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Physiognomy and Emotional Abuse in Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Grey Woman"

Natalie Ann Davis

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Physiognomy and Emotional Abuse in Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Grey Woman"

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Perrault's Bluebeard tale is a story of domestic abuse: Bluebeard tries to control his wife's movements by prohibiting her from entering a specific room in their chateau and attempts to kill his wife as punishment when she ultimately disobeys him. Bluebeard's violence towards his wife clearly marks him as an abuser. There have been countless other versions of the Bluebeard tale including Elizabeth Gaskell's short story "The Grey Woman." Unlike other versions of the tale that emphasize Bluebeard's physically abusive behavior, Gaskell's version focuses on a more subtle form of abuse: emotional abuse. Emotional abuse has remained an obscure topic within Victorian scholarship, and my paper attempts to address this gap in the literature by exploring the emotionally abusive marriage between Anna Scherer and, her personal Bluebeard, M. de la Tourelle.

The term "emotional abuse" did not exist during Gaskell's time, and yet, she skillfully portrays an emotionally abusive relationship. M. de la Tourelle isolates Anna from her family, controls her movements within her own home, and unexpectedly rages at her. Anna records the events of her abusive marriage in a letter to her daughter years after the events originally take place. As Anna writes her narrative, she attempts to articulate the abuse she endured. Without access to our 21st-century lexicon of abuse, Anna instead settles on physiognomy as a language that allows her to make sense of her husband's behavior. Physiognomy was a popular pseudoscience at the time, and it teaches that physical characteristics are indicative of personality traits. So, in her writing, Anna analyzes the curve of her husband's mouth, the light in his eyes, and the color of his cheeks all in an attempt to explain the emotional abuse she endured throughout her marriage. Anna also subjects herself to a physiognomic reading as she depicts how drastically her coloring has changed during her brief marriage to M. de la Tourelle. When Anna first married M. de la Tourelle, she had bright, lily-like skin and blonde hair. However, after enduring abuse in her marriage, her hair and skin both turn unnaturally and permanently gray. Anna depicts herself as being forever changed because of her abusive marriage.

Gaskell's short story uses physiognomy as a tool to discuss emotional abuse long before the term "emotional abuse" existed. Studying the role physiognomy plays in "The Grey Woman," allows for new insights on how emotional abuse operates within the text. Ultimately, physiognomy provides a way of understanding how Victorian authors may have depicted both abusers and victims.

Keywords: emotional abuse, physiognomy, Elizabeth Gaskell, Bluebeard, "The Grey Woman"

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Introduction

The Bluebeard tale depicts overt abuse. It is the story of a wealthy man who marries a woman and commands her not to go into one particular room in his chateau. The curious wife inevitably enters the forbidden room and discovers the dead bodies of Bluebeard's previous wives. When Bluebeard discovers his wife has disobeyed him, he is outraged by her disobedience and tries to kill her as punishment. In most versions of the tale, Bluebeard is caught in the act of trying to murder his latest wife and is finally executed for his crimes.

Although there are now dozens of variants of the Bluebeard tale, Charles Perrault's 1697 rendition is considered the earliest complete version of the tale. Victorian authors retold the Bluebeard story in works such as Charles Dickens' *Captain Murderer*, Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*, and Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Grey Woman." While all of these stories are different, they each maintain the same basic elements of Perrault's tale: a forbidden room, a curious wife, and an abusive husband. Many of these works, especially *Captain Murder* and Perrault's Bluebeard tale, focus on the gore of the story by emphasizing the husband's violence and inhumanity. However, Elizabeth Gaskell's short story "The Grey Woman" resists retelling this story in a way that sensationalizes domestic violence.

Instead of accentuating the violence of the Bluebeard character in Gaskell's story, Gaskell focuses her attention on how Bluebeard's wife is impacted by the abuse she endures. In Gaskell's story, Anna Scherer is a young German woman who is pressured into marrying M. de la Tourelle because he is from a higher social class than she is (248). After the wedding, M. de la Tourelle takes Anna to his chateau in France where he begins criticizing her, controlling where she is allowed to go in the house, and isolating her from her family (252–63). Eventually, Anna discovers that her husband is the leader of a murderous gang, so she goes on the run from her

husband who tries to hunt her down. Instead, M. de la Tourelle is caught and executed for his crimes. Even after her husband's death, Anna is so afraid of M. de la Tourelle that her skin and hair remain gray from fear, and she lives out the remainder of her life isolated from society. Gaskell shifts the focus of her version of the Bluebeard tale from the abuser to the abused, focusing on Anna's suffering instead of on M. de la Tourelle's extravagant crimes. Gaskell's version of the tale expands on the types of abuse that Bluebeard's wife suffers: Anna experiences significant abuse that culminates in her feeling both physically and psychologically unsafe.

During the nineteenth century, abuse could simply mean to misuse something, and the terms "domestic abuse," "physical abuse," and "emotional abuse" did not even exist. Physical abuse within a marriage typically was called "wife-beating," and England only began to legislate against it in 1853 (Williams and Walklate 306). Perrault's Bluebeard would clearly be called a wife-beater under this legislation; however, Gaskell's version of the Bluebeard tale is less physical than Perrault's version. Although M. de la Tourelle kills other characters throughout the story and threatens to kill his wife, there is not a single scene in the text where M. de la Tourelle physically harms Anna. And yet, by the end of the story, Anna has been so transformed by the abuse she endured that she is nothing more than a pale reflection of her former self.

