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Keywords

Portraiture, Social classes, Bleak House

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Heather Twele

In Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, Lady Dedlock is the subject of two portraits which are intricately woven into the mystery plot of the novel. The primary plot centers on Esther Summerson, a young woman of illegitimate birth under the care of her guardian Mr. Jarndyce, and Lady Honoria Dedlock, Esther Summerson's mother. Honoria's youthful affair with a British Captain and Esther's birth were kept secret, and after being told that her daughter died at birth, Honoria married her wealthy suitor Sir Leister Dedlock. Once Lady Dedlock learns of Esther's existence, she attempts to conceal her connection to Esther to avoid tarnishing the aristocratic Dedlock name. However, Mr. Tulkinghorn, the protective Dedlock family lawyer, and Mr. Guppy, a law clerk in love with Esther, uncover Lady Dedlock's secret after they discover the identity of her former lover, Nemo (formerly Captain James Hawdon). The two portraits of Lady Dedlock reveal the physical resemblance of mother and daughter, which increases the danger of their connection being publicly exposed.

An oil portrait of Lady Dedlock inhabits her country residence of Chesney Wold, Lincolnshire, while the other, an engraving, resides for a short period in Krook's Rag and Bottle shop, London. The different mediums and locations are significant, for in the nineteenth century, the status and position of art in society was rapidly changing. Portraits were no longer the sole property of the upper class to display their prominence and

wealth; instead, portraiture filtered down to the middle and lower classes through the cheaper medium of mass-produced engravings. Although the mediums differed, portraiture connected the upper and lower classes during the nineteenth century, shattering the aristocracy's strict hierarchical social structure. The separate private and public spheres were also integrated in an unprecedented manner through the process of industrialized engraving. The exclusive sanctity of upper-class habitations became popular subject matter for mass-produced engravings, particularly reproductions of private portrait collections for the lower class. Lady Dedlock's likeness existing as an oil portrait for private viewings and as a mass-produced engraving for public enjoyment mirrors that societal shift in the nineteenth century. The difference between the two mediums is suggestive of the old aristocratic views and the new emerging middle-class ideals. Oil paintings require numerous layers of paint and varnish, whereas the intaglio printing process requires the strength to scrape away layers of copper plate to form an engraving; the former is additive and the latter subtractive. While the upper-class desired to protect their elevated station and privileges, the lower classes wanted egalitarianism. Through the portraits of Lady Dedlock, Dickens reveals that the interrelated transformations of art and Victorian society are inextricably linked. Art possesses the capacity to transcend the confines of class structure, and *Bleak House* presents the unique shift during the Victorian era in which the boundaries between upper class and lower class, and private and public spheres, begin to break down.

Dickens strategically connects portraiture to the character of Lady Dedlock, one of the only characters who experiences social mobility. Lady

Dedlock's marriage to Sir Leicester raises her from the middle-class to the aristocracy. Once she discovers that her daughter, Esther, is alive, Lady Dedlock exerts her influence to keep the truth secret in order to protect her reputation and the status of her husband. The mediums of oil paint and copper-plate engraving reflect Lady Dedlock's social mobility and connect her middle-class past to her aristocratic present. The additive layering of oil painting mirrors Lady Dedlock's attempt to conceal her past transgressions, while the subtractive process of engraving illustrates the reversal of that attempt.

The portrait of Lady Dedlock in the long drawing-room at Chesney Wold is first mentioned when Mr. Guppy and his friend, Mr. Weevle, visit under the strict watch and guidance of the housekeeper, Mrs. Rouncewell. Guppy is described to be in "spirits . . . so low that he droops on the threshold" of the long drawing-room (82). However, he immediately "recovers" when he notices the painting of Lady Dedlock: "a portrait over the chimney-piece, painted by the fashionable artist of the day, acts upon him like a charm . . . He stares at it with uncommon interest" (82). Guppy's interest originates from his recognition of similar facial features between Lady Dedlock and his love interest, Esther Summerson, to whom he declares, "Thy image has ever since been fixed in my breast" (114). When he asks who the portrait represents, Rosa, Lady Dedlock's maid, replies that "[t]he picture over the fireplace . . . is the portrait of the present Lady Dedlock. It is considered a perfect likeness, and the best work of the master" (82). Although the narrator does not reveal the identity of the "fashionable artist" or the exact medium of the portrait, the majority of painted portraiture during the nineteenth century was completed in oils through a "complex multi-step and multilayer process"

