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An entertaining study : Our mutual friend's Bradley Headstone and Dickens's answer to phrenology

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“An Entertaining Study: *Our Mutual Friend*’s Bradley Headstone and Dickens’s
Answer to Phrenology”

by

Sean Patrick Magee

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ABSTRACT

The characterization of Bradley Headstone in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* coincides with the theories of nineteenth century phrenology. Dickens creates what I call a "duel of readability," a contest between Eugene Wrayburn and Bradley. Winning consists of knowing what the other is thinking, a failure for Bradley that leads to his loss of composure. By examining Bradley's psychological decline through the novel and definitions of necessary faculties in phrenological literature, I demonstrate that Bradley's attempt to and inability to maintain the faculty phrenologists labeled "secretiveness" makes him a danger to those around him because he believes that functioning in society depends on a faculty he does not possess. By turning to violence Bradley finally becomes unreadable to those around him. Finally, I suggest that Bradley's suicide is a victory for him, a final demonstration that he can be unpredictable. Through this characterization Dickens passes judgment on phrenology, indicating that living in the manner phrenology suggests is repressive and dangerous.

I. Introduction

When Bradley Headstone speaks with Lizzie Hexam of his disappointment with her decision to find other means to an education than himself, he reveals a dangerous capacity to feel emotion that stays hidden under layers of repression: "I am a man of strong feelings, and I have strongly felt this disappointment. I do strongly feel it. I don't show what I feel; some of us are obliged to keep it down. To keep it down" (339). Bradley kids himself in this passage; his inability to hide his emotions is a constant problem, one that makes him a threat to those around him. From this ineptness at concealing feelings and intentions stems the repressed rage that plagues him throughout the novel. What makes Bradley's failure to function fascinating is that through this problem Bradley becomes a representation of phrenological concepts prevalent in the nineteenth century. By examining the premises of phrenology and Bradley's relations to these premises as he disintegrates throughout the novel, we can determine how Bradley serves as both a portrayal of and response to phrenological definitions of insanity. Bradley's inner turmoil stems from his incompetence at keeping his emotions hidden known in phrenological texts as "secretiveness," a faculty phrenologists believed necessary for the individual to protect his feelings and remain sane. Dickens sets up what I call a duel of readability, a contest Bradley feels he must win in order to control his faculties. Through this inability to be secretive Bradley's passions make him a violent individual, creating a situation where Bradley's only means to self-esteem is through murder and suicide. In this sense Bradley suggests that Dickens found phrenological tenets inadequate and dangerous.

II. Phrenology's Reception in London

For the British public of the early and middle nineteenth century, phrenology served as a way to represent and understand insanity. George Combe's *Constitution of Man*, which became the definitive work on phrenology in the 1820's, gave London its first impression of the "warring faculties" of the brain, offering the public a new way to understand the human mind. As Diana Postlethwaite notes, Combe's book had a profound impact on Victorian culture: "*The Constitution of Man* is a work extremely significant to this Victorian frame of mind. Mill, Comte, Combe, Chambers, Bray, Martineau, Lewes, Spencer, Eliot: one of the key common denominators among them all was some degree of interest in the science of--and more important, the philosophy that grew out of--the study of phrenology. And George Combe's *Constitution of Man* was the Bible of this new faith" (74). Phrenologists such as Combe and Johann Gasper Spurzheim, speaking throughout Britain at paid lectures, argued that the brain possessed faculties constantly in conflict with each other, and that only when these faculties are balanced and controlled can the individual remain sane. Combe's work immediately tapped into the London public's urge to understand, and through understanding correct insane and criminal behavior. Phrenology supplied London with what Postlethwaite describes as "a would-be science of psychology" (17). Combe's new understanding of the mind, which implied an ability to locate specific emotions and motivations for behavior in the brain, meant the hope of bringing order to the human mind and, by controlling sanity and aggression, bringing order to society. David de Giustino suggests

that this hope of order, along with an ability of phrenologists to reach the London public, made phrenology popular during Dickens's time:

There were many causes for the wide if intermittent popularity of phrenology in the nineteenth century. It was an easy philosophy, expressed in ordinary language. It was a guide to reform and to knowledge; it was a new basis of morality. It was logical and slightly mysterious but flexible, awesome in judgment and yet humanely hopeful. It meant amusement and improvement, common sense and social liberation. (74)

By creating an empiricist methodology which could be grasped and applied by all of London, phrenology asserted that the secret to controlling the criminal and the insane lay in under what faculties in the individual were unbalanced. Without offering viable solutions, phrenology gave 1820's London what it wanted, a psychology that would demystify the relationship between the brain and human behavior.

Shortly after phrenology was introduced to England, phrenologists broke into two groups. The first demanded that Spurzheim be named the first leader of the London Phrenological Society, the other sect firmly behind Dickens's friend John Elliotson. Yet both groups shared four basic principles, according to Postlethwaite: "The moral and intellectual dispositions are innate; their manifestation depends on organization; the brain is exclusively the organ of the mind; the brain is composed of as many particular and independent organs, as there are fundamental powers of the mind" (62). Supported by Gall's map of the faculties of the brain and both factions of phrenologists, the convictions of warring faculties in their geographical location in the brain seemed indisputable.