The type of abuse Gaskell depicted would remain unarticulated for over a century after "The Grey Lady" was written. However, today we have a working definition of emotional abuse. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), emotional abuse is "a pattern of behavior in which one person deliberately and repeatedly subjects another to nonphysical acts that are detrimental to behavioral and affective functioning and overall mental well-being" ("Emotional Abuse"). APA goes on to identify several behaviors that are indicative of an emotionally abusive relationship including "intimidation and terrorization; . . . rejection and

withholding of affection; isolation; and excessive control" ("Emotional Abuse"). Abusers may threaten to harm the other person in the relationship—whether by spreading lies about that person or by physically attacking them. Even if the abuser does not follow through on the threat, the other person in the relationship is left feeling unsafe. Abusers typically withhold affection at unpredictable times and in inconsistent circumstances; for example, abusers may laugh at a joke one day and criticize a similar joke the next. Over time, the other member of the abusive relationship typically becomes confused and disoriented. Isolation often takes place when an abuser discourages their partner from interacting with family and friends. Excessive control occurs when an abuser dictates where their partner can go, who they can talk to, how they should dress, what kinds of jokes they should laugh at, how they should feel, etc. These patterns of abuse often cause the survivor of the abuse to experience trauma, or what the Victorians would have termed shock. Today, we would define trauma as "an emotional response to a terrible event" ("Trauma"). In the long term, trauma can cause people to experience "unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea" ("Trauma"). It is essential to understand the elements of an abusive relationship so that a reader can better understand the trauma Anna experienced in her abusive marriage.

Gaskell skillfully showcases an emotionally abusive relationship even though people in Victorian England did not have a clear term to describe the experience of emotional abuse. Instead of using psychological language, which was still in its infancy at the time, Gaskell used the tradition of physiognomy to allude to the inner workings of her characters. Physiognomy suggests that you can learn about a person's psyche by studying their appearance—typically a person's facial features ("Physiognomy n1a"). This idea has ancient roots; it was first proposed by Aristotle, but it continued to be popular throughout Western thought for millennia. The study

of physiognomy gained even more traction in the nineteenth century, as the theory of evolution seemed to confirm some of the basic tenets of the practice. For instance, in 1872 Charles Darwin wrote a book exploring the connection between human and animal expressions, although he tried to distance himself from the pseudo-science by avoiding personality claims. Fairy tales, such as Bluebeard, have a special relationship with physiognomy because, as Linnea G. Stevens notes, fairytales rely on physiognomic clues to differentiate heroes from villains (2). For instance, heroines are typically beautiful whereas villains are often ugly. More applicably, Bluebeard was destined to be the villain of his story because he has an unnaturally colored beard (Perrault 33). Gaskell follows the pattern set out by fairytales and uses physiognomy to explore the emotional abuse taking place between her characters Anna and M. de la Tourelle.

My paper will explore how Gaskell uses physiognomy to articulate the complex issue of emotional abuse in "The Grey Woman." I will begin my study with a review of the scholarly conversation surrounding Victorian literature and emotional abuse before moving into an in-depth analysis of how physiognomy operates within Gaskell's text. This analysis will begin by reviewing the way Gaskell describes M. de la Tourelle in the text using physiognomic terminology and by evaluating how these descriptions connect to emotional abuse. Once I have finished examining M. de la Tourelle's physiognomic traits, I will review Anna's physiognomic characteristics to see what they reveal about Anna as an abuse survivor. Finally, my paper will conclude with a discussion on how physiognomy can be used to understand the implications of emotional abuse in Victorian literature.

Victorian Literature and Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is still a budding topic in Victorian studies. Susan Anne Carlson's dissertation "Unveiled Rage and Unspoken Fear: A Study of Emotional, Physical and Sexual

Abuse in the Juvenilia and Novels of Charlotte Brontë" is one of the few scholarly works to overtly discuss how emotional abuse was depicted in Charlotte Brontë's work. There has been only one scholarly addition to the study of emotional abuse in Victorian England since Carlson's work: Heather Nelson's "'Nothing That She Could Allege Against Him in Judicious or Judicial Ears': 'Consensual' Marital Abuse in Victorian Literature." Nelson's article discusses various forms of abuse, but she takes time to explicitly explore how emotional abuse took place alongside physical abuse in Eliot's "Janet's Repentance." Nelson's work was published in 2017, far more recently than Carlson's dissertation, yet Nelson comments in her article that because emotional abuse is still viewed as less harmful than physical abuse, it has been generally ignored by Victorian scholars. Nelson says that John M. Biggs and A. James Hammerton are the only historians to seriously address emotional abuse in their respective works *The Concept of Matrimonial Cruelty* and "Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth Century Married Life." Both of these works were published over three decades ago. Despite these scholars' efforts, emotional abuse has remained an obscure topic of Victorian scholarly interest.