(Wallert 9). Many nineteenth-century artists including the English painters J. M. W. Turner and Augustus Wall Callcott used “varnish interlayers so that later paint could be applied safely” (183). This “multilayer process” of oil painting protected the layers of pigments beneath, requiring sufficient money to compensate the artist for his time and supplies. Since the artist is “fashionable,” such a caliber of portrait would only be available to the aristocracy. The portrait of Lady Dedlock functions not only as a “likeness” but also as a symbol of the social and economic power of the ancestral Dedlock family.

The distinction between high- and low-quality oil paintings is introduced when the narrator describes the portrait of the Snagsbys, a lower middle-class husband and wife: “The portrait it displays in oil—and plenty of it too—of Mr. Snagsby looking at Mrs. Snagsby” (118). The mocking phrase “and plenty of it too” implies that the painter used too much oil in the process of mixing the paints, and thus, the painter’s work was of low quality. Regina B. Oost comments on the “ubiquity of portraits among the novel’s middle-class characters” (141), particularly the portraits of “Guppy and the Snagsbys” (142). In the nineteenth century, oil painting became common among the middle classes as they tried to consolidate their newly asserted status in society, and Anthony Edward Dyson notes that “the impulse of the rising middle classes” was “to emulate those they considered their social superiors” (4). To gain legitimacy in Victorian society, the middle class used oil portraits to display their wealth and newly established social power. However, only the rich could afford high quality paintings. Although the narrator never comments on the quality of Lady Dedlock’s

portrait at Chesney Wold, he implies that a “fashionable” artist is associated with a high standard of technique and execution. Therefore, the especially oily quality of the Snagsby’s portrait separates it from Lady Dedlock’s “fashionable” portrait. Although the oil medium for both portraits indicates the narrowing divide between nineteenth-century classes, the quality of the paints reveals that the divide has not been completely eradicated.

Introducing fine art from private collections into the lower classes, mass-produced engravings also complicated the previously strict class divide in nineteenth century England. Lady Dedlock’s second portrait is a “copper-plate” engraving “from that truly national work, *The Divinities of Albion*, or *Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty*, representing ladies of title and fashion” (256). Mr. Weevle, otherwise known as Jobling, hangs the engravings on his walls, thereby liberating the “impressions” from their previous confinement in a “bandbox” (256). A textual note in the Norton edition of *Bleak House* states that “[a]nnuals, featuring portraits of ladies of fashion, were popular publications in the Victorian period,” such as “*The Book of Beauty, or Regal Gallery*” (256). Ronald R. Thomas also suggests “*Heath’s Book of British Beauty* (1844)” as a possible “model” for the “copper-plate impressions” decorating Weevle’s wall (137). The general popularity of annuals filled with portraits of fashionable, aristocratic women reveals that Lady Dedlock’s mass-produced likeness is a source of connection between the middle and lower classes and the upper class. Weevle feels as though he has a connection to Lady Dedlock, even though he has never seen her in his entire life. Through annuals, the lower class felt a connection to the private lives of the aristocracy in a way that was previously unheard of.

