

**The Gendered Danger of Illusion in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852)  
and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)**

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## **The Gendered Danger of Illusion in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)**

Magic naturally complicates representations of visual perception. With the proliferation and popularity of professional conjurors reaching its peak during the Victorian period, the relationship between visuality and nineteenth-century literature was at its most complicated. There was also, however, as highlighted by the sparsity of and lack of recognition for female conjurors during this period, a gendered aspect to the visuality of illusion and its natural bedfellow: spiritualism. As Jill Galvan has noted, Victorian readers and audiences would have been far more used to women engaging with magic through séances, mediumship and spiritualism, in particular with regard to communication.

Galvan further states that these communications between the living and the dead had a “need for a go-between, someone to mediate them; very often it was a woman who carried out this task” (Galvan 2010, 2), and this article looks to consider why acting as this apex through which the illusory and spectacular combine often ends in danger and fatality in Victorian literary culture, through its examination of two texts: Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* (1852). These exemplary novels highlight the transatlantic nature of the social fear of illusory capabilities presented in mid to late nineteenth-century literature. Hawthorne’s text is most notable as one of the few serious<sup>1</sup> literary depictions of a professional magician during this period, encompassing both the threat posed by a male conjurer and the nonconformist implications of women exhibiting illusions in the home. *Casterbridge* takes this danger a step further in the form of Lucetta Templeman –

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<sup>1</sup> Other representations, such as Signor Brunoni in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1853), tend to adopt a more comedic approach.

a literary descendent, I argue, of the esoteric Zenobia of *Blithedale* – and her arcane and illusive deceptions and rituals.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the high-spirited Lucetta Le Sueur, later Templeman<sup>2</sup>, is frequently aligned with the visual and material culture of conjuring in the nineteenth century, with a focus on sight and the deception of human perception. Using Lucetta's card tricks, Michael Henchard's uncanny aura, and their eventual deaths through the use of effigy and doubling as focal points of interest, the first half of this article examines how the atmosphere of illusion in *Casterbridge* becomes synonymous with otherness, visuality and secret or esoteric knowledge. G. Glen Wickens has examined spectacle, phantasmagoria and "tedious conjuring" (Glen Wickens 2013, 421) in Hardy's later drama *The Dynasts* (1904, 1906 and 1908), but I would argue that Hardy exhibits similar sensibilities almost twenty years earlier in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, stressing a focus on magic which reoccurs throughout his work.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, the role of women as being 'gifted' with the pretended second sight ability also epitomises the male gaze, as a female medium, Priscilla, is forced to perform onstage and is controlled in all aspects of her life by Professor Westervelt, a nefarious stage magician. Westervelt exerts a similar control over Priscilla's extravagant sister, Zenobia, and her own illusory powers. Westervelt's masculinity, however, is also called into question as a result of his foppish appearance and the inherently deceptive qualities of his profession, complicating the gendered role

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<sup>2</sup> Lucetta's change to a more anglicised surname is in itself notable in regard to what Julian

Wolfreys has highlighted as the ability of names to 'fix the limits of an identity' (*Victorian Hauntings*, 2002, p. xi).

of magic in the novel even further. This article seeks to interrogate the gendered danger of conjuring's complication of vision and optical reality in Victorian fiction through the lens of Hardy and Hawthorne's two novels, seeking out examples of the ways in which "Victorian visuality refuses to be captured by single paradigms" (Otter 2008, 61).

Performance magic and professional illusionism in the nineteenth century was, by and large, an occupation and interest for men. The most famous magicians onstage during this period were male, and conjuring featured frequently in periodicals aimed at boys, with the numerous explanatory manuals of magic regularly assuming the maleness of the reader. The late nineteenth century, however, saw an increase in the marketing of parlour magic, or minor tricks performed in the home, towards women, as seen in Somerville Gibney's "Conjuring for Ladies" articles in 1889 published in *Young England*. Gibney's series is serious and informative, offering a range of tricks for performance by young, single women in their friend's drawing-rooms or in society. Gibney opens the series in the January edition by stating that: "why there should not be lady conjurors I fail to see" (1889, 14), but also clearly acknowledges that female magicians are a rarity, as any "lady who can do this is as certain to come in for a double amount of applause and attention, because she will be a novelty" (14).

Parlour tricks designed for female performance, however, were minimised by their locational and sartorial restrictions, and so were often purely domestic rather than spectacular. As Iwan Rhys Morus notes in his examination of the often-political nature of Victorian optical illusions, the spectacle is an "appeal to visual sensation" (Rhys Morus 2012, 49), and spectacles feature heavily throughout Hardy's narrative in *Casterbridge*. Chief amongst these illusionary, transitory events is the

folkloric parade which later results in Lucetta's death, but to begin chronologically, this aura of artifice and spectacle is present from the outset of the novel. Hardy's rural setting immediately evokes enchantment, with the initial scene of Michael Henchard selling off his wife to another man taking place in the especially liminal space of the town fair.