Phrenology served both as a working class religion and as a way for the upper classes to keep the working class from asserting itself. Paired with Calvinism, phrenology furthered concepts of predestination, implying workers were meant to remain in their positions. Since curing the brain's imbalances was a difficult task, phrenology minimized the idea that the worker could improve his situation and transcend his status. At the same time, phrenology appealed to the working classes. The faculties that were more abundant in the London worker than the London aristocrat, instinctive talents for industry and agriculture, suggested that, though the worker could not move out of his low position in London society, that position was to be celebrated. These strengths of the London workers "made them a special breed of men. Their labour, whether mechanical or manual, made Britain the leader of nations" (de Giustino 64).

In addition, phrenology promised a new methodology not present in the psychology of nineteenth century London. Gall's labels of the brain, which led to the stereotype of phrenology as the science of bump reading, devised an empirical way of looking at the mind that seemed provable. Faults of human behavior could be traced to a particular faculty in a certain location of the brain, though early phrenologists could not offer a solution to unbalanced areas. Even so, phrenological journals such as *The Zooist* sold well, as did Combe and Gall: "By 1851 Combe's *Constitution of Man* (published 1828) had sold 90,000 copies and was, according to Harriet Martineau, outstripped in all time readership only by the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson*

Crusoe" (Shuttleworth 63). Phrenology promised Victorian London that the human brain could be understood, mapped and perhaps controlled.

III. Phrenology and Mesmerism

Phrenology's initial popularity did not last long. Elliotson, at the head of a phrenological society both divided and losing popularity with the London public of the 1830's, was in dire need of rejuvenation. Gall's labels of the faculties of the mind were thought of as incorrect or unimportant to the majority of the public, and the phrenologists themselves had separated into two camps. Spurzheim became the leader of the "northern" or "Scottish" phrenologists," while Elliotson assumed the role of leader of the "southern" faction. By the 1840s ideological differences became so incompatible the two sides refused to acknowledge the other, which meant little to a public which was not nearly as attracted to phrenology as it had been when Combe's *Constitution of Man* came out. Elliotson's mission to bring phrenology back into the London spotlight meant giving the notion of warring faculties a more pragmatic edge. Mesmerism would serve that purpose.

The amalgamation of phrenology and mesmerism served to reinstill in the London public the notion that the brain was an understandable organ, a belief phrenology depended on for survival. Ideally the two sciences worked together to heal any mental disorder. Phrenology, whether through the classification of the passions through skull reading or Gall's labels of the mind's faculties, could determine which faculty or faculties were out of balance. Once the problem was isolated, mesmeric sessions in which the patient was induced into a trance through the application of

magnets could correct the problem in the brain. Where phrenology originally promised that mental or emotional problems could be labeled, phrenomesmerism assured its believers that such problems could now be corrected. As Cooter explains, the result of this hybrid science on the public was immediate:

...Touching the individual phrenological organs of a mesmerized person and having him or her perform the behavior associated with the mental faculty seemed a persuasive demonstration of phrenology's truth. As Elliotson pointed out (with only slight exaggeration), where formerly *one* had been converted to the truth of phrenology, now, through mesmerism, *one hundred* were converted. (150)

By 1865 the combined science of phrenomesmerism was a familiar way of looking at psychology. Mesmerism and phrenology had been associated together for twenty years, and phrenomesmerists had outlasted Spurzheim's faction, who had claimed the two could not be linked. In fact, mesmerism's role in phrenology went to the heart of the debate that kept phrenologists separated, the debate of whether phrenology could correct the brain's imbalances or only identify them. Elliotson made himself a figurehead for the phrenomesmeric argument:

Phrenology and animal magnetism went hand in hand after 1838. Indeed, the strength of the phrenological movement was sharply divided in the early 1840's when Elliotson and others insisted, despite the convictions of many scientists who had accepted phrenology but not mesmerism, that the phrenological societies affirm an unalterable link between the two. (Kaplan 14)

Elliotson, now the champion of the phrenomesmeric amalgamation, confirmed that the New Science could cure psychological problems facing London. As the first president of the London Phrenological Society, Elliotson promised that phrenomesmerism could correct problems in an individual's brain:

Elliotson claimed that a patient in a mesmeric trance would evidence knowledge and/or behavior directly corresponding to the phrenological stimulation applied by the mesmeric operator to the specific area of the cranium that phrenology had identified with a certain human quality or trait of personality. (14)

But by the 1860's the promises of phrenomesmerism had grown tiresome with London. Elliotson had grown senile and suicidal, and those who at first embraced phrenomesmerism as a way for the troubled mind to help itself had dismissed his notions. As Cooter explains, "From the perspective of the first half of the nineteenth century nothing appears more certain than that during the second half of the century phrenology entered a precipitous decline. From the aspiration of science the whole of it slipped into an easily ridiculed art of character analysis" (256). The phrenomesmeric art, heralded a short time earlier as a way to understand and combat problems of the human psyche, was now reduced to a form of amusement, an amusement Dickens would not let slip by without comment.

