VISION AND CHARACTER

PHYSIOGNOMICS AND THE ENGLISH REALIST NOVEL

Eike Kronshage

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As readers, we develop an impression of characters and their settings in a novel based on the author's description of their physical characteristics and surroundings. This process, known as physiognomics, can be seen in works written throughout history including the English Realist novels of the 19th and 20th centuries. *Vision and Character: Physiognomics and the English Realist Novel* offers a study into the physiognomics and aesthetics as presented by some of the best-known authors in this genre, like Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, Charles Dickens, and Jane Austen. In this highly original approach to the issues of representation, visuality and aesthetics in the nineteenth-century realist novel, and even the question of literary interpretation, Eike Kronshage argues that physiognomics has enabled writers to access their characters' inner lives without interfering in an authoritative way.

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Contents

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Introduction
Physiognomics and Realism[1]

In October 1774, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg travelled to England to present King George III with his latest book, an edition of the German astronomer, Tobias Mayer's, unpublished maps and writings. During his sojourn at the royal court, which lasted until December 1775, an edition of the first volume of Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* (*Physiognomische Fragmente*) was given to Lichtenberg by Queen Charlotte (Lichtenberg 4: 252; see also Blumenberg 2000: 212; Mare/Quarrell xxiii). Lichtenberg disliked what he read and noted in his so-called "Scrapbooks," *Sudelbücher*, that Lavater was a master in producing meaningless gibberish (1: 389). This was the hour of birth of the protracted dispute between the Swiss pastor, Lavater, and the German physicist, Lichtenberg, about the validity or invalidity of physiognomic theory: the so-called "Physiognomic Controversy" ("Physiognomik-Streit", see Riha 6). For shortly after his return to Germany, Lichtenberg publicly attacked Lavater in his polemic "Treatise Concerning the Science of Physiognomy, Against Those Who Defend It" ("Über Physiognomik wider die Physiognomen"),[2] writing that physiognomic analysis would not lead to knowledge, but were rather a source of human errors in judgment (3: 265). This was countered by Lavater's claim that physiognomics was as scientific as physics itself, "as capable as physic, for it is a part of the physical art" ("Physiognomy a Science", 37; "Die Physiognomik, eine Wissenschaft", 1: 52),[3] a claim obviously directed against Lichtenberg, the professor of physics. In the same physiognomic fragment, Lavater explained that even children were able to grasp the scientific status of physiognomics, and recommended those critics who were unable to understand this simple circumstance never again to criticize physiognomics as unscientific (37; 1: 52–53). Lichtenberg's answer followed on the spot, in the form of a vitriolic parody of Lavater's *Essays*, titled "Fragment on Tails" ("Fragment von Schwänzen", 1777).[4] In this text, Lichtenberg takes at face value Lavater's claim that any part of the body could reveal human character, and asks what could be learned about men by analyzing their sexual organs, "Schwänze." Imitating Lavater's magniloquent diction in his essay, Lichtenberg wryly asks, "Which could have been Goethe's?" ("Welchen könnte Goethe getragen

haben?", 3: 538). After the publication of this essay, Lichtenberg's editor received numerous letters by Lavater's apologists, filled with indignation (Riha 82). At this point the controversy had already developed into a proxy war, with the main opponents refusing to directly communicate with each other (Lichtenberg 2: 158). The dispute, which had begun in London with the loan of Lavater's book to Lichtenberg by the English Queen, would continue long after the deaths of both Lichtenberg in 1799 and Lavater in 1801. In fact, it continued in an altered form throughout the entire nineteenth century, and the discussion spread across different cultural areas: science, philosophy, religion, and art.