Hardy writes that the fields were full of "peep-shows, toy-stands, wax-works, inspired monsters, disinterested medical men, who travelled for the public good, thimble-riggers, nick-nack vendors, and readers of Fate" (Hardy 2004, 7-8). This descriptive listing offers a provocative blend of transient entertainers and the more dangerous characters of the fair, situating Henchard somewhere amongst the toy sellers and fake doctors. The noise and overcrowding in the carnivalesque scenes of the fair, clear from Hardy's dense, inventory-like prose, contrast with the natural tranquillity of the surrounding countryside, as "outside the fair, in the valleys and woods, all was quiet" (Hardy 2004, 14). Even nature, however, is grounded in illusion, as the sunset in what one might expect to be a typically pastoral scene is at its core a performance, with Hardy noting that "to watch it was like looking at some grand feat of stagerly from a darkened auditorium" (14). Performance and artifice, then, are set out as inescapable from the beginning of the novel, or, as John Goode states, "theatricality [...] is the very condition of [the novel's] existence" (Goode 1988, 79).

When Susan Henchard is reunited with her husband years later, she notes that "Time the magician had wrought much" (Hardy 2004, 32) upon his person, for better or for worse. The temporal nature of conjuring and the illusionary aspects of aging, therefore, are present in both the setting and chronology of *Casterbridge*. Even

the Henchards' daughter, Elizabeth-Jane, is capable of magical and extra-sensory perception, continuously being "silently conjured" (Hardy 2004, 43) by her parents and appearing on command. Elizabeth-Jane also experiences implicit illusory activity; in one notable scene Hardy describes her thusly: "Hearing voices, one of which was close at hand, she withdrew her head, and glanced from behind the window-curtains" (Hardy 2004, 55). Elizabeth-Jane's 'voices' are quickly revealed to be of human origin, but the vague phrasing of the sound, combined with her proximity to the subliminally ghostly curtain, adds to the sense of the supernatural surrounding the Henchards.

Hardy's odd wording of Elizabeth-Jane withdrawing her head through the window, when read with what Simon During terms "the assemblage of magic" (During 2002, 1) in mind, is also reminiscent of the decapitation tricks which gained popularity in the Victorian period, along with the past threat of the guillotine. As Sofie Lachapelle recounts, during the same period as *Casterbridge's* publication, one of the most popular magic theatres in the world, the Théâtre Robert-Houdin in Paris, "began advertising *Le Decapite recalcitrant* (The Recalcitrant Decapitated Man) act as part of an evening of *Bouffonnerie spirite* (Spiritist Buffoonery)" (Lachapelle 2015, 59). The narrative of this performance follows a spiritualist medium talking endlessly about hearing the voices of the dead at séances, until the magician decapitates him onstage in an act of graphic dominance in an effort to stop the talking. The medium's head then continues to talk following the decapitation. Elizabeth-Jane perception of the ghostly voices before withdrawing her head through the partition echoes the analogous visual illusions popular in theatres during this time, and aligns her with the cultural concept of the medium we will see more explicitly in Hawthorne's earlier novel.

Susan Henchard herself later comes to embody a ghostly apparition, as Hardy notes that she is “so pale that the boys call her ‘The Ghost’” (Hardy 2004, 78) when out in public. Susan’s nickname by the town’s populace is also immediately evocative of ‘Pepper’s Ghost’, the highly popular and effective mirror trick still in use today at several theme parks and in holographic performances. Much criticism has been written on the mimetic effects of ‘Pepper’s Ghost’ (Castle 1988, Groth 2007) and its reflective nature, debuted in 1862 by Professor John Pepper and Henry Dircks, although several earlier versions of the same trick have been documented. Martin Willis has noted in his work considering the relationship between science and complex visuality in the Victorian period that ‘optical illusions offered an egalitarian world of shared visual fallibility’ (Willis 2016, 198) in their capacity to reveal failure of authority. Here, however, Susan’s ghostliness, when combined with the sense of trickery surrounding her family throughout the novel, instead indicates the fallibility of the family unit and personal identity. The epithet and its cultural context throws into question her permanence and creates an unstable identity, which, as we will see, also affects Michael Henchard and Lucetta Templeman towards the narrative’s conclusion.

Symbols of conjuring continue to follow Elizabeth-Jane in particular throughout the novel. Lucetta Templeman, Michael Henchard’s former paramour, eventually bonds with Elizabeth-Jane, who moves into her home to act as a companion. It is, notably, the ability to project their own gaze from this house and observe the community which attracts both women, with Hardy noting that “that raking view of the market-place which it afforded had as much attraction for [Elizabeth-Jane] as for Lucetta” (Hardy 2004, 155). Although Hardy places great emphasis upon the importance of the view and visuality in regard to Elizabeth-Jane and Lucetta’s safety

and interest, it is within the privacy of the drawing-room, rather than in the outside world of the town, that Templeman attempts to perform magic for Elizabeth-Jane:

“And you seem dead-alive and tired. Let me try to enliven you by some wonderful tricks I have learnt, to kill time. Sit there and don’t move.” She gathered up a pack of cards, pulled the table in front of her, and began to deal them rapidly, telling Elizabeth to choose some.