However, despite the new-found connection between the lower and upper classes, the annuals only provided the viewer with stereotypical images of aristocratic women. The engraving of Lady Dedlock is not mentioned until Mr. Guppy observes it “over the mantel-shelf,” and he pronounces it to be a “speaking likeness” of Lady Dedlock (396). In contrast to Lady Dedlock’s Chesney Wold portrait, the engraving is described in detail:

Mr. Guppy affects to smile; and with the view of changing the conversation, look with an admiration, real or pretended, round the room at the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty; terminating his survey with the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantel-shelf, in which she is represented on a terrace, with a pedestal upon the terrace, and a vase upon the pedestal, and her shawl upon the vase, and a prodigious piece of fur upon the shawl, and her arm on the prodigious piece of fur, and a bracelet on her arm. (396)

However, the lack of description of Lady Dedlock’s physical presence limits the considerable amount of detail illustrating the engraving for the reader. Evidently Lady Dedlock’s body is missing from the description, other than a brief mention of her “arm” (396), and the engraving is “fraught with symbols that connote the wealth of the model” (Talairach-Veilmas 118). According to Laurence Talairach-Veilmas, the printed portrait’s “display of luxurious items crowded together turns the portrait into a publicity image,” and the body of Lady Dedlock “seemingly vanishes” (118). The engraving of Lady Dedlock is a symbol of wealth and aristocracy, but the engraving also

allows the viewer to gaze upon her “likeness,” which Guppy mentions with surprise. Although the engraving does not allow the viewer an intimate window into her private affairs, Lady Dedlock’s privacy is still violated and the intuitive viewer might be able to read her internal struggle in the carefully cut lines of her engraved face.

The exact intaglio method of “copper-plate impressions” of the *Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty* is never mentioned, but Roger Baynton-Williams indicates that “[t]he most widely adopted intaglio method was line engraving” and “[c]opper was the favoured metal . . . used until the early part of the 19th century” (47). The creation of “incisions on the plate” is the trademark of intaglio methods of image production, including “line engraving, etching, drypoint etching, mezzotint, stipple engraving, soft-ground etching and aquatint” (46). However, “line engraving” was the popular choice in the early nineteenth century. The engraver’s tools included “v-shaped chisels, known as ‘burins’ or ‘gravers’, which were used to cut tiny channels into the plate,” and the depth of the “incisions” in the copper determined the “light and shade” of the “finished print” (47). In opposition to the additive layering process of oil painting, engraving requires the subtractive process of removing layers of copper to produce an image. This distinction is heightened through the comparison of the tools: the pliable bristles against the elasticity of the canvas surface, and the sharp burin scratching against the smooth, hard copper surface. Another point of comparison lies in the affordability factor of the different mediums. Antony Griffiths states that copper was the “preferred” metal until the early nineteenth century because “it provided the optimum balance between softness

(for ease of engraving) and hardness (for length of print run), while being available and affordable” (28). The affordability of the copper engravings increased depending on the length of the print run: “higher prices at the top end compensated for shorter print runs, while the long runs from crudely engraved plates enabled prints to be sold much more cheaply at the bottom end of the market” (50). The varying levels of quality in the print trade can be compared to the difference in quality of oil portraits at the beginning of the nineteenth century as the middle-class adopted that artistic medium to increase their prominence in society. However, overall affordability of lower quality engravings was greater than lower quality oil portraits; hence, the lower-class character, Weevle, can afford a copy of the *Galaxy Gallery of British Beauties*.

To understand the societal implication of the two different mediums of Lady Dedlock’s portraits and their connection to Victorian society as a whole, the reader must first understand the changing social structure in the nineteenth century. In particular, the terms upper, middle, and lower class must be discussed in light of the distinct yet merging public and private spheres. Discussing the issue of privacy as a historical “social construction,” Mats G. Hansson defines the private sphere as “a protected zone for the individual and family, where the curiosity of outsiders can be excluded, and family matters can be dealt with in secret, secluded from the outer world” (16). Families create this safe zone to maintain credibility and integrity in society. The term “social construction” indicates that the separation of the public business and private home life was created for and “altered in different social situations” (15), including social and class power. In addi-

tion, Hansson indicates that “economic circumstances” are one of the main factors in “determining the form of private life” (17). For example, the “economic circumstances” of the “urban poor,” particularly overcrowding, in the nineteenth century to the twentieth century restricted their access to private spaces. The public and private spheres merged, particularly for people who lived on the streets and in alleyways (17-18). The lower-middle class also experienced a merging of the private and public spheres, which is seen most clearly in the characters of the Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby with their law-stationary business. The shop is located underneath their private apartment, and as Hansson states, “the tradesman’s customers, as well as his family, were part of the domestic scene” (18). Mrs. Snagsby is involved in the law-stationary business as much as her husband.