This dispute and its repercussions throughout the nineteenth century form the starting point of this book, which investigates the development of literary physiognomics in the Victorian novel. The central hypothesis is that the literary physiognomic portrait depends on the realist mode in literature. I intend to demonstrate that the systematic use of physiognomic portraiture came into being with the rise of realist fiction in the early nineteenth century, and was then abandoned by post-realist writers. I argue that literary realism appropriated the (pseudo)science of physiognomics to try to create detailed representations of the world "as it really is." Thus put on allegedly sound scientific ground, realist novels seemed to provide a value-free description of human character as seen from its visible outside. The partnership between physiognomics and literary realism, I suggest, is based on their shared tenets that character and vision are paramount for our assessment of the world. In other words, realist writers set out to represent ordinary and common everyday characters in an allegedly non-judgmental way, i.e. by meticulous description of their visible exterior. Similarly, physiognomics aims at an interpretation of character by minute observation of outer features, particularly facial ones. In this aspect, physiognomic observation and literary portraiture overlap, as the etymology of the word portrait shows; it derives from Latin *protrahere*, meaning "to reveal" and "to draw forward" (*OED*, "protract, v." and "portrait, n."). In realist fiction, character is primarily revealed through detailed physiognomic portraiture, and, consequently, many nineteenth-century realist novels are replete with physiognomic portraits.

To demonstrate just how substantial the connection between realism and physiognomics was, this book examines the work of six canonical writers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the light of both their physiognomic representation of character and their take on the literary imitation (*mimesis*) of the world. I begin with the earliest novels commonly labeled realist, the novels of Jane Austen (Chapter 1), and continue with an analysis of what I regard as the apex of literary physiognomics in the Victorian realist novel, the novels of Charlotte Brontë (Chapter 2) and George Eliot (Chapter 3), although the latter appears already more ambivalent regarding physiognomic analysis. Disapproving of

both realism and physiognomics, however, is another writer from that period, Charles Dickens (Chapter 4). The late-Victorian fiction of Joseph Conrad already anticipates the burgeoning mode of modernism and is more skeptical of the possibilities of literary physiognomics (Chapter 5), while high-modernist writers like Virginia Woolf completely abandon the basic assumptions of both literary realism and physiognomics (Chapter 6).

Realism

In his wide-ranging survey of realist literature and its connection to vision, *Realist Vision* (2005), Peter Brooks correctly remarks that the nineteenth-century realists' "radical pioneering in the novel, has ceased to astonish us" (5) by gradually developing into the dominant literary mode of twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction:

> Once *a radical gesture, breaking with tradition*, realism becomes so much the expected mode of the novel that even today we tend to think of it as the norm [...]. The novel in the airport newsstand will tend to be written from a repertory of narrative and descriptive tools that come from the nineteenth-century realists.
>
> (5; my italics)

My own understanding of realism also hinges on this radicalness, on the status of realism as "a radical gesture, breaking with tradition," and "a radical pioneering in the novel," as Brooks puts it. This is because literary realism represents the first systematic break with the tradition of Aristotelian principles of genre. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, the hierarchy of the constituent elements of tragedy—and also of the epos, as he explains in the later chapters—is dominated by the plot, while "character takes the second place" (*Poet.* 1450a). Aristotle explains this order by pointing out that it is "chiefly on account of the action that it [tragedy] is also a representation of persons" (*Poet.* 1450b). Nineteenth-century realism inverts this order by putting character first and plot second. Unlike Aristotle, realist writers could at least theoretically conceive of a depiction of character without external plot action.[5] The reduction of plot complexity and the constraint of plot excitement with concomitant meticulous character portrayal are the most prominent features of European realism. Some realist novels considerably reduce the level of plot action, as in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, or Theodor Storm's *Immensee*, to name but a few prominent examples.

The inversion of the hierarchy of literary elements from plot over character to character over plot was not the sole modification of Aristotle's normative poetics; literary realism redefined the very notion of character itself. The Aristotelian definition mentions three ways of representing

human beings: "Men must be represented either as better than we are, or worse, or as the same kind of people as ourselves." Moreover, Aristotle aligns these types of character with certain literary genres, claiming that "comedy aims at representing people as worse than they are nowadays, tragedy as better." One type, then, is identified as the hero of tragedy, who is good (*spoudaios*), the other as the hero of comedy, who is bad (*phaulos*) (*Poet.* 1448a).