“Well, have you chosen?” she asked, flinging down the last card.

“No,” stammered Elizabeth, arousing herself from a reverie. “I quite forgot, I was thinking of – you, and me – and how strange it is that I am here.” [...] She looked thoughtfully around the room – at the little square piano with brass inlayings, at the window-curtains, at the lamp, at the fair and dark kings and queens on the card-table, and finally at the inverted face of Lucetta Templeman, whose large lustrous eyes had such an odd effect upside down. (Hardy 2004, 140-141)

Hardy’s references to the cards’ dark and fair kings and queens and the later inversion of Lucetta’s face present the possibility that Lucetta is using divinatory tarot or, given her French-Jersey origins, Lenormand<sup>3</sup> cards instead of standard playing cards in attempting to perform tricks for Elizabeth-Jane. It is also of note that Lucetta deals the cards to Elizabeth-Jane forcibly, and, despite asking her if she has picked her choice, assigns them to her herself. It is significant also that Elizabeth-Jane is specifically distracted by a ‘reverie’, in itself related the idea of an illusory daydream (“reverie, n.”, *OED Online*). Thus, even when outside the home of her parents who, as we have seen, are often influenced by hidden forces in their own way, Elizabeth-Jane cannot escape the imaginary nature of her being, both as a fictional character and as one followed by an atmosphere of illusion.

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<sup>3</sup> Pictorial divinatory cards named for Marie Anne Lenormand (1772–1843), a notable French fortune-teller.



In contrast to Elizabeth-Jane's daydreaming, Lucetta exhibits a forceful and present personality throughout the novel, but also a lack of resolve, highlighted in her inability to actually finish and perform the tricks she promises. She still, however, presents her short-lived attempt at reading the cards as a magic trick, one which seems to trigger a trance-like state in Elizabeth-Jane, thus creating a real physical effect. Hardy's description of the other "odd effect" created by Lucetta's inverted face is also remarkable in its allusion to this aborted act of conjuring having inverted the domestic space as a whole, a trope and concern which Victorian magic tricks often played with in a self-referential style. Tricks such as 'The Haunted Swing', pioneered at the Midwinter Fair in San Francisco and later performed in Britain and Australia, in which an entire room was built and situated around a rotating bar, created the effect of a room being turned upside down around an audience. This particular trick proved to be extremely popular with audiences, with Albert A. Hopkins describing it as "most successful" (Hopkins and Ridgley Evans 1897, 91), and through scenes such as this Hardy creates a visual mirror of the popularity of such performances in *Casterbridge*.

Templeman's affinity for magic, however, is quickly transformed from a private occupation to a public spectacle. Her secret conjuring foreshadows the folk horror-esque nature of her eventual downfall, which comes at the hands of the public parade put on by citizens of the town, featuring effigies of herself and Michael Henchard. Elizabeth-Jane is present with Lucetta when the parade first arrives, and she announces to her companion that she "will see it!" (Hardy 2004, 259), centering the visuality of the act and her own fixation with seeing and being seen. Lucetta is clearly the most visual character of *Casterbridge*, from her "large lustrous eyes" which so transfix Elizabeth-Jane to her determination to see herself even through the parodying

lens of others. The masquerade disturbs Lucetta in particular due to her prior establishment as a character obsessed not only with seeing, but specifically with viewing her own appearance and others' reactions to her, demanding of Elizabeth-Jane earlier in the novel: "Bring me a looking-glass. How do I appear to people?" (Hardy 2004, 161).

Hardy further states that "Lucetta's eyes were straight upon the spectacle of the uncanny revel" and that "the numerous lights around the two effigies threw them up into lurid distinctness: it was impossible to mistake the pair for other than the intended victims" (Hardy 2004, 259), with these descriptions implicitly invoking the illusory and magical. That the lights, reminiscent of the stage lights of conjuring and theatrics, make it "impossible" for the effigies' originals to be disputed is also notable in terms of performance and identity. This event echoes Antonin Artaud's concept of the Theatre of Cruelty, writing that "there can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty" (Artaud 2005, 77). Artaud further considers that acting results in its own doubling, and that "Theatre has an effect on this Double, this ghostly effigy it moulds, and like all ghosts this apparition has a long memory" (Artaud 2005, 89). The concept of the haunting effigy is clearly applicable to *Casterbridge's* burning scene, but so too is Artaud's comment regarding memory, as the novel is also concerned with the dangers of such a long memory, with Henchard being unable to escape the memories of his past family and the town despite the many years that have passed.