Although there has been little discussion on how emotional abuse operates in Victorian fiction, there has been significant work connecting Victorian understanding of shock and nervous conditions to modern-day trauma theory. For instance, Jill Matus' *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* establishes the connection between Victorian psychic shock and modern conceptions of trauma while Gretchen Braun's *Narrating Trauma: Victorian Novels and Modern Stress Disorders* focuses on the relationship between Victorian nervous disorders and PTSD, and Terry Adam's dissertation "Traumatic Reverberations: Victorian Narratives of Trauma Culture" discusses the relationship between Victorian narratives and modern conceptions of female trauma. Although none of these works addresses emotional abuse as a

primary concern, they do show that trauma studies plays an important role in Victorian studies. In my own writing, I would like to continue the work begun by these scholars by analyzing the role emotional abuse plays in "The Grey Woman." I hope that by using physiognomy to help me conduct my analysis, I can open the door for a serious discussion on how Victorian authors might have conceptualized emotional abuse.

There is already a long scholarly tradition of exploring how physiognomy operates within Victorian fiction. For instance, Taylor M. Scanlon's work "The Face of the Crowd: Reading Terror Physiognomically in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*," Christie Harner's "Physiognomic Discourse and the Trials of Cross-Class Sympathy in *Mary Barton*," Josh Epstein's "'Neutral Physiognomy': The Unreadable Faces of *Middlemarch*," and Michael Hollington's "'For God's Sake Look at This!': Physiognomy in *Bleak House*" all examine how the language of physiognomy was utilized by Victorian authors as a means of character description. However, these works do not address how physiognomy may have operated in some texts as a language to discuss abuse.

I will be using a variety of Victorian physiognomy texts to help inform my analysis. I will mainly use Alexander Walker's *Physiognomy Founded upon Physiology*, which was published in London in 1834. However, I will supplement the information found in this book with Thomas Cookes' *A Practical and Familiar View of the Science of Physiognomy*, published in London in 1819, and Orson Fowler's *New Illustrated Self-Instructor In Phrenology and Physiognomy*, published in New York in 1859. Each of these publications uses illustrations to first identify physical features and then explain how those attributes demonstrate the personality of the person who has them. For instance, according to these books, people with short foreheads are typically more energetic but less intelligent than people with taller foreheads (Cookes 283;

Fowler 41; Walker 54). By cross-referencing these texts with one another, I hope to gain a general understanding of physiognomic norms while avoiding some views that may be specific to individual authors.

As an imprecise pseudo-science, physiognomy oscillates between predicting people's personalities by analyzing their features and explaining discrepancies between features and expectations. Rather than acting as an exact science that perfectly equates features to personality, physiognomy is a study that allows for nuance and occasionally contradiction. One feature might deceptively indicate a certain personality trait, and yet, through a more detailed physiognomic reading, a more subtle feature may allow for a different psychological conclusion. It is physiognomy's imprecise nature that made it such an effective tool for fiction writers: writers could create expectations using physiognomy and could then subvert those expectations while still explaining the discrepancy using physiognomy. Anna is the main narrator throughout Gaskell's text, and Anna uses physiognomy as a tool to describe her husband's behavior. Although physiognomy is a highly imperfect lexicon for abuse, it provides Anna with a framework that allows her to articulate what it was like to be isolated and controlled by M. de la Tourelle. Anna's physiognomic reading of M. de la Tourelle is not straightforward, as her interpretation of her husband's features only becomes clear once she begins experiencing abuse; however, this reflects the complex nature of emotional abuse. Anna cannot easily articulate what she experienced in her marriage to M. de la Tourelle, and so she ultimately settles on physiognomy as a tool that allows her to make some sense of an otherwise senseless situation.

Bluebeard and M. de la Tourelle

From the first time M. de la Tourelle is introduced in "The Grey Woman," his physical features are described in detail. Anna, as the narrator of her story, gives several descriptions of

M. de la Tourelle's features before their marriage; however, she does not attribute much meaning to these traits until after her marriage, when her husband's behavior becomes clearly abusive. By examining M. de la Tourelle's physical descriptions from early in the text, we can read the physiognomic clues that established M. de la Tourelle's character as a potential abuser and that Anna only later learns to interpret. I will conduct this analysis by evaluating the differences between M. de la Tourelle's appearance and Perrault's Bluebeard's appearance before doing a close physiognomic reading of M. de la Tourelle.

While M. de la Tourelle is a Bluebeard character, Tourelle's features differ drastically from Bluebeard's. Fairy tales often rely on physiognomic descriptions to help the reader distinguish between the heroes and villains in the story, and Bluebeard is no different (Stevens 2). The second sentence in Perrault's story describes the titular character as having a "blue beard" which made him so "ugly" and "frightful" that women literally run from him (33). In fact, the only way Bluebeard can convince the heroine of the story to marry him is by inviting her family to his country house to prove he is a gentleman and—perhaps more persuasively—to show off his obscene wealth. Although Bluebeard is finally able to convince the heroine that he is not a threat to her, he is well aware that everyone who comes in contact with him fears him because of his beard. To the characters in the fairytale, the color of Bluebeard's beard marks him as an outsider and apparently unsafe to be around. Fowler's illustrated guide to phrenology and physiognomy states that both beard "color" and "the beard" itself are "very significant of character" (55–56). Obviously, Fowler's guide does not describe the significance of blue hair, but it makes it clear that the characteristics of any beard indicate something about a person's character. Because blue is a non-traditional hair color, having blue hair would not only mark a

person as being physically "other" but would also mark that person's character so outside of the realm of normalcy that the only safe thing to do would be to avoid that person altogether.