In contrast, the upper-middle class and the aristocracy possessed the monetary means to establish a strict delineation between private and public spheres. Hansson attributes this social distinction between private and public spheres to the “gender division between the home and the outside world” that was highly influenced by the evangelical movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century (21). The evangelical writer Hannah More promoted “the view of man as a person responsible for public duties, while woman was responsible for the spiritual and moral education of the family” (21). Men were allowed to engage in the private and public spheres, whereas women were expected to remain solely in the realm of domesticity. “The correlation between the men’s and women’s spheres of influence,” Jaquie Smyth confirms, “and the spheres of the public and private is strikingly apparent in European history” (28). While women were confined within the nine-

teenth century patriarchal ideas of the separation of business and domesticity, men were allowed to traverse the limits of both. In essence, the strict boundaries between public and private spheres existed only for women, who were expected to remain solely in the home. However, the firm distinction between public and private spheres is only possible for the rising bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

The separation of the private and public spheres for the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie is distinctly illustrated through the characters of Sir Leicester Dedlock, who represents the aristocracy, and Guppy, who represents the rising middle-class. In contrast to the Snagsbys, whose private life and business are inextricably intertwined, Sir Leicester Dedlock and Guppy religiously adhere to the separation of private and public spheres. When Guppy tours Chesney Wold and shows interest in Lady Dedlock's portrait, he asks Rosa, "Has the picture been engraved, miss?" (82), and she replies that "[t]he picture has never been engraved. Sir Leicester has always refused permission" (82). Sir Leicester's firm denials hint that he assumes the role of protector of Lady Dedlock, and he demands that the sacred privacy of the domestic sphere be respected. According to Emily Epstein Kobayashi, "Sir Leicester essentially wishes to make Chesney Wold impermeable to the outside . . . Sir Leicester's wife is similarly off-limits" (198). Although people of the lower classes are sometimes allowed to tour Chesney Wold, Sir Leicester refuses to allow anyone access to the domestic sphere of his household outside the confines of the country estate itself. In a similar way, Guppy separates his business from the peace of his home. In fact, the reader is wholly unaware of any aspect of Guppy's private life until he proposes to

Esther and reveals that he has strong ties to his mother, stating that “[s]he is eminently calculated for a mother-in-law. She never interferes, is all for peace, and her disposition easy” (113). Since Guppy desires to marry Esther, allowing her into the private sphere of his life, he informs her of his financial and personal situation.

However, Sir Leicester is more concerned with class distinction than Guppy. Expressing agitation over the maintenance of his aristocratic status and the “Dedlock dignity” (12) in an age of societal and economic transformation, Sir Leicester desires absolute respect and obedience from people who he deems beneath him: “Sir Leicester Dedlock is only a baronet, but there is no mightier baronet than he. His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable” (12). Sir Leicester’s desire for respect extends to his wife, who gained the rights to that respect when she married into the Dedlock family, and when Detective Bucket relates Mr. Tulkinghorn’s suspicions about Lady Dedlock to Sir Leicester, Sir Leicester exclaims, “My Lady’s name is not a name for common persons to trifle with!” (638). In opposition to changing class structure, Sir Leicester’s wish to safeguard Lady Dedlock’s name as well as preserve the sanctity of her portrait also originates from his desire to keep his wife’s image out of “common” hands. Sir Leicester’s burst of outrage at Bucket’s insinuations about Lady Dedlock reflects the social anxiety prevalent in the nineteenth century surrounding changing class structure, which threatened to reduce aristocratic power and authority. Presenting the aristocratic versus the bourgeois delineation of class division, Jerrold Seigel discusses the “language of class” (158):

Although people in the nineteenth century believed

that the practice of dividing society into distinct and separate classes was a novelty of their time . . . Penelope Corfield has shown that the term ‘class’ was regularly used before 1800, first alongside the older vocabulary of ‘ranks’ and ‘orders,’ then in its stead. The earlier vocabulary reflected a notion of society as a stable configuration of parts whose relations to each other were widely presumed to be rooted in some divine or natural principle independent of human will . . . Class, by contrast, referred not to an ordained division but either to one in which particular human action played some part. (157)