Lucetta's death, ascribed to the stress of witnessing the town's macabre street pantomime, perhaps serves as her punishment for engaging with trickery and allowing herself to be made into a literal and societal spectacle. Henchard himself notes

that “that performance of theirs killed her”, but that he, who performs the most complete vanishing and resurrection act of the novel, was “kept alive” (Hardy 2004, 278) by it. Henchard attributes an immortality to his visual imitation used in the parade but does eventually meet his own end, and it is significant too that he is closely aligned with the devil and the supernatural throughout *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, frequently being described as the “Prince of Darkness” (Hardy 2004, 254). This connection is perhaps unsurprising given Henchard’s own propensity towards the illusory and esoteric, beginning with the fact that he sells his wife inside a fairy ring. As Rogan P. Taylor notes, historically anyone “connected with all the outcast arts, as musicians and entertainers, [...], mountebanks and exhibitors of animals, and magicians and fortune tellers [...] were soon inevitably associated with the Devil” (Taylor 1984, 60). Many of these professions are represented, as we have seen, in Hardy’s depiction of the town fair at the beginning of the novel, and unconsciously Henchard himself takes on the role of diabolical magician, epitomised, as we will see later, in Professor Westervelt in *The Blithedale Romance*.

Even as Henchard’s demise approaches, Hardy portrays illusions and problematised visuals as being an inexplicable part of his life:

In the circular current imparted by the central flow the form was brought forward, till it passed under his eyes; and then he perceived with a sense of horror that it was *himself*. Not a man somewhat resembling him, but one in all respects his counterpart, his actual double, was floating as if dead in Ten-Hatches-Hole. The sense of the supernatural was strong in this unhappy man, and he turned away as one might have done in the actual presence of an appalling miracle. He covered his eyes, and bowed his head. (Hardy 2004, 276)

This passage immediately invokes Freud's *unheimlich* and the conceptualised *doppelgänger*, as Henchard sees his own reflection in the water – the remains of the town's effigy of him – and loses a firm grasp on his own sense of self as a result of what he sees. It is not only the effigy, however, which Henchard considers to be one of his identities, as he asks Elizabeth-Jane on the river bank: "to be sure---the image o' me! But where is the other? Why that one only?" (Hardy 2004, 278). It is this fixation upon whether an image is real or inauthentic and Henchard's own "mockery of death" (Dickens 2001, 510), to use Dickens's term in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) – the effigy of himself – which disturbs all of his senses, but particularly his interpretation of visual stimuli.

Hardy also invokes magic in his portrayal of the "sense of the supernatural" (Hardy 2004, 276) surrounding Henchard and his misreading of his own image as a reversed biblical act. In this moment, Henchard is deceived by sight just as characters such as Elizabeth-Jane have been swayed by voices and sounds throughout the narrative, further emphasising that personal senses in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* can become esoteric forces. The "sense of the supernatural" in this passage also takes on a double-meaning – just as Henchard's image is split apart, here a distinction is made between having a perception of the mystical and embodying paranormal forces in oneself, without fully revealing whether Henchard is haunted by the aura of the supernatural surrounding him or whether he is "unhappy" in himself as the object of occult doubling. Hardy often exhibits a more intuitive attitude towards magic in those who employ it as a profession: Mr. Fall, the "weather-caster" (Hardy 2004, 174) of Casterbridge acts as a folk-healer or cunning-man, much like Conjuror Trendle in *The*

*Withered Arm* (1880), who, as with many of the characters of *Casterbridge*, is focused only on finding the visual “likeness” (Hardy 1979, 149) of his patrons’ enemies.

Henchard’s relationship to Susan is equally foregrounded in illusory doubling. After initially selling her off in a “pixy-ring” (Hardy 2004, 296), in itself a magical space, following their reunion Susan Henchard agrees to remarry him. She states that she “like[s] the idea of repeating [their] marriage” (Hardy 2004, 71), and this repetition is key to my reading of the central disintegrated marriage of *Casterbridge* as a narrative illusion in itself. In Roger Caillois’ influential exploration of games and the nature of play, he notes that “mimicry is incessant invention [...] the spectator must lend himself to the illusion without first challenging the décor, mask, or artifice which for a given time he is asked to believe in as more real than reality itself” (Caillois 2001, 23). Jehangir Bhowmagary also draws a more explicit connection between mimicry and performance magic, stating that “conjuring is mimicry” (Bhowmagary 1972, 32) in itself. Susan, then, acts as the spectator in Hardy’s narrative game by accepting the obvious mimetic illusion of their remarriage as being exactly as it once was.

By entering into an imitation of their prior marriage and reinventing Susan as a new wife, the Henchards attempt to act as they were years before, but Hardy slowly distorts their relationship throughout the narrative, and it is after the repetition of the marriage that the town begins to turn against them. As Julian Wolfreys observes in his reading of *Casterbridge* as embodying a ghost story, “the entire order of the novel is predicated on the troping of return as the spectral persistence disordering order” (Wolfreys 2013, 302), and this repetition of their union is a symbol of disorder which begins to alter *Casterbridge*’s isolated society’s attitudes towards them. The town’s

citizens can eventually no longer suspend their disbelief in Henchard's masks and stage settings.