While relating representations of "better" human beings to tragedy and "worse" to comedy, Aristotle refrains from assigning any particular literary genre to the third type of character, namely those characters who are "the same kind of people as ourselves." His reasons for this omission are obvious: literary characters must be exceptional, either exceptionally good or exceptionally bad, otherwise they are unable to arouse the audience's emotions, *eleos* and *phobos* in tragedy, and, presumably, laughter in comedy. For Aristotle, a common, ordinary, everyday character would, in all likelihood, cause boredom, and not pity, fear or laughter (cf. *Poet.* 1453b). What is more, Aristotle even recommends portraying the heroes of tragedy, who are already by definition "better than ourselves," in an idealizing way, to "paint them better-looking than they are" (*Poet.* 1454b). Similarly, the heroes of comedy, who are by definition "worse" than we are (*Poet.* 1448a), should be portrayed in a way that makes them look even worse than they are.

Literary realism on the other hand, with its focus on ordinary, everyday life, does not usually deal in such extreme positions of character portrayal. It recognizes the idealizations and grotesque exaggerations involved in tragic and comic fiction, and instead places its interest in what Aristotle left out of his discussion: the third type of character, "the same kind of people as ourselves." The realists' radical departure from the dominating Aristotelian principles—be it in direct opposition to those principles, or in an indirect opposition to the literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that still operated according to those principles—is to be understood as the attempt to engage the readers' sympathy for ordinary characters.[6] In the depiction of such everyday characters, realism further deviates from Aristotelian poetic rules, both by replacing the "language that is pleasurably embellished" (*lexis*) with dialects, topolects, and sociolects, and by enhancing the status of vision (*ópsis*) that for Aristotle had "the least to do […] with the art of poetry" (*Poet.* 1449b–1450b). This reevaluation of *ópsis* is an essential characteristic of literary realism, which indeed takes vision as its central concern.[7] Peter Brooks makes a strong case for the importance of realist vision in his book of the same title, claiming:

> Certainly realism more than almost any other mode of literature makes sight paramount—makes it the dominant sense in our understanding of and relation to the world. […] The claim of 'realism' in

both painting and literature is in large part that our sense of sight is the most reliable guide to the world as it most immediately affects us. [...] Realism tends to deal in 'first impressions' of all sorts, and they are impressions on the retina first of all—the way things look. It is not coincidental that photography comes into being along with realism, with the lens imitating the retina to reproduce the world.

$$(3)^8$$

Literary realism therefore deviates from Aristotelian poetics by making vision paramount. To Aristotle, *ópsis*, i.e. everything that is visible, i.e. costumes, props, and scenery on stage, and the description of the visible world in epic fiction, appears insignificant, because literature may well evoke pity and fear entirely without any visual dimension. Realism, on the other hand, assumes that vision is something that "immediately affects us" and that arouses emotions better than anything else. In the etymological sense, realism is, as Brooks points out, concerned with things (*res*-ism or thing-ism; see Brooks 20), and is therefore interested in "the way things look," and their "impressions on the retina." Realism is largely empiricist in its reassessment of vision as the most important way to gain knowledge, and indeed takes on a scientific appearance (see Levine 18).

Broadly speaking, the idea was that visual data, if processed correctly, would lead to truth, and that correct processing was guaranteed by more and more professional scientific elaboration. For the Victorians, therefore, truth was visual (see James 2006: 86), or to be more precise, it was both visible and legible. In the context of realism's departure from Aristotelian principles, the fundamental truth of literary realism appears to be that it is not only characters who are *spoudaios* (*Poet.* 1448a) who deserve our sympathies, but also those who are "the same kind of people as ourselves." In Victorian realism, such a truth must also be a visible truth. Therefore, realism set out to meticulously describe ordinary characters in order to evoke sympathy for them, when they "fall into misery" (*Poet.* 1453a). The illusion these novels create, as George Levine has correctly stated, is "the impression of an empirically shareable experience" (Levine x): "shareable" because the realist novel undertakes to present familiar experiences, which most readers are supposedly able to recognize from their own individual experience, and "empirically" shareable because realist narratives attempt to represent the sensuous experience involved in that recognition.