The first definition of “class,” synonymous with “rank” and “orders,” is Sir Leicester’s view of class order as “independent of human will” ordained by a “divine or natural principle” (157). Sir Leicester views everyone who does not have an aristocratic lineage as beneath his notice: lower classes are useful but are not to be fraternized with. In contrast, Guppy’s view of class is not determined by divine order; instead, human will determines class, particularly those who have the economic means to create a defined order of humans. However, despite Sir Leicester and Guppy’s differing views on the exact definition of class structure and its origins, both the aristocracy and the rising middle-class simplify human existence: “The language of class thus at once fostered a recognition that actual social relations are intricate and unpredictable, and offered opportunities and temptations to reduce them to a simpler state” (158). This “simplification” continued to foster the

hierarchical societal structure in nineteenth century England, clearly laying out three main classes without taking into account social mobility and the complexities of human relationships. Despite Sir Leicester's insistence on the separation of classes and spheres, Lady Dedlock's image still graces Weevle's wall in the squalor of Krook's shop and punctures the privacy of the aristocracy.

The two portraits of Lady Dedlock integrate aristocratic values with the rapid lower-class consumption of industrialized products. A mass-produced medium, the engraving in Weevle's room in Krook's dilapidated shop is associated with the economic means of the lower-middle class as well as the public sphere owing to the *Galaxy Gallery of British Beauties'* wide circulation. A high-quality oil painting, the portrait at Chesney Wold represents the wealth of the upper class as well as the private sphere since the portrait remains concealed, for the most part, in the long drawing-room of the Dedlock ancestral home. These two portraits not only reveal the shifting class structure at the time and the strong connection between art and society in the nineteenth century, but they are also a physical representation of Lady Dedlock's internal struggle and her desire to keep the truth about her daughter, Esther Summerson, a secret. Layers of protection surround Lady Dedlock: Lady Dedlock herself, Sir Leicester, and Esther act to maintain her reputation in society. The layers of protection surrounding Lady Dedlock parallel the additive medium of her portrait at Chesney Wold: an oil painting. In contrast, the black and white subtractive medium of the mass-produced engraving on Weevle's wall foreshadows that Lady Dedlock's secret will escape the boundaries of her control and the control of those who seek

to protect her from the scrutiny of the public eye.

Hiding her secrets beneath a veil of “haughty” indifference (448), Lady Dedlock attempts to protect her own image and position in society. Lady Dedlock possesses “[a]n exhausted composure, a worn out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by satisfaction” (13). Composed of many layers of oil paint, glazes and varnish, Lady Dedlock’s oil portrait symbolizes her estimation of herself: “She supposes herself to be an inscrutable Being, quite out of the reach of ordinary mortals” (14). Wrapped in layers of practiced aristocratic indifference and boredom, Lady Dedlock believes that her “mask” (452) makes her invincible and unreadable. Discussing class and gender in nineteenth-century fiction, Arlene Young reveals that characters with aristocratic “social status” are often “to a greater or lesser extent, idle, haughty, vain, extravagant” (48). Lady Dedlock uses these common aristocratic characteristics to protect herself from prying eyes, particularly Mr. Tulkinghorn’s keen observance as he investigates the mysteries of her past. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator hints that “while Mr. Tulkinghorn may not know what is passing in the Dedlock mind at present, it is very possible that he may” (15). Continuing to foster a sense of mystery surrounding the interactions between Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock, the narrator reveals possibilities of their internal dialogue:

[H]e and she are as composed, and as indifferent, and take as little heed of one another, as ever. Yet it may be that my Lady fears this Mr. Tulkinghorn, and that he knows it . . . It may be that her beauty, and all the state and brilliancy surrounding her, only give him the

greater zest for what he is set upon, and make him the more inflexible in it. (357)