Illusion equally seeps into the relationship between Donald Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane. The summoning of both Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane to a remote location is described by the former as "a trick perhaps" (Hardy 2004, 88), and later in the novel Henchard, when faced with the loss of his crops after ignoring Farfrae's advice, asks: "What if that curst conjuror should be right after all!" (Hardy 2004, 177). Henchard's description of Farfrae as a conjuror is notable not only in its links to Farfrae's apparent ability to predict weather and crop yield, but also in relation to his romantic pursuit of Elizabeth-Jane. There is evidence from another popular writer of Victorian period, Anthony Trollope, that being described as a "conjuror" could be linked to marital eligibility. In Trollope's work several seemingly unworthy suitors, such as Jonathan Stubbs of *Ayala's Angel* (1880) and Hugh Stanbury of *He Knew He Was Right* (1869), are described as being "conjuror[s]" (Trollope 1968, 148), or, more positively, "no conjuror" (Trollope 2008, 501) at all, and so Henchard's accusation towards Farfrae of being the former, therefore, also throws into question his eligibility to marry Elizabeth-Jane.

The novel ends by acknowledging its own performative nature and the conjuring at work in its narrative, with Hardy noting that Elizabeth-Jane herself is aware of the "adult stage" on which she now stands and that her happiness "was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain" (Hardy 2004, 310). The illusory nature of *Casterbridge* and its invocation of the potential deception of sight, identity and authenticity adds to the ambience of misperception and instability throughout the novel.

Between Susan's ghostliness, Michael's doubling, and Elizabeth-Jane's distorted domesticity, *Casterbridge* is arguably more about the haunting of the Henchard family than the town itself. Lucetta Templeman, equally, acts as a signifier of the cost of illusion, as her own effigy drives her image-conscious self to the point of insanity, and eventually, death. Perception, in particular supposed extra-sensory ability, is therefore key to the narrative of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and foregrounds the novel as a by-product of the nineteenth-century's conjuring culture and magical sensibilities.

In turning to examine Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1852 novel *The Blithedale Romance*, we move from British Victorian fiction to the American novel and the ostensibly realist to the proclaimed romantic. However, conjuring during the nineteenth century was in many ways borderless and often manifested as a transatlantic occupation, with most popular performers embarking on American, if not world, tours. America is also often the focus of criticism relating to the links between performance magic and movements such as spiritualism (Nadis 2005, Cook 2001, Kasson 2001), and the country grew to become even more firmly associated with conjuring during the twentieth century through figures such as Harry Houdini. *The Blithedale Romance* is crucial, however, as it features one of the few prominent depictions of a fictional magician, 'Professor' Westervelt, and Hawthorne says much about gender, aesthetics and society in regard to the dangers of illusion in the nineteenth century through this novel.

Hawthorne's text follows the residents of the titular Blithedale Farm, an envisioned utopian community, through the perspective of a new arrival, Miles Coverdale. Three characters share a clear connection to conjuring both privately and

publicly onstage: Zenobia, a beautiful and self-assured resident of the farm; her sister Priscilla, an enigmatic, frail girl who is later revealed to be an unwilling performer of mediumship under the pseudonym ‘The Veiled Lady’; and Professor Westervelt, a flamboyant and eccentric magician who wanders in and out of the residents’ lives and performs with Priscilla, to some extent controlling both women. From Washington Irving Bishop’s later pamphlet, *Second Sight Explained* (1880), which presents the exact relationship of conjuror and clairvoyant exhibited between Priscilla and Westervelt, we learn that a clairvoyant must typically be “a young lady, interesting in manner and dejected in appearance, as if distressed by some constant strain upon the nervous” (Bishop 1880, 8). This description, alongside the vital “appearance of passive submission” (Bishop 1880, 8) on the part of the clairvoyant girl, perfectly describes Priscilla’s behaviour and appearance throughout *Blithedale*.

Hawthorne’s engagement with illusion in the novel is first shown through the enigmatic character of Westervelt, giving a lengthy description of Coverdale’s disapproval of the latter’s appearance and the gauche personality he associates with such a disturbingly aesthetic spectacle:

He was still young, seemingly a little under thirty, of a tall and well-developed figure, and as handsome a man as ever I beheld. The style of his beauty, however, though a masculine style, did not at all commend itself to my taste. His countenance – I hardly know how to describe the peculiarity – had an indecorum in it, a kind of rudeness, a hard, coarse, forth-putting freedom of expression, which no degree of external polish could have abated, one single jot. Not that it was vulgar. [...] He was rather carelessly, but well and fashionably dressed, in a summer-morning costume. [...] He carried a stick with a wooden head, carved in vivid imitation of that of a serpent. I hated him, partly, I do believe, from a comparison of my own homely garb with his well-ordered foppishness. (Hawthorne 2009, 92)



This damning overview of Westervelt's appearance emphasises that Coverdale's main concern regarding the magician is his tendency towards dandyism, which he views as disrupting normality in a way which arguably equivalent to magic itself. The uncertainty of this first-person description, too, displays Coverdale's conflicted attitude towards Westervelt,<sup>4</sup> presenting him as a dandy figure or fop whilst also clarifying that his style was still "masculine", albeit not in a way that pleases the beholder.