Scholars who engage in definitions often begin by stating how difficult (some even say impossible) it is to define realism (e.g., Shaw 5; Potolsky 94). I have therefore decided not to attempt a definition of realism, but rather to approach it by means of a descriptive characterization.[9] The least common denominator of most realist novels and, for that matter, of scholarly research on these novels, is the predominance of the aspects

character and vision. Character in this context means the engagement in full coherent description of an everyday character's inner life: intellectual capacity, emotional state, behavioral disposition, morality, and so on. Literary historians often describe the intensive focus on one single character as psychological realism (see Mackay/Petocz 2010), although one could argue that almost all literary realism is psychological, since it focuses so decidedly on character. The aspect complementing this focus on character in literary realism is vision. At first sight, this may appear counter-intuitive, as the focus on psychology and inner character does not necessarily demand, or even require, an outer, visual dimension. Vision, however, also encompasses sensory perception, as a way in which a character regards the (visible) world. In addition, Victorian science and literature revolved around a strong belief that truth was essentially visual. Consequently, the truth of character was to be detected through visual observation and exact description. Therefore, the emphasis of realist fiction on vision and character connects it particularly well to literary physiognomics, which claims to find the inner (character) from an observation of the outer (vision). Physiognomics is therefore situated at the intersection of vision and character, which explains the close alliance of literary physiognomics and realist fiction, as well as the abundance of physiognomic discourse in Victorian realist novels. It soon became a central device for realism's attempt to represent character through exact and meticulous description.

Physiognomics

Physiognomics was considered as the science, art, or skill (Greek: *téchne*) of assessing character by an analysis of outer appearance. It can be further divided into subsystems, depending on the preferred bodily parts of its analysis. Physiognomists in the narrow sense believed the face to be the privileged part of the human body to assess inner life, while phrenologists claimed that it was the form of the human skull that would best disclose character, and chiromancers, practicing palmistry, looked at the human hand. Pathognomists, on the other hand, differed from physiognomists, phrenologists, and chiromancers by their preference of bodily parts in motion (gestures, facial expressions, gait, and posture). Not only was the development of these different forms of body semiotics highly unsystematic, but also were the several labels rarely used in a consistent way. Since physiognomics never became an exact science, it also never developed conceptual or terminological scientific standards. In the example of the above-mentioned "Physiognomik-Streit," for instance, Lichtenberg dismissed physiognomics and supported pathognomy as the superior system of character assessment, thereby clearly distinguishing between the two (Lichtenberg 3: 278). Lavater, on the other hand, regarded pathognomy as an epistemologically inferior subsystem of

physiognomics, which was used by the masses, while the initiate would exclusively rely on physiognomics instead ("Physiognomy, Pathognomy" 12; "Physiognomik und Pathognomik" 4: 39).

These conceptual intricacies also affect present-day scholarly research. In some research, there prevails a rather narrow concept that excludes pathognomy (e.g. Shookman 1993; Wolf 2002), while other scholars seem to find it unproblematic to mix pathognomic and physiognomic approaches (e.g. Hartley 2001; Baumbach 2007a). Some scholars emphasize the lack of clarity that comes with the imprecise conceptual history of physiognomics, and set out to maintain this tension in their analyses (e.g. Porter 2005; Pearl 2010), and yet others use a hypertrophic concept of physiognomic interpretation to describe anything that has an inner and outer side (e.g. Warning 1999; Koch/ Hansen 1987). I prefer to keep the concepts of physiognomics and pathognomy clearly separated, for in literature, facial expressions and facial features signify in different ways. There, the shape, position, color, and size of eyes carry a different physiognomic meaning than blinking, narrowing, dilating, or shading these eyes. The former make a general statement about character (e.g., X is fearful), whereas the latter imply a statement about the condition in a particular given moment (e.g., X is feeling fear). This implies that pathognomic statements can be deduced from physiognomic ones, but not vice versa. It does not, for instance, follow from the circumstance that someone is feeling fear at a given moment that he is generally fearful, and yet someone who is fundamentally fearful is likely to feel fear very often. Furthermore, as both Lichtenberg and Lavater pointed out, facial expressions can be complicit in willing deception, in simulation and dissimulation. Physiognomics, on the other hand, was commonly considered as immune to deception. Lavater claims: "Pathognomy has to combat the arts of dissimulation; physiognomy has not" ("Physiognomy, Pathognomy" 12; "Physiognomik und Pathognomik" 4: 39), and even Lichtenberg concedes: "The movable facial parts contain not only the pathognomic, involuntary movements, but also the voluntary movements of deception" (3: 287; my translation). For these reasons, I decided to stick to a narrow concept of physiognomics and to exclude pathognomy from my discussion.