While Bluebeard's looks immediately distinguish him as a villain, a first impression of M. de la Tourelle marks him as being a potential hero. The first time Anna meets M. de la Tourelle, she says, "I thought I had never seen anyone so handsome or so elegant" (Gaskell 246). Far from being ugly enough to cause maidens to run in fear, M. de la Tourelle is handsome. This one change in Gaskell's depiction of a Bluebeard character—changing him from ugly to handsome—subverts readers' expectations: instead of being fearsome, M. de la Tourelle is inviting. Because of this, the abuse that eventually follows in the narrative is a surprise to the reader rather than an expectation. By making M. de la Tourelle handsome, Gaskell is developing a more subtle narrative that shifts the abuse from being overtly violent to being psychologically destructive.

M. de la Tourelle is described as handsome to an almost alarming extreme when Anna remarks that she "had never seen anyone so handsome or so elegant" (Gaskell 246). This extremity is notable for several reasons: first, it caused the people around M. de la Tourelle to put their guard down, and second, the extremity is warned against in physiognomy. In regard to the first reason noted, M. de la Tourelle is highly calculating and manipulative, so it would be entirely to his benefit if people felt comfortable around him. Rather than scaring off people, everyone believes him to be entirely harmless. His good looks make him even more dangerous than Perrault's Bluebeard because M. de la Tourelle does not have to convince anyone that he would make a genteel husband. However, Fowler's physiognomy still has a word of warning about M. de la Tourelle. Although he is extremely handsome, physiognomy warns that extremity is dangerous—even if that extremity is of good looks. Fowler warns, "The finest things, when

perverted, become the worst" (51). He says that extreme beauty can be dangerous because when someone extremely beautiful is perverted "they become proportionally bad" (51). Therefore, while extreme beauty is a reference to extremity of character, neither Fowler nor Walker clarifies whether this trait is inevitably good or bad.

By the end of her first meeting with M. de la Tourelle, Anna begins to doubt his character. She states, "I became a little tired of the affected softness and effeminacy of his manners" (Gaskell 247). Perhaps Anna finds M. de la Tourelle's softness false because he is a member of the upper class and is using "court manners"—behaviors which Anna, as a miller's daughter, finds laughable (246). However, Anna consistently describes M. de la Tourelle's features as being "as delicate as a girl's," which should suggest a genuinely delicate nature that would need no affectation (247). Therefore, it is curious that Anna believes M. de la Tourelle is feigning his "softness and effeminacy," even as those personal characteristics appear to be in harmony with his physical features (247). Looking at Walker's and Fowler's physiognomic descriptions of feminine features can help give the reader some clues as to why Anna may have been suspicious of M. de la Tourelle's character. Anna describes his features as delicate, which both Walker and Fowler associate with being an expert in emotions. Walker describes delicate features, such as M. de la Tourelle's, as indicating "intellectual sentiment" (261). Fowler similarly describes people with delicate features as being sensitive in thought and feeling, prioritizing mind over body, and being highly intelligent (35). While Walker and Fowler agree that delicate features are linked to sensitivity and intellect, they do not specify whether these traits lead to morally upright or poor behavior. For instance, a combination of these characteristics could make someone compassionate, but they could also make a person particularly adept at emotional manipulation. Of course, M. de la Tourelle would prefer people

believe the first explanation—that his delicate features reflect virtuousness—but the second explanation becomes increasingly likely as the story unfolds.

As soon as M. de la Tourelle and Anna are legally married, the true meaning of his effeminate features becomes clearer. After their wedding, Anna asks her husband if they can travel through her hometown of Heidelberg as they make their way to his castle in France (Gaskell 250). M. de la Tourelle denies her request, and this is the first of many moments when we see him intentionally isolate Anna from her family. Even though Anna "begged" her husband to go through Heidelberg, she writes the following: "I found an amount of determination, under that effeminate appearance and manner, for which I was not prepared, and he refused my first request so decidedly that I dared not urge it" (250). This quote shows that M. de la Tourelle's effeminate features are not linked with a weak temperament. In fact, Fowler connects these features with a person who "feel[s] that their ends are of the utmost importance, and must be answered now" (36). Fowler attributes delicate features with urgency and even impatience, which Anna recognizes as well when she describes M. de la Tourelle as having denied her request "decidedly" (Fowler 36; Gaskell 250). He denied her request "so decidedly" that Anna was too afraid to continue the discussion (Gaskell 250). Within hours of officially marrying Anna, M. de la Tourelle has already shown that his sensitive features imply impatience rather than gentility.