James Eli Adams writes in regard to dandyism during the nineteenth century that the masculine was made "as much a spectacle as the feminine" (1995, 11) through a focus on clothing, particularly of the fashionable style which so offends Coverdale. Adams further describes the figure of the dandy as "a problematic of audience and authority", a "fundamentally theatrical being, abjectly dependent on the recognition of the audience he professes to disdain" (1995, 22). David Greven argues that Westervelt's foppish and effeminate presentation is explicitly queer in his reading of *Blithedale* as embodying the Lacanian slippages between the homoerotic and homophobic gaze. He reads the trio of Zenobia, Westervelt and Coverdale as "the Medusan harlot, the Male Medusa, and the onanistic voyeur", further noting that "these three conform to the triptych of Victorian social monsters, as Jonathan Ned Katz puts it, the prostitute, the sodomite, and the onanist, all enemies of the properly reproductive and normative family" (Greven 2006, 138). As in the fears of conjuring as a threat to domesticity in Hardy's Lucetta Templeman, then, Westervelt as a character can be read as a risk to normative society on several levels.

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<sup>4</sup> David Greven reads this conflict as homoerotic but also autobiographical, arguing that "Hawthorne imbues Westervelt with the calumniated qualities lobbed against the writer himself—foppishness, artificiality, effeminacy" (2006, 139).

Westervelt's snake-headed cane evokes temptation and the diabolic, alongside his "coal-black" hair and eyes which look "as if the Devil were peeping out of them" (Hawthorne 2009, 94), with "remarkably brilliant" teeth, later revealed to be made of gold. Westervelt's teeth provoke a further physical reaction in Coverdale which even his foppish attire cannot compete with, inducing a sense of horror. The magician's "brief, metallic laugh" becomes "immensely prolonged and enlarged" in a grotesque action full of "the excess of his delight", causing him to open "his mouth wide" (95). This allows Coverdale to see into his mouth where he discovers "a gold band around the upper part of his teeth; thereby making it apparent that every one of his brilliant grinders and incisors was a sham" (95). Hawthorne's choice of the word "disclosed" (95) in relation to the reveal of the gold band adds a level of secrecy and unveiling to the literal insides of Westervelt's body, which ultimately are just as inauthentic and superficial as his exterior appearance.

Westervelt morphs from the humorous to the grotesque in regard to both his physical characteristics and the illusory effects he creates. His disturbing transformation of a traditionally light-hearted action such as laughter confirms Coverdale's thoughts regarding whether "the whole man were a moral and physical humbug" (2009, 95) and solidifies his view of the conjuring profession as being morally and materially linked to deception and fakery. Magic and its embodiment in the form of the conjurer, however, are contagious. Hawthorne writes that Coverdale is so overcome with the "fantasy of [Westervelt's] spectral character" that the "contagion of his strange mirth" (95) causes Coverdale to burst out into fits of laughter just as loud as Westervelt's. While Westervelt's spectral nature may be echoed in the ghostly depiction

of Susan Henchard in *Casterbridge*, where she is frail and ineffectual, he is threatening and perverse, embodying the perceived differences between male and female illusionism.

The connotations of Westervelt's gold-banded teeth are of particular note in regard to his depiction as a stage magician. John Woodforde notes in *The History of Vanity* that "as late as 1846 a dentist wrote that false teeth were only for the vain" (1992, 61), and in the United States gold teeth seem to have reached their pinnacle in the 1860s, where more than ever dentists advertised this service in periodicals. An 1866 edition of the *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*, too, advertises Patten's Dental Rooms, offering: "teeth set on gold plate; teeth set on silver plate; teeth set on vulcanized rubber; teeth filled with gold" ('Multiple Classified Advertisements.', 1866, 233). Alongside acting as a physical emblem of Westervelt's narcissism and falsity, however, I argue that his gold teeth can be read as indicating more emphatically the magician's untrustworthiness and deceptive capabilities, serving as a visual indicator of external flamboyancy covering up a rotten interior.

Greven describes Westervelt's mouth as signalling "the physical blight of moral depravity and "contagion"" (2006, 139) and takes the image a step further in positing that "Westervelt's monstrous mouth, artificially constructed, yawns open like a technologically engineered *vagina dentata*, with mechanized teeth and draw-bridge flexibility" (2006, 139). Ryan Sweet, in his chapter focusing more specifically upon women and nineteenth-century prostheses, has noted that both artificial leg and false teeth users were both "subject to similar stigma regarding [...] duplicitousness depending on the mimetic capacity of the user's device" (Sweet in Jones 2017, 123). In

*The Blithedale Romance*, then, the superficial duplicitousness of prosthesis and conjuring signals menace on several fronts, and here manifests as a physical indicator of untrustworthiness in the form of gold-banded teeth.

Illusion and its emphasis upon gendered gaze and ocular misdirection in the novel is particularly clear, however, in regard to Zenobia, independent of her covert connection to Westervelt. In Robert S. Levine's salient reading of *Blithedale* in regard to selfhood, sympathy and societal reform, he notes that Hawthorne presents the act of mesmerism carried out by Westervelt upon Priscilla as a "selfish enactment of hyperintrusive patriarchal power" (Levine 2004, 212) and as an embodiment of the male gaze upon the feminine body. It is the character of Zenobia, however, which I predominantly wish to focus on to conclude, and in particular the private, confined space of Zenobia's drawing-room. Levine further notes that Zenobia "masks her inner self and desires, even as she calls attention to how difficult it is for women to challenge the assumptions of patriarchal culture" (Levine 2004, 222), and whilst I would agree with his reading of Zenobia's hidden selfhood, I argue that further exploration of how the physical and concealed space of the drawing-room reflects Zenobia's often concealed inner self is vital, especially in considering how the veiled descriptions of this space engage with the patriarchal atmosphere of the novel in regard to conjuring and illusion.

The location and title of Chapter XIX, "Zenobia's Drawing Room" – notably often an "inner sanctum" (Logan 2001, 27) particularly for women in the nineteenth century – appears briefly and singularly as a focal point for the action of its specified chapter. Hawthorne's narrator in his initial description of his view of

Zenobia's drawing-room immediately presents it as a phantasmagorical space, reminiscent of a magic lantern show or camera obscura:

When I returned to my chamber, the glow of an astral lamp was penetrating mistily through the white curtain of Zenobia's drawing-room. The shadow of a passing figure was now-and-then cast upon this medium, but with too vague an outline for even my adventurous conjectures to read the hieroglyphic that it presented.

(Hawthorne 2009, 161-162)

The curtain of Zenobia's drawing-room conjures an image of theatricality, and the projected shadows of, as it later turns out to be, Zenobia and Westervelt, become incomprehensible, othered symbols to Coverdale in the form of hieroglyphics. Coverdale struggles with the obscured mystery of Zenobia's drawing-room as an audience member mediating on the truth behind a magic trick, "tormenting" himself with "crazy hypotheses" (Hawthorne 2009, 162) regarding what is going on behind the curtain. Zenobia's drawing-room is further described by Coverdale as representing an extension of herself, an assortment of "gorgeousness" (Hawthorne 2009, 164) which he finds highly unflattering and conceited, specifically for a woman, but also calling to mind his previous criticism of Westervelt's dazzling appearance.

Coverdale's brief insight into Zenobia's private space is also reminiscent of Bruno Latour's consideration of the oligopticon and panorama, noting that the latter "see everything", but that they equally "see nothing" as they "show an image painted (or projected) on the tiny wall of a room fully closed to the outside" (Latour 2005, 187). In the same way, Coverdale, as Hawthorne's central narrator, presents as omnipresent to the reader, with Zenobia being the most notable exception to his ability to 'see everything'. Latour also emphasises here that phantasmagorical displays rely on projection, meaning that the viewer experiences a mediated image rather than the 'truth'

of what is inside the hidden space. Likewise, Coverdale's view into Zenobia's parlour is mediated by her curtains and "astral lamp", leaving him to project his own reflections of what could be concealed within the room. Coverdale uses his reading of the luxurious decoration of the room to form his own conclusions as to her character, deciding that through this superficial interiority he has "malevolently beheld the true character of the woman, passionate, luxurious, lacking simplicity, not deeply refined, incapable of pure and perfect taste" (Hawthorne 2009, 164-165). Coverdale, whose first-person insights the reader is privy to throughout as opposed to the detached third-person narration of Hardy's depictions of female illusion, acts an avatar of the outsider male gaze, but Hawthorne's ascriptions of masculinity are by no means fixed in traditional ways.

Adornment and magic are united by Hawthorne primarily through his presentation of the always "elaborately dressed" (Hawthorne 2009, 172) Westervelt, which, as we have seen, Coverdale finds equally as disconcerting on a man as he does a private, female space. Through Hawthorne's presentation of Zenobia's equally bejewelled drawing-room, we can read this as a quasi-magical space synonymous with deception and superficiality. Maya Higashi Wakana has noted in her microsocial consideration of Hawthorne's texts that "individuals are expected to don a 'face,' an assumed identity" which can only be dropped, in the words of Erving Goffman (1959), "backstage" (Wakana 2018, 25), especially in works such as the author's 1832 short story 'The Minister's Black Veil'. *The Blithedale Romance* shares an equal obsession with the need to see a character's backstage identity beyond their embellished "faces" or domestic interiors, here epitomised by Zenobia's "backstage" drawing-room, but also in Westervelt and Priscilla, with all three characters being deliberately aligned with performative conjuring and illusion.

The drawing-room setting of Chapter XIX allows Zenobia to perform her own revelatory trick, stepping back into a hidden area of the room and summoning Priscilla by theatrically calling her name aloud. Priscilla, presented as a magic performer herself, is from the narrative's perspective only the apparatus through which Westervelt, and Zenobia, are performing their trick, having "never had any free-will" (Hawthorne 2009, 171) of her own. Priscilla reappears after being audibly summoned by Zenobia in Chapter XX, with the suitably magical and visually complicated title of "They Vanish". Zenobia's summoning positions her as the magician-figure at work in the parlour, but denigrates Priscilla to the role of her assistant. As Karen Beckman has stated, "disappearance, masquerading as a certain kind of magical vanishing, can threaten to erase completely those bodies deemed superfluous or redundant" (Beckman 2003, 19), and Priscilla's constant vanishing and reappearance at the will of others, combined with her diffident personality, resigns her to female redundancy, also implied to be one of the reasons for Zenobia's suicide.

Hawthorne himself also draws a connection between the gendered impact of Westervelt's magic by connecting Zenobia and Priscilla through the lens of the magician's act and Zenobia's own seemingly magical control over Priscilla, writing that Zenobia embodies "the sorceress herself, not aged, wrinkled, and decrepit, but fair enough to tempt Satan with a force reciprocal to his own" in absolute contrast to "Priscilla, the pale victim, whose soul and body had been wasted by her spells" (Hawthorne 2009, 214). The narrative voice, then, lays the blame for Priscilla's manipulation at Zenobia's door rather than Westervelt, who is controlling her in public and onstage, rather than in a private setting as Zenobia is accused of.

This assignment of blame for the impact of magic upon Priscilla, however, also marks Zenobia's descent into a "bitterness" (218) towards Hollingsworth, a fellow resident of Blithedale and the object of her romantic interest. The realisation that Hollingsworth is not in love with her causes Zenobia to announce that she is finally "awake, disenchanted, disenthralled!" (218). By going on to state that Hollingsworth is a "better masquerader than the witches and gipsies yonder; for your disguise is self-deception" (219), Zenobia brings Hollingsworth into the complex web of characters who exhibit a connection to illusion, spectacle and magic in Hawthorne's novel. Her monologue equally implicates all of the men of the narrative as being as guilty as Westervelt in terms of their internal disguises, and shows that Zenobia's attempts to engage in the masculine world of illusion portrayed in the novel has backfired upon her, with Coverdale, Hollingsworth and Westervelt all representing an equal threat towards women through their performative identities.

Zenobia's suicide, implied to be a result of Hollingsworth's spurning and her secretive dealings with Westervelt, results in illusion also, leaving behind a "terrible phantasm of her death" (Hawthorne 2009, 234). The potential danger created by women performing conjuring or engaging in magical practices eventually reaches its peak in 1911 with the publication of Max Beerbohm's satirical novella, *Zuleika Dobson*, in which a (comically unskilled) female conjuror uses her fatal beauty to kill off a large section of Oxford's undergraduates. In *Blithedale*, however, Zenobia's beauty is used to amplify the awfulness of her death as opposed to a source of comedy. Coverdale describes her suicide as a "perfect horror of [a] spectacle" which he can still "reproduce" in his mind "as freshly as if it were still before [his] eyes" (Hawthorne



2009, 235), in a similar vein to the ocular spectacle of *Casterbridge* which causes the unexplained death of Lucetta Templeman. Zenobia's message given to Coverdale to convey to Hollingsworth prior to her suicide, that when they next "hear" from her it will be her face "behind the black veil" (Hawthorne 2009, 228) arguably acts as a sign that she and Priscilla have swapped roles: in death, Zenobia becomes the 'Veiled Lady'. Priscilla, however, in having her veil removed by Hollingsworth onstage during her performance with Westervelt and staying with him at the novel's close, is implied to go on to perform what Francesca Coppa describes as "that more familiar Victorian vanishing" (Coppa 2008, 87): marriage.

Both *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Blithedale Romance*, then, subtly act to warn their readers of the gendered dangers of illusion and its potential to disrupt visual and societal conventions. Conjuring in these texts emphasises gender divisions, serves to feminise the appearance of men and gives women a sense of untamable, masculine-coded confidence in creating hidden private spaces, which are inevitably forced to an end by both individual male characters and communal attitudes. In the two novels, illusion is inherently bound up in questions of sight and visibility, drawing upon the material culture of conjuring during the Victorian period, but also evaluating whether concealed – in some cases literally veiled – activities and spaces were deemed suitable for women to engage with in nineteenth-century fiction and in society more widely.

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