IV. Dickens and Phrenomesmerism

Dickens was clearly well versed both in phrenology and mesmerism throughout his writing career. Dickens toyed with phrenology in *Sketches by Boz*. In "The Next Door Neighbor" Dickens breaks phrenology down into an oversimplified and entertaining mockery:

Some phrenologists affirm, that the agitation of a man's brain by different passions, produce corresponding developments in the form of his skull. Do not let us be understood as pushing our theory to the full length of asserting, that any alteration in a man's disposition would produce a visible effect on the feature of his knocker. Our position merely is, that in such a case, the *magnetism* which must exist between a man and his knocker, would induce the man to remove, and seek some knocker more congenial to his altered feelings. (41)

Before the phrenologists' debate over whether to incorporate mesmerism, Dickens predicts that the phrenological concept of the faculties of the mind will fuse with the concept of animal magnetism inherent in mesmerism. While not making phrenology the subject of the sketch, Dickens makes clear his understanding of what phrenology entails, and where the science is headed. He predicts the incorporation of the magnets, essential for the phrenomesmeric sessions that would come after the two groups of phrenologists broke apart. Though humorously, he suggests that mesmerism will add a new dimension to phrenology, making the science more pragmatic and beneficial.

Dickens's awareness of phrenology probably stemmed from his contact with Elliotson. Becoming interested in Elliotson's experiments the two met and became friends in 1838, a friendship that lasted their lifetimes. They traveled in the same circles throughout the 1840's, and Dickens saw several exhibitions of the phrenomesmerism Elliotson practiced. When Elliotson began demonstrations dramatizing the effects of animal magnetism in 1838, Dickens was invited to and attended several (Kaplan 18). According to Kaplan "Dickens attended either the first demonstration on Thursday, May 10, 1838, or the second on Saturday, June 2, perhaps even both" (36). Later that year Elliotson turned in his resignation to the University College Hospital when he was told by the Hospital Committee that he was forbidden from any more exhibitions of mesmerism because the exhibitions were looked at as embarrassing and dangerous. That night Elliotson and Dickens dined together. In 1840

Dickens became friends with Chauncy Hare Townshend, also a friend of Elliotson's, and the three discussed phrenomesmerism regularly.

Being in the middle of the phrenological debate over whether phrenology and mesmerism could be melded together, Dickens was able to see the connections between the two first hand. Elliotson was among the first to insist that phrenology and mesmerism could work together for the sake of the patient. Dickens practiced this sort of mesmerism during his trip to Italy in 1844, and those sessions had a powerful impact on him. His friend Madame de la Rue suffered from problems closely linked to phrenomesmerism by Elliotson' faction of phrenology. At the time they met in Italy she was a sad invalid "whose alternations between nervous headaches and painful indispositions on the one hand and voluble sociability and cheerful good humor on the other must have reminded Dickens of many of Elliotson's patients" (Kaplan 76). From October through December 1844 Dickens worked with de la Rue almost daily with magnetic trances in an attempt to exorcise the "Phantom" that was causing her discomfort. Although progress was slow, de la Rue was apparently becoming remarkably better until Dickens's wife Catherine expressed her discomfort with the relationship. Dickens stopped the sessions reluctantly, constantly inquiring about his patient's condition.

At the time *Our Mutual Friend* was being written, Dickens may have been disillusioned about the concepts illustrated in phrenology and mesmerism. No record of Dickens's practicing mesmerism again after his meetings with the de la Rues exists, nor is there any documentation of his attending any more exhibitions or phrenological

meetings after his return to the continent. Elliotson had grown senile, and his constant threats and attempts to commit suicide constantly worried those close to him. While the geographies of the brain and the power of the mesmeric trance were at one time stimulating and effective for Dickens, none of the promises of phrenomesmerism came to fruition. The second wave of phrenology had all but died out. Yet Dickens, while never addressing phrenology or mesmerism directly, would not be silent on the make up of the violent criminal.

V. Secretiveness: The Beginnings of Bradley's Phrenological Failure

Phrenology insisted that the faculties of the brain must remain balanced so that the individual could function. The faculty of secretiveness was central to this balance. Sally Shuttleworth's work focuses on these phrenological principles at work in *Jane Eyre*, where warring passions make insanity a constant threat to all, a condition to which women are particularly susceptible. Shuttleworth recognizes that the phrenological "domain of selfhood is not the originating source of emotion, thought or action, but rather the shifting balance or product of internal conflicts; a battleground of warring autonomous energies, where conflict is inscribed not as an occasional lapse, but as a necessary principle of existence" (155). Given this definition of the brain as an internal battleground, the faculty of secretiveness becomes an essential safe zone, a protected area of the mind where the human being could think freely without the fear of exposure. G. S. Weaver, an American phrenologist of the 1830's addresses the need for secretiveness in the individual:

Man is in great need of a faculty which shall enable him to conceal his feelings, to hide them from the public gaze. If every feeling of his heart,

every thought of his intellect, and every suggestion of his propensities were acted out, and the whole inward man, in all its various states and changes were exhibited in the outward life, what a strange, ludicrous life he would exhibit! The truth is clear, that a concealing faculty is absolutely needed. It is necessary for him to hang a curtain around his soul, and do his planning from behind it. (156).

In *Jane Eyre*, according to Shuttleworth, the faculty of secretiveness is central to courtship in the novel, creating a contest where the goal is to read the opponent's mind while remaining unreadable. Courtship, Shuttleworth suggests, is dependent upon "an attempt to read the inner territory of the other while preserving the self unread" (170). While in *Our Mutual Friend* the courtships of Lizzie Hexam are different than those in *Jane Eyre*, the triangular relationship of Lizzie Hexam, Bradley Headstone and Eugene Wrayburn makes secretiveness and readability the determining factors of the contest for Lizzie's hand. Eugene and Bradley both wish to educate Lizzie, Bradley through his own tutoring and Eugene in the school of his choice. Both wish the other was out of Lizzie's life, and all become confused about where they stand in these relationships. Lizzie, gradually falling in love with Lizzie as Bradley intimidates her, becomes the prize Eugene and Bradley will fight for during the duration of the novel. The duel of readability, instead of being between male and female, becomes a duel between Bradley and Eugene, a game where one must keep his intentions and feelings hidden or be punished with embarrassment. The faculty of secretiveness becomes a necessary weapon to survive in this conflict, since without the secretive faculty the individual becomes transparent and powerless.

The first time we see Bradley, Dickens's narrator describes the transparency and tension in his face, making his actions readable and courtship impossible. Bradley's

face reveals a subtle inner tension, an inability to hide what is happening behind the face:

There was a kind of settled trouble in his face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow and inattentive intellect that had toiled hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself. (218)

From the beginning Bradley fears his thoughts being discovered, and this fear plagues him throughout the novel. Bradley tries to hide his hatred of his childhood, hatred Eugene recognizes during their confrontation. Bradley's effort to hide his embarrassing past and his troubled psychological state will keep him defensive and paranoid throughout his interactions, triggering an overflow of emotions that will lead to his fall.

Bradley attempts secretiveness throughout the novel, failing almost every time. His first attempt is with Charley Hexam. As he talks of Lizzie, he tries to keep Charley doing the talking, keeping his views hidden while Charley speaks. When asked if he doubts whether Lizzie would make a good pupil, he does not refute Charley, but offers only vague responses: "I did not say I doubt it," he answers Charley, "I do not say so, because I do not know. I put it to you. I ask you to think of it. I want you to consider. You know how well you are doing here" (217). This tactic of evasiveness works on Charley since Charley is loyal to Bradley at this point in the novel, but the tactic is futile in encounters with other characters. Jenny Wren uses Bradley's transparency as a source of ridicule. When he walks into Jenny's place looking for Lizzie Jenny makes clear that Bradley cannot fool her: "I know your tricks and your manners, my friend!" (337). When Lizzie walks in, the taunting becomes clearer:

“‘Here’s a perfectly disinterested person, Lizzie dear,’ said the knowing Miss Wren, ‘to talk to with you, for your own sake and your brothers, so very kind and so very serious’” (338). Bradley’s transparency humiliates him, a problem with which Bradley has great trouble dealing. His constant fear of being discovered and his incapability of secretiveness make Bradley’s meetings with Lizzie hopelessly awkward. At their first meeting Bradley shows his inability to be calm and mysterious. He cannot hide his awkwardness: “Her eyes met those of the schoolmaster, who had evidently expected to see a very different sort of person, and a murmured word or two of salutation passed between them. She was a little flurried by the unexpected visit, and the schoolmaster was not at his ease. But he never was, quite” (225). Later in the conversation Bradley is “not improving in respect of ease” (226). Bradley cannot control his curiosity, and becomes readable to everyone in the room:

It happened that Bradley Headstone noticed a very slight action of Lizzie Hexam’s hand, as though it checked the doll’s dressmaker. And it happened that the latter noticed him in the same instant; for she made a double eyeglass of her two hands, looked at him through it, and cried, with a waggish shake of her head: “Aha! Caught you spying, did I” (226).

Bradley’s thoughts are not only hopelessly transparent to everyone around him, but they restate the dialogue he must endure.

V. Eugene’s Mastery, Bradley’s Failure: The Duel of Readability

Bradley’s first meeting with Eugene is a dismal failure, emphasizing Eugene’s mastery at veiling intention and Bradley’s inability to control the faculties at war in his mind. As Bradley discovers his inability to maintain secretiveness, he overindulges in combativeness and destructiveness, looked on by the phrenologists as lethal if not

controlled. Bradley and Charley enter Eugene's workplace trying to pressure Eugene into discontinuing contact with Lizzie. The duel of words with Eugene is an attempt to beat Eugene at his own game, but the attempt is laughable. As Bradley and Charley arrive, Eugene is already winning, "he found the visitors to be young Charley Hexam and the schoolmaster, both standing facing him, and both recognized at a glance" (285). Eugene immediately identifies and labels both rivals, surprising Bradley who does not expect the behavior that confuses him: "Passing him [Charley] with his eyes as if they were nothing where he stood, Eugene looked on to Bradley Headstone. With consummate indolence he turned to Mortimer, inquiring: 'And who may this other person be?'" (285). In response Bradley attempts to hide his name, but in doing so he reveals much more: title, position, and intent to play in the duel of readability. He replies, "'I am Charles Hexam's friend, I am Charles Hexam's schoolmaster'" (285). Throughout the argument, Eugene maintains an arrogant calmness, a suppression which stirs the warring faculties inside Bradley. He quips to the schoolmaster, "'you should teach your pupils better manners'" (286). Whether Eugene means to belittle Bradley is uncertain, but for Bradley the remark is an insult to the one thing in the world Bradley can prize, his teaching ability. Eugene has shown he can annoy and anger Bradley with little or no energy.

As the duel continues, Bradley's combativeness becomes more transparent. When Bradley retorts to Eugene he is "answering him with pale and quivering lips" while Eugene is "enjoying a cigar" (285). Eugene again shows his knack for disparaging Bradley while keeping himself impenetrable. He inquires, rather

indifferently, “You have my name very correctly. Pray what is yours?” (285).

Bradley’s tension and awkwardness become obvious, making clear to Eugene what is going on inside Bradley’s head. Bradley tries to evade him, but before Eugene cuts him off, he is about to give his name away, something he was determined not to do a second earlier: “It cannot concern you much to know, but—“ (285). Eugene makes him pay for the mistake, “‘True,’ interposed Eugene, striking sharply and cutting him short at his mistake, ‘it does not concern me at all to know. I can say Schoolmaster, which is a most respectable title. You are right, Schoolmaster’” (286). In one sentence Eugene patronizes, insults, and embarrasses the challenger. Bradley knows he is losing horribly to a man who appears to be barely trying to annoy him, and his trembling passions move outward: “It was not the dullest part of this goad in its galling of Bradley Headstone, that he had made it himself in a moment of incautious anger. He tried to set his lips so as to prevent their quivering but they quivered fast” (287). Eugene may be noticing Bradley Headstone’s struggle to control his physical readability, and, if he does notice it, he masterfully reserves the fact, keeping Bradley curious and insecure. Eugene’s advantage, established early in the dialogue, forces Bradley into an intense inner conflict, while Eugene knows he has no reason to feel anxious.

Eugene’s style is too much for Bradley, who does not understand the method of Eugene’s wit until he has been soundly defeated. Part of Eugene’s pattern is to silently mock Bradley after he has alienated him. Bradley’s confusion about why Eugene refuses to address Charley once again demonstrates that he is out of Eugene’s league:

“I don’t know, Mr. Wrayburn,” answered Bradley, with his passion rising,

“why you address me—“

“Don’t you?” said Eugene, “Then I won’t.”

He said it so tauntingly in his perfect placidity, that the respectable right-hand clutching the respectable hair-guard of the respectable watch could have wound it round his throat and strangled him with it. Not another word did Eugene deem it worth while to utter but stood leaning his head upon his hand, smoking, and looking imperturbably at the chafing Bradley Headstone with his clutching right-hand, until Bradley was wellnigh mad (287).

Eugene has made clear that Bradley does not deserve a proper name or any dialogue whatsoever, and Bradley is left speechless and quivering. Bradley cannot hide his frustration from losing the duel with Eugene while in the middle of combat. His outburst shows Eugene that he is trying to be secretive and failing in the attempt, but it also indicates how well Eugene is playing on his passions:

“This more. Oh, what a misfortune is mine,” cried Bradley, breaking off to wipe the starting perspiration from his face as he shook from head to foot, “that I cannot so control myself as to appear a stronger creature than this, when a man who has not felt in all his life what I have felt in a day can so command himself!” He said it in a very agony, and even followed it with an errant motion of his hands as if he could have torn himself. (290)

Now Bradley has conceded defeat, making him no more to Eugene than “an entertaining study” (290). For the remainder of the argument Eugene makes explicit he wants Bradley to leave as soon as possible, implying he has more important matters than Bradley, knowing that this conflict is the focus of Bradley’s life:

“Come, come, Schoolmaster,” returned Eugene, with a languid approach to impatience as the other again struggled with himself; “say what you have to say. And let me remind you that the door is standing open, and your young friend waiting for you on the stairs.” (290).

Bradley’s combative passions begin to become more visible, making him more predictable. Bradley speaks with “great effort and difficulty,” showing his frustration

(290). His face becomes “flushed and fierce,” indicating the passion Eugene is stirring inside him (290). His next strike betrays his intentions and his passion, making everything visible to Eugene: “I strongly support him in his disapproval of your visits to his sister, and in his objection to your officiousness—and worse—in what you have taken upon yourself to do for her” (290). By guessing his intention Eugene reveals how readable Bradley is, how hopelessly transparent he appears: “Are you her schoolmaster as well as her brother’s?—Or perhaps you would like to be?” (290). Bradley gives up, letting his passions take over, and giving up any chance at secretiveness with his superior. These passions show in his physiognomy: “It was a stab that the blood followed, in its rush to Bradley Headstone’s face, as swiftly as if it had been dealt with a dagger” (290). In phrenological terms, Bradley loses his power of self-control, essential to prevent the state of mind that phrenologists defined as insanity (Shuttleworth 166). Bradley’s final remarks admit defeat while they scorn the duel: “I scorn your shifty evasions, and I scorn you. ...I hold you in contempt for it. But if you don’t profit by this visit and act accordingly, you will find me as bitterly in earnest against you as I could be if I deemed you worth a second thought on my own account” (291). Through his passion he admits that he cannot forget about Eugene although he believes him not to be worth a second thought. As he walks away, he still is unable to disguise his rage, the same inability that has made him so amusing to Eugene in the first place: “With a consciously bad grace and stiff manner, as Wrayburn looked so easily and calmly on, he went out with these words, and the heavy door closed like a furnace-door upon his red and white heats of rage” (291). Not only has Bradley lost the

argument, but he has also made it apparent to his rival that he has lost. But Bradley is more dangerous the more he thinks about his defeat.

VII. Bradley's Fall: The Plunge into Combativeness

One of Bradley's deepest problems is his inability to maintain self-control, an inability phrenologists of the 1830s felt led to insanity. On one hand phrenologists believed that human passion in moderation could be the means to what Combe called a fountain of pleasure (Shuttleworth 168). Shuttleworth points out that the idea that controlled passions led to happiness was at the center of "Victorian social hopes and fears: doctrines of self-improvement through the nourishment and exercise of the faculties, are set against more deep-rooted fears of social turbulence" (157). Bradley's turbulence is obvious, and after the argument with Eugene his passions lead him to outward violence. After he loses his match with Eugene, Bradley knows his emotions are fierce and makes no effort to control them:

Love at first sight is a trite expression quite sufficiently discussed; enough that in certain smouldering natures like this man's that passion leaps into a blaze, and makes such heat as fire does in a rage of wind, when other passions, but for its mastery could be held in chains. As a multitude of weak, imitative natures are always lying by, ready to go mad upon the next wrong idea that may be broached—in these times, generally some form of tribute to Somebody for something that never was done, or, if ever done, that was done for Somebody Else—so these less ordinary natures may lie by for years, ready on the touch of an instant to burst into flame. (336)

Bradley knows the turmoil inside him and does nothing to regain his self-control:

"Truly, in his breast there lingered a resentful shame to find himself defeated by this passion for Charley Hexam's sister, though in the very self-same moments he was concentrating himself upon the object of bringing the passion to a successful issue"

(226-7). As the novel continues, Bradley's psychological decline gains momentum. He cares less and less about who knows of his rage, showing a dangerous imbalance of his faculties.

Dickens repeatedly exposes the warring passions in Bradley, particularly after his fight with Eugene. At his next meeting with Lizzie he once again tries secretiveness, and once again fails miserably. He attempts to show that Eugene is of little concern to him when he mentions Eugene's name: "My allusion was to this matter of your having put aside your brother's plans for you, and given the preference to those of Mr.—I believe the name is Mr. Eugene Wrayburn" (339). Bradley realizes that the attempt is pathetic: "He made this point of not being certain of the name, with another uneasy look at her, which dropped like the last. Nothing being said on the other side, he had to begin again, and begin with new embarrassment" (339). Bradley now gives up any attempt at being secretive: "I wish to avoid reservation or concealment, and I fully acknowledge that" (339). Having given up the game, Bradley allows his warring passions to take over right in front of Lizzie. His manner immediately after abandoning secretiveness is "like the action of one who was being physically hurt, and was unwilling to cry out" (339). Dickens once again reveals passions in Bradley's physiognomy: "He looked at Lizzie again, and held the look. And his face turned from burning red to white, and from white back to burning red, and so for the time to lasting deadly white" (339). As the conversation continues "the poor stricken wretch sat contending with himself in a heat of passion and torment" (340). Destroyed by his inability to be careless and secretive he leaves: "his face, so deadly white, was moved

as by a stroke of pain. Then he was gone” (341). He leaves in a fit of temper and embarrassment, marking his transition from inner suffering to outward violence.

Lizzie’s rejection of Bradley’s marriage proposal is Bradley’s most painful failure, and this realization brings out the combativeness and destructiveness that will take him over. The tension inside Bradley is visible to Lizzie from the beginning: “She started at the passionate sound of the last words, and at the passionate actions of his hands, with which they were accompanied” (388). Once Lizzie rejects Bradley, his destructive nature becomes visible and dangerous, a condition Bradley refuses to veil: “‘Then,’ said he, suddenly changing his tone and turning to her, and bringing his clenched hand down upon the stone with a force that laid the knuckles raw and bleeding, ‘then I hope I may never kill him!’” (390). Once again Bradley’s face reveals his emotional imbalance, making clear that his passions control him:

The dark look of hatred and revenge with which the words broke from his livid lips, and with which he stood holding out his smeared hand as if it held some weapon and had just struck a mortal blow, made her so afraid of him that she turned to run away. But he caught her by the arm. (391)

Bradley’s combativeness has become physical toward others. Bradley now destroys things around him as he destroys himself. Joel Brattin writes of this passage: “The gesture is symptom of and symbol for the violence and potential for self-destruction in Bradley’s repressed nature. Evidently, Dickens so carefully planned the way this symbol would work that the passages came out on paper as if rehearsed” (155).

Because containing the relationship between Eugene and Lizzie is futile, he can only contain Lizzie and argue with her while he has a chance. As the argument continues,

Bradley's passions become more understandable to Lizzie, "compassionating the bitter struggle he could not conceal, almost as much as she was repelled and alarmed by it" (390). His thoughts are as visible now as when he was trying to conceal them.

For Bradley Lizzie's rejection means Eugene wins, and that Bradley has once again behaved the way Eugene predicted. He reserves the right to consider Eugene an opponent: "'He can be a rival to me among other things'" (392). He believes that by losing both Lizzie and the match over readability, he has handed his self-respect over to Eugene:

"And it [his self-respect] lies under his feet," said Bradley, unfolding his hands in spite of himself, and fiercely motioning with them both towards the stones of the pavement. "Remember that! It lies under that fellow's feet, and he treads upon it and exults above it" (392)

In making the statement he knows Lizzie will disagree and give him the chance to argue with her and, by doing so, release some of his passion. She disagrees, and he reveals how predictable he thinks he is to Eugene, and Eugene's total victory: "I have stood before him face to face, and he crushed me down in the dirt of his contempt, and walked over me. Why? Because he knew with triumph what was in store for me tonight" (392). In revealing his inner pain to Lizzie he has made everything public and admitted a total defeat. Even though he attempts to communicate his pain, his inner passions are too much for him: "Clasping his hands, he uttered a short unearthly broken cry" (393). The cry is of special significance here, marking Bradley's refusal to attempt to control his rage and the beginning of his plan of revenge. The pain Bradley has tried to repress for so long now overflows, and at the heart of this pain is his inability to hide his intentions and emotions as Eugene can.

With Bradley's refusal to control his anger comes an acceptance of criminal behavior as an outlet for his hostility. This acceptance of brutality as a release of passion takes shape as Bradley follows Eugene around the city. Bradley's nightly ritual of stalking Eugene after his rejection by Lizzie becomes a constant source of humiliation for him, a feeling that prompts Bradley to attack Eugene. Knowing he has won the duel of readability Eugene takes delight in Bradley's destructive journey into insanity: "I goad the schoolmaster to madness. I make the schoolmaster so ridiculous, and so aware of being made ridiculous that I see him chafe and fret at every power when we cross one another. The amiable occupation has been the solace of my life, since I was baulked in the manner unnecessary to recall I have derived inexpressible comfort from it'" (533). Although at this point Eugene fails to grasp how dangerous Bradley is, Eugene realizes that Bradley is suffering emotionally, and enjoys extending that suffering. Eugene brags to Mortimer of the entertainment he takes in finding new ways to embarrass Bradley, and the gratuitous chases through town serve that purpose. Face-to-face contact during these excursions is particularly pleasurable for Eugene and makes these moments all the more agonizing for Bradley: "I walk at a great pace down a short street, rapidly turn the corner, and getting out of view, as rapidly turn back. I catch him coming on post, again pass him as unaware of his existence, and again he undergoes grinding torments" (533). What makes the torment so unbearable to Bradley and so stimulating to Eugene is that Bradley can never figure why or where Eugene is going, and, through the embarrassment inherent in this realization, Bradley's violent behavior becomes possible. To say Bradley's torments are grinding is

Not too strong a phrase for the occasion. Looking like the hunted and not the hunter, baffled, worn, with the exhaustion of deferred hope and consuming hate and anger in his face, white-lipped, wild-eyed, draggled-haired, seamed with jealousy and anger, and torturing himself with the conviction that he showed it all and they exulted in it, he went by them in the dark, like a haggard head suspended in the air: so completely did the force of his expression cancel. (534)

If Bradley's intention is to be unpredictable, Eugene's behavior throughout these nightly rituals make clear that Bradley's only means to secretiveness will be to change his impression from an entertaining study to an imminent danger.

VIII. Checkmate: Bradley's Ultimate Success through Suicide

Up until the Bradley's attack on Eugene, Bradley's interactions with Eugene and Lizzie are self-defeating. His proposal to Lizzie is ultimately doomed, a fact Bradley seems aware of before he proposes. Stalking Eugene only serves to humiliate and anger him more, worsening his psychological condition every night. Even so, Bradley continues to follow Eugene nightly, knowing that doing so will be torturous. In phrenological definitions of sanity it is this inability to control or move beyond destructive emotions that makes one like Bradley so dangerous. As John Kucich notes, Bradley cannot move beyond his obsession with Eugene, and this inability to reconcile pain as a part of human experience is a problem Bradley can never move beyond:

Headstone's distress comes largely from his inability to integrate forms of self-negation and forms of self-conservation without an internal conflict that eventually tears him apart. He is capable of destroying himself for Lizzie, as his famous striking of his bloody knuckles against the tombstone indicates, yet he is constrained by an equally violent possessiveness; together the contradiction of impulses toward self-negation and toward conservation torments and divides Headstone hopelessly against himself, producing erratic emotional compulsions rather than a controlled emotional expansion. (221)

Since Bradley cannot overcome his obsession with defeating Eugene, his only choice is to be unpredictable in some manner, and that manner becomes violence:

The state of the man was murderous, and he knew it. More: he irritated it, with a kind of perverse pleasure akin to that which a sick man sometimes has in irritating a wound upon his body. Tied up all day with his disciplined show upon him, subdued to the performance of his routine of educational tricks, encircled by a gabbling crowd, he broke loose at night like an ill-tamed and wild animal. Under his daily restraint, it was his compensation, not his trouble, to give a glance towards his stare at night, and to the freedom of its being indulged. (535).