Soon into their married life, Anna realizes that although her husband is overly affectionate towards her, that affection does not indicate that her husband respects or values her. Anna writes:

> M. de la Tourelle behaved towards me as if I were some precious toy or idol, to be cherished, and fostered, and petted, and indulged, I soon found out how little I, or,

> apparently, anyone else, could bend the terrible will of the man who had on first acquaintance appeared to me too effeminate and languid to exert his will in the slightest particular. (Gaskell 253)

This passage helps conclude the previous analysis of M. de la Tourelle's feminine features. Although he appears delicate, those delicate features show a determined will and intellectual prowess. This section also speaks to a certain duplicitous value M. de la Tourelle has. He presents himself as being overly affectionate to his wife, but his affection is not genuine. He does not even love his wife enough to seriously consider her opinions. Instead, he acts as though his will is the only one that matters in his relationship with Anna.

Instead of M. de la Tourelle's delicate features reflecting a gentle personality, his looks are carefully described in ways that emphasize an intelligent, unyielding, and extreme nature. Through a physiognomic reading, it becomes clear that all of M. de la Tourelle's physical characteristics show that he is predisposed to the kind of self-serving behavior that might lead a person to become an emotionally abusive partner.

Two Physiognomic Passages

Although Anna begins to doubt her fiancé's character before the marriage, it is only after they are man and wife that she truly learns to interpret his expressions. In fact, the longer Anna is married to M. de la Tourelle, the more meaning she attributes to her husband's looks. There are two passages in particular where Anna gives a detailed account of how her husband's features predict his poor behavior. These descriptions are directly linked to the abusive behavior she experiences in her marriage. The first passage comes directly after Anna notes that although her husband pretends to dote on her, he does not actually have any interest in listening to her opinions (Gaskell 253). She says the following:

> I had learnt to know his face better now; and to see that some vehement depth of feeling, the cause of which I could not fathom, made his grey eye glitter with pale light, and his lips contract, and his delicate cheek whiten on certain occasions. (Gaskell 253–54)

Anna identifies three aspects of her husband's face that to her are signs of "some vehement depth of feeling" that Anna "could not fathom" (253). She says that her husband's gray eyes appear to have "pale light" within them, that "his lips contract," and that his "cheek whiten[s]" (253). This segment comes soon after Anna and M. de la Tourelle's wedding. However, there is one more passage where Anna gives a physiognomic reading. This next reading comes later in their marriage and almost directly before the events that would lead her to witness her husband carrying a dead body through the window of his office. Anna says:

> His love was shown fitfully, and more in ways calculated to please himself than to please me. I felt that for no wish of mine would he deviate one tittle from any predetermined course of action. I had learnt the inflexibility of those thin, delicate lips; I knew how anger would turn his fair complexion to deadly white, and bring the cruel light into his pale blue eyes. (257)

This passage is almost the same as the previous physiognomic reading, but this time, Anna has shifted from saying that she "could not fathom" the meaning behind his expression to saying that she "had learnt" the importance of his features (253 and 257). She again identifies the light in his eyes, but this time she calls the light "cruel" (257). She again mentions the thin lips, but this time calls them "inflexible" (257). She again describes the change in the coloring of his cheek, but this time she attributes the shift to "anger" (257). I will discuss these three attributes in detail in this section.

The first feature Anna mentions is her husband's eyes. Walker describes eyes as "the organ . . . of intellectual emotion," and we have already discussed how M. de la Tourelle's features indicate that he is intellectual by nature; however, Anna reads something beyond intelligence in her husband's eyes (240). In both passages, she identifies a light that passes through his eyes. Anna says that her husband's eyes "glitter" with a light that she describes first as "pale" and eventually as "cruel" (Gaskell 253 and 257). Going back to Walker's physiognomic reading of eyes can help make sense of Anna's description of the light in M. de la Tourelle's eyes. Walker nuances what he terms "intelligence" when he states that "the same actions which express intellectual emotion and passion will accompany, and therefore express, animal emotion and passion" specifically through the eyes (Walker 244). So, while the eye expresses intelligence, it also expresses emotion. It is this emotion that Anna seems to be reading when she analyzes the "cruel light" in her husband's eyes (Gaskell 257).

Anna then examines her husband's controlling nature with her description of his mouth. She says that she learned that her husband was experiencing a "vehement depth of feeling" when his "lips contract[ed]" (Gaskell 253–54). Walker specifically addresses this physical motion. He associates lips with passion but says that if "the lips are gently held in or drawn backward or toward the angles," then whatever "expression of passion" the person may be experiencing "is under controul, and a character of coolness and precision is proportionally given" (253–54). Anna learns from experience that when her husband's lips contract, that means he is experiencing deep feelings, an association that Walker supports. Physiognomically reading the angle of M. de la Tourelle's lips reveals that he is a calculating person who cares deeply about maintaining a position of control in his marriage.

The last quality Anna mentions is that her husband's cheek whitens when he is displeased. Although eyes and lips are both rife with physiognomic meaning, physiognomy is largely (and curiously) skeptical of the significance of cheeks. Walker's book only discusses cheekbones, Fowler's book hardly mentions cheeks at all, and Cookes only mentions cheeks to say that they are "extremely liable to change by time and accident" and should therefore be avoided as a source of physiognomic examination (Cookes 182). He even goes so far as to say, "There cannot be any great degree of reliance placed on decisions formed from an examination of the cheeks" (183). However, all three of these guides do mention the importance of coloring. Cookes notes that a pale cheek is usually indicative of fear, disappointment, or sorrow and Fowler says that the color of the cheek "indicates the existing states of body and mind" (Cookes 212 and 183; Fowler 57). Yet, even this information is lacking in specificity. All we can safely assume using a physiognomic reading is that a whitening cheek indicates that M. de la Tourelle's mood is shifting swiftly and significantly.