Physiognomics in this book thus refers to the relation between facial features and inner character, although I slightly extend the notion of *facial* features to include the head in its entirety. While I thus draw a sharp line between pathognomy (facial expressions) and physiognomics (facial features), I see phrenology (cranial features) as falling more in line with physiognomics. On this point I therefore disagree with the distinction between physiognomics and phrenology that Sally Shuttleworth makes in her study of Victorian psychology on the basis of their different origins:

> Although the two systems of physiognomy and phrenology clearly
> overlapped in popular usage, they sprang from very different roots,
> and were associated with quite distinct world views. While physiog-
> nomy, as defined by Lavater and other eighteenth-century theorists,
> was an extension of theology; phrenology, in its English incarnation,
> was based on a materialist system of the mind and was linked to a
> specific political and social platform. [...] The premises of his [Lav-
> ater's] doctrine were religious: God had inscribed a language on the
> face of nature for all to read. [...] The science of phrenology which
> evolved from the writings of Franz Joseph Gall in the 1790s held
> much in common with physiognomy, but its fundamental premises
> were neither essentialist nor idealist but rather defiantly materialist.
> (Shuttleworth 59–60)

While Shuttleworth is right to interpret Lavater's physiognomic writ-
ings as deeply rooted in Christian theology, she overlooks the fact that
Lavater was not the founder of physiognomics, but merely its most
prominent eighteenth-century promulgator, and furthermore that he
was dwelling on physiognomic treatises that not only predate the *Essays
on Physiognomy* by many centuries (they were first published in four
volumes between 1775 and 1778), but also derive from a pre-Christian
culture. The particular English situation that Shuttleworth evokes in her
book, the "English incarnation," even demonstrates that physiognomics
was less associated with Christian theology than with heathen practice.
In his book *Daemonologie, In Forme of a Dialogie* (1597), King James
VI of Scotland discredits physiognomics as too "vtterlie vnlawful to be
trusted in, or practized amongst christians, as leaning to no ground of
natural reason: & it is this part which I called before the deuils schole"
(14). With these lines, the Scottish monarch obviously intends to dis-
sociate physiognomic practice from pious Christian faith. In the same
year, 1597, the English Parliament passed the "Acte for punyshment of
Rogues, Vagabondes and Sturdy Beggars," better known as the "Vaga-
bonds Act," penalizing "to have knowledge in Phisiognomye Palmestry
or other like crafty Scyence" (39 Eliz, c.4.). The act makes clear that it
largely suspects non-Christians of possessing (or pretending to possess)
such knowledge: "idle persons going about any Cuntry eyther begging
or using any subtile Crafte or unlawfull Games and Playes [...] Fellons
wandering pretending themselves to be Egipcyans, or wandeirng in the
Habite Forme or Attyre of counterfayte Egipcians" (39 Eliz, c.4.). In
fact, the great popularity of phrenology in England may well be due to
the circumstance that physiognomics, according to the Vagabonds Act,
was technically still illegal until 1824, at which point the term "Phisi-
ognomye" dropped out of the list of unlawful activities in the transition
from the Elizabethan Vagabonds Act to the Vagrancy Act of the Re-
gency era. From these examples, one can see that physiognomics was not