He later admits to himself that Eugene's knack for secretiveness is at the heart of this destruction:

Possessed in his jealousy by the fixed idea that Wrayburn was in the secret, if it were not altogether of his contriving, Bradley was as confident getting the better of him at last by sullenly sticking to him, as he would have been—and often had been—of mastering any piece of study in the way of his vocation. (536)

When Bradley physically attacks Eugene he seems not to care what Eugene thinks of him, and this indifference is a success in Bradley's view. His intentions are unreadable to Eugene, an impossibility if Bradley behaves rationally. Before he attacks, he walks right by Eugene, yet Eugene does not know him, or his purpose:

Turning suddenly, he met a man, so close upon him, that Eugene, surprised, stepped back, to avoid a collision. The man carried something over his shoulder which might have been a broken oar, or spar, or bar, and took no notice of him, but passed on.
"Halloa, friend!" said Eugene, calling after him, "are you blind?"
The man made no reply, but went his way. (681)

For the first time Bradley is secretive and unreadable, and so he succeeds with his attack. But even this act is readable to some, as Charley Hexam knows what Bradley has done. Charley not only realizes that Bradley attacked Eugene, but can read the

warring faculties in Bradley's mind as he admonishes him, "Now what have you done? Why, you have justified my sister in being firmly set against you from first to last, and you have put me in the wrong again! And why have you done it? Because, Mr. Headstone, you are in all your passions so selfish, and so concentrated upon yourself" (694). Charley's awareness of Bradley's attack turns victory into defeat, further self-negation in Bradley's deteriorating psychology.

Bradley's only chance to win this duel of readability with anyone is by killing himself and Riderhood. Riderhood is in a clear position of power over Bradley since Bradley's circumstance is so predictable. Since Bradley's attempt to murder Eugene fails, Riderhood believes Bradley is incapable of murder. This assumption presents Bradley with an opportunity to surprise Riderhood. When Bradley walks from the Lock-House, it is the first time in the novel those around him have difficulty guessing his purpose. Riderhood cannot think that Bradley is trying to sway him because he is a trained parasite. Riderhood tries to reassert control over Bradley by breaking silence, claiming to still be reading Bradley correctly, "This is a dry game. And where's the good of it? You can't get rid of me, except by coming to a settlement. I am going along with you wherever you go" (779). But Riderhood never suspects a suicide and gives Bradley his chance to be unreadable. His next remark reveals frustration and judgment as Bradley puts his plan in motion: "Why there's even less sense in this move than t'other" (781). For the first time Bradley's face does not reveal his mind: "Without taking the least notice, Bradley leaned his body against a post, in a resting attitude, and there rested with his eyes cast down" (781). Riderhood's last words

express anger, fear and amazement that Bradley has been this unpredictable, “Stop! What are you trying at? You can’t drown Me. Ain’t I told you that the man as he come through drowning can never be drowned? I can’t be drowned” (781). There is a sense of victory for Bradley here; although he will die, he has fooled Riderhood, and cannot resist verbalizing his accomplishment, “I am resolved to be. I’ll hold you living, and I’ll hold you dead. Come down” (781). Bradley’s final act of self-destruction brings him a balance of passion unattainable in his life, a balance where the quest to achieve this self-control becomes fatal and self-defeating. Bradley’s death is a testament that the phrenological tenets of balance and control create a dangerous way to live, a system where those who cannot function are passionate animals endangering everyone around them.

IX. Conclusion

Bradley’s transparent struggle to be unreadable makes him “an entertaining study” to Eugene, who is a master of the art of secretiveness. The problem for Eugene is that Bradley does not remain an entertaining study, but through his gradual collapse becomes a physical risk. Brattin notes that Dickens’s attention to Bradley Headstone highlights Bradley’s danger to society during his psychological decline: “Dickens’s working and reworking of Headstone’s language, gestures, and state of mind shapes both Bradley’s villainy and his humanity, and results in convincing and frightening portrayal of Bradley’s inner life” (164). Bradley’s participation in the duel with Eugene makes his inner life an outer threat to those around him. While the duel establishes a clear winner and loser, the results of the game are painful and permanent for both men.

Bradley escapes his feelings of failure and inadequacy through murder and suicide, his only chance to show he can live within phrenological constructs. Eugene, while he wins the duel and obtains a life with Lizzie, must survive a brutal attack that alters the lives of Eugene and everyone around him. Dickens thus represents the concept of secretiveness as a dangerous aim, an objective with painful outcomes for all.

Bradley's continual efforts to control his faculties are juxtaposed with his failure to accomplish this control, and serves as a critique of phrenological tenets of insanity. Bradley's awareness that he must control his passions in order to function in society creates the repression that will eventually result in violence: "Suppression of so much to make room for so much, had given him a constrained manner, over and above" (218). This suppression, while commendable by phrenologists, is inappropriate and dangerous for one of Bradley's character. As Miyazaki recognizes, "Headstone is too self-centered to regard people detachedly" (211). By constructing Bradley's destruction as a failed attempt to conform to phrenological concepts, Bradley becomes Dickens's final dismissal of phrenology, an admission that the science had become dated, and useless.

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