The three features Anna identified—her husband's eyes, lips, and cheeks—are all tied to abusive behavior. For instance, the emotion Anna identifies in her husband's eyes alludes to her husband's tendency to intimidate and terrorize her. While Anna must try to decipher the meaning behind her husband's actions, she is able to clearly explain the impact they have on her. Anna describes herself as experiencing "dread of his displeasure" to the extent that she avoided his company when possible (Gaskell 254). In the same paragraph, Anna says that she is afraid of her husband's "outbursts of passion" (Gaskell 254). Interestingly, Anna's description of her husband's eyes as "glitter[ing] with pale light" leading to "outbursts of passion" fits perfectly with Walker's description of the eye being an avenue for "animal emotion and passion" to express itself (Gaskell 253–54; Walker 244). Of course, M. de la Tourelle expressing "animal

emotion and passion" that results in Anna feeling "dread" clearly follows the pattern of emotional abuse: the abuser terrorizes the abused so that they live in a state of constant fear (Walker 224; Gaskell 254).

The unpredictable way M. de la Tourelle treats Anna perfectly follows the pattern of emotional abuse established today. It is interesting, then, that Gaskell was able to so easily identify it. M. de la Tourelle's behavior is so variable that Anna resorted to studying the kind of light entering her husband's eyes, lips, and cheeks in order to try to make sense of his illogical behavior (253–4). Anna is never able to identify what causes her husband to get angry with her. All she can definitively say is that the light, and presumably the actions they precede, that enters his eyes is "cruel" (257). It is essential to remember that Anna did not describe her husband as being fitful: instead, she described "his love" as being fitful (257)—a love where Anna is accustomed to being either praised or berated, a love where Anna is never sure what she has done to incite either his affection or anger, a love where Anna is entirely subject to her husband's erratic whims, a love that is emotionally abusive.

These emotionally abusive patterns of withholding allow M. de la Tourelle to control Anna throughout their marriage. M. de la Tourelle is so controlling that he dictates where Anna can go and whom she is allowed to talk to. He controls what parts of the house Anna can visit; he controls whom she can trust by employing servants who only answer to him and who treat her with disrespect; and he controls to whom she is able to speak by hiding letters from Anna's family and by being jealous of Amante, Anna's maid and only friend (257). M. de la Tourelle was jealous of Anna's other relationships as well. Not long into their marriage, Anna says, "The love I bore to anyone seemed to be a reason for his hating them" (257). M. de la Tourelle's jealousy led him to isolate Anna from the other members of the house and even from her own

family. This isolation is helpful for M. de la Tourelle because it allows him to more easily control Anna—how can Anna realize the significance of her situation without other people to help her develop an accurate sense of reality? And yet, this isolation is one of the largest differences between Gaskell's text and Perrault's Bluebeard.

Interestingly, Perrault's Bluebeard does not isolate his wife from her family and friends. He even encourages his wife to invite people over on the fateful weekend he leaves town (Perrault 34). Ultimately, his lack of isolation is what leads to his demise and his wife's victory. When he is just about to kill his wife for disobeying him, her brothers come to visit and are able to stop Bluebeard (42). They kill Bluebeard and allow their sister to live a free and happy life (42). While the wife in Perrault's version of the Bluebeard tale is saved because of her familial relationships, Anna is completely cut off from her own family. M. de la Tourelle hides all of the letters she receives from her brother and father, so Anna has no way to communicate her distress to any family member (Gaskell 259). Even when Anna finally escapes M. de la Tourelle's chateau, she cannot return to the protection of her brother and father because she is sure that her murderous husband will have gotten there before she could (291). She is correct.

Anna describes the light in her husband's eyes, the line of his mouth, and the color of his cheeks all in an effort to make sense of the way he terrorizes her, controls her actions, isolates her from others, and withholds love from her. She does not remark on these details before their marriage: it is only after he begins abusing her that she starts to read the details of his face for more significant clues about his character. His eyes, mouth, and cheek all become tools to help her make sense of an otherwise senseless situation. His eyes became meaningful because the light in them helped her understand when he was becoming angry. His mouth became telling because she understood the meaning behind how tightly it was shut. The color of his cheek

became a signal for a change in his emotion. As a victim of emotional abuse, Anna needed to learn to read these subtle signs to ensure her psychological survival. As Anna realized her husband's temperament was erratic and entirely self-serving, she needed to find ways to predict the sudden shifts in his mood because those moods would inevitably lead her husband to enact psychological violence against her. Looking back at the physiognomic passages from the beginning of this section, it is interesting to see that the main difference between the two passages is Anna's understanding of her husband. While in the first paragraph she says she "could not fathom" the cause behind her husband's "vehement depth of feeling," through the short time span of their marriage, Anna is soon able to say "I had learnt" (Gaskell 253). She learned to be silent when her husband became angry, she learned that her needs did not matter in light of his wants, and she learned that she existed only to satisfy his whims. Anna's physiognomic reading of her husband was a necessary act of survival, even as it necessitated her to give up parts of herself along the way.