necessarily as much in line with Christian faith as Shuttleworth claims. In this context, it must appear as one of Lavater's major achievements to have reconciled Christian theology with the divinatory practice of physiognomics, for even the famous early modern physiognomist Giambattista della Porta still had to answer an ecclesiastical tribunal in 1592 for his books (although the inquiry remained without further consequences for him or his books). If physiognomics is not so closely linked to Christian faith as Shuttleworth suggests, then the differences between it and phrenology and its rather materialist approach begin to shrink. Shuttleworth's claim of a strong conceptual distinction between physiognomics and phrenology is also opposed by other scholars, who emphasize rather the continuity in the development of both sciences. Graeme Tytler, for instance, states that phrenology is "*pace* Franz Joseph Gall […] itself a kind of physiognomy," and he adds a long footnote to this statement, containing many references that strengthen his argument for a "close association between physiognomy and phrenology" (Tytler 1993: 169). Winfried M. Senseman, who repeatedly adds a hyphen to the names of Lavater and Gall, "Lavater-Gall" (Senseman 1953: 485), asserts that "phrenology is a branch of physiognomy" (Senseman 1950: 291), and Ian Jack similarly describes "physiognomy and phrenology [as] two related aspects of psychology" (378). For those reasons, I will distinguish clearly between pathognomic and physiognomic practice, but will consider physiognomics and phrenology to be akin.

Difficulties in defining such inexact concepts also originate from the entangled history of physiognomics. Since there exists a great number of standard works on its history, I briefly refer to these works rather than providing a full-length survey of the history of physiognomics myself.[10] Unfortunately, there are almost no extant documents of physiognomic theories that predate the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonica* (c.300 BCE), so that this treatise must be considered as a sort of physiognomic *urtext* (see Schmölders 2007: 47).[11] The best available study on Pseudo-Aristotle's *Physiognomonica* is Sabine Vogt's extensive and excellent commentary on her German translation (particularly her chapter on literary physiognomics: 45–107). The most prominent text in the Roman tradition is by the rhetorician Polemon of Laodicea (88?–144? CE). His treatise is extant in an Arabic translation and was later retranslated into Latin (see Porter 49–50). For a brief survey of physiognomics in the Middle Ages (or rather its absence during this period), see Joseph Ziegler's article, "Philosophers and Physicians on the Scientific Validity of Latin Physiognomy, 1200–1500."[12] The early modern period witnessed a strong increase of interest in physiognomic thinking; for discussions of Giambattista della Porta's impact, see Katherine MacDonald 2005, or Gérard Simon 1980 (particularly the chapter "Porta, la physionomie et la magie: Les Circularités de la similitude"). Sibylle Baumbach's book on physiognomics in Shakespeare's plays contains a concise discussion

of both reception and production of physiognomic theory on the early modern English stage (Baumbach 2007a: 29–34). Concerning Lavater's physiognomics, there is an abundance of literature. Invaluable and of undisputed importance in this context, however, is John Graham's book, *Lavater's Essays on Physiognomy: A Study in the History of Ideas* (1979). It also contains a brief chapter on the reception of Lavater's theories in England (61–70) that is largely based on his earlier article, "Lavater's Physiognomy in England" (1961). Lavater's impact on English literature is explored by Graeme Tytler's article, "Lavater and Physiognomy in English Fiction, 1790–1832" (1995). Karl Riha's introduction to his edition of Lichtenberg's critical approach to Lavater is a good account of the above-mentioned "Physiognomik-Streit" between Lichtenberg and Lavater. The "sister-science" of phrenology, as put forward by Johann Spurzheim, Franz Joseph Gall, and George Combe in the early nineteenth century, is perhaps best documented in David Stack's book on George Combe, *Queen Victoria's Skull* (2008). The many articles dealing with physiognomics or phrenology in a particular novel or author are specified in the later chapters of this book and are therefore not listed here. In the historical context of my analysis, it is crucial to point out the importance of physiognomics for Victorian culture. Sharrona Pearl states in this context that "Physiognomy achieved almost universal penetration into the Victorian consciousness" (2), mainly for reasons of its universal accessibility. This is an aspect to which I will frequently return in my close readings: the fact that Victorian literature is permeated with physiognomic discourse. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, traditional physiognomics and phrenology gradually became absorbed in criminal anthropology. The detailed introduction to the English translation and scholarly edition of Cesare Lombroso's *Criminal Man* (Italian: *L'Uomo Delinquente*) by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Lombroso 1–41) provides a good survey of the relationship between physiognomics and criminology. A wider scope is provided by Peter-André Alt, who not only focuses on Lombroso, but also on Richard Krafft-Ebing, Max Nordau, and Hans Groß, as well on their influence on literature of the fin de siècle (Alt 340–352).

While Pseudo-Aristotle, della Porta, Lavater, Lichtenberg, and Lombroso are the canonic texts in their respective fields, less well-known for their discussion of physiognomic theory is the second strand of texts that I use as basis for my argument, namely texts from German idealism. As texts which are concerned with distinct philosophical questions, these texts only occasionally touch upon physiognomic ideas. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, however, includes an entire chapter on physiognomics and phrenology in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and the topic resurfaces in the writings of many of Hegel's critics, such as Arthur Schopenhauer, who not only mentions the topic in passing in *The World as Will and Representation*, but also includes an entire chapter on physiognomics in

his later *Parerga and Paralipomena*. I will dwell on these texts further in the context of my close readings (particularly, in the chapter on Joseph Conrad, who demonstrably knew Schopenhauer's philosophy).

These articles provide an excellent survey of the long history of physiognomic practice. In the context of this book, however, it is important to note the difference between "scientific" and literary physiognomics. The concept of literary physiognomics is to a certain extent independent from the cognition of "scientific" physiognomics (see Kronshage 2016). Even when a certain physiognomic theory is debunked (for example della Porta's physiognomic analogy between men and animals), it might, in the narrated world of the realist novel, be operational nevertheless. As long as physiognomic practice is justified by the narrative itself, it can well feature as a meaningful and key epistemological concept in the fictional text. This circumstance also explains why literary realism around 1850 appropriated the moribund science of physiognomics to create detailed representations of the world. Realist writers were not scientists, but writers. They formed an idea of how literature should represent the world, especially human beings: through visual description of the outer appearance. It is in this context that they discovered the usefulness of physiognomics as a *literary* device, no matter how true it really was. What mattered to the Victorian realists was the analogous perspective of physiognomics and the realist approach that went in both cases from the visual outside to an inside otherwise imperceptible by the senses.

It is important, then, to recognize when a narrative text employs literary physiognomics as a "signifying system" (Flint 21). In other words, it is necessary to develop criteria that allow us to distinguish physiognomic from facial descriptions (also see Wolf 392). For any physiognomic portrait is always also a facial one, but not the other way around. A first important clue for distinguishing facial and physiognomic portraiture is the common *complexity* of the latter. In the nineteenth-century novel, the literary portrait clearly gained in complexity, and it also started to include "scientific" *jargon* taken from physiognomic and phrenological textbooks. Furthermore, the Victorian portrait referred to certain *specifics of physiognomic discourse*. To determine whether a given literary portrait may justly be called "physiognomic," I will therefore dwell on three aspects: complexity, signal words, and discourse reference.

Throughout literary history, descriptions of people's looks have changed significantly. There is a marked difference in speaking epithets like the "the goddess, *flashing-eyed* Athena" (Hom. *Od.* 1.178; my italics) and the dense, meticulous, and extensive physiognomic descriptions in a Victorian novel like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The difference is both in quantity, since descriptions in Victorian novels are commonly much longer than those in fiction from earlier periods, and in quality, since physiognomic descriptions tend to be denser in the nineteenth century, and aim at descriptive completeness. The substantial descriptions

in Victorian novels are therefore commonly regarded as one of their central features. Even more than length, density is a clear signal of physiognomic discourse in a literary portrait. The following (comparably brief) portrait of Mr. Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* makes that very clear:

> [T]he fire shone full on his [Rochester's] face. I knew my traveller with his broad and jetty eyebrows; his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. I recognised his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, choler; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw—yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake. His shape, now divested of cloak, I perceived harmonised in squareness with his physiognomy: I suppose it was a good figure in the athletic sense of the term—broad chested and thