claim that philosophy of literature and philosophy in literature subordinate literature, but one or both of these subdisciplines are required to reach conclusions belonging to another subdiscipline—that of philosophy and literature—then the impression remains that one must first subordinate literature (engage in philosophy of literature or philosophy in literature) in the process of leaving literature unsubordinated (the goal of philosophy and literature). On the face of it, at least, this seems contradictory.

To avoid this contradiction, I see two possibilities: one can accept that philosophy of literature and philosophy in literature do not subordinate literature, or one can accept that philosophy and literature also subordinates literature. Surely the latter is regrettable, and I have already argued that the former of these possibilities is true.

This conclusion does have the unfortunate consequence of obscuring the aims of philosophy and literature once again, but perhaps what can be taken from Chen's argument and my corresponding discussion is that philosophy and literature will involve—but be more than just—philosophy of literature or philosophy in literature, and that its conclusions should not subordinate one discipline to the other. This is still progress—progress I would credit to Chen—and does allow for some evaluation of arguments that aim for the subdiscipline of philosophy and literature. To exemplify such an evaluation, take two essays published in *Philosophy and Literature* from the same year, each of which uses philosophy in literature as part of a greater argument: Brian Reilly's "Irony and Cognitive Empathy in Chrétien de Troyes's Gettier Problem" and Scott DeVries's "Borges Scoops Gettier." Both scholars center their theses on the presence in literary works of Gettier's famous counterexamples to the justified true belief theory of knowledge (K=JTB), but the authors' conclusions are vastly different and demonstrate how philosophy in literature can proceed to either subordinate or not subordinate literature.<sup>1</sup>

Reilly describes two Gettier problems in Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*, one that occurs among the characters and one that occurs to the reader as they proceed through the narrative (171). From this, Reilly concludes that *Cligès* produces "cognitive empathy" between readers and characters rather than the "aesthetic distance" characteristic of what would have been irony had the reader not been Gettiered as well (179). This conclusion implies no subordination: the philosophical counterexample of Gettier provides a *deeper*

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<sup>1</sup> A counterexample responds to an argument by creating a scenario in which that argument has true premises but a false conclusion.

critical understanding of a literary work and the reader's response to it. The philosophy is a *source* that adds to the current understanding of a work of literature. DeVries, on the other hand, notes a Gettier problem in Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Emma Zunz" to argue the following points:

first, that Borges preceded Gettier in identifying the shortcomings of JTB as knowledge; second, that fictional writing is inherently better than philosophical treatises at establishing the validity of counterexamples; and third, that the parameters of Borges's story make it particularly well suited to demonstrate the weight of the Gettier problem. (A291)

A brief critique of DeVries's second thesis is useful insofar as it demonstrates how theses developed from philosophy in literature can inadvertently subordinate literature. The first and third pose no major issues. The second, however—"that fictional writing is inherently better at establishing the validity of counterexamples"—is as ambitious as it is problematic.

First and foremost, the second thesis demonstrates little appreciation for discipline-specific understanding of validity—that is, of *logical* validity. Logical validity requires only that an argument's conclusion cannot be false if its premises are true. So it is that many ridiculous arguments can be valid. Take the following:

P1: Dogs have legs.

P2: Cats have heads.

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C: Triangles have three sides.

Because the conclusion will always be true, this is a logically valid argument.

Admittedly, this is a nuanced understanding of validity, but it is necessary to consider if one is attempting to show literature's ability to carry out analytic philosophy, particularly since the validity of counterexamples, Gettier or otherwise, was not and is not in doubt.

Below is a loose construction of what an argument from counterexample might look like:

P1: Argument A has premises P and conclusion C.

P2: Argument A is sound iff<sup>2</sup> it is both valid and premises P are true.

P3: Counterexample E shows scenario S in which premises P of Argument A are true but conclusion C is false.

P4: Therefore, argument A is invalid.

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C: Argument A is unsound.

Note that, if a counterexample *soundly* provides a scenario in which the premises of an argument are true but the conclusion is false (P3), then that counterexample will both *soundly and validly* show the argument it opposes to be invalid (P4) and unsound (C).

Such is the nature of philosophical counterexamples, so their validity was not in need of additional support.

It seems likely that DeVries's intentions were to argue that literature could better establish the soundness (not validity) of Gettier problems as a legitimate manifestation of P3 in the previous argument. Maybe so. But this generosity risks, as a result, the sort of

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<sup>2</sup> "Iff," short for "if and only if," is a phrase used in formal logic to denote two-way conditionality. For instance, "x if and only if y" is logically equivalent to "if x, then y; and if y, then x."

philosophy in literature that subordinates literature to philosophy. Supposing that literature is subordinated appears counterintuitive when granting that literature sometimes achieves a philosophical goal more effectively than a philosophical treatise. Would that not elevate rather than subordinate literature? I argue that it does not.

The reason for my arguing so comes down to the difference between using something as a source versus using something as a tool. Adding this language to Chen's argument gives a clearer picture of what I intend to say: if X is a means to Y, and X is used as a tool, then X is subordinated to Y; if X is a means to Y, but X is used as a source for Y, then X is not subordinated to Y. Note that this solves the tutoring counterexample. A tutor is a means to the end of improved writing ability, but they are used as a source, not (ideally, anyway) as a tool. So, if DeVries's thesis were adapted to understand literature as a source for *new* philosophical ideas—soil from which philosophical ideas can sprout—then this would not subordinate one or the other; literature would not be utilized to better understand an existing idea but rather be acknowledged as a place from which new and important ideas could arise. DeVries, however, does not argue this. His thesis orients literature as a tool to better understand existing ideas and ways of philosophizing, a lens through which philosophical pictures come into improved focus: a tool for philosophy.

The upside of DeVries's article, though, is that it provides helpful contrast for seeing how to leave literature unsubordinated after noting philosophy in literature. All one really must do is adjust the understanding of literature from tool to source to succeed in preventing subordination: if it can be shown that the content of the fictional world in a

work of literature can support, inspire, cause, or result in *new* philosophical ideas, then literature has shifted from tool to source. And as Reilly's article has shown, this conclusion has an important parallel: philosophy, too, can be a literary critical source, inspiring *new* critical interpretations of literary works, rather than simply illustrating or establishing existing interpretations; the Gettier problems in de Troyes's narrative were shown to create cognitive empathy rather than the more traditional reading of an aesthetic distance caused by irony.

Finally, then, a picture of what philosophy and literature *does* is coming to the fore. Considering the work of Nussbaum, Jaima, Lamarque, Chen, DeVries, and Reilly, we can see that philosophy and literature is not the argument that literature is philosophy and philosophy is literature; instead it appeals to the conclusions of philosophers of literature or delineates philosophy in literature in order to show how literature can be a source for philosophical ideas or how philosophy can be a source for literary critical insights, where neither discipline is subordinated to the other.

My project is therefore committed to the above aims and includes chapters responsive to both sides of the disjunct, showing literature as a source for philosophical inquiry and philosophy as a source for literary critical insights. Chapter I, "Narrative Elucidation and the Gettier Problems in *The Woman in White*," performs the former of these. Noting two instances in which *The Woman in White* included significant philosophical ideas that succeeded Collins's fiction, and using terminology contributed by philosophy of literature, I show how the elucidation of literary narratives helps form new philosophical counterexamples. Chapter II, "Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology as

Narrative Technique in *The Woman in White*,” performs the opposite side of the disjunct. I first describe alternative responsibilist virtue epistemology and then apply profiles of the individual intellectual virtues to the character of Marian Halcombe, cataloguing her effects on the epistemic community of *The Woman in White*, complicating the scholarly claim that Collins’s work subordinates complex characterization to complex plotting. The concluding section then sketches some practical implications and future directions for the potential philosophical productivity of today’s cultural production as well as possible avenues for additional applications of alternative responsibilist virtue epistemology. The remainder of the current chapter focuses on foregrounding the arguments made in Chapters I and II.

After providing the relevant philosophical background, Chapter I fills in premise five of the following argument:

P1: Individual literary narratives and individual philosophical counterexamples are creations.

P2: If individual literary narratives and individual philosophical counterexamples are creations, then literary narratives and philosophical counterexamples are creation-types.

P3: Therefore, literary narratives and philosophical counterexamples are creation-types.

P4: If elucidating some creations of creation-type A shows that the creations contain creations of creation-type B, and those creations of creation-type A were

created before the creations of creation-type B, then creation-type A can help form new creations of creation-type B.

P5: Elucidating some literary narratives shows that the literary narratives contain philosophical counterexamples, and the literary narratives were created before the philosophical counterexamples that they contain.

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C: Elucidating literary narratives can help form new philosophical counterexamples.

The weight of this argument rests on its logical soundness, which in turn requires both logical validity and the truth of its premises. Premises one through four will be defended in the remainder of this introductory chapter. Premise five will be defended via the case study presented in Chapter I.

*Premise one: Individual literary narratives and individual philosophical counterexamples are creations.*

Premise one is not meant to be surprising or controversial; it should be fairly easy to accept. But there do seem to be two angles from which one might reject this premise (though no one, to my awareness, has actually done so). One would stem from so-called “impersonality theory.” Impersonality theory is characterized by the post-structuralist attitude towards authorship offered in the influential papers of Roland Barthes (“Death of the Author”) and Michel Foucault (“What is an Author?”). Post-structuralists, generally speaking, argue that “there is no such thing [as the self], at least conceived as an autonomous, unified subject of experience” (Lamarque 104). This notion of selfhood



could conceivably challenge the notion of literary narratives and philosophical counterexamples as creations: if there is not a unified self, then who or what does the creating? However, any such argument from this stance against creation involves both a misreading of Barthes and Foucault and challenges regarding the definition of “create.”

Both Barthes and Foucault are concerned with arguing the dissolving of self to interrogate the role that authors have in the meaning of a work, not to interrogate the act of creation itself. Neither imply that such a creative *act* does not still occur. For Foucault, this analysis takes place through a systematic elaboration of the “author function,” the conclusion being that there need be no interpretive limit to a text nor an attribution of the text to a particular person (137–8). For Barthes, the very act of writing destroys all of its origin points; texts speak, not a person (142). This multiplicity of meaning sparks Barthes’s famous claim that “the birth of the reader must be at the death of the Author,” that any given text’s unity “lies not in its origin but in its destination” (148). Both theorists argue against the author’s control of a text’s meaning, but this does not amount to an argument against the physical creation of the words on the page. Additionally, the word “create” implies that some thing or idea comes about as a result of intention; that intention need not come from a unified self to be considered creation. This appeals to our common sense understanding of “create,” too: I feel that I am creating the specific string of words that are being written on this page through an intentional act, even though the intention of that physical act is not one and the same thing as creating the words’ meaning.

The only other objection to the premise that literary narratives and philosophical counterexamples are created would require a strong Platonism that extends itself past music and mathematics to include literature, as well. Just as Platonists of music hold that all abstract sound structures already exist and are discovered instead of created, and just as Platonists of mathematics hold that all mathematical theorems already exist and are discovered instead of created, a Platonist of literature would hold that all linguistic structures already exist and are discovered instead of created (Lamarque 73–4). Thus, any given work of literature would not be created by its author—it would be discovered by its author. There are two things to note here: first, I am not aware of anyone that has actually forwarded this conception of literature, though some do for music and mathematics; second, my argument can accept Platonism without sacrificing its validity.<sup>3</sup> Even if a Platonistic conception of literature is true, the only adjustment this argument would require is a shift from “creations” and “creation-types” to “discoveries” and “discovery-types.” Though I do not accept Platonism, there is little impetus on my part to defend the argument I have presented against Platonism; the two can coexist quite easily.

*Premise two: If individual literary narratives and individual philosophical counterexamples are creations, then literary narratives and philosophical counterexamples are creation-types.*

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<sup>3</sup> In *Poetics* 6, Aristotle insists on poetry’s plots as mimetic (as opposed to propositional) of life and action (1450a–b). This is somewhat similar to what Lamarque calls a Platonist view of literature. Still, the two differ. Imitative plots may “discover” and use (or in other words, reproduce) a specific ordering of events, but a literary Platonism would hold that the specific string of words that communicate those events already existed prior to being written or spoken. Moreover, in the opening sentence of *Poetics* 9, Aristotle writes that “it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen,—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity” (1451a–b). If part of a poet’s function is to relate what may happen, that seems to support poetic works as creations more so than discoveries.

This premise simply moves from the individual to the classificatory term that brings those individuals together: if there is a plant referred to as an orchid, then “orchid” refers to a type of plant, a plant-type. If there is a creation referred to as a literary narrative, then “literary narrative” refers to a type of creation, a creation-type. The same goes for philosophical counterexamples.

No doubt the term “creation-type” is functioning much like the term “genre” in this argument. “Genre” may be used if one prefers, but I opt for creation-type. This is because notions of genre are so closely tied to writing and the arts. Of course, I am considering two creation-types here that require writing—literary narratives and philosophical counterexamples—but as the orchid example shows, the point being made is of much greater breadth than writing and the arts: if there is a drink vessel referred to as a “cup,” then there is a drink-vessel-type, “cup”; if there is an article of clothing referred to as a “sock,” then there is an article-of-clothing-type, “sock”; so on and so forth. “Creation-type,” therefore, seems more appropriate.

Of course, I accept that literary narratives and philosophical counterexamples cannot be precisely typified: at what point does a narrative lose enough value or aesthetic appeal such that it ceases to be literary and becomes, for example, a part of popular culture? This is a fair objection, but I will not attempt to outline all that is essential to literary narratives as literary narratives or philosophical counterexamples as philosophical counterexamples. Defining literariness or providing necessary and sufficient conditions for a piece of writing to be qualified as such is particularly tricky and so falls well outside the scope of this project. I do acknowledge the importance of doing so, but for the current purposes, the all-encompassing definitions can be practically substituted by the act of

classifying individual creations according to a simple, binary, yes-or-no system that puts individual works up against common sense understandings of the two terms: surely a Charles Dickens novel counts as literature, while the short story I wrote when I was six years old does not. As a result, *Great Expectations* (1861) is implicated by my argument, while the short story I wrote as a child is not. The same logic applies to philosophical counterexamples. For the purposes of this project, then, a creation that is not a clear yes or no (i.e., “maybes”) as a literary narrative or philosophical counterexample can be understood as not implicated. Because I am not supplying precise definitions, all “maybes” should be safely put in the “no” category to secure the soundness of the argument, albeit by weakening it and implicating far fewer works. Nonetheless, I am satisfied with this as a starting point.

*Premise three: Therefore, literary narratives and philosophical counterexamples are creation-types.*

This is not only a premise but also the conclusion of a syllogism; it is entailed from premises one and two. If premises one and two are accepted, so must be premise three.

*Premise four: If elucidating some creations of creation-type A shows that the creations contain creations of creation-type B, and those creations of creation-type A were created before the creations of creation-type B, then creation-type A can help form new creations of creation-type B.*

Premise four performs much of the conceptual legwork required for the validity and soundness of the conclusion. The first step, however, is to describe what is meant by “elucidating.” The term is being used in this premise and premise five in a manner

derived from Lamarque's *Philosophy of Literature*, which he borrows from Monroe Beardsley's *Aesthetics*. The term is contrasted with "explication," "the investigation of verbal or sentence meaning" and with "interpretation," "the attempt to assign significance or see the point of something" (Lamarque 143). By contrast, Lamarque later states that "[i]n Beardsley's sense, elucidation is the quest for details about a narrative—what occurs in the world of the work—which are not made explicit in the narrative itself" (145). Elucidation, therefore, is not strictly concerned with the complex and vexed issue of meaning. More importantly, elucidation names what already exists in the world of a work but is not immediately apparent, whereas interpretation—saying what a work is "about"—opens itself up to the possibility of constructivist theories, which argue that interpretations adds—in the ontological sense—something to a work (i.e., constructs a work) (Lamarque 158).

To exemplify these different terms, consider the following narrative sentences: "The woman cast a downward glance at the crumpled cardboard box filled with objects from her past. Blankly staring at the tall grass dancing around the box's bottom perimeter, the smile that had spread across her face but moments ago began to fade with proportion to the number of memories she was slowly recollecting. Bursting with sudden energy, she broke from her lull, picked up the box, and threw it with all her force into the river below, turning her back as it fell, letting those memories sink even deeper into her consciousness than the heavy box would sink in the dark water of the river." Using the framework of Lamarque and Beardsley, explication, elucidation, and interpretation would each provide unique possibilities in response to this narrative text. Explicating the text, for instance, might fixate on the metaphoric "bursting with sudden energy" to denote its

meaning in the context of the narrative. Elucidation's set of possibilities would be limited to those statements that a reader can infer from the narrative, even if they are not integrated into the narrative: for example, the statements that the woman was born or that the woman believed she knew what was in the box. Finally, an interpretation of this brief narrative might explore and analyze the symbol of the psychological landscape—of the box in the river, even the river's subsumption into oceans, symbolizing memories' subsumption into the subconscious. While literary explication and interpretation are valuable endeavors, it will be crucial to this project to stay within the bounds of elucidating narrative, precisely because elucidation *names what already exists* in the narrative. If I am understood to add something to a narrative that does not already exist within it, then I would not be proving that literary narratives can help form new philosophical counterexamples. Elucidation is key.

I adapt this sense of the term for the current premise: to elucidate a creation of creation-type A is to show what already exists in the creation but is not immediately apparent. If elucidation reveals a creation of another creation-type (B), and the creation of creation-type A predates the creation of creation-type B rendered through elucidation, then the creation of creation-type A could have helped form the creation of creation-type B. Finally, if the creation of creation-type A could have helped form a creation of creation-type B, it follows that creations of creation-type A can help form new creations of creation-type B. This is self-consciously couched in conditional terms; it is of course not true that creations of creation-type A *will* help form new creations of creation-type B, only that they are capable of doing so.