Anna Turning Gray

Anna undergoes a complete transformation throughout her marriage to M. de la Tourelle. Gaskell makes this transformation literal as the narration shifts between describing Anna's psychological terror of her husband to describing her stark physical transformation. While Anna had been experiencing emotional abuse throughout the entirety of her marriage, her final encounter with M. de la Tourelle is the moment when she suffered what the Victorians would call a great shock and what today we would call a traumatic experience (Matus 47). Anna hid under a desk in her husband's office while he and a band of murderous thieves pulled a dead body through the window (Gaskell 264). She held back a scream as her fingertips grazed the cold hand of a corpse that had been laid beside her, and she remained hidden as her husband bragged

about killing his previous wife (267). Anna experienced such a shock that she was never unable to fully recover physically or mentally.

Aside from being called beautiful, which is something many physiognomy books already associated with German women, Anna is almost entirely described in terms of her coloring (Walker 116; Gaskell 240). In the portrait of Anna painted before her marriage, Anna has a "complexion of lilies and roses" and Anna is later described as having "fair hair" (Gaskell 240 and 279). However, Anna's coloring changes dramatically after the shock she experiences when she witnesses her husband bring a dead body into their home. Anna and her maid, Amante, go on the run and assume completely new identities. Amante dyes Anna's hair and skin "with the decaying shells of the stored-up walnuts" to help disguise her as an old woman (297). Anna continues to dye her hair and skin even when she settles into an apartment in Frankfort. In spite of the fact that Anna stays inside and avoids getting near the window, she continues to dye her hair and skin (294). Even when there is no one there to see her, she continues to compulsively change her coloring. While the disguise was meant to prevent Anna from being recognized by her husband, it becomes a symbol of how her shock has transformed her. She was so changed that when Anna happened to look out the window and make eye contact with M. de la Tourelle walking through the street, he did not even recognize her (297).

Color plays an interesting role in the world of physiognomy. While hair turning gray is typically a sign of old age, skin is not usually a sign of great significance. Because skin coloring can vary significantly from moment to moment among people like Anna who have a fair complexion, it can be difficult to use skin as a marking of a person's character. Whether or not a person's skin is flushed or pale can have as much to do with anger, fear, and embarrassment as temperature, time of day, and drowsiness; therefore, color is typically not a consistent enough

measure to say something about a person's character. Cookes is so determined to dissuade physiognomists from using coloring to determine personality that he pleads, "Let not the physiognomist, therefore, hold the reputation of his science by so slender a tenure" (183). Of course, it seems difficult to use coloring to make implications on a person's character when coloring can change drastically based on seemingly arbitrary variables. However, Anna's skin does not shift back and forth as a healthy complexion would. Instead, Anna's skin is described as remarkably lily-like before her marriage and then permanently gray after the shock she suffered.

This shift defies traditional physiognomic reading because it is not the type of color shift that happens naturally. Gray skin should be a temporary description rather than a permanent characteristic. A woman should only have gray skin for a few moments after receiving a great fright or perhaps while feeling sick or maybe even while suffering from lack of sleep. But a woman's skin would surely regain its natural hue once she had recovered fully from whatever extremity robbed her skin of its healthy pigment. This is not the case for Anna. Her skin and her hair are never the same color as they were before she married M. de la Tourelle because she is never the same as she was before her marriage. Even after Anna sees the decapitated body of her husband and abuser, she is still not able to "return to a more natural mode of life" (Gaskell 298). While eventually she stops dying her skin and hair, she soon discovers that her hair and skin have turned gray of their own accord. She says, "my yellow hair was grey, my complexion was ashen-coloured, no creature could have recognized the fresh-coloured, bright-haired young woman of eighteen months before" (297). It is at this point in the narrative that people begin calling her "the Grey Woman" (297). Although Anna logically knows that she is safe from M. de la Tourelle, she says that for the remainder of her life, "the old terror was ever strong upon me," so she was unable to reenter society as her normal self (298). Instead of becoming her old self

again once she logically realizes she is out of danger, she is never able to recover from the abuse she endured, and therefore, she is forced to forever remain the Grey Woman.

Of course, it is only natural that color would play an essential role in "The Grey Woman," since this short story is a version of the Bluebeard tale. Perrault's tale is titled after Bluebeard, an abusive man with an unnaturally colored beard: Gaskell's version is titled after Anna, an abused woman with unnaturally colored hair and skin. Although Anna's remarkable coloring mirrors the unnatural coloring in the original fairytale, Gaskell's story shifts the focus of the narrative from the abuser to the abused.

Anna has been so harmed in her marriage with M. de la Tourelle that she is given a new identity that persists even after her death. Anna is given a new name, and this is the name that her relatives continue to use years after she dies (Gaskell 240). Anna is no longer Anna Scherer or even Anna de la Tourelle because her identity has shifted beyond both her maiden and married names. She is the Grey Woman, a woman defined by her abusive marriage and by psychic shock. The time between her marriage and M. de la Tourelle's death lasted a mere three years, and yet she is forever changed. Forever marked. Forever gray.