Through the continual use of the verb “may,” expressing possibility and suggesting probability, the narrator emphasizes that Tulkinghorn is neither deceived nor defeated by Lady Dedlock’s “mask” of composure and aristocratic indifference. Lady Dedlock’s futile self-protection is a direct example of Leila Silvana May’s idea that humans “are necessarily self-interested social psychologists”: “we must try to guess what others are thinking, and learn to protect ourselves against those plans of others that would be detrimental to us” (3). Throughout the novel, Lady Dedlock attempts to read Tulkinghorn’s mind until she realizes the impossibility of knowing for certain what he is planning. Then, she confronts him about her imminent “exposure,” stating, “I am to remain on this gaudy platform, on which my miserable deception has been so long acted, and it is to fall beneath me when you give the signal?” (509, 512). In her attempt to conceal the secrets of her past, Lady Dedlock has met her match in Tulkinghorn’s inscrutability. Her privacy has been violated, and her attempts to limit the destructive nature of the violation are unsuccessful.

Sir Leicester’s desire to protect the image of Lady Dedlock’s portrait from reproduction presents the reader with his layer of protection of Lady Dedlock’s reputation in society. Sir Leicester’s insistence on the separation of classes and his pride in his aristocratic lineage indicates to Lady Dedlock that her husband only cares about maintaining their social standing and image of wealth. The “issue of respectability” in Victorian England is evident in discussions of Lady Dedlock’s reputation throughout

the novel, and Colleen Denney uses words such as “mask” and “façade” to emphasize the “sexual virtue” and “cleanliness” required for a woman to be deemed “righteous and above suspicion” (41). Denney reveals that often women were required to hide their past in order to integrate into respectable Victorian society; Lady Dedlock also displays an urgent need to hide her past to preserve her new social position. Not merely a selfish act, Lady Dedlock shows concern for Sir Leicester should the news of her former lover, Captain Hawdon, become public knowledge: “I must keep this secret . . . not wholly for myself. I have a husband” (450). The importance of his aristocratic status is evident in Sir Leicester’s concern for the maintenance of the “Dedlock dignity,” and when Lady Dedlock confronts Tulkinghorn about his suspicions of her past, Tulkinghorn indicates that his sole interest in Lady Dedlock’s past is also to “save the family credit” (511). Both Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock are concerned about the preservation of Sir Leicester’s family name and social standing. However, despite Sir Leicester’s preoccupation with class, ironically Lady Dedlock is wholly unaware that her husband “married her for love” (12) and that she is more important to him than a spotless societal standing, so she attempts to conceal news of her illegitimate child, Esther.

Even though Tulkinghorn and Guppy have already detected the secret of Lady Dedlock’s past, Esther protects Lady Dedlock from further exposure when she contracts an infectious disease and her face becomes slightly disfigured: “I was very much changed—O very, very much” (444). Jolene Zigarovich states, “this extraordinary resemblance between Esther and Lady Dedlock is soon disrupted,” identifying Esther’s changes as an “erasure

of resemblance” (77). Continuing on the theme of “erasure,” Zigarovich writes that “[t]he illness that has erased her identity has proven fortunate, for Esther’s face no longer mirrors her mother’s” (77). Even though Esther’s change in physical appearance is beyond her control and is therefore not a conscious effort to protect Lady Dedlock’s reputation, Esther expresses gratitude when she realizes the positive outcome of her illness:

[W]hen I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace likeness; as that nobody could ever now look at me, and look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us. (449)

However, it is important to note that Esther’s physical “identity” has been changed, not “erased” as Zigarovich claims. Esther’s internal and spiritual identity remains unchanged by her illness. Esther’s altered appearance is the layer of varnish and the final defence designed to protect Lady Dedlock from further discovery; however, Lady Dedlock’s image is already circulating in the public sphere. Unbeknownst to Esther, her changed appearance has no effect on the outcome of Lady Dedlock’s secret seeing the light of day. Tulkinghorn already knows that Esther is Lady Dedlock’s child, and Lady Dedlock leaves Chesney Wold before he can tell Sir Leicester about her illegitimate child.

In contrast to the additive layers of protection emulating the oil painting process, the subtractive method of engraving symbolizes those lay-

ers of protection being scraped away. The concerted efforts of Tulkinghorn, Guppy, and the moneylender, Mr. Smallweed, undermine the endeavours of Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester, and Esther to protect Lady Dedlock's reputation. It is important to note that Sir Leicester is unaware of Lady Dedlock's secret and protects her image out of love for his wife. Unlike the vague oil portrait, the engraving is described with scrupulous detail. The black and white medium of the engraving mirrors the clarity with which Lady Dedlock's portrait is described. However, the lack of description of Lady Dedlock's physical presence limits the considerable amount of detail illustrating the engraving for the reader. As mentioned above, Lady Dedlock's body is absent from the description, and the engraving becomes a mere "publicity image" of aristocratic wealth (Talairach-Veilmas 118). Although the engraving receives considerably more description than Lady Dedlock's Chesney Wold portrait, neither portrait displays Lady Dedlock's body. The narrator's vague description of Lady Dedlock's portrait at Chesney Wold merely states that she has a "handsome face" (499). In a similar way, the narrator's exclusion of Lady Dedlock's bodily presence in the "copper-plate impression" (256) is slightly counteracted by Guppy's observation that it is a "speaking likeness" of Lady Dedlock (396). In both instances, the reader must rely on the narrator to present the facts. And while portraiture contains the power to give insight into complex characters, at the same time, according to Piehler, "portraiture can reveal, and sometimes conceal, layered attributes of its subject" (105). In both portraits, Lady Dedlock's strangely absent body presents her as a symbol of the aristocracy within the private and public sphere.

The hierarchical class implications of Lady Dedlock's two portraits

can be summarized in relation to the different mediums. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, oil portraits were still considered the unique possessions of the aristocracy. In a “lecture to the Academy,” painter and critic Henry Fuseli states, “portrait-painting, which formerly was the exclusive property of princes, or a tribute to beauty, prowess, genius, talent, and distinguished character, is now become a kind of family calendar” (qtd. in Bray 10). Fuseli’s apparent anxiety about the relationship between the visual arts and changing class structure aligns with Sir Leicester’s indignation. The rising middle-class also began using family portraits to exhibit their increasing wealth and power in society, which limited the aristocracy’s control of portraiture as merely a symbol of upper-class values. Members of the lower class, such as Weevle, who cannot afford original portraits, collect the cheap mass-produced portraits of aristocratic and wealthy families. Margaret Beetham argues that “The rise of mass-production . . . ‘moved the portrait of the aristocratic lady from the wall of her home into different contexts where its meaning was radically altered’” (qtd. in Talairach-Veilmas 118). Whether or not the engraving is a reproduction of Lady Dedlock’s portrait at Chesney Wold, the likeness of her produced in the “Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty” (256) moves Lady Dedlock’s image from the private sphere of her aristocratic home and acquaintances to the public sphere of Krook’s dingy shop in Weevle’s room, compliments of the mass-produced engravings catalogue. Lady Dedlock’s likeness is not merely seen by intimate acquaintances at Chesney Wold, but it is now circulated to a wide audience throughout the middle and lower classes. Neither she nor Sir Leicester has control over the dissemination of her likeness. Distinctions between the lower,

middle and upper classes, as well as between the public and private spheres, have weakened as a result of Lady Dedlock's two portraits.

Through the two portraits of Lady Dedlock, Dickens presents the reader with a mystery plot in which the oil painting and the engraving simultaneously conceal and reveal the secret of Lady Dedlock's illegitimate daughter, Esther. Lady Dedlock's image erupts into the public sphere through the mass production of an engraving, despite Sir Leicester's attempts to protect his wife's privacy. The subtractive method of engraving contrasts with the additive layering process of oil painting, mirroring the thwarted attempts of Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester and Esther to maintain Lady Dedlock's privacy. The two portraits, in other words, become a platform to discuss the transformation of the hierarchical class structure in England in which the separation of the private and public spheres played a crucial role.

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