*Premise five: Elucidating some literary narratives shows that the literary narratives contain philosophical counterexamples, and the novels were created before the philosophical counterexamples that they contain.*

This premise will be defended and illustrated over the course of Chapter I. There, using the work of Victorian author Wilkie Collins and twentieth-century analytic philosopher, Edmund Gettier, I elucidate Collins's narrative to show two cases of philosophy in literature in which the literary narrative both contained and predated the famous philosophical counterexample given by Gettier. The fact that Collins's narrative predated this philosopher's is, as this argument implies, crucial to understanding literature as a potential source for new philosophical ideas (and therefore engaging in philosophy and literature).<sup>4</sup>

*Conclusion: Elucidating literary narratives can help form new philosophical counterexamples.*

The conclusion follows from premises four and five, which require the terminology of premise three. If premises three through five are accepted, this conclusion follows. If this conclusion is accepted, literary narratives are a source for novel

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams identifies in *Marxism and Literature* the ways in which emergent cultural practices either oppose or offer alternatives to existing, dominant culture. The "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships" that attend emergence continually stream into (or fail to stream into) the dominant culture, making them sometimes hard to notice (123). Williams, finding a foothold in Marxist theory, states that emergent culture is most salient when a new social class is developing. He uses the growing working class of nineteenth-century England and the concurrent incorporation of working class concerns into journalism and entertainment as his main example (124–5). Emergent culture must, according to Williams, adapt old forms or create new forms to prod dominant culture with whatever set of oppositional or alternative values, meanings, practices, or relationships that the emergent culture may have (126). The notion that emergent culture can—or perhaps must—be expressed through new and popular forms is highly relevant to my analysis. Implicitly critiquing (opposing or offering an alternative to) British empiricism (a dominant cultural value), *The Woman in White*—the first example of sensation novel (a form adapted from the realist Victorian novel)—contains two Gettier problems (an emergent epistemological idea that registers a new relationship between justification, truth, and belief and knowledge).

counterexamples and thus a source for philosophical innovations. To the imagined philosopher who might react by accepting literature as a source for counterexamples to epistemological theories but ask why the reading of literary narratives in this manner would ever be preferable to traditional philosophizing, I give Martha Nussbaum's answer: "Schematic philosophers' examples almost always lack the particularity, the emotive appeal, the absorbing plottedness, the variety and indeterminacy, of good fiction" (46).<sup>5</sup> In the "emotive appeal" and "absorbing plottedness" of literature lies its ability to better establish the counterexample (philosophical tool); in the "variety and indeterminacy" of literature lies its ability to create new counterexamples, to be a philosophical source. And it is perhaps this latter quality that contributed to the presence of Gettier problems in literature well before Gettier's articulation of them per se. And it is perhaps this latter quality that could contribute to readers elucidating literature's epistemological foresight once more, if only given the chance.

The goals of Chapter I are, first, to provide enough philosophical background to stress the significance of Gettier's counterexamples and, second, to perform the work of philosophy in literature such that literature is granted status as a philosophical source.

The goals of Chapter II are to contemplate the opposite side of the philosophy and literature coin: to propose ways in which contemporary academic analytic philosophy can add to understanding Collins's novel specifically, and perhaps literature more generally.

Chapter II therefore takes up the work of responsibilist virtue epistemologists, a school of

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<sup>5</sup> This is Nussbaum's response to a rather similar imagined philosopher, who asks the following of literature's potential for moral philosophy: "Why can't we investigate everything we want to investigate by using complex examples of the sort that moral philosophers are very good at inventing?" (46).



thought arising after and as a result of Gettier's work, to further develop my modeling of the fitness of a "philosophy and literature" approach as I understand it. I show in Chapter II that Marian Halcombe's exemplary cognitive character counters the unhealthy epistemic community created by Sir Percival and Count Fosco. Other characters respond to the epistemic values embodied in Marian's open-mindedness, intellectual perseverance, and intellectual humility—a cast of important intellectual virtues. When Sir Percival and his attendant deceptions first visit Limmeridge, Marian's open-mindedness causes Mr. Gilmore to transition from acting with closed-mindedness to acting characteristically of one who is open-minded; when Sir Percival and Count Fosco insist on obtaining Laura Fairlie's signature, Marian's intellectual perseverance prevents Laura from acting with irresolution, causing her to instead act characteristically of one who intellectually perseveres; and when Walter Hartright scrambles for a weak point in Count Fosco's conspiracy, the product of Marian's intellectual humility (i.e., her examination of conscience in her journal) enables the epistemic success of Walter Hartright's intellectually humble actions. On each of these occasions, both Marian and the character she affects counter the unhealthy epistemic community created by Sir Percival and Count Fosco's concealment of secrets and telling of lies. And on each of these occasions, the same narratorial act that characterizes likewise contributes to the narrative's resolution.

A final hurdle to successfully positioning alternative responsibilist virtue epistemology as an apt source for literary understanding requires some demonstration as to how the above interpretation is *new*. The space for this novelty is clear enough, though, for the traditional dominance of belief-based epistemologies has made its mark on approaches to Victorian novelists such as Wilkie Collins. This influence should come as

no surprise, given that Collins was writing in the aftermath of British empiricism, which, though variegated, gave the relationship between evidence, belief, and knowledge significant focus. The details of influential early empiricists such as John Locke or David Hume is not of concern here, nor are the effects such thinkers had on nineteenth-century theorists of evidence such as Thomas Starkie. Rather, I am interested in showing how Collins's proximity to British empiricism has led to present-day work that restricts its epistemological considerations to the traditional object of epistemological evaluation (belief) and properties (justification and knowledge). This restriction leaves open the possibility for responsibilist virtue epistemology to shed new light on Collins's novel, in that virtue epistemologies subordinate belief and justification beneath the import of the cognitive character an agent manifests in intellectual pursuits and the subsequent effects those cognitive features have on other thinkers and knowers.

Geoffrey Baker has examined British empiricism in relation to the Victorian novel. Surveying a fair number of empiricists, spanning from older figures such as Francis Bacon to early twentieth-century legal theorists such as John Henry Wigmore, Baker observes a somewhat stable picture of belief, with philosophers holding belief distinct from knowledge in its lack of certainty, on a spectrum from conviction backed by reliable evidence to "insane belief" (41–5). For terminological consistency, Baker coins the poles of this spectrum "belief-in-evidence" and "belief-against-the-evidence" (40), pointing out that the Victorian novel upholds this picture of belief, but with a notable difference:

The novel, though, frequently parts ways with these other discourses in one fascinating respect, for despite this ambivalent mobilization of belief in British

empiricism and in the evidentiary practices and theories said to arise from British empiricism, belief in the novel turns out almost invariably to be right and in particular to prevail against the ostensibly more empirically grounded forms of evidence, which belief dismisses. (46)

In other words, while many British empiricists would have found belief in the face of good evidence technically insane or irrational, the Victorian novel often employs characters who believe otherwise—against the evidence offered to them—and yet turn out to be correct. Baker appeals in particular to Collins’s later detective novel, *The Law and The Lady* (1875), to show how Valeria’s belief in Eustace’s innocence is rooted in a sort of emotional certainty rather than experiential or evidentiary certainty. Despite Valeria’s “belief otherwise” against the evidence that supports Eustace’s guilt, Valeria, contra empirical evidence, is ultimately correct (Baker 48–9). The lack of detail a reader is given regarding Valeria’s past experience of her husband underwrites, Baker further notes, the ambivalence of *The Law and the Lady* toward evidence and experience as ways of knowing (49). Valeria does not refer to her knowledge of his character based on past experience of him as a reason for believing in his innocence. It is, in other words, neither circumstantial evidence nor experience of her husband’s character that spearheads her belief formation; she just believes in his innocence, and believes correctly.

Ann-Marie Dunbar has also considered the ways in which Collins’s fiction “taps into mid-century enthusiasm for circumstantial evidence as a means of discovering truth and producing knowledge” only to have that evidence ultimately be insufficient for producing knowledge (98). Focusing on how legal shifts in nineteenth-century England saw direct, eyewitness testimony supplanted by the professional construction and

interpretation of evidence by lawyers, Dunbar inspects the ways in which criminal confessions are often at odds with evidence in the Victorian sensation novel—a sensational dissonance between the new and old ways of knowing (99). Regarding *The Woman in White*, Dunbar recognizes Count Fosco’s confession to Walter Hartright near the end of the novel as both inconsistent with Walter’s evidence (98) and so performative and digressive that it is not entirely reliable itself (107). The separate insufficiency and combined inconsistency of evidence and confession suggests to Dunbar that

[a]lthough these novels are clearly invested in the new models of knowing and narrating, they also reveal a deep cultural anxiety about such detached, objective modes of knowledge and representation. Confession's formal alterity in these texts points to the increasing hegemony of circumstantial evidence and disinterested forms of knowledge, but also to their failure to tell the whole story or to get it right. (99)

Dunbar’s point is similar to Baker’s; both note how, alone, beliefs derived from evidence in the Victorian novel—and in Collins’s fiction in particular—are often incapable of allowing characters to get at truth and knowledge. Moreover, Dunbar specifically points to this convention as expressive of epistemological anxiety involving evidence’s ability to construct beliefs that amount to knowledge, an implicit critique of empiricist discourses.

Historically-driven studies such as these leave open not only a space for a responsibilist virtue epistemology reading of Collins’s work but also justification for it. Baker and Dunbar (in the vein of British empiricism) pay more attention to beliefs and evidence rather than the agent(s) who produced those beliefs. The authors of these

approaches indicate that Collins's work expressed doubt and anxiety over the (supposedly) disinterested way of knowing supplied by experiential and evidence-backed belief. Why not focus on the epistemological role of character, motives, and action as well? The cultural anxiety over evidence-backed-belief's inadequacy and Walter's qualification of the story in terms of character traits (i.e., patience and resolution) situates responsibilist virtue epistemology as an apt yet untapped source for gaining new insight into *The Woman in White*.

## CHAPTER I

### NARRATIVE ELUCIDATION AND THE GETTIER PROBLEMS IN *THE WOMAN IN*

### *WHITE*

Imagine.

It's nine o'clock on Saturday morning. You are holding a twice-emptied coffee mug, smiling to yourself about the patterns of the coffee grounds on its interior. On your nose and ears sit a pair of newly prescribed glasses, vivifying the colors in your home. Sunlight peeks through open windows. Doors are open. Lights are on. Sufficient sleep and caffeine enable you to feel both alert and relaxed. You, indeed, are primed for empirical investigation.

Peering up from the coffee mug, you turn your gaze towards the doorway to your right: the office. Do you want to spend this Saturday morning in your office? No, you do not. But alas, you are a graduate student, so your body spends as much time in this space on Saturdays as any other day.

Looking in, you spy a book on the right side of your desk. Its back cover faces up. An enlarged, lowercase "b" . . . red and black text—ah! This must be the Broadview edition of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, silently beckoning you to your desk. Walter Hartright and Marian Halcombe await you.

From this sensory evidence, you come to form and believe the proposition, "My copy of *The Woman in White* is on my desk." As you approach the desk, however, doubt begins to creep in. The book is slimmer than *The Woman in White*. The red text is a shade pinker than it seemed before. One step closer, two steps closer, then you realize: this is

not the Broadview edition of *The Woman in White*. This is the Broadview edition of *Heart and Science*. O; the deception!

Moments later, though, you find that your belief held true: on the opposite side of your desk, two books lay atop a third, and that third just so happens to be *The Woman in White*. Your copy is on your desk. Your belief was true. You knew *The Woman in White* was on your desk after all.

Or did you?

What the above scenario represents is, in fact, more than a playful narrative introduction using second-person pronouns. Though it may be that as well, the introduction renders an example of a so-called “Gettier problem,” in which a subject holds a justified, true belief (JTB) but is shown to not satisfy the conditions for having knowledge of that true belief. In this case, the belief, “my copy of *The Woman in White* is on my desk” is both justified (the subject’s senses are intact, and they have sensory and situational evidence for the proposition) and true (*The Woman in White* is on the desk), but as the example makes clear, the belief is not knowledge at the moment it is formed. First offered in 1963 in Edmund Gettier’s two and half page essay, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?,” the Gettier problem at least challenged and at most disproved the predominant theory of knowledge for over two millennia (Borges et al. vii).

In this chapter, I will first detail the philosophical weight of the Gettier problem before relating the two Gettier problems present in *The Woman in White*, both of which are accessible and describable via narrative elucidation: in the burial-ground scene two-thirds of the way through the novel, Walter has the justified, true belief that Laura’s body

is in the burial ground, but the belief is not knowledge; similarly, due to Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick's likeness, the asylum proprietor had the justified, true belief that Anne Catherick was Anne Catherick, but the belief was not knowledge. By elucidating the contents and justification for both of these beliefs, I seek to show that literature can be a source for philosophical advancement. This is the first headlight of the "two-headlight" methodology proposed in the introductory chapter. In Chapter II, then, I show one way in which analytic philosophy can be a source for literary critical insights.

Perhaps the best place to begin is with Gettier's famous refutation of the justified, true belief theory of knowledge (K=JTB). Put in formal conditions, K=JTB goes like so:

Subject S knows that proposition p iff:

- (i) p is true,
- (ii) S believes that p, and
- (iii) S is justified in believing that p. (Gettier 121)

In his essay, Gettier simply and effectively undermines the notion that these conditions are sufficient for a subject S to know that proposition p.<sup>6</sup> After providing the above conditions, Gettier equates the conditions to two other sets of conditions proposed by contemporary epistemologists (Roderick Chisholm and A.J. Ayer), and then describes two scenarios in which a subject forms a justified belief that is clearly true, yet does not satisfy conditions for knowledge (Gettier 121-23). The Gettier problem, as a result,

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<sup>6</sup> Though syntactically awkward, "subject S knows that proposition p" is the standard way to refer to a subject's having propositional knowledge.



rejuvenated and reoriented twentieth- and twenty-first-century epistemology in seeking an answer to the question: what conditions are sufficient for a subject to have knowledge? But before discussing the many attempts of philosophers to answer (or avoid) this question, it is perhaps helpful to frame the importance and longevity of the JTB theory by first mentioning its birth.

It is no controversy to state that today's interest in justified, true belief finds its beginnings in the Socratic dialogues. The theories Plato attributed to Socrates seem to change throughout the dialogues, causing scholars to disagree about how to accurately understand and articulate Plato's epistemology as a whole. The JTB account of knowledge, according to Nicholas Smith, "has its *locus classicus* in Plato's *Meno*": Socrates and Meno ponder the difference between knowledge and "true opinion," leading Socrates to conclude that knowledge is but true opinion "tied down" with an explanation (Smith 33-4). As a topic in Plato's dialogues, knowledge shifts and develops in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates and Theaetetus consider as the central node of discussion numerous theories of knowledge, among them knowledge as perception and knowledge as lasting impression. The interlocutors then return to the statement in the *Meno*—knowledge as "true judgement with an account"—and the dialogue proceeds with many failed attempts at describing what qualifies as an account (Smith 44-6). Socrates ends the *Theaetetus* doubting that accounting for one's true judgment will work as a definition of for knowledge after all:

SOCRATES. Well then, what about getting hold of an account *in addition to* one's correct judgement[?] [...] the instructions turn out to be quite absurd.

THEAETETUS. In what way?

SOCRATES. When we already have a correct judgement [that includes an account] as to how something differs from everything else, those instructions tell us to add a correct judgement as to how that same thing differs from everything else [. . .] this looks like the behaviour of someone who is well and truly in darkness. (209d3–209e4, my emphasis)

The notion of a true judgment being accounted for by virtue of its differentness from other true judgments is Socrates and Theaetetus's final attempt at defining the conditions for what comprises an account. This attempt fails, for Socrates, because of its circularity. Under these conditions for one's knowledge to require an account of one's judgment, I *know* there is a mug in front of me if I form a judgment that there is a mug in front of me, a mug is in front of me, *and* my true judgment differs from everything else. In support of my true judgment, I would need an *additional* true judgment as to how the *original* true judgment differs from everything else, leading Socrates to declare that "knowledge is neither perception, nor true judgement, nor an account added to true judgement" (210a9–210b4).

Despite Socrates rejecting a theory of knowledge similar to the JTB theory (at least in the *Theaetetus*), the intuitive strength of the JTB theory enabled this theory of knowledge to last for millennia without any major challenges. But to say that epistemology remained stagnant from the final words of Socrates and Theaetetus to the publication of Gettier's essay would be more than misleading; it would be incorrect. To be sure, epistemic inquiry and theories of knowledge were taken up by many other major

thinkers, such as Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Wittgenstein, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Locke, Hume, and Berkeley, for instance, notably recast knowledge and justification in British empiricism. They argued against the innate ideas of someone like Descartes and claimed that all our ideas and concepts derive from sensory experience, resulting in the notion that any justification for a proposition must arise from experience (Kail 112-3). Yet the way these thinkers argued to and from this epistemological position sets apart their broader philosophical scheme: Locke’s “representative realism,” which holds that our sense perceptions are representative of an objective reality, is in philosophical opposition to Berkeley’s “subjective idealism,” in which such sensory experience is constantly renewed and sustained by God (Berkeley xv-xvii).

What this shows, then, which is certainly no news to the professional analytic philosopher, is that the disciplinary boundaries of epistemology exceed the strict formulation of a theory of knowledge. Failing to acknowledge this would do a disservice to a discipline that engages in “[p]hilosophical reflection . . . [that] often reveals previously unsuspected problems for the would-be consistency, coherence, and explanatory power of what might have been our pre-philosophical concepts of knowledge” (Hetherington 5). Because my project specifically takes up Gettier problems in relation to *The Woman in White*, it is useful to invoke Roderick Chisholm’s widely cited 1964 introduction to theories of knowledge, written just after Gettier’s essay was published but before its

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview, see *Epistemology: The Key Thinkers*, edited by Stephen Hetherington, Continuum International, 2012.

import was as clear as it is now: “Most of the problems and issues constituting the ‘theory of knowledge’ were discussed in detail by Plato and Aristotle and by the Greek skeptics. There is some justification, I am afraid, for saying that the subject has made very little progress in the past two thousand years” (Chisholm 239). Given the scope of my project, this, *I am afraid*, warrants a leap from Plato to Gettier, even if doing so leaves unheard important thinkers in between.

In the process of progressing the theory that Chisholm testifies as not advancing for two thousand years, Gettier cites Chisholm’s conditions for knowledge, equating Chisholm’s conditions to those of the JTB theory before demonstrating their insufficiency (121-3). For Gettier, having propositional knowledge is not one and the same thing as holding a justified, true belief because it is possible to construct counterexamples in which subjects hold justified, true beliefs but do not appear to have propositional knowledge. Ideally, I would now attempt a review of the literature to which Gettier’s essay served as a catalyst. After 60 years, though, any brief survey of responses to Gettier is bound to be incomprehensive. As Borges et al. put it, “There seem to be more approaches to the problem than philosophers working on it” (1). Nor do these many approaches lend themselves to neat and tidy summaries; they do not evolve from common ground, and they do not differ only in minor, detail-driven points. Indeed, some epistemologists, including Brian Weatherson, are not convinced that Gettier counterexamples to the JTB theory of knowledge are adequate to justify vast reconsideration of the theory at all. Weatherson argues that support for these counterexamples rests too much on intuition. For Weatherson, “the following argument against the JTB theory is unsound”:

P1. The JTB theory says that Gettier cases are cases of knowledge.

P2. Intuition says that Gettier cases are not cases of knowledge.

P3. Intuition is trustworthy in these cases.

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C. The JTB theory is false. (27)

Objecting to P3 in this argument, Weatherson consequently complicates the very basis of the revitalization of epistemology since the 1960s, and does so, it must be said, compellingly. Other critics of Gettier's work balk at the luck involved when beliefs in Gettier counterexamples are made true (Zagzebski 68-70), and still others use the many failed attempts of philosophers trying to counter the Gettier problem to desert the method of this conversation all together, claiming that

doing epistemology in which knowledge is central, and not subordinate to belief [. . .], enables us to abandon the attempt to state necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge in terms of belief without abandoning epistemology itself. Indeed, by abandoning that fruitless search we can gain insight into epistemological problems, because we are freed to use the notion of knowledge as an instrument of understanding in ways that its subordination to belief would not permit. (Williams 5)

What Williams is picking up on is that Gettier problems and post-Gettier solutions presuppose that believing a proposition must come prior to knowing that proposition. Showing his cards quickly, Williams argues in this passage that searches stemming from this presupposition have thus far been "fruitless," and are therefore worth "abandoning."

Nevertheless, and compelling or not, the efforts of Weatherston, Zagzebski, and Williams have done little to defuse attempts at solving Gettier counterexamples, proposing new theories of knowledge, and further explicating the JTB theory.

It could be said that, even among those who grant Gettier's examples more credence, few are inclined to outright drop the JTB theory. Surely—surely—for a subject to have knowledge of a proposition they must believe that proposition, and that belief must prove true. Knowledge must therefore be comprised of true belief with the addition of something else. As a result, the work of Gettierites became less a task of constructing a theory of knowledge from scratch and more a task of articulating precisely how a true belief transforms into knowledge, rather reminiscent of Socrates and Theaetetus. In this way, the question turned from sufficient conditions for knowledge to sufficient conditions for justification.

The contributors to this conversation are many, and their thinking has split into schools that, in turn, have disagreements even amongst themselves (hence the difficulty in neat summaries). Chief among those seeking conditions for justification are the reliabilists and evidentialists, with philosophical progenitors Alvin Goldman, and Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, respectively. Though not strictly concerned with justification, in conversation with reliabilism and evidentialism are responsibilism and contextualism. I will cover the basic ideas of the reliabilists and evidentialists before turning to the responsibilists and contextualists, as their theories are not as justification-centric.

Goldman, the reliabilist, confronted the causal connections employed in a variety of Gettier situations as early as 1967; specifically, Goldman noted that there must be a

causal connection between reality and one's belief about reality for that belief to be justified (364). A byproduct of this position, and one that holds through later versions of Goldman's argument, is that justification for one proposition does not entail justification for a different proposition that the original proposition logically entails: if S is justified in believing that p, and p entails q, S is not necessarily justified in believing that q by virtue of their justification that p. Goldman skillfully advances this argument's logic to refute one of Gettier's counterexamples (357-58).

However, this response to the Gettier problem, though intuitively strong, fell to later counterexamples. In response to these, Goldman sought conditions for justification that rested on the reliability of the cognitive processes employed. After facing some early challenges, these conditions appeared in fully revised form in 2000:

If S's belief that p:

(i) results from a reliable process; and

(ii) there is no (unconditionally or conditionally)<sup>8</sup> reliable process available to S that, had he also used it, would have resulted in his not believing p; then, S's belief that p is justified. (qtd. in Gutting 62)

But even this fully revised version has its issues. As Gary Gutting points out, it is unclear what "available" means or could mean in (ii), and such meaning is a necessary

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<sup>8</sup> An unconditionally reliable process, for Goldman, is one that does not involve derivation from other beliefs; conditionally reliable processes do involve this (Gutting 60).

demarcation if reliabilism were to be especially convincing (63). If it is unclear what processes qualify as available, it is unclear what qualifies as knowledge.

While Goldman was in the process of developing his position, the evidentialists, an epistemic school of thought expressed most clearly in Feldman and Conee's 1985 essay, "Evidentialism," responded directly to the reliabilists and other related theses of epistemic justification that argued that "epistemic justification depends upon the cognitive capacities of people, or upon the cognitive processes or information-gathering practices that led to the attitude" (16). Moving away from the import of "processes" or "practices," Feldman and Conee defended a thesis that places doxastic attitudes in direct relation to the quality of evidence backing a subject's belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment with respect to any given proposition. Formally, their position is as follows: "Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified for S at t if and only if having D toward p fits the evidence S has at t" (15). In other words, believing, not believing, or suspending belief in a particular proposition at a particular time is epistemically justified if and only if that doxastic attitude accords with the evidence a subject has for that particular proposition at that particular time. These conditions for epistemic justification, Feldman and Conee maintain, offer a normative evaluation of subjects' doxastic attitudes: if an individual has "overwhelming perceptual evidence" for a proposition, then the evidentialist thesis generates enough normative force to hold that this individual "ought to believe that proposition," and vice versa (19).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Such normative force refers to epistemic normativity; this is not the same as having moral force. That is, one who does not believe a claim they ought is epistemically culpable, not necessarily morally culpable.



Needless to say, Feldman and Conee's work did not cause epistemologists to dust off their hands, pack up their bags, and move on to something else. Some 15 years later, for instance, Keith DeRose proposed a series of counterexamples to the evidentialist thesis that questioned, if they did not refute, the position. The first of these counterexamples takes issue with what one "ought" to believe on evidentialist grounds. In this scenario, a subject, Henry, has perfect evidence that proposition *p*, does in fact believe that proposition *p*, but believes that proposition *p* not due to the perfect evidence but to decidedly weak and inadequate evidence (DeRose 697-99). Given the force of this counterexample, DeRose states that "Henry ought not to believe *p* at all, much less believe it to the degree that he does[,] . . . [so] Feldman's evidentialist thesis . . . gets this case wrong" (698). My intuition is much the same. While the evidentialists represent an important milestone in the search for epistemic justification, I take Keith DeRose's refutation *prima facie* as decisive.

Adapting a version of reliabilism proposed by Ernest Sosa, but to a different end, Lorraine Code's "Toward a 'Responsibilist' Epistemology" lay tracks for an epistemology that shifts emphasis from what is known to who is knowing. The central defense for the shift in emphasis claims that excluding the characteristics of the subject who knows and focusing only on that which is known can "produce only a partial account of the nature and conditions of knowledge" (Code 30). Trying to fill in what such a "partial account" has left incomplete, Code aims to "develop a theory of epistemic responsibility as a potential new focal point for a theory of knowledge" (29). In performing the shift from a proposition-centric to a subject-centric theory of knowledge, an epistemologist must begin to be attentive to and evaluate the intellectual virtues a

subject uses in belief formation, virtues Code notes are analogous, but not reducible, to moral virtues.<sup>11</sup>

To demonstrate, Code makes a simple comparison using a consequentialist ethical framework. For a consequentialist, a type of action is rarely absolutely justified, but an instance of that action can be morally justified for a certain person at a certain time if it is aiming for the best possible outcome; likewise, a belief can be epistemically justified for a certain person at a certain time if it is aiming for the best possible epistemic outcome (Code 32). Crucially, Code's point is not that one is justified in a belief—or worse, has knowledge—simply because the belief in a proposition would benefit them. The point, rather, is that justification could be grounded in a manner analogous to an ethical framework (e.g., the consequences of believing that black mold is good for me to eat will be epistemically bad because it is untrue; therefore, I ought not believe that black mold is good for me to eat). This is by no means Code's final analysis of knowledge. It is, instead, a simple example as to how the vocabulary that spans ethical and epistemic disciplinary contexts may be more than semantic. Building from the consequentialist example and analogous potentiality of ethical and epistemological frameworks, Code decided that the virtue from which all other epistemic virtues derives is “epistemic responsibility” (34).

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<sup>11</sup> Evaluating intellectual virtues sounds very similar to reliabilism. Indeed, the two are very similar, but they do remain distinct. Code points toward this distinction: “I call mine a ‘responsibilist’ position in contradistinction to Sosa's proposed ‘reliabilism’, at least where it is human knowledge that is under discussion. This is because the concept ‘responsibility’ can allow emphasis upon the active nature of the knower/believer that the concept ‘reliability’ cannot” (39).

Code prefers the word “responsibility” over “reliability” because “responsibility” implies decision-making and accountability on the part of the knower. To use her example, “[w]e would speak of a ‘reliable’ computer, not a ‘responsible’ one” (40). This implicates the knower or would-be knower as having an active role in their cognitive structuring and, therefore, in their belief formation, a subtle change that so fundamentally adapts the reliabilist thesis that it can no longer be understood as part of the same theory of knowledge. The shift enables Code to direct her attention towards subjects as particular people, in a particular place at particular time, immersed in a particular community of knowers. Moreover, it allows Code the ability to evaluate subjects as agents who do or do not enact intellectually virtuous practices. Broadly speaking, Code borrows these virtues from Aristotle: wisdom, prudence, and intelligence (40). Code means something precise by the virtues of an epistemically responsible agent:

The intellectually virtuous person [. . .] is one who finds value in knowing and understanding how things really are. S/he resists the temptation to live with partial explanations where fuller ones are attainable, the temptation to live in fantasy or in a world of dream or illusion, considering it better to know, despite the tempting comfort and complacency that a life of fantasy or illusion (or well-tinged with fantasy or illusion) can offer. (44)

Such a view is, by my lights, quite captivating: how could one not be drawn to a theory of knowledge with the call to action for would-be knowers to continuously chip away at their partial explanations? This surely seems the (albeit, more nuanced version) of the method that one uses to acquire knowledge in day-to-day life: if I want to say I know

something, I try to gain a full explanation of that thing. Yet, as David Lewis later showed, partial explanations are not easily overcome and are often resisted.

The final position mentioned here is contextualism, a worthy and significant inclusion precisely because of how it drastically differs from reliabilism, evidentialism, and some other post-Gettier efforts. While many others sought (and are seeking) conditions for justification, David Lewis—in his bubbly and exclamation-point-filled essay “Elusive Knowledge”—complicated the importance of justification *per se* and aimed, instead, for a middle ground between epistemic fallibilism and epistemic skepticism. These two poles are formed by the obvious but provocative notion that knowledge be infallible, that to know a proposition a subject must have eliminated every single possibility in which that proposition could be untrue (Lewis 549). This is implausible. How could one ever eliminate each and every possibility that would undermine the truth of a proposition in which they believe? Though tautological claims, themselves subject to debate, have some hope of retaining their status as knowledge, seemingly basic propositions would fail to qualify as knowledge under an infallibilist definition. Take, for instance, the proposition “I own a car.” Most living human beings who own a car, are capable of understanding the English language, and recognize their own existence would say they know this to be true. To know this, however, using the notion that knowledge be infallible, one must eliminate every possibility that renders this statement false. This would require not only a keen sense of the pronoun “I” and a thoughtful definition of what “car” actually refers to; it would also require that infinite possibilities could be refuted, which is not achievable. Not only that, but such possibilities would need to be *constantly* refuted in order to maintain knowledge of the

proposition: for instance, there is always the possibility that someone has stolen the title of the car and signed their own name (giving them “ownership”), and this possibility would recur each time one’s attention is taken away from the car’s title. Even if this were the only possibility that need be refuted (which is not the case), to have knowledge under the infallibilist definition would require that one’s attention be permanently fixed on the title to ensure knowledge that one owned one’s car—impractical, at the least.

If this were not enough, some of the simplest and most fundamental propositions drawn from our sense perceptions cannot hold up to the infallibility requirement, the most famous example being the skeptical argument against knowing “that I have hands.”

David Lewis expresses the argument in the following manner:

P1: I have hands implies that I am not a handless being;

P2: I am not a handless being implies that I am not a handless being deceived by a demon into thinking I have hands;

P3: Therefore, “I have hands” implies that I am not a handless being deceived by a demon into thinking that I have hands;

P4: Therefore, “I know that I have hands” implies that I know I have hands and am not deceived by a demon into thinking that I have hands;

P5: I don’t know that I am not a handless being deceived by a demon into thinking that I have hands

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C: I don’t know that I have hands. (564)

To bring the argument back to Lewis's point: because I cannot eliminate the possibility that I am a handless being deceived by a demon into thinking that I have hands (driving a car I think I own), under the infallibilist understanding of knowledge, I cannot know that I have hands (or a car for them to drive).

There are two options here: accept that knowledge must be infallible or reject that knowledge must be infallible. As shown, if we accept knowledge as infallible, we can know very little or perhaps nothing at all (not even that we have hands, which may be apparitional—made apparent by a demon). This is skepticism. If we reject knowledge as infallible, we must accept that the propositions we claim to know are, in fact, fallible. This is fallibilism. Neither of these options are favorable: we either know almost nothing for sure, or we “know” only propositions that always may be false.

With a stroke of philosophical ingenuity, Lewis locates a position between fallibilism and skepticism by making knowledge context-dependent; contextualism allows knowledge to remain infallible, but skepticism is avoided because the possibilities that a subject must eliminate are delimited by epistemic context. As Lewis jocosely puts it, “S knows that P iff S's evidence eliminates every possibility in which not-P – Psst! – except for those possibilities that we are properly ignoring” (554). The obvious question that follows from this, and the question that Lewis spends the majority of his essay answering, is what qualifies as “properly ignoring” a possibility. To this end, Lewis provides and explains a list of seven rules; let it suffice for the current purpose to say that Lewis explains how his rules allow knowledge to retain some semblance of being

infallible without committing one to skepticism and how his rules solve the Gettier problem (554-560). This is a major achievement.

But Lewis's theory of knowledge does have one peculiar result: knowledge in degrees. Though belief has long been discussed in terms of degree, Lewis's placement of knowledge on a spectrum is unique. Indeed, we often speak of knowledge as a binary, and this is the rather common-sense way of understanding what it means to know something. For example, if I say I know I am hungry, I mean that I *know* I am hungry. Knowledge of hunger is not knowing that I am very hungry—hungry to a high degree.

Lewis's theory describes "knowledge-by-degrees" by positing two ways to achieve knowledge that p: eliminating possibilities in which not-p and "properly" ignoring possibilities in which not-p. Put differently, S knows that p if each not-p possibility has been *either* eliminated *or* "properly" ignored. So, consider a subject, S, and two propositions, p and q. Using the contextualist theory of knowledge, let us assume that S has knowledge that p and knowledge that q. For p, S has eliminated many, many possibilities that not-p and is only "properly" ignoring those that are highly impractical or impossible to eliminate. For q, S has eliminated some possibilities, but knowledge was mostly achieved in S's context for q by properly ignoring possibilities that not-q. According to Lewis, S's knowledge that p would be "better" knowledge than S's knowledge that q. In other words, the elimination of possibilities yields "better" knowledge than properly ignoring possibilities (Lewis 562).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Philosophers in this strain agree that some possibilities can be "properly" ignored; the debate in establishing knowledge concerns what possibilities can be agreed upon as proper to ignore.

I might now encourage a reader to pause and reflect on the information presented in this chapter so far. There were two main questions I wished to answer here: (1) what was the Gettier problem? (2) why was (and is) the Gettier problem so important? These questions have been addressed primarily by surveying pre- and post-Gettier knowledge theorizing. But to reiterate: “Gettier problem” is a term used to refer to counterexamples—first formulated by Edmund Gettier in 1963—that show justified, true belief is not equivalent to propositional knowledge. Attempt, for a moment, to come up with conditions for propositional knowledge: how is it that you *know* you are reading right now? Chances are, this attempt will move something along the lines of, “I know I’m reading because I believe I’m reading, my senses and understanding of the relevant definitions justify that I am reading, and it is true that I am reading”—in other words, you know you are reading because you have a justified, true belief. Such is the draw of the JTB theory. It just *feels* right. The ingenuity of Gettier to provide a counterexample to the theory is astounding—mind-boggling, even.

The significance of Gettier’s work is clearly expressed through the number of responses it has received. From those who reject the counterexamples and remain convinced that knowledge is justified, true belief; to those who accept that the counterexamples have shown a need for better understanding conditions for justification; to those who abandon justification as a component of knowledge all-together; the Gettier problem has proved long-lasting in its effect on epistemology, and no matter the stance taken, its impact cannot be ignored.



When K ≠ JTB in *The Woman in White*

*The Woman in White* is a story about the elusiveness of knowledge—its acquisition, its retention, its spread. The narrative twists and turns frequently as the reader turns pages, withholding and disclosing secrets from and to characters and readers alike. It is told primarily by a character–narrator, Walter Hartright, who recounts a dramatic period of his life during which he transitioned from a middle-class drawing-master to the owner of the large estate, Limmeridge House. Because many of the pertinent events take place outside the scope of his experience, Hartright solicits supplementary narratives from a cast of other characters, rendering him as much the story’s chief editor as he is the main protagonist or narrator. As an early reviewer wrote,

Mr. Collins’s plot is a work of elaborate art. The reader is long kept in a real state of uncertainty—first, as to what the mystery is; and secondly, how it is to be cleared up: it is never possible to see more than a very few pages ahead; while all the time the attention is kept alert by suggestive hints, which show you that the writer himself never loses sight of his plan. Such a story [. . .] would be obviously spoiled by the previous knowledge of a meagre outline: and we forbear to give it.

(Review from *Guardian*, 1860; Page 89-90)

In contrast to this reviewer’s forbearance, I will offer a “meagre” outline of the story.

Walter’s first experiences at Limmeridge are in a professional capacity, teaching half-sisters Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe. Laura soon emerges as a love-interest for Hartright, despite the class differences between them and her prior engagement to the iniquitous and conniving Sir Percival Glyde. After Marian, who has easily detected

Walter's not-so-secret love for Laura, advises him to leave Limmeridge, he decides to join an archaeological expedition in Central America, hoping that time and separation will lessen his passions. In his absence, many misfortunes befall Laura. Heeding her father's deathbed wish, she marries Sir Percival despite her feelings for Walter. The debt-ridden antagonist duo of Sir Percival and his friend Count Fosco then proceed to manipulate Laura out of her fortune for their own financial interests. Finding this more difficult than expected, Sir Percival and the Count mastermind a conspiracy whereby they stage Laura's death and then commit her to an asylum, under the identity of her dead double, Anne Catherick (first introduced to the reader as "The Woman in White"), whose body is buried as though it were Laura's. The identity switch initially works for Sir Percival and Count Fosco because Anne had been falsely incarcerated in that very same asylum due to Sir Percival's fear that Anne knew a secret that could ruin his life. The asylum personnel therefore ignore Laura's protestations that she is not Anne Catherick, assuming that they are the delusional ramblings of a madwoman. With his wife "dead," Sir Percival is then in position to receive Laura's fortune as he had desired.

Upon his return from Central America, Hartright is initially led to believe that Laura has died. That belief, however, is soon overturned in a dramatic scene while he is visiting her grave. Seeing Laura alive, but denied her identity, money, and relationships, Hartright spends the final third of the novel in full-on investigation mode, uncovering the secret pasts of Sir Percival and Count Fosco, and doing all that he can to prove that Laura is, in fact, *Laura*, and not Anne Catherick, as everyone (excepting himself and Marian) had been led to accept., Walter and Marian face challenges one after another and make

important discoveries, and, in the end, Laura's identity is restored, and she and Walter marry.

The narrative's reliance on thinking, believing, knowledge, and emotion ripens it for critical inquiry into Victorian psychology and, equally, critical inquiry in light of present-day psychology-related discourse. Scholars of Collins have often followed through on this with great acuity. Jenny Bourne Taylor has studied "moral management" (i.e. self-regulation and -analysis of one's mental states) as a psychological code that produces narrative tension in the novel—tension that in turn subverts and transforms the meaning of the moral management that created it (130). Exploring concealed minds in the novel, Maria Bachman has discussed the "cognitive complexities" and social implications of secrecy, "investigat[ing] how the novel's proliferation and unraveling of secrets engage both the story-world participants' and readers' Theory of Mind (ToM)" (76). And Hannah Scupham, employing Peircean semiotics and the biosemiotic notion of *Umwelten* to approach Walter and Marian's ability to construct evidence, has argued that the "liminal bodies" of the two enable them to interface with their environments in such a way as to become the two best detectives in the novel (3-4). Although brimming with individual merit, none of these studies take a sustained look at associations between *The Woman in White* and the revitalization of theories of knowledge since the 1960s. Vanessa Ryan treads closest to this with an excellent examination of "unconscious cerebration," a mental process of Victorian psychological discourse that denoted unreasoned, unarticulated, automatic thought that could still affect an individual's behavior (280). The hope, for Victorian psychologists, was that this mental capacity could be trained and perfected as an alternate pursuit of knowledge to conscious reasoning (Ryan 281). From

Ryan's treatment of unconscious cerebration, we could interpret a claim that rings similar to a component of a twenty-first-century theory of knowledge: "A subject can know proposition p without being conscious of their knowing proposition p." But nevertheless, the name, Gettier, remains unsaid. And there enters the purpose of this chapter: to establish not one, but two Gettier problems as they occur in *The Woman in White*. The purpose is not here, nor anywhere throughout this project, to claim that Collins *predicted* Gettier's complication of the JTB theory of knowledge; that Collins's novel preceded Gettier's essay by a century should not be under contextualized. My goal is to establish and explain the significance of the counterexamples to the JTB theory that do exist in Collins's novel.

Walter returns from Central America in October of 1850, about two to two and a half months after Laura's "death." He has heard nothing of this tragedy on his travels, so when he returns to England, Walter has no inkling that there has been death or foul play. But the justification for believing in Laura's passing quickly builds. When he returns, Hartright's first visits his mother and sister. After initial greetings, Walter notices "sorrow" in his mother's eyes and "pity" in the strength of her hand as it holds his (416). The subtext of the interaction that follows is clear to both Walter and the reader:

"You have something to tell me."

My sister, who had been sitting opposite to us, rose suddenly, without a word of explanation—rose, and left the room.

My mother moved closer to me on the sofa, and put her arms around my neck. Those fond arms trembled; the tears flowed fast over the faithful, loving face.

“Walter!” she whispered—“my own darling! my heart is heavy for you. Oh, my son! my son! Try to remember that I am still left!”

My head sank on her bosom. She had said all, in saying those words. (417)

Are the unspoken words of Walter’s mother enough to justify his believing that Laura has died? He seems to think so. But in a certain philosophical mind, this half-verbalized sense of loss might appear unfit on its own to justify belief in the proposition. Surely, though, Laura’s name and the date of death, inscribed on her tombstone, are enough to justify Walter in this, and he visits and views this grave a few weeks after his visiting his mother and sister (417-8). In the burial-ground, Walter’s observes that “the tomb . . . now rose over mother and daughter alike” (418). As narrator of events, Walter thus reveals his justified belief that Laura is dead and buried, which, by extension, implies the justified belief that Laura’s body is in the burial ground.

That justified belief, no less, is true; Walter observes: “Beyond me, in the burial ground, standing in the cold clearness of the lower light, I saw two women. They were looking towards the tomb; looking towards *me*” (419). The veiled women approach Walter. One’s voice reveals her as Marian Halcombe. The other woman moves closer to Walter, a revelatory scene worth quoting at length for both its dramatic and philosophical importance:

The woman came on; slowly and silently came on. I looked at her—at her, and at none other, from that moment.

The voice [Marian's] that was praying for me, faltered and sank low—then rose on a sudden, and called affrightedly, called despairingly to me to come away.

But the veiled woman had possession of me, body and soul. She stopped on one side of the grave. We stood face to face, with the tombstone between us. She was close to the inscription on the side of the pedestal. Her gown touched the black letters.

The voice [Marian's] came nearer, and rose and rose more passionately still. "Hide your face! Don't look at her! Oh, for God's sake, spare him!——"<sup>13</sup>

The woman lifted her veil.

## Sacred

### TO THE MEMORY OF

Laura,

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<sup>13</sup> Per the MLA guidelines, quotations of dialogue are formatted in one of five ways throughout my project, depending on the situation. A regular (nonblocked) quote that contains *only* dialogue uses *only* double quotation marks. A regular (nonblocked) quote that contains *both* dialogue *and* narration uses double quotation marks around the whole passage and single quotation marks to indicate the dialogue. A blocked quote that contains *only* dialogue by *only* one character is not enclosed by any quotation marks. A blocked quote that contains *both* dialogue *and* narration encloses *only* the dialogue in double quotation marks. Finally, in an exchange between two or more characters, double quotation marks enclose each line of dialogue, starting on a new line when the speaking character changes.

## LADY GLYDE,——

Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription, and was looking at me over the grave. (419-420)

As the veil lifts from Laura's face, as Walter discovers his former love has not died, the veil is simultaneously lifted on the JTB theory. Subject S, Walter, had (or at the very least, could be understood to have) the justified, true belief that proposition P—that Laura's body was in the burial ground. But the justified, true belief was not knowledge: Laura's body was in the burial ground, but that truth bears no connection to Walter's justification for believing that Laura's body was in the burial ground.

This scenario strikingly resembles the Jones–Smith counterexample from Gettier's original essay. In that counterexample, Smith and Jones have both applied for the same job. Smith receives strong justification via sensory perception for the beliefs that “Jones will get the job” and that “Jones has coins in his pocket,” deducing a final, justified belief that “the man who will get the job has coins in his pocket” (Gettier 122). Unbeknownst to Smith, he himself also has coins in his pocket, and he (Smith) ends up getting the job. This makes Smith's justified, true belief that “the man who will get the job has coins in his pocket” true, but the belief does not appear to be knowledge. The evidence that justified Smith's belief that “the man who will get the job has coins in his pocket” is not what made the proposition true, so while Smith had a justified, true belief, he did not have knowledge. The lack of a connection between what justifies a proposition and what makes that proposition true is a key element in Gettier problems, and it is present in this Gettier problem of *The Woman in White*, as well. Walter receives strong

justification for Laura's body being in the burial-ground (if a headstone is not sufficient justification, it's hard to say what is), but the evidence he garners from the physical world to justify that belief is, as with Smith, not what renders the proposition "Laura's body is in the burial-ground" true. Her body *is* in the burial ground, but she is alive at the edge of the burial ground, not buried underneath the headstone.

As in Gettier's counterexample, the specific phrasing of the belief itself is important. The words used to articulate a belief in part determine whether that belief turns out to be false or true. If Smith's belief was expressed as "Jones, who has coins in his pocket, will get the job," then that belief would be *false* because Smith got the job. Worded in that way, the belief would not be a Gettier problem. Showing an agent does not have knowledge when they hold a justified, false belief has little philosophical value.<sup>14</sup> For a Gettier problem, the belief must be *true* because the counterexamples show that having a justified, *true* belief in a proposition is not the same as knowledge of that proposition. So, whether the scene in the burial ground amounts to a Gettier problem depends on the belief a reader attributes to Walter when elucidating the scene. The *only* justified, true belief that is not knowledge would be the belief *that Laura's body is in the burial ground* (because that belief *is* true—she is standing, alive, at the edge of the burial ground). Elucidating Walter's belief in that way, and only in that way, demonstrates a Gettier problem. Other, related beliefs elucidated from this scene are *not* Gettier problems because they are *false* beliefs. The belief that Laura has died would be a justified, *false* belief. The belief that Laura is buried underneath a particular headstone would be a

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<sup>14</sup> Gettier problems do not show how justified beliefs that turn out to be false. Instead, they show justified, true beliefs that are not knowledge.



justified, *false* belief. Many other similar beliefs would be justified and false—and therefore not Gettier problems. I argue that Walter may or may not hold many of these justified, false beliefs, but that it is consistent with the story to elucidate his belief *that Laura's body is in the burial ground*. That *one* belief is a justified, true belief that is not knowledge, so it is the belief of a Gettier problem.<sup>15</sup>

Following the publication of Gettier's essay, numerous philosophers formulated their own version of the Gettier problem—critics of Gettier's counterexamples, Gettierites, and the ambivalent alike. Of these, one of the more famous is the “fake barn example,” offered by Alvin Goldman in 1976. In this example, a subject, Henry, and his child are driving through the countryside. As they pass things on the road, Henry points them out to his child. They pass a barn; Henry says “that's a barn.” Henry does seem to know it is a barn. However, as it turns out, Henry and his child are driving through fake barn country; all the barns *except for the one to which Henry pointed* is a fake barn made of papier-mâché, but they look identical to the real barn. If a fake barn had been in the location of the real barn, Henry would still have believed it to be a barn and said “that's a barn” to his child. In the case that actually obtained, Henry did have a justified, true belief that the thing to which he pointed was a barn, but because a different case in which

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<sup>15</sup> I do admit it is *conceivable* that Walter does not actively believe that Laura's body is in the burial-ground. He, of course, does not outright say, “I believe Laura's body to be in this burial-ground.” But he also does not outright say, “I believe Laura has died and is buried beneath this headstone.” As a reader, one typically has to deduce character beliefs through their dialogue and actions within a story-world. Walter's actions and words are quite enough for a reader to reasonably infer that Walter believes *that Laura's body is in the burial-ground*. The burial ground scene thus contains a Gettier problem if and only if a reader elucidates that belief worded in that exact way. The same goes for Gettier's Jones–Smith counterexample. Smith's belief is a justified, true belief that is not knowledge if and only if it is worded as “the man who will get the job has coins in his pocket.”

one of the fake barns could so easily have duped him, it is difficult to see how Henry had knowledge that “that’s a barn.” To use Goldman’s words, “Henry’s ‘justification’ or ‘evidence’ for the proposition that the object is a barn is the same in both cases. Thus, Henry should either know in both cases or not know in both cases” (773). Because Henry would clearly not have knowledge of the barn’s barn-ness when looking at a papier-mâché barn (because the belief would be false), Henry does not have knowledge of the barn’s barn-ness when looking at the real barn. Thus, Henry had a justified, true belief, but does not appear to satisfy the conditions for knowledge: a Gettier problem.

On a more general level, Goldman’s example of a justified, true belief that is not knowledge requires three components: a thing (or person) T that is actually T, a thing (or person) T<sub>1</sub> that looks just like a thing T but is not thing T, and subject S, who would believe that both T and T<sub>1</sub> are instances of T. If S justifiably believes that T is T and that T<sub>1</sub> is T, then S had a justified, true belief in the case of T that is not knowledge. As readers familiar with *The Woman in White* may already recognize, this structure parallels the beliefs formed by the asylum proprietor, who, at different times, believed both Laura and Anne to be Anne.

During Walter’s first days in Limmeridge House, Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick’s apparently uncanny physical likeness (they turn out to be half-sisters) is made known to the reader. After Marian shows Walter an old letter written by Laura’s mother that describes her similarity to Anne, Walter looks at Laura and recognizes that “[t]hat something wanting was my own recognition of the ominous likeness between the fugitive from the asylum [Anne Catherick] and the heiress of Limmeridge House [Laura Fairlie]”

(99). However, certain aspects of their physical demeanor and mental health had helped differentiate them at first: Anne's time in the asylum cause her well-warranted paranoia, and her declining health due to the conditions there manifest in a sickly appearance. Thus, despite their likeness, they had distinguishing features such that all who looked at Anne Catherick were justified in believing, "that is Anne Catherick"; likewise, all who looked at Laura Fairlie were justified in believing, "that is Laura Fairlie." And, of course, both of those beliefs would be true: they would be justified, true beliefs.

But the situation changes after Anne dies (a death presumably hastened by the sinister machinations of Count Fosco) and Laura is falsely committed to the asylum under the name Anne Catherick. Laura's memory loss, effected by Count Fosco's medicinal manipulations, combined with her traumatic time in the asylum induce much the same physical and mental fragility that were observable in Anne. Even Walter, who is able to recognize Laura as Laura, sees that the "outward changes wrought by the suffering and the terror of the past had fearfully, almost hopelessly, strengthened the fatal resemblance between Anne Catherick and herself" (440). Taking such enhanced physical similarity along with Anne and Laura's inherent likeness figures Laura as so visually similar to Anne that the majority of people in the novel believe Laura to be Anne. The only exceptions are Marian, Walter, and the Sir Percival-Count Fosco cohort who devised the conspiracy.

This narrative thread, then, reflects the fake barn example. Consider the previous formulation of Goldman's example, then let T represent Anne, T<sub>1</sub> represent Laura (after being committed to the asylum), and S represent the asylum's proprietor. When Anne

was first committed, S had the justified true belief that T was T. When Laura was committed, S had the justified false belief that  $T_1$  was T. Therefore, in the vein of Goldman's fake barns, the asylum proprietor's justified true belief that Anne was Anne was not knowledge: another Gettier problem.<sup>18</sup>

The purpose of describing these Gettier problems in Collins's novel is to support the conclusion that the elucidation of literary narratives can help formulate new philosophical counterexamples. With an important counterexample now demonstrated, it is possible to both further explain what the act of elucidation looks like and indicate when such elucidation would be effective. An image of the elucidatory quest for details of a narrative that are not immediately apparent remains only a silhouette as a practical mode of philosophizing. The basic formalist and narratological concepts of fabula, "a series of logical and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors," and story, "a fabula that is presented in a certain manner" (Bal 5) will provide further clarification as to how a reader appropriately elucidates a narrative to form a counterexample.

First, though, consider this short rehashing of the burial-ground Gettier problem in *The Woman in White*: the behavior of Walter's mother and sister imply that his love interest, Laura, has died. Walter visits the burial-ground and finds the tombstone bearing Laura's name. Walter is thus justified in believing Laura has died and, due to the assumed burial practice, justified in believing that Laura's body buried underneath the

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<sup>18</sup> Only the belief that Anne was Anne would be a Gettier problem. The belief that Laura was Anne would be a justified, false belief, meaning it's not a Gettier problem (because beliefs in Gettier problems must be true).

headstone. Deducible from these justified, *false* beliefs is the justified, *true* belief *that Laura's body is in the burial ground*. Walter sees two women at the edge of the burial-ground. They approach, and one of them is Laura. Walter had the justified, true belief that Laura's body was in the burial-ground but did not have knowledge of the proposition. The evidence that justified his true belief (his mother's words and the inscription on the headstone) had no connection to what actually made the belief true (Laura's living body standing at the edge of the burial ground).

The Gettier problem is located through an act of elucidation, of considering what is occurring between the lines, so to speak, of the narrative Collins has written. In appropriately performing and communicating this elucidation, however, it was necessary (1) to retain the same components of the fabula as exist in the original narrative, that is, to not remove any of the relevant events or actors, import new ones, or change the logical or chronological sequence of events, and (2) to present the fabula such that the story the counterexample expresses is logically consistent with the story of the original narrative.<sup>19</sup> Taking this Gettier problem in *The Woman in White* as an example, the same actors and same logical and chronological series of events are kept as in Collins's novel, but they are, of course, presented in a manner different than the novel because a comparison to the JTB theory must make appeals to justification and belief. And this presentation must be logically consistent with (i.e., not contradict) the original story in *The Woman in White*, which it does not. Thus, the notion of elucidating a literary narrative to offer a

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<sup>19</sup> For example, if I had kept the same actors and series of events but commented that "Walter is justified in believing Laura is alive" prior to his seeing Laura, this would not be logically consistent with the original story.

counterexample emerges as the following: a search for the relevant philosophical details that are within a narrative but not explicitly stated that, once found, are presented in a narrative account written by the elucidator that assumes the same fabula and does not contradict the original story.

Finally, to the question of when such elucidation would be philosophically effective, I return to *The Woman in White* and, more specifically, the genre to which it belongs: sensation fiction. Lyn Pykett describes sensation fiction as “the product of an age of rapid communication in which railways, [. . .] newspapers and the electric telegraph system changed the physical and social geography of Britain and transformed conceptions of time and space” (52). The elements of the genre were distinguished, for those of the Victorian era, by their dramatic and morally questionable elements, including such things as madness, impersonation, adultery, blackmail, secrets, and so on (Pykett 51). But the most relevant aspect of sensation fiction for my current purpose is its preoccupation with the cultural anxiety surrounding the breakdown of “knowable community.” Drawing on the fears of Victorians who felt that they did not know the true identities of their neighbors, sensation fiction created characters with “pleasing outsides” that concealed from those around them unknown and unwelcome characteristics (Pykett 53).

Intriguingly, both Gettier problems in *The Woman in White* appear to be an expression of Victorian culture’s epistemological anxiety, at least indirectly, as both of the Gettier problems hinge on subjects lacking knowledge of the identities of those around them. To put this another way: if many Victorians were anxious about not

knowing the identity of individuals in their proximity, and the Gettier problem in *The Woman in White* hinges on subjects not knowing the identity of individuals in their proximity, then the Gettier problems in *The Woman in White* are an expression resultant of a common form of Victorian anxiousness. That the Gettier problems may be a consequence of Victorian anxiousness allows for at least a preliminary filter through which one could sort out which literary narratives to read against which epistemological theories: when epistemically relevant cultural anxieties effect cultural production responsive to that anxiety, that cultural production is a good candidate for the formation of counterexamples to related epistemological theories. Using *The Woman in White* as an example, the epistemically relevant cultural anxiety of knowable community's breakdown effected the cultural production of sensation fiction, making sensation fiction a good candidate for the formation of counterexamples to theories of knowledge.

## CHAPTER II

### RESPONSIBILIST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY AS NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN

#### *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

Just as twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars bind the genre of sensation fiction in part by noting that one of “the overriding feature[s] of [. . .] the sensation novel is the subordination of character to plot” (Brantlinger 12), so too did reviewers contemporary to the publication of *The Woman in White* describe (often unfavorably) the novel’s representation of events as superior to its representation of human character. An anonymous writer for the *Saturday Review*, for instance, dramatically asserted that if all “improbable incident” were removed from the novel, one could “burn what remains without depriving the world of any imaginative creation, any delineation of character, or portrait of human nature worth preserving” (Page 85). Ignoring the irony of proposing arson while decrying a sensation novel, suffice it to say that such a wholesale denunciation of character in Collins’s novel fails to consider all delineations of character worth preserving.

Of course, the multiple narrators who are all willing to delay the reveal of Sir Percival’s secret until the end does evince a high degree of plottedness. Elaborate plots are common to the sensational form. Nevertheless, reaching a resolution in spite of such concealing narrators requires narrative actors who help uncover the secrets in the story-world for the narrator(s) to then reveal to readers. The unraveling of a complex plot all but necessitates the presence of complex intellectual character; intertwined are stories of intriguing mystery and the possibility, at least, for well-rendered pictures of human intellectual fortitude and foibles. Moreover, a narrator that withholds information from



readers and thus suspends dramatic irony puts readers in better position to appreciate (or disapprove of) the intellectual fortitude or foibles that characters express. To state that characterization is subordinate to plot in such novels is perhaps to ignore, in the first degree, the presence of carefully represented intellectual character traits, and in the second degree, the fact that intellectual character traits may spread to other narrative actors, causing characterization to become a narrative event that propels the story toward the resolution. In this chapter, then, I use the vocabulary and conceptual footing of alternative responsibilist virtue epistemology to deepen understanding of characterological dimensions in the novel. In the first section, I describe alternative responsibilist virtue epistemology and justify its application to *The Woman in White*. In the second section, I show that Marian Halcombe not only possesses and acts with numerous intellectual virtues throughout the novel; other narrative actors also imitate these intellectual virtues, and the effect is a resolution marked by a healthier epistemic community. Characterological shifts of the intellectual variety thus constitute narrative progression, complicating the notion that character is sacrificed for plot in Collins's work.

#### On Alternative Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology

Distinguished from their fellow practitioners, so-called virtue epistemologists stress the importance of would-be knowers' character traits over the propositions they purportedly know. When Lorraine Code and Ernest Sosa founded this school of thought in the 1980s, such an emphasis was fairly radical. As Heather Battaly has explained, the majority of traditional analytic epistemology can be broadly grouped under the heading of "belief-based epistemologies" (640). Whatever their differences, belief-based

epistemologies are similar in that they hold the mental state of belief to be the primary, most fundamental *object* of epistemological evaluation and, furthermore, justification and knowledge to be the most fundamental *properties* of evaluation (Battaly 640). On the contrary, for a virtue epistemologist, an agent is the primary, most fundamental object of epistemological evaluation, and intellectual virtues and vices are the properties of such evaluation (Battaly 640).

To illustrate, imagine I have just walked into my home. I smell chicken noodle soup, and I see my partner cooking what looks for all the world like chicken noodle soup. For whatever reason, though, I form the false belief that my partner is baking brownies. A belief-based epistemology would be most concerned with taking the belief—“that my partner is baking brownies”—and then evaluating it to determine whether it is justified (or warranted, or amounts to knowledge, etc.). Likely any belief-based epistemology would then note that the circumstances reveal this belief to be thoroughly unjustified. By contrast, a virtue epistemology would be most concerned with taking the agent, me, and evaluating my actions as an agent for intellectual virtuousness or viciousness. In this scenario, this evaluation would lead to the conclusion that I acted with the intellectual vices of, for instance, poor deduction or wishful thinking.

That final disjunct, however, underlines one of the main distinctions between virtue epistemologists, which gives rise to the two types of virtue epistemology: reliabilism and responsibilism. What qualifies as an intellectual virtue (and why) separates these two epistemologies. For a virtue reliabilist, an intellectual virtue is a cognitive faculty that helps agents succeed in the acquisition of truths (Battaly 644). These faculties can be natural or acquired, and they can be enacted passively or

intentionally without effect on their relative virtuousness (Battaly 646). Examples include sense perceptions, memory, deduction, induction, and introspection. Finally, for a virtue reliabilist, a faculty is an intellectual virtue when it is reliably truth-producing in an epistemic context conducive to its limits (Battaly 646). This contextual component is crucial because it prevents simple counterexamples. For instance, one might point out that 30-year-old memories of relatively insignificant life events are bound to be unreliable, but this would be an ineffective counterexample because the virtue reliabilist can respond that that epistemic context is no longer conducive to the kind of truth-producing memory that one frequently uses, such as remembering where the refrigerator is in one's home. The counterexample would not, therefore, show that memory is unreliable; it would show that 30-year-old memories of insignificant life events are unreliable. To give a full example, then, the virtue reliabilist would hold that it is intellectually virtuous for one born with 20/20 vision (a natural trait) to passively (without intention) use that vision to produce the belief that there is a car in front of them when there is, in fact, a car 15 feet in front of them (a context conducive to the limits of 20/20 vision's reliable truth production).

Virtue responsibilists, on the other hand, hold the intellectual virtues as analogous to (but not coextensive with) Aristotelian moral virtues. An analogous relationship with Aristotelian moral virtues entails a number of philosophical distinctions between them and virtue reliabilists. For one, this analogy commits responsibilists to the claim that the intellectual virtues are fairly stable traits of one's cognitive character that cannot be natural to an agent, instead acquired over time by that agent. Furthermore, actions that manifest these traits must intentionally aim at an epistemic good (e.g., knowledge, truth,

or understanding), meaning one cannot passively (unintentionally) form a belief in an intellectually virtuous manner (Battaly 648–9). In the strictest analogies to Aristotelian moral philosophy, the intellectual virtues are—in addition to being acquired character traits that must be enacted intentionally and aimed at an epistemic good—a mean between two vices. For example, Nathan King characterizes intellectual perseverance as a mean between irresolution (a lack of intellectual perseverance) and intransigence (an excess of intellectual perseverance) (3781). Some additional examples of the responsibilist intellectual virtues include intellectual courage, inquisitiveness, open-mindedness, intellectual autonomy, and intellectual humility.

Unlike virtue reliabilists, virtue responsibilists argue that these traits are not (or are not only) virtuous because they typically produce true beliefs; rather, they hold that, to be virtuous, the agent who manifests the trait or traits in question must be motivated to do so by epistemic values that view epistemic good as intrinsically good, such as having a love for knowledge or valuing the attainment of truth for the sake of possessing truth (Battaly 649–51). An agent can therefore *act with* an intellectual virtue without *being* intellectually virtuous. For example, a journalist might have acquired intellectual courage over time, often overcoming fear for their safety in order to acquire truths about the events they are covering. In trying to uncover the political corruption of a fascist state, for instance, they may have to deal with very real threats to their physical well-being.<sup>21</sup> When this journalist acts with intellectual courage, overcoming these threats and continuing their pursuit of knowledge, they do so with definite intent to acquire epistemic

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<sup>21</sup> Jason Baehr argues that, as long as intellectual good is an agent's end, it is unclear whether threats may be physical and intellectual or *only* intellectual in nature when manifesting intellectual courage (190).

goods, such as true belief, knowledge, understanding, and the like. They are an intellectually courageous agent. The motivations of this journalist, however, might have nothing to do with a sense of intrinsic epistemic good. In short, they might aim for epistemic goods—like the knowledge of political corruption—out of a desire for fame, money, praise, or some combination thereof. This does not mean that the journalist’s actions are no longer intellectually courageous, but it does mean that their actions are not *virtuously* intellectually courageous, as the actions are not motivated at least in part by valuing epistemic good intrinsically.<sup>22</sup> If the journalist, in addition to caring about their renown or financial compensation, also simply loved having knowledge or found value in acquiring true beliefs simply because the beliefs are true, then the journalist would be *virtuously* intellectually courageous.

Within virtue responsibilism is a further divisor, though not one that has mutually exclusive quotients. Responsibilists find agents to be the most fundamental objects of epistemic evaluation, and intellectual virtues and vices to be the properties of this evaluation. But this does not prevent the possibility of providing necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge in terms of the intellectual virtues and vices. According to notable virtue responsibilist, Linda Zagzebski, “Knowledge is a state of true belief arising out of acts of intellectual virtue” (qtd. in King 247). Some responsibilist work elaborates on describing knowledge conditions in terms of intellectual virtues; some does not.

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<sup>22</sup> From a compositional standpoint, the constant repetition of “intellectual” and “intellectually” throughout this chapter is unfortunate. However, it is necessary. Referring to courage, perseverance, humility, and other virtues without an attendant “intellectual” traditionally invokes the moral virtues. Because moral virtues and intellectual virtues are distinct, “intellectual” must precede a given virtue to indicate that qualification. At times, I use “epistemic” and “cognitive” as synonymous with “intellectual” to provide some variety (as is standard when writing about virtue epistemology).

Battaly refers to the former as “theoretic” work and the latter as “anti-theoretic” work, where theoretic work provides arguments in defense of necessary and sufficient knowledge conditions, similar to Zagzebski’s “acts of intellectual virtue” above, while, for anti-theoretic work, “exploring the intellectual virtues is the most important epistemological project, even though it won’t yield systematic connections to knowledge or justification” (641–3, 659–60).

However, not all responsibilists engaged in anti-theoretic work are explicitly *against* the idea of formulating necessary and sufficient knowledge conditions. For that reason, the terminology of “conventional” versus “alternative” approaches, proposed by John Turri et al., seem more appropriate, and these terms map well onto what Battaly refers to as theoretic and anti-theoretic. Alternative virtue epistemologists, Turri et al. claim,

focus on topics other than knowledge and justification, such as deliberation, inquiry, understanding, wisdom, profiles of individual virtues and vices, examinations of the relations among distinct virtues and vices, and the social, ethical, and political dimensions of cognition involved in misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and so on. (sec. 4)

Alternative virtue responsibilism, then, provides prolonged, rigorous meditations on the features of specific intellectual virtues. This form of responsibilism also claims that such virtues have communal impact and import: that pursuing, acquiring, and transmitting truths are social activities that have social implications so often overlooked by considering individuated time-slices of subjects and the beliefs they form. As Turri et al. put it, the intellectual virtues “are essential to understanding the cognitive life of the

mind, particularly development and learning, which happens over time through various processes, such as imitating virtuous agents and taking to heart cautionary tales of vice” (sec. 10.1). In other words, the intellectual virtues and vices an agent possesses and exercises are not of epistemological importance for themselves only; as humans, we learn through imitation, often acquiring the intellectual virtues and vices we witness in our epistemic communities, the thinkers and knowers in our communicative circle(s). One’s cognitive character is both impressionable and reproducible. An inquisitive student can encourage expressions of curiosity in classmates; a dogmatic extremist propagates dogmatic followers, and so on.

Within the subfield of virtue epistemology, the profiles of individual intellectual virtues and the description of their social effects seems a most fitting approach to *The Woman in White* (and, I later posit, for approaching literature more generally). Virtue epistemology shares certain, significant forms and themes with fiction: among them, character and action. In a formalist sense, a character is a function that causes events through action. Narrative fiction layers plot with various sorts of description and characterization that individuate characters and invite readers to anthropomorphize them. As Mieke Bal writes,

[c]haracters resemble people. Literature is written by, for, and about people. That remains a truism, so banal that we often tend to forget it, and so problematic that we often repress it with the same ease [...] The character is not a human being, but it resembles one. It has no real psyche, personality, ideology, or competence to act, but it does possess characteristics which make psychological and ideological descriptions possible. (115)

Not a particularly surprising nor illuminating observation—hence Bal’s reference to the “truism.” Nonetheless, the resemblance of “character” to “human being” does highlight an important point (known since the Greeks but recontextualized here for the postmodern turn)—that literary narratives represent figures with psychological character traits that readers respond to and anthropomorphize. Characters’ qualification as narrative actors (agents/functions) implies that characters in a story-world *act*—they perform actions that they both cause and shape experience. Characters function in narrative events to create “the transition[s] from one state to another state” in the fictional world (Bal 182). Virtue responsibilists, on the plane of intellectual action, have strikingly similar concerns:

[I]nquiry has a robustly *active* dimension. It involves observing, imagining, reading, interpreting, reflecting, analyzing, assessing, formulating, and articulating. Success in these activities is hardly guaranteed by the possession of sharp vision, sensitive hearing, or an impeccable memory. Rather, it requires an exercise of certain intellectual *character* traits. (Baehr 1, emphasis in original)

Novels rely on psychologically complex characters performing actions, while virtue responsibilism explores the “active dimension” of “intellectual character traits.” A meet-up seems productive.<sup>23</sup>

Given the implications of the similarities between fiction and virtue responsibilism, it becomes clear that the deep investment of *The Woman in White* in calling into question and destabilizing propositional knowledge makes the novel

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<sup>23</sup> To some extent, the meet-up has already occurred. As Turri et al. point out, responsibilist virtue epistemologists often look to literature to exemplify their discussions of individual intellectual virtues and vices (sec. 4). This ultimately amounts to the sort of philosophy *in* literature that I’m trying to avoid; it is another example of literature being used as a tool for a philosophical end. Nonetheless, a connection between virtue epistemology and literature does already exist.



particularly apt for an exploration of characters' use of intellect. The novel successfully dramatizes the concealment and subsequent unraveling of secrets in a struggle for epistemic good. The novel's antagonists hide important truths about debt, family history, and political activity from other characters, resulting in the further deception of serial stolen identities. Other characters determinedly chip away at and uncover these truths over time. Learning that the law will be of little use to him, in the early stages of investigating Count Fosco and Sir Percival's crimes, for example, Walter vows that his own intellectual efforts will restore the community. Limmeridge House, Walter tells the lawyer, Mr. Kyrle,

shall open again to receive her [Laura], in the presence of every soul who followed that false funeral to the grave; that lie shall be publicly erased from the tombstone, by the authority of the head of the family [Mr. Fairlie]; and those two men [Sir Percival and Count Fosco] shall answer for their crimes to ME, though the justice that sits in the tribunals is powerless to pursue them. (450)

By overcoming innumerable challenges and threats, Walter will do, he says, what the law cannot: discover the truths of the situation and reveal the lies to the town's broader community. As the narrator recounting this pursuit, Walter does not mince his words when it comes to what such endeavors require. Walter does not qualify the story as one which involves evaluating beliefs for their justification, nor of seeing how evidence contributed to subjects' having knowledge. No; the first sentence reads: "This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and of what a Man's resolution can achieve"

(49).<sup>24</sup> The novel's account of the events is, in Walter's words, the story of character traits—patience and resolution (almost allegorized)—and the epistemic successes they bring. And it does not seem to be lost on Walter that character traits, whatever they are, are powerless without action. Late in the novel, he reflects: “the poverty which had denied us all hope of [legal] assistance, had been the indirect means of our success, by forcing me to act for myself” (611). The novel recounts a story of character traits and the actions that manifests those traits.

#### Marian Halcombe's Cognitive Character

Thus far, this chapter has set out to achieve two main goals: first, to describe alternative responsibilist virtue epistemology, and second, to justify the application of this school of thought to *The Woman in White*. These goals are in service of the argument that Marian Halcombe's cognitive character and corresponding actions of intellectual virtue enable other characters to act characteristically of those virtues, thereby countering the unhealthy epistemic community created by Sir Percival and Count Fosco's intended deceptions (sustained, as it happens, by the limitations of law and lawyers). This emphasis on Marian, however, does raise a question: why not Walter? Walter does, after all, position himself as the hero of his own story. In Walter's telling and reconstruction of

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<sup>24</sup> Pamela Perkins and Mary Donaghy have noted (394–5) that the gendered character traits Walter attributes to men and women are inaccurate, undermined by the novel itself: Walter, at one point, declares to Marian that “I have learnt patience” (546), and is earlier composed during a trying circumstance by recalling Marian's “energy, fidelity, and admirable quickness of resolution” (538). He is patient; she is resolute; the split of the character traits into a gendered binary ceases to make much sense. Still, though, it is telling that Walter introduces the story in terms of character traits and associates the corresponding intellectual successes—discovering what the law could not—with intentional action. The novel, responsive to anxiety over objective propositional knowledge, also shares discursive similarities with responsibilist virtue epistemologists, with Walter qualifying the story as not just a story *resultant of* character traits but one *of* character traits.

the events, at least, it is he who tracks down Mrs. Catherick, he who discovers Sir Percival's secret, he who forces the confession from Count Fosco, and he who restores Laura's identity. In more epistemic terms, it is he who seeks and gains knowledge of Sir Percival's secret, he who forces Count Fosco's admission of the truth, and he who spreads the truth of Laura's identity to the community. Walter is heavily involved in much of the epistemic good that leads to the resolution, which would seem to support a focus on the role of Walter's cognitive character in the novel, rather than on Marian's. There are, however, some considerations which disable the urge to view Walter as the intellectual focal point that tips the narrative scales in favor of truth. The instability of his cognitive character and the problematic epistemic values motivating many of his intellectual actions complicate his usefulness as a paradigm for a "philosophy and literature" approach to the novel that calls upon responsibilist virtue epistemology.

For responsibilists, being a virtuous intellectual agent requires more than simply acting with a particular intellectual virtue. A virtuous intellectual agent also possesses a variety of intellectual virtues as relatively stable traits of their cognitive character and, when enacting these virtues, is in large part motivated to do so by a sense of intrinsic epistemic good, such as a genuine love for knowledge or respect of truth for truth's sake. These characterological and motivational conditions help to reveal some of the issues raised when reading Walter's intellect closely.

First, the novel hardly supports the notion of Walter possessing many—if any—intellectual virtues as stable traits of his cognitive character. His sleuthing skills come to the fore only after his return from Central America, during the final third of the novel.

For the first two-thirds of the novel, Walter himself appears to believe that his cognitive character was in many ways lacking. Upon his return to England, he reflects,

[f]rom that self-imposed exile I came back, as I had hoped, prayed, believed I should come back—a changed man. In the waters of a new life I had tempered my nature afresh. In the stern school of extremity and danger my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind to rely on itself. (416)

Reminiscing on his return from Central America, Walter-as-narrator comments on the characterological changes that his travels wrought in him: a stronger will, a more resolute heart, a more autonomous mind. These changes foreground an acquisition of certain intellectual virtues. Walter's travels to Central America may have truly imbued in him the sort of, for instance, intellectual courage he acts with in his pursuits of Sir Percival and Count Fosco. But Walter acknowledges in these lines that, whatever intellectual virtues he may or may not have acquired from his travels, they were not possessed by him prior to this moment. The first two-thirds of the novel show Walter with a markedly less virtuous cognitive character, of which he is well aware.

This self-characterization by Walter is, additionally, more than just rhetoric; it is accurate—borne out of his actions prior to his travels. In the time before Walter leaves for Central America, he fails to seek out or see certain important truths that a more intellectually virtuous thinker (such as Marian) would likely have sought or seen quite easily. For example, when Walter first arrives at Limmeridge House, he tells Marian Halcombe of his late-night encounter with the mysterious woman in white (Anne Catherick) who had happened to be familiar with Hampshire, Limmeridge House, and the

late Mrs. Fairlie (Laura's mother). The story sparks Marian's curiosity, but she scolds Walter for not pursuing a seemingly obvious question. Marian asks,

"You said, I think, that she belongs to this place?"

"Yes, she told me she came from Hampshire."

"And you entirely failed to find out her name?"

"Entirely."

"Very strange. I think you were quite justified, Mr. Hartright, in giving the poor creature her liberty, for she seems to have done nothing in your presence to show herself unfit to enjoy it. But I wish you had been more resolute in finding out her name." (78)

If the encounter seemed trivial to Walter, he could perhaps be excused for forgetting to ask Anne's name. But the encounter was not trivial. It was significant enough to bring up in Walter's first conversation with Marian, and memories of the encounter dominate his mind for some time (e.g., 109, 113, 118). Yet, despite the significance of his meeting with Anne Catherick, Walter fails to ask the obvious question—to seek out the important truth—regarding the name of this mysterious woman in white. Moreover, following Marian's remonstrance, Walter *still* allows this truth to go unpursued by him, as it is Marian who searches through Mrs. Fairlie's old letters for information and eventually discovers Anne's name without Walter's help (96–7).

Yet it is not only the lack of intellectual virtues stably comprising Walter's cognitive character that discourages a positive reading of his intellect's influence on the unhealthy epistemic community; it is also the questionable, decidedly unepistemic motivations that prompt his intellectual action. Walter-as-narrator leaves no doubt as to

what the motivations were in his pursuits of truth and knowledge regarding the antagonists' crimes. In the lead-up to Laura's wedding with Sir Percival, Laura receives an upsetting, anonymous letter of warning (from Anne Catherick) containing many lines suggestive of Sir Percival's evil (e.g., "Inquire into the past life of that man with the scar on his hand, before you say the words that make you his miserable wife" [117]). The letter is among the first things to prompt Walter's suspicion that something is amiss with Laura's betrothed; the suspicion begins and remains, however, rooted in jealousy:

I began to think, with hateful eagerness of hope, of the vague charges against Sir Percival Glyde which the anonymous letter contained. What if those wild accusations rested on a foundation of truth? What if their truth could be proved before the fatal words of consent were spoken, and the marriage-settlement was drawn? I have tried to think, since, that the feeling which then animated me began and ended in pure devotion to Miss Fairlie's interests. But I have never succeeded in deceiving myself into believing it; and I must not now attempt to deceive others. The feeling began and ended in reckless, vindictive, hopeless hatred of the man who was to marry her. (119)

To Walter's credit, he does appear to gather his jealous suspicions and aim their power at epistemic good. In other words, Walter gives readers no reason to think that he wants to acquire and spread false beliefs about Sir Percival in order to bring the marriage to a halt. Walter wonders if the letter's accusations have a "foundation of truth" and if proving that truth could stop the marriage. Motives aside, these impulses to uncover truth he aligns with epistemic good. Motives not aside, though, Walter allots no motivational space to the good of truth in and of itself or as an enabler of communal epistemic health. Walter

does not care in the least to acquire knowledge of Sir Percival's wrongdoings because he loves knowledge, or to spread the truths of Sir Percival's wrongdoings because truth is valuable in itself. In Walter's own words, his motivations to aim at epistemic good are reckless and vindictive, his actions prompted by a hatred of the manipulative man set to marry Laura.

Walter's expression of motive for epistemic action occurs well before his travels to Central America seem to incorporate intellectual virtues into Walter's cognitive character. But even his travels, Walter admits, were not enough to squash these selfish motivations. Upon learning from Mr. Kyrle (the lawyer who fills in because the Fairlie's family lawyer, Mr. Gilmore, falls ill) that the law is unlikely to help Walter and Marian in their attempts to restore Laura's identity, Walter remarks: "I confess it was a satisfaction to me to feel that the surest way [...] of serving Laura's cause, was to fasten my hold firmly on the villain who had married her. I acknowledge that I was not strong enough to keep my motives above the reach of this instinct of revenge" (459). Before and after Central America, Walter's motivations for acquiring truths betray unsound epistemic values of the self-serving and vengeful variety.

A final, off-putting dimension of Walter's intellectual motivations is rendered by his dubious editorial and narratorial acts. At the outset of the novel, Walter indicates that the story will be recounted by multiple people—"told by more than one pen"—for the purpose of "present[ing] the truth in its most intelligible aspect" (50). This narrative strategy seems a rather responsible intellectual choice, perhaps even rooted in a genuine sense of truth as intrinsically valuable. However, as Perkins and Donaghy point out, there are many aspects of the novel that imply the unreliability of Walter as a narrator: the real

names of the characters are withheld; “[t]he narratives of Hester Pinhorn, Jane Gould, Mrs. Michelson, and Frederick Fairlie all provide evidence of the directive influence of, presumably, Walter” (396); certain passages from Marian’s diary are omitted from the reader’s view (397); and the narrative presented to the people of Limmeridge to restore Laura’s identity is slightly inconsistent with the narrative readers have been presented, suggesting “that our text too may be limited in ways neither Walter nor his reader can identify” (397).<sup>26</sup>

The multiple narratives, then, are not as committed to communicating the whole truth as first described. Walter exercises editorial influence over most of the narratives that are not his own, and his concealment of Sir Percival’s secret (that he forged the documentation of his parents marriage to gain a baronetcy and possession of Blackwater Park) from Laura and the people of Limmeridge at the end of the novel suggests to readers that they, too, might have had important truths withheld from them. Such influences, Perkins and Donaghy argue, show that Walter, “far from being objective, is in fact manipulating the narrative for his own ends” (392). Maria Bachman goes a step further, propelling from manipulative to downright nefarious the motives behind Walter’s editorial influences. Bachman refers to the novel itself as a set of narratives “arranged by a master of deception masquerading as a mild-mannered drawing master,” and to Walter Hartright as “the ‘secret’ villain of the novel, the narrative conspirator whose clandestine editorial prerogative creates [...] a labyrinth of narrative secrecy, of ‘blocked

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<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Laura—the character perhaps most central to the relevant chain of events—never has her own narrative incorporated into the novel. Walter attributes this lack to the effects of her traumatic experience in the asylum, calling her words “often interrupted, often inevitably confused” (423). Whether one accepts that justification or not, Walter’s decision to tell of Laura’s experiences in his own words conflicts with the structure of the narrative he proposes at the beginning of the novel.



communication” (93). As a character in his own story, then, Walter expresses a lack of intellectual virtues until the final third of the novel and expresses the motivations for his pursuits of Sir Percival as sheerly vengeful rather than partially intellectual. Add to this, now, that, as the editor and narrator of the story, Walter may not even be aiming at the epistemic good of transmitting truths to readers. Consequently, an unabashed fixation on Walter-as-character’s epistemic successes late in the novel—tempting as it is—is compromised by these more subtle, negative hints and nuances of his intellect. Admirable though Walter’s tribulated chase of Sir Percival and Count Fosco may be, it is the communal impact of Marian Halcombe’s mind that untangles the web of deceit weaved by these debtors.

Contrasting with Walter’s fluctuating cognitive character and questionable motivations is the mind of Marian Halcombe. Unlike Walter, Marian’s tendency to succeed in her intellectual actions and to act in pursuit of epistemic good is confirmed frequently and by multiple characters; and her motivations for these various intellectual actions, though not always clearly stemming from a sense of epistemic good’s intrinsic value, are at least not as anti-epistemic as Walter’s.

Readers quickly learn from Walter’s narrative, for example, that Marian has the “unaffected self-reliance of a highly-bred woman” (75), the “easy inborn confidence in herself and her position, which would have secured her the respect of the most audacious man breathing” (76), a “quick eye nothing escaped” (88), and “the accomplishments of grace, wit, and high-breeding” (102). In fact, even in Walter’s initial description of Marian—a description that is primarily concerned with qualities of character manifest in her physical appearance (a tendency of Victorian observation strategies)—he cannot help

but acknowledge her intellectual capacity, referring to her eyes as “resolute” and her expression as “bright, frank, and intelligent” (74). Nor are Walter’s first impressions of Marian overturned as time progresses; in the later stages of the novel, for instance, Walter confides Sir Percival’s death-by-fire to Marian due to her courageousness and reliability (520) and concludes the story by coining Marian “the good angel of our lives” (617).<sup>27</sup>

But perhaps more telling of the accomplishments of Marian’s mind is the praise she receives from a character whose interests directly oppose her own. Though Walter clearly delivers his own reverence for Marian’s cognitive character throughout the novel, Count Fosco does so as explicitly and with even more conviction. With a complete disregard for privacy, Fosco decides to read and even write comments in Marian’s journal, the very journal from which excerpts have been pulled to construct the narrative text that readers see incriminate him! Rather than respond in outrage to all that Marian has uncovered of his and Sir Percival’s plans, Fosco, in all his exuberance, outbursts with praise for Marian as an “Admirable woman!” and for her journal as an “unexpected intellectual pleasure” (351). Exalting not only Marian and the object her intellect has produced, Fosco goes on to praise the courage and reliability of her intellectual *actions* in pursuit of knowledge, as well. Alluding to the method by which Marian overheard and recorded a clandestine conversation by sneaking out on the veranda under the cover of night, Fosco says, “I bear witness, in the most disinterested manner, to the excellence of the stratagem by which this unparalleled woman surprised the private interview between

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<sup>27</sup> Walter says the following of his decision to tell Marian of Sir Percival’s death: “In the case of any other woman less courageous and less reliable, I might have hesitated before I ventured on unreservedly disclosing the whole truth. But I owed it to Marian to be faithful to my past experience of her, and to trust her as I trusted myself” (520).

Sir Percival and myself—also to the marvelous accuracy of her report of the whole conversation from its beginning to its end” (352). An admirable and “unparalleled woman” who devises excellent strategies and produces accurate and intellectually pleasurable reports—so goes Count Fosco’s summary of Marian’s intellect. And as with Walter, the praise is not isolated. Later on, in the confessional narrative that he writes for Walter, Fosco again characterizes Marian as a “magnificent creature” who has “profound mental insight” (592).

In addition to other characters in the novel—other members of the novel’s epistemic community—qualifying Marian’s cognitive character in the most complimentary of terms, Laura provides readers with a notion that Marian’s intellectual actions are often motivated by something like intrinsically good epistemic values. I say “notion” only because motivations can and do frequently change with each individual action, and because motivations—when not openly admitted, as Walter’s are—typically sit locked behind the door of a character’s psyche, unavailable in any determinable form to the reader (surmisable mostly from conduct). For example, it is easy to see that Marian acts in pursuit of epistemic good when, for instance, climbing out on the veranda to overhear a conversation between Sir Percival and Count Fosco or closely studying letters to discover the name of the woman in white. But it is hard to say with any confidence precisely what motivates those actions, given that Marian does not introspect on her motivations with the regularity that Walter does.

Nevertheless, at one moment early in the novel, Laura does provide readers reason to believe that Marian frequently experiences the intrinsic value of truth as a motivational force for action. Prior to her marriage, Laura decides she should tell Sir

Percival truths about her emotional state—that her love does not and will not belong to him. To Laura’s determination, Marian vehemently responds that Sir Percival “has not the shadow of a right to know it!” Laura observes that her sister is,

much too fond of me and so much too proud of me that you forget in my case, what you would remember in your own. Better that Sir Percival should doubt my motives and misjudge my conduct, if he will, than that I should be first false to him in thought, and then mean enough to serve my own interests by hiding the falsehood. (193)

Laura’s statement primarily confirms her own commitment to truth, but in doing so, she indirectly characterizes Marian, noting that Marian would do the same if she were in similar circumstances. Put plainly, in Laura’s eyes, she and Marian both would tell the truth—transmit epistemic good, that is—because persistence in falsehood is bad; they would tell the truth because persistence in truth is good.

Such moments as these supplied by Walter, Fosco, and Laura, when brought together, paint the admirable cognitive character of Marian in its most general aspect: a resolute, intelligent woman, with profound mental insight and a commitment to the truth. Yet it is not in this generality that Marian’s intellectual agency affects the actions of other characters and thus the trajectory of narrative events. Instead, it is through the exercising of specific intellectual virtues and the spread of those virtues to other characters that Marian reinvigorates the epistemic community of the novel, creating an environment more conducive to knowing, which is, ultimately, the cognitive experience that relieves the tension created by the abundance of lies, deception, and concealment.

Though restricted by both gender and class, Marian Halcombe's presence affects the way the novel's characters think, feel, and act. This much is made explicit to readers. When Walter first meets Marian, he describes himself as catching "the infection of her own bright gaiety of spirits" (76); when Laura tells Sir Percival that she does not and will not love him, Laura brings Marian along, saying that "her presence helps me, and gives me confidence" (196). The beneficial influence of Marian's character exceeds the passing along of cheerful conversation and confidence boosts. Her actions are equally contagious when directed in pursuit of truth, knowledge, and understanding, and thereby contribute to the intellectual actions of her fellow narrative actors and, relatedly, the events they cause. The first notable instance of this occurs when Mr. Gilmore reaches Limmeridge House, but before discussing this, a brief note is needed regarding the intellectual virtue and intellectual vice at play in the interaction between Marian and Mr. Gilmore.

While open-mindedness is an intellectual virtue, closed-mindedness is an intellectual vice. Due to the current colloquial use of these two terms, these qualifications likely seem obvious. If I qualify a friend of mine as closed-minded, it is probably done so in a manner that imputes some degree of blame; if I qualify a friend of mine as open-minded, it is probably done so in a manner that imputes some degree of praise. Casual usage and general understanding can only bring one so far, however, and they are not quite sufficient for the present purposes. To accurately label a person or their actions as closed- or open-minded requires precise definitions and conditions, and to label closed- and open-mindedness as a vice and virtue, respectively, requires good reasons for doing so.

For Battaly, closed-mindedness is “an unwillingness or inability to engage (or engage seriously) with relevant intellectual options” (16). The conditions are brief but multidimensional, for there are many ways to not engage (or not engage seriously) with intellectual options. For example, one can be closed-minded in the inquiry that leads to their belief formation. Consider: I might have no belief about who the best Victorian author is. In forming a belief that Wilkie Collins is the best Victorian author, I might read only Wilkie Collins’s fiction and only criticism on Wilkie Collins’s fiction, failing to seek out other options. This would be closed-minded. But I could seek out other options and still be closed-minded: I could read Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, and Anthony Trollope, all the while acknowledging but dismissing the accomplishments of Dickens’s, Bronte’s, and Trollope’s work, resulting in my eventual belief that Wilkie Collins is the best Victorian author. In the first case, I was closed-minded because my inquiry failed to seek out—and therefore failed to engage—relevant intellectual options; in the second case, I sought out and engaged other intellectual options, but I am still closed-minded because my inquiry dismissed (maybe even ignored) evidence and therefore failed to engage *seriously* with other intellectual options.

Of course, even if a belief has already been formed, one can still be closed-minded. Battaly notes that one can be closed-minded by ignoring, failing to seek out, or being oblivious to evidence or ideas contrary to one’s existing belief (i.e., failing to engage); or by acknowledging evidence or ideas contrary to one’s belief but dismissing them without evaluating the merits of the evidence or ideas simply because they do not align with one’s existing belief (i.e., failing to engage seriously) (17). Moreover, in addition to evidence and ideas, one could also be closed-minded by ignoring or being

oblivious to questions, sources, or methods that relate to relevant intellectual options (i.e., failing to engage); or, again, by acknowledging but dismissing the questions, sources, or methods that challenge one's belief (i.e., failing to engage seriously) (Battaly 18). Thus, for Battaly, closed-mindedness is a disposition that can manifest pre- or post-belief formation and is characterized by ignoring, failing to seek out, being oblivious to, or acknowledging but dismissing relevant ideas, evidence, questions, sources, or methods.

As a character trait, closed-mindedness is an intellectual vice because it betrays bad epistemic values on the part of the agent.<sup>28</sup> This is not to say that the agent must be motivated to pursue ignorance or falsehood; rather, it is to say that the agent's epistemic priorities are misguided, that the agent, for instance,

place[s] too much value on, and care[s] too much about, protecting and preserving their own worldview, while placing too little value on, and caring too little about, truth and independent thought. In short, they may prioritize stability and conservatism in their thinking over the value of knowledge. (Battaly 32)

Importantly, though, closed-mindedness need not exclude valuing the truth, for a closed-minded agent could be motivated to acquire truths, yet believe "that the truth is something they already have and can only get from their own worldview" (Battaly 33). In either version, the closed-minded agent acts on bad epistemic values.

Such an outline of closed-mindedness helps to draw the actions of Mr. Gilmore into further light. In the novel, Marian appeals to Mr. Gilmore, the family's lawyer, to aid

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<sup>28</sup> Bad epistemic values are those that subordinate acquiring or transmitting epistemic good to desires that do not typically produce knowledge, understanding, or true belief. In "Virtue Epistemology," Battaly provides these two ends as indicative of bad epistemic values: "believing whatever is easiest to believe, or believing what makes one feel good" (656).

in determining whether the anonymous letter Laura received, which discourages her from marrying Sir Percival, should be cause for concern. From the start, Mr. Gilmore approaches the matter with his mind closed off from any possibility inconsistent with Sir Percival's innocence. He tells Walter, for instance, that he has "no doubt" Sir Percival will provide a good explanation and that Sir Percival's "eminent position" (as a baronet) in society gives him a "reputation above suspicion" (151). When Walter opposes this, Mr. Gilmore refers to his own take on the situation as the "practical view" and to Walter's as the "romantic view," before asking Walter that they not dispute their different views and move on to other topics of conversation instead (151). Both actions reveal Mr. Gilmore's closed-mindedness, but in different ways. In seeing Sir Percival's reputation as above suspicion, Mr. Gilmore ignores the very possibility of Sir Percival's guilt, thereby failing to engage with a relevant (and true) intellectual option. Moreover, this shows that Mr. Gilmore has certain commitments to the sort of stability and conservatism to which Battaly refers—that the general superiority of the upper class is more vital to Mr. Gilmore's outlook than truths or knowledge that might complicate that assumed superiority. Likewise, in asking Walter that they refrain from disputing their respective opinions, Mr. Gilmore not only fails to ask questions regarding the development of Walter's belief in Sir Percival's guilt, but he also reveals bad epistemic values, in that his condescension of Walter's so-called "romantic" view shows that Mr. Gilmore believes—and believes falsely—that his own "practical" worldview is the way to reach the truth.

Mr. Gilmore, to his credit, does at least acknowledge the evidence of the letter and of Anne fleeing the area in fear right before Sir Percival's arrival. He sends a copy of the letter to Sir Percival's solicitor, talks about it with Marian, and brings it up with



Walter; he also conducts a search for Anne. However, Gilmore quickly dismisses this evidence of Sir Percival's guilt rather than let it challenge his belief because anonymous, accusatory letters from jealous women are, in his experience, "most unhappily, common—common" (151). Moreover, though Gilmore recognizes that finding Anne is important, he never suggests that her fear of being near Sir Percival could be indicative of Sir Percival's guilt. In short, Gilmore shows his unwillingness to engage with relevant ideas and questions by ignoring the possibility that Sir Percival's character as a gentleman could be morally suspect and by failing to ask questions of Walter as to how he came to the opposite stance. Further, Gilmore shows his unwillingness to engage *seriously* with evidence contrary to his belief by acknowledging but dismissing the contents of the letter and Anne's flight from Todd's Corner.

Mr. Gilmore's own narrative confirms such closed-mindedness, referring to his belief in Sir Percival's innocence as a "conviction [...] that every possible explanation of the circumstances would be readily afforded by Sir Percival Glyde" (160). Sir Percival then arrives at Limmeridge House, and so do his explanations of inculpability. He presents committing Anne Catherick to the private asylum as a generous gesture of noblesse oblig e to Anne's mother, who had agreed that Anne required such supervision, but who did not want her daughter to be committed to a public asylum. His connection to Anne's commital, in Sir Percival's manipulative and deceitful account, caused Anne to hate him and, accordingly, to write the letter advising Laura not to marry him. Though rather vague and free from much detail, the explanation is, for Mr. Gilmore, as "satisfactory as I had all along anticipated it would be" (162). Gilmore recognizes that, as

a lawyer, he could dispute Sir Percival's statement if he wanted to. He does not.

According to Gilmore,

my duty did not lie in this direction; my function was of the purely judicial kind. I was to weigh the explanation we just heard; to allow all due force to the high reputation of the gentleman who offered it; and to decide honestly whether the probabilities, on Sir Percival's own showing, were plainly with him or plainly against him [...] I accordingly declared that his explanation was, to my mind, unquestionably a satisfactory one.

To Mr. Gilmore's mind, just as Sir Percival's gentleman's reputation cannot even be so much as suspected, his explanation cannot even be questioned, let alone challenged—the explanation is, as he says, unquestionable. Of course, no reputation is truly beyond suspicion and no explanation is truly beyond questioning, and Collins puts Gilmore's mind on a collision course with one much more open to such suspecting and questioning—that of Marian Halcombe.

In contrast to Mr. Gilmore, Marian leaves her mind open to all intellectual options and does not let her initial impression of Sir Percival's character or position lead to an unmovable conviction. Like Gilmore, she, too, initially believes that Sir Percival "is a man whose character is established" and, for that reason, initially considers the letter dubious (120). Evidence, however, moves Marian in a way that it simply does not move Mr. Gilmore. When she and Walter visit Todd's Corner in search of Anne Catherick, only to learn that Anne has fled due to Sir Percival's imminent arrival, Marian allows this expression of Anne's fear in the form of flight to put the belief she's formed of Sir Percival's innocence up for revision. In response to Walter prodding to see if she is now

doubting the truth of her initial belief, Marian answers in the affirmative: “Sir Percival Glyde shall remove that doubt, Mr. Hartright, or Laura Fairlie shall never be his wife” (148).

The presence of doubt in Marian’s mind reveals the inner workings of her open-mindedness. Such a cognitive experience shows her willingness to do what Jack Kwong argues is the core of open-minded intellectual agency, that is, “a willingness to make room for novel ideas in one’s cognitive space and to give them serious consideration” for the purposes of gaining true beliefs, avoiding or eliminating false beliefs, gaining understanding, or gaining knowledge (71, 84-5). One of the ways Kwong mentions how a thinker might make such room for a novel viewpoint in their cognitive space is by “determining its compatibility with the rest of what the agent believes” (77). To show how Marian does this, it is best to put the epistemological dimensions of the scene in the clearest light.

Marian and Mr. Gilmore are both offered two primary pieces of evidence to inform their beliefs: the letter from Anne Catherick associating Sir Percival Glyde with some vague moral wrongdoing; and Anne fleeing from the area after learning that Sir Percival was soon to arrive at Limmeridge House. For Marian and Mr. Gilmore, there are two, main intellectual options available: that Sir Percival Glyde is innocent of any moral wrongdoing related to Anne (p); and that Sir Percival Glyde is not innocent of any moral wrongdoing related to Anne (~p). Given only the letter, both Mr. Gilmore and Marian falsely believe p (though Marian does not immediately find Sir Percival’s explanation completely sufficient). Given *both* the letter and Anne’s disappearance, however, Mr.

Gilmore's firm belief in  $p$  holds, while Marian's belief begins to falter, causing her to experience doubt regarding  $p$ .

The imposition of doubt at this stage of the inquiry marks Marian's ability to determine the potential compatibility of  $\sim p$  with the rest of her beliefs. The notion of  $\sim p$  given only the letter is far likelier to be incompatible with the rest of Marian's related beliefs—essentially, she need only consider which is more credible: an anonymous letter or a man who has “successfully fought two contested elections; and has come out of the ordeal unscathed” (120). Believing, as Marian does, that the unscathed man (Sir Percival) is the more credible of the two sources,  $\sim p$  is incompatible with her other beliefs, and so not believed. Yet the discovery that Anne turned “faint and ill” and then left the area abruptly after hearing of Sir Percival's arrival supplies a novel viewpoint. At this point, Marian's newly formed doubt evinces her realization that  $\sim p$  has become more compatible with other, related beliefs that one might assume Marian (as a rational agent) holds. Roughly,  $\sim p$  would be compatible with the general belief that individuals experience fear when in proximity to people who have done them significant wrong, and the belief that individuals typically prefer to remove or avoid the causes of their fear. A belief that  $\sim p$  would thus hold an explanatory power for Anne's actions that  $p$  does not hold. If one who held the belief that  $p$  considered the compatibility of  $\sim p$  with Anne's flight and the two above beliefs, experiencing doubt in  $p$  would be one of the natural consequences. Marian experiences this doubt; Mr. Gilmore does not.

Or, at least, (notably) Mr. Gilmore does not experience such doubt *until* his interaction with Marian. Upon hearing Sir Percival's explanation of the letter—the same explanation which Mr. Gilmore referred to as “unquestionably” satisfactory—Marian,

too, affirms the believability of his story, but “with a certain hesitation of manner” that prompts Sir Percival to produce “a *proof* of the truth” by having Marian write to Anne’s mother to confirm his explanation (166). Even after writing the letter and receiving confirmation of Sir Percival’s account, though, Marian’s doubt remains. Although she tells Gilmore that the testimony from Anne’s mother is sufficient proof of Sir Percival’s innocence, Gilmore suspects that she is suppressing an unspoken opinion, and her hesitation to believe firmly in Sir Percival’s innocence evidently unlocks the door to what has thus far been Gilmore’s closed mind:

She left me abruptly; her naturally firm voice faltering as she spoke those last words. A sensitive, vehement, passionate nature—a woman of ten thousand in these trivial, superficial times. I had known her from her earliest years; I had seen her tested, as she grew up, in more than one trying family crisis, and my long experience made me attach a significance to her hesitation under the circumstances here detailed, which I certainly should not have felt in the case of another woman. I could see no cause for any uneasiness or any doubt; but she had made me uneasy, and a little doubtful, nevertheless. (167)

Having seen the degree to which Gilmore seems invested in his ways of knowing—his “practical view,” his general belief in the moral superiority of the upper class—it is unlikely that this one interaction with Marian has imbued him with the character trait of open-mindedness. His epistemic values are likely to remain as they were. Regardless, Marian’s hesitation does cause Mr. Gilmore to pause. Mr. Gilmore thus acts characteristically of one who possesses open-mindedness as a character trait—that is, he acts as though he were an open-minded intellectual agent—in the sense that “uneasy”

doubt creeps into what was, pre-Marian, a fortress-like conviction of Sir Percival's moral untouchability.

Mr. Gilmore falls ill soon after these events take place and, as a result, drops out of the narrative almost entirely. Thus, the spread of intellectual virtue has a noticeably less extreme impact on the trajectory of events than do the following two examples of Marian's intellectual virtuosness. Still, experiencing Marian's practice of belief-formation produces an effect on Mr. Gilmore that certainly transfers to Mr. Kyrle, his partner, when Mr. Kyrle takes over as the family's lawyer in Mr. Gilmore's absence. Much later in the novel, after the conspiracy has been carried out and Laura's identity has been stolen, Mr. Kyrle's patience with Walter is due in no small part to Marian's earlier influence on Mr. Gilmore. For example, before Walter recaps the version of the conspiracy to which he subscribes, Walter warns Mr. Kyrle that even the shortest telling of the events will take up quite a bit of time. To this, Mr. Kyrle replies that his time is "at Miss Halcombe's disposal": "Where any interests of hers are concerned, I represent my partner personally as well as professionally. It was his request that I should do so, when he ceased to take an active part in business" (446). Thus, the interview continues, according to Mr. Kyrle, as a direct result of Mr. Gilmore's opinion of Marian. And the result of the interview is far from trivial, as it fixes Walter with a method of proving, in the eyes of law and society, that Laura's identity has been stolen: that is, through proving a discrepancy in dates between Laura's supposed death and her arrival in London (449). Not only, then, can one credit Marian with playing a causal role in Mr. Gilmore's shift towards an open mind, but in fact her influence reaches so far that, even after Mr.

Gilmore has bowed out of the events covered in the novel, she can also be credited in part with the knowledge gained from Mr. Kyrle.

With Mr. Gilmore, Marian's cognitive character manages to *cause a transition* in an agent's actions from intellectual vice to intellectual virtue. This causal and transitional relationship between vice and virtue is one, important way in which Marian's actions create a healthier epistemic community, but it is not the only way. At an absolutely critical moment in the novel's chain of events, Marian's intellectual perseverance *prevents* Laura from an action of irresolution, an intellectual vice, by causing her to act characteristically of one who intellectually perseveres. Thus, in the first case, the relationship was causal and transitional: Marian's actions caused a closed-minded agent to transition to acting open-mindedly. In this case, the relationship is causal and preventative: Marian's actions prevent Laura's irresolute action by causing her to act characteristically of one who intellectually perseveres.

The moment I am referring to occurs when Sir Percival, who faces the impending wrath of his creditors, seeks to obtain Laura's signature on a document while simultaneously concealing the contents of the document from her. Sir Percival's purported reason for the concealment, which never convinces Laura or Marian, is that the document is "purely formal" and so full of "legal technicalities" that Laura could not understand its meaning even if it were explained to her (267). That, of course, is false. As Marian initially suspects, and as Mr. Kyrle later confirms, Laura's signature would cheat her out of her twenty-thousand-pound trust and grant Sir Percival access to her money, enabling him to pay off his debts at her expense.

Laura reacts to Sir Percival's ludicrous request with calm words of hesitation: "I ought surely to know what I am signing, Sir Percival, before I write my name?" (267). Reasonable as her question sounds, it advances Sir Percival from common irritation to bitterness and anger. His words lash out at both Laura and Marian. As he becomes nearly apoplectic, Sir Percival orders Laura to refrain from appealing to Marian, who is present to witness the signature, because Marian "has nothing to do with the matter" (268). Seeing the distress Sir Percival is causing his wife, Marian speaks up: "I cannot assume the responsibility of witnessing her signature, unless she first understands what the writing is which you wish her to sign" (268). The retort further inflames Sir Percival, causing Laura to retreat to Marian's side. Marian records the moment in her journal:

"Come back and sign!" cried Sir Percival, from the other side of the table.

"Shall I?" she asked in my ear; "I will, if you tell me."

"No," I answered. "The right and the truth are with you—sign nothing, unless you have read it first."

"Come back and sign!" he reiterated, in his loudest and angriest tones. (269)

It is in this moment that Marian's own disposition to persevere prevents Laura from an irresolute act. Acting on Marian's reassurance, Laura returns to the table on which the document sits and resolutely repeats to Sir Percival that she will not sign the document unless given the chance to understand what she is signing. Sir Percival maintains his concealment and continues in his anger, and Laura and Marian leave the room, the document remaining unsigned.

Provided time to reflect on what the contents of the document might be, Laura and Marian combine what they know of Sir Percival's circumstances to form the true



belief that the document had been “drawn up for the purpose of borrowing money” and that “Laura’s signature was absolutely necessary to fit it for the attainment of Sir Percival’s object” (273). Laura and Marian then decide to write to Mr. Kyrle to ask his opinion and guidance, to which they receive a sufficiently detailed response that confirms and elaborates on much of what they already believed (289). In sum, Laura’s refusal to sign the document results in both true belief and increased understanding regarding its contents and conditions.

The actions in question parallel Nathan King’s characterization of intellectual perseverance and the vice counterpart which marks a deficit of perseverance, irresolution. For King, intellectual perseverance is “a disposition to continue with serious effort in one’s intellectual projects in the pursuit of intellectual goods, for an appropriate amount of time, despite having to overcome obstacles to the completion of these projects” (3796). Irresolution—or, having a perseverance deficit—is the disposition to abandon the pursuit of intellectual goods too early due to obstacles that render the pursuit difficult (3786). What qualifies the time spent on an intellectual pursuit “appropriate” or “too early” King chalks up to practical wisdom. A perfect formula is unavailable, but King argues that when determining the amount of time to spend on an intellectual pursuit, the practical wisdom of a virtuous thinker will consider the importance of the pursuit’s completion to either themselves or general human flourishing as well as consider the likelihood of the pursuit’s success (3787–9). Put another way, all things equal, more important pursuits are worth spending more time on than those that are less important, and pursuits more likely to succeed are worth spending more time on than those less likely to succeed.

King's conditions for the manifestation of intellectual perseverance also require the presence of obstacles that cause difficulty for an agent's pursuit of intellectual good (3791). The details of this condition are important, for it is not enough for something to simply *be* an obstacle; if one is to manifest intellectual perseverance, it must be an obstacle that causes difficulty. For example, say I hear someone knock at my door, and I want to know who it is (i.e., want to pursue an intellectual good). The door that I must open to discover who is knocking is an obstacle to this intellectual good, and I overcome it by opening the door; I do not persevere in pursuit of this intellectual good, however, because opening a door does not pose me any notable difficulties.

Another detail worth noting is King's delineation into categories the various types of obstacles one might face in pursuit of intellectual good into. He names three such categories: obstacles inherent in the difficulty of the intellectual pursuit itself (e.g., writing a biography), obstacles that are external to both the agent and the intellectual pursuit (e.g., "discouragement from one's community"), and obstacles internal to the agent (e.g., having depression or experiencing fear) (3791). Each of these types of obstacles, when significant enough, pose difficulties to the completion or success of an intellectual pursuit.

In *The Woman in White*, neither Laura nor Marian faces significant obstacles in the first part of the signature scene, so neither at that point really manifests intellectual perseverance. Certainly, Sir Percival's physical concealment of the document is an obstacle to understanding its contents, but if he had kindly responded to Laura's request and allowed her to read it, one could plausibly deny that Laura had manifested intellectual perseverance in asking once or twice to know what she is signing. As the

scene progresses, however, both external and internal obstacles arise. Sir Percival continually discourages Laura from reading the document, saying that she will not understand it, that he has no time to explain it to her, and that, as her husband, he is under no obligation to explain it to her anyway (267–8). In addition to this external obstacle of discouragement, Sir Percival's growing anger causes Laura to experience distress, constituting another obstacle—an internal obstacle—to her intellectual pursuit.

Responding to these obstacles, Laura reveals her willingness to give up too early—to act irresolutely—when she tells Marian that she will sign her name if Marian tells her to do it. That is, under Marian's direction, Laura would willingly abandon her desire to understand the document prior to pledging herself to whatever it contains. With the matter in her hands, Marian maintains that Laura should endure the obstacles and refuse to sign the document, with one notable motive for doing so: because the truth is on their side. Thus, Marian virtuously manifests not only her own disposition to intellectually persevere, but she also prevents Laura from acting with an intellectual vice which would have affirmed Sir Percival's falsehood and concealment. Laura, according with Marian's advice, stifles Sir Percival by resolutely withholding her signature, continuing to demand truth, knowledge, and understanding—continuing to demand epistemic good.

Small as this moment may seem, the entire weight of the narrative bears down upon it. If Laura's signature had been obtained, the logic behind Sir Percival and Count Fosco's conspiracy would unravel. Laura's death would no longer be necessary for the acquisition of her wealth. The narrative's sequence of events would then change entirely. Though avoiding the temporary loss of Laura's identity might be one of the beneficial

byproducts, had the signature been obtained, it would also mean that Laura sign away her own fortune, that Laura remain married to Sir Percival, that Laura not marry Walter, that Walter never uncover Sir Percival's secret, and that Mrs. Catherick remain under the lock and key of Sir Percival's threats. This spread of intellectual virtue thus not only fixes Laura and Marian with the epistemic goods of true belief and understanding (following their correspondence with Mr. Kyrle), but it also serves as a compass for the narrative events that follow, pointing in the direction of Laura and Walter's marriage.

The final example of Marian's cognitive character countering the novel's unhealthy epistemic community concerns a connection between Marian and Walter's acts of intellectual humility: Marian's extensive journaling and Walter's later citation of that journal. This example diverges from the first two examples in a couple of important ways. First, there is neither the presence nor the threat of an agent acting with an intellectual vice. While Mr. Gilmore acts on his closed-mindedness and Laura threatens to act with irresolution, Walter, in these circumstances, does not act with or threaten to act with intellectual servility or intellectual arrogance, the two vices that Whitcomb et al. argue are the counterparts to the virtue of intellectual humility (531). Second, the actions in question (Walter's citation and Marian's journaling) are neither chronologically nor physically proximal. That is, Mr. Gilmore transitions from vice to virtue directly after (chronological proximity) and as a direct result of hearing and witnessing (physical proximity) Marian's open-minded actions. Likewise, Laura avoids acting with an intellectual vice directly after and as a direct result of hearing and witnessing Marian's intellectual perseverance. In the case to be discussed, Marian's act(s) of writing passages

in her journal and Walter's later act(s) of consulting them for information are separated by both time and space. Thus, this example is not interested in showing how Marian *causes* Walter to act with an intellectual virtue so much as it is interested in showing how the product of Marian's intellectually virtuous actions (her journal's record of events) *enables* Walter's intellectually virtuous actions (citing her journal) to acquire epistemic good (truth, knowledge, understanding, etc.).

One might question how such different sorts of actions manifest the same intellectual virtue. This objection is fair, given that, in the first two cases, agents' actions were far more similar: Mr. Gilmore senses Marian's doubt and so experiences doubt himself; Marian maintains that Laura should not sign the document despite Sir Percival's anger and so Laura refuses to sign the document despite Sir Percival's anger. Journaling and citation, on the other hand, are somewhat dissimilar actions. So how do these actions manifest the same intellectual virtue?

There is more than one way to approach this question. One approach would be to indicate that responsibilist virtue epistemology recognizes the fact that a single action may manifest multiple intellectual virtues. Choosing to highlight the intellectually humble dimensions of journaling is a matter of emphasis, not exclusion. One could justifiably argue that the accuracy of Marian's journal manifests her attentiveness, or that the length of her journal manifests intellectual perseverance. A more direct answer to the above question, however, would be to point out that intellectual humility is a very broad virtue under which many kinds of praiseworthy intellectual actions could be classified.

As with other intellectual virtues and vices, the virtue epistemologists who have delivered a profile of intellectual humility do so by beginning with a relatively simple

statement of its necessary and sufficient conditions before explaining the various dimensions of those conditions. Whitcomb et al. thus begin by distinguishing humility from pride, in that pride is a disposition concerning one's strengths, and humility is a disposition concerning one's limitations, meaning intellectual humility is the disposition to have "the right stance towards one's *intellectual* limitations" (516, emphasis in original) for the purpose of achieving, maintaining, or transmitting epistemic good (520–1). This preliminary condition is, of course, rather vague, and it prompts two questions that Whitcomb et al. go on to address: what does it mean to have the "right stance"? And what qualifies as an intellectual limitation?

To the latter of these questions, Whitcomb et al. provide the following list: intellectual limitations can be "gaps in knowledge (e.g. ignorance of current affairs), cognitive mistakes (e.g. forgetting an appointment), unreliable processes (e.g. bad vision or memory), deficits in learnable skills (e.g. being bad at math), intellectual character flaws (e.g. a tendency to draw hasty inferences)"; as for what constitutes taking the "right stance" towards such intellectual limitations, the authors argue that being "attentive to" and "owning" one's intellectual limitations are required for the manifestation of intellectual humility (516). Being attentive, on their view, is simply the disposition to have one's intellectual limitations come to mind only when an occasion calls for it (516–7). However, Whitcomb et al. argue that *owning* one's intellectual limitations can occur in a variety of ways: cognitive responses, behavioral responses, motivational responses, and affective responses (Whitcomb et al. 517–9).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Roughly, one or more of these response forms is necessary to manifest intellectual humility because simply being aware of a limitation in the right context falls short of acting humble. One could, for instance, be aware that their mental math skills are only average, but nevertheless insist on their resume that their

The details of each individual response form posed by Whitcomb et al. are not necessary here, however, as both Marian and Walter most explicitly own their intellectual limitations through behavioral responses. According with its name, owning an intellectual limitation through a behavioral response occurs when an agent behaves such that it is evident they are attentive to their relevant intellectual limitation; Whitcomb et al. state that an agent owning their intellectual limitations in this way would “admit their limitations to others, avoid pretense, defer to others, draw inferences more hesitantly, seek more information, and consider counter-evidence judiciously” (517). For example, consider a writing tutor who, in the middle of a session, is asked about a minor rule of MLA style by the student they are tutoring. The tutor internally acknowledges that they do not know the answer and, instead of pretending they do and giving a best guess, admits to the student that they do not know and searches the handbook for the relevant information. In addition to being attentive to their intellectual limitation, this tutor also owns the intellectual limitation through a behavioral response that aims at epistemic good, consequently manifesting intellectual humility.

First, then, consider Marian. Her ardent journaling records events in vivid detail and transcribes conversations with—according to Fosco—commendable accuracy. The journal constitutes a large portion of the novel and, apart from the short narratives of the tombstone and the death certificate, is the only narrative in the novel written as the events are happening. On her own word, though, Marian often journals because she is aware of the unreliability of her memory—that is, because she is aware of the unreliability of her

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mental math skills are exceptional. This action would satisfy the condition of being attentive to the intellectual limitation, but it would not satisfy the condition of owning that limitation and, therefore, fail to manifest intellectual humility.

memory in maintaining knowledge with the level of detail she aspires to keep. For instance, when Marian returns from the veranda to write an entry in her journal about the conversation she has overheard, she transcribes a long harangue of Count Fosco's in which he praises Marian as (among other things) a "magnificent woman, whom I admire with all my soul" (340). Reflecting on this harangue, Marian writes, "I write the villain's words about myself, because I mean to remember them, because I hope yet for the day when I may speak out, once for all, in his presence, and cast them back, one by one, in his teeth" (340). Though Marian never quite gets the opportunity to cast Fosco's words back in his teeth, her reflection does reveal one aspect of her journaling: namely, that it records details her unaided memory would be incapable of maintaining. In other words, it is not that Marian sees her memory as altogether incapable (for she and others praise it on numerous occasions). Instead, she recognizes the *limits* of her memory (i.e., is attentive to an intellectual limitation) and owns that limitation by preserving her knowledge of events and conversations in the written word. As she says later, "I recal the impulse that awakened in me to preserve those words in writing exactly as they were spoken, while the time was my own, and while my memory vividly retained them" (350). Thus, Marian aims at the epistemic good of maintaining knowledge, manifesting intellectual humility by being attentive to the limits of her memory and owning those limits through her behavioral response of journaling—the practice of writing bits of knowledge she hopes to preserve.

Marian, moreover, has keen enough foresight to predict the potential epistemic value of her journal for both herself and other characters. Put another way, Marian recognizes that the knowledge she maintains and preserves could later be a vital source of



information. She makes this estimation in the journal itself. Having judged the extent of Sir Percival's aggression and Count Fosco's morally amiss but intellectually sound character, Marian writes, "In the perilous uncertainty of our present situation, it is hard to say what future interests may not depend upon the regularity of the entries in my journal, and upon the reliability of my recollection at the time when I make them" (304). Far from unfounded, the very reading of this statement demonstrates the truth of Marian's suspicion, as the regularity of her entries are precisely what give it narrative value to Walter. But, importantly, her journal has more than editorial value for Walter or literary value for the reader.

In the portion of Walter's narrative that covers the events which follow his return from Central America, he recounts how he frequently garnered important information about the events that passed in his absence from Marian's journal. In fact, on my counting, Walter consults Marian's journal (442) and then cites it as reason for his knowledge of something or someone five times in the final 200 pages of the novel (445, 457, 558–9, 561, 578), with one of those citations being a direct quotation of a passage from her journal (558–9). These acts of consultation and citation are certainly of the intellectually humble variety, for Walter explicitly recognizes his knowledge gap (i.e., is attentive to an intellectual limitation) when he forms the resolution to begin his amateur sleuthing by "gathering together as many facts as could be collected" and owns this limitation through the behavioral responses of deferring to others and seeking out additional information; as he says, "The first source of information to which I applied, was the journal kept at Blackwater Park by Marian Halcombe" (442). The product of

Marian's intellectual humility enables the success of Walter's intellectually humble action(s) in acquiring knowledge and true beliefs.

Notably, one of these successes contributes to the formation of a true belief vital to the story's resolution. Late in the novel, amidst a manic search for leverage over Count Fosco, Walter asks Marian to reread a passage from her journal that "referred to her past curiosity about the Count, and to the few particulars which she had discovered relating to him" (558). He narrates the rereading as follows:

She describes him as "not having crossed the frontiers of his native country for years past"—as "anxious to know if any Italian gentlemen were settled in the nearest town to Blackwater Park"—as "receiving letters with all sorts of odd stamps on them, and one with a large official-looking seal on it." She is inclined to consider that his long absence from his native country may be accounted for by assuming that he is a political exile. But she is, on the other hand, unable to reconcile this idea with the reception of the letter from abroad, bearing "the large official-looking seal"—letters from the continent addressed to political exiles being usually the last to court attention from foreign post-offices in that way. (559)

These details first recorded in Marian's journal (245–6) and then reiterated in Walter's narrative fix Walter with a crucial true belief—not that the Count is a political exile—but that "the Count is a Spy!" (559).

Armed with this new belief, Walter and his friend Professor Pesca follow Fosco to the Opera. Unbeknownst to Pesca, the excursion is performed entirely out of the desire to pursue Fosco and not for entertainment, as Walter thinks it possible that Fosco and Pesca,

both being Italian, may know each other. Walter soon discovers that Pesca is unfamiliar with Fosco but that the reverse is a different story: Fosco not only knew Pesca; he “*feared* him as well!” (565, emphasis in original). This unexplained fear of the professor surprises Walter and thereby elicits an explanation from Pesca regarding his political past, a past that makes clear both that Pesca is an enforcer of loyalty for a political society—coined “The Brotherhood” in Walter’s narrative—and that Fosco is a traitor of that same society, placing him at the mercy of Pesca (568–72). Walter summarizes: “The mark of the Brotherhood was on his [Fosco’s] arm—I felt as certain of it as if I had seen the brand—and the betrayal of the Brotherhood was on his conscience—I had seen it in his recognition of Pesca” (572). Finally in possession of the necessary leverage over his foe, Walter is able to force a confession from the Count that describes the reasons for and details of the conspiracy that displaced Laura’s identity as well as force the Count to provide proof of the discrepancy in dates between Laura’s supposed death and her actual arrival in London (591–604). As these events are well separated from Walter’s quotation of Marian’s journal, it is easy to attribute these discoveries to Walter and Pesca and easy to forget the true belief that prompted these actions—the true belief that was formed as a direct result of Marian’s and Walter’s intellectual humility. It was, first and foremost, a reference to Marian’s journal that suggested to Walter the weak point in Fosco’s life.

Marian, though “condemned to patience, propriety, and petticoats for life” (222), transcends her gender and class confinements by enabling other characters with more social power to act characteristically of the intellectual virtues she herself possesses. Her body may be condemned to petticoats, then, but her mind eludes these expectations and

finds ways to extend past social boundaries. And the fact that Marian's mind is so successful at encouraging others' intellectually virtuous actions and enabling others' epistemic successes points to the sort of cognitive interdependence that Lorraine Code argues is central to human intellectual life (166–9). Moreover, the way in which Marian's intellectual practices are noticed, admired, and emulated by other characters positions her as a model, as a good practitioner—what Code calls an “exemplar” (179, 186–7). That is, Marian's intellectual practices demonstrate the kind of “[o]utstanding achievement” that Code notes “tends to stimulate emulators to go beyond it as much as it encourages them to approach its level as nearly as possible” (188). Some of Mr. Gilmore's, Laura's, and Walter's intellectual actions, as I have shown, are good because they depend on Marian's cognitive dispositions, recognizing her not only as a reliable and trustworthy source of knowledge but also as an agent whose epistemic values and practices are worth emulating in their own intellectual life.

Collins has thus crafted a character that consistently and deftly explores the narrative potential of alternative virtue responsibility's topics and concerns. In many ways, what animates and binds the epistemological dimensions of Collins's narrative is not the avoidance of hearsay evidence through multiple testimonies but the communal impact of an exemplar practitioner of intellectual virtues who is confronted with an epistemic community in which trust has broken down and concealment runs more rampant than knowledge-sharing and truth-telling. With the narrative closely following the manner in which an exemplary intellectual character interfaces with an unhealthy epistemic community, Collins's elaborate plot becomes interwoven with an equally elaborate picture of human intellectual character—something that would be lost if one

took the writer for the *Saturday Review* at their word, burning all of the novel but the improbable incidents.

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing chapters have made distinct arguments, but for the same end; in their own way, both chapters have attempted to show a method by which philosophy and literature can be approached as a subdiscipline with goals distinct from either of its parent disciplines. The conjunction “and” in “philosophy and literature” implies a relationship in which neither the philosophical nor the literary are subordinated, and in response to that implication, the subdiscipline must (or so I argue) seek ends with the intent of treating philosophical schools of thought as a source for literary critical advancement or, conversely, with the intent of treating literature as a source for philosophical advancement. In exemplifying the latter of those, Chapter I elucidated the narrative of Wilkie Collins’s *Woman in White* to highlight two Gettier problems, an artifact vital to present-day epistemology, within the novel’s story-world. Chapter II, exemplifying how philosophy can have literary critical value, showed the characterological depth of Marian Halcombe when grounding a description of her intellectual character and its social effects in the vocabulary of alternative responsibilist virtue epistemology.

Though involving some good fortune—some falling-into-my-lap-ness—the decision to illustrate this approach to philosophy and literature via contemporary epistemology and Wilkie Collins’s *Woman in White* was not random. The genre which Collins’s novel arguably began, sensation fiction, emerged with form and content encoding many Victorians’ epistemological anxiety. Often narrativizing the increasingly unknowable community caused by industrialization, subverting the evidentiary objective knowledge espoused in British empiricist discourses, and including both intricate plots and secretive narrators, the sensation novel imported the epistemologically cutting-edge

into the blueprint of storytelling. Dense with concealment and rife with the desire for knowledge, then, *The Woman in White* seems a testing ground for both what it means to know something as well as what type of personal character traits and epistemic values one would ideally have when acquiring, pursuing, or maintaining knowledge. Collins may have written to entertain, yet given the hindsight of 160 years, evident are the advancements elicited by approaching modern-day epistemology with his work, and his work with modern-day epistemology.

Ultimately, though, these claims are not intended to wrap up and put a bow on the matter; I see them more as provocations for future scholarly inquiry. Even within *The Woman in White*, there are more paths of inquiry for alternative responsibilist virtue epistemology. One could, for example, consider in-depth how the focalizer perceiving intellectual vice affects the rendering of the vice in narrative, as Mr. Gilmore's closed-mindedness arises both in Walter's narrative and in Mr. Gilmore's own. The specific intellectual vices that Count Fosco and Sir Percival possess and act upon could also be studied in more detail than I have had room for here. As a final example, one might take a more full-scale genre-based approach and compare the present conclusion to other Victorian sensation novels to determine whether characters restricted by gender or class yet who have exemplary cognitive character are recurrent figures in this type of fiction.<sup>31</sup>

Nor does the philosophical productivity of literature seem confined to the bounds of these pages. Extending from the arguments of the first chapter, one might ask, for instance, what contributes to the epistemological anxiety of the twenty-first century? To

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<sup>31</sup> My mind, at least, drifts towards Gabriel Betteredge of *The Moonstone*.

be sure, this is a difficult—maybe impossible—inquiry to answer comprehensively. But in an era of mass communication filled with vast amounts of information, misinformation, and disinformation, I name one possibility: the (in)ability to be justified in beliefs. Recalling the work of post-Gettier epistemology, namely the reliabilists and evidentialists, sufficient conditions for a justified belief are as much a current philosophical problem as a ubiquitous epistemological anxiety. So, if a philosopher or literary critic today were to consume literature or some other form of cultural production with one eye on sufficient conditions for justification, might the reliabilists or evidentialists face a previously unforeseen counterexample? With the conflicting realities constructed through various forms of media, might there emerge stories clairvoyant in what it means to hold a justified belief?



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