Narrative Structure

Anna is trapped by her traumatic memories. Matus defines traumatic memory as memory that "is not at the disposal of the subject" and instead "obtrud[es] on the present in the form of dreams, flashbacks and hallucinations" (92). At the end of her narrative, Anna admits "the old terror was ever strong upon her," a terror that controlled her life to the point that she was never able to "return to a more natural mode of life" (Gaskell 298). Using Braun's language, Anna lived "on the margins of Victorian social legibility" as the trauma she experienced was "unspeakable" (10). According to her own narrative, Anna spent her life avoiding her traumatic

past. She did not tell her daughter, Ursula, the truth about her father and instead let Ursula grow up believing Dr. Voss was her father (Gaskell 297). Even Dr. Voss, Anna's second husband, only knew about Anna's traumatic past because Amante recounted the story to him on her deathbed (296). Anna's memories remain "unspeakable" to Anna until Ursula is a grown woman preparing for marriage. It is only at this point that Anna tells her narrative as she realizes Ursula needs to know the truth about her real father, M. de la Tourelle.

As Anna writes down her story in a letter to Ursula, Anna begins to address her traumatic past. Throughout the story Anna is consistently isolated, controlled, and terrorized by her husband; and yet, Anna is ultimately the author of her story. Every physiognomic detail we gain about M. de la Tourelle, every account of his abusive behavior, every word spoken by him, every instance is recorded by Anna. According to Judith Herman, traumatized individuals can regain power over their narrative if they are "the writer of their own story, the author and arbiter of their own recovery" (133). Therefore, by writing her own narrative, Anna is beginning to take control of her reality.

As Anna records her abusive relationship for the first time, she must find a way to make sense of it. She must find a way to explain the abuse she experienced at the hands of her husband, and yet, she lacks the words to describe emotional abuse. She did not know what words to use to communicate the isolation, terror, and control she experienced during her abusive marriage, so instead, she used physiognomy to articulate the abusive behavior that lurked behind the light in her husband's eyes, the curve of his lips, and the whitening of his cheek. Throughout her narrative, Anna does not present herself as a woman healed from trauma—in fact, she takes great pains to express how permanently she has been changed as a result of her abusive marriage.

And yet, through the process of writing the letter, Anna has processed her trauma enough that she can narrativize a previously unspeakable experience.

Anna's story gets passed down from generation to generation and Anna's story becomes a legend. Indeed, Anna's relatives talk about her as if she were a fairytale character like Bluebeard. Anna's relatives continue to call her the Grey Woman long after her death, hang a portrait of her in her family's old mill house, and share the story with visitors. Just like a traditional fairytale, Anna's story is meant to teach the reader a moral. While we know Anna's primary concern is revealing the true relationship between Ursula and her intended—M. de la Tourelle killed the father of Ursula's prospective husband—Anna's story is far more focused on describing Anna's marriage with M. de la Tourelle. Perhaps Anna's physiognomic reading operates as more than a tool for Anna to understand her husband's abusive behavior; perhaps it is also instruction for her daughter, showing Ursula how to identify abusive behavior. By passing on wisdom to her reader, Anna is teaching future readers how to avoid experiencing the same trauma Anna endured. While Perrault's Bluebeard ends with a list of morals that warn the reader against the dangers of curiosity, essentially blaming the wife for Bluebeard's murderous behavior, Anna's narrative reverses the moral: rather than blaming her husband's destructive behavior on herself, she is warning the reader against abusive behavior. By flipping the script, Anna takes a scandalous story about a murderer and transforms it into a study on surviving abuse.

Conclusion

Within "The Grey Woman," Anna uses the vocabulary of physiognomy to describe her husband and attempt to make sense of his abusive behavior. Through Anna, Gaskell uses physiognomy as a tool that allows her to explore an as-yet unarticulated societal issue. She uses

physiognomy as a language that allows her to characterize a fundamentally abusive relationship long before "emotional abuse" had entered the English lexicon, long before psychological institutions would recognize the legitimacy of this type of abuse, and long before therapy existed that could address the issues people like Anna experienced. The accuracy with which Gaskell displayed an emotionally abusive relationship reveals how prevalent these kinds of relationships must have been in Victorian England. It should be chilling to realize that Gaskell did not need a psychology textbook to explain what an emotionally abusive relationship looks like. Just by living in her time period, she had examples enough for herself.

I began my paper by saying that very little work has been done to understand how Victorian thinkers conceived of emotional abuse, and through examining Gaskell's use of physiognomy in "The Grey Woman," I have attempted to show how physiognomy operates as a language that allowed authors to discuss emotional abuse. Of course, physiognomy was not created for the purpose of depicting abuse and is certainly not a perfect tool. However, it offers a way of understanding how authors in the Victorian Era were able to depict a character's internal state through their physical appearance. Studying the way physiognomy operates in other texts may reveal new insights into how the Victorians understood abuse and how physiognomy operated as makeshift psychological language. Even though Victorian thinkers did not have access to our modern psychological lexicon, they still lived in a world where emotional abuse existed, and they found ways to discuss that abuse. It is our responsibility as scholars to understand how Victorian thinkers related to the idea of emotional abuse, and physiognomy might just be our best way to get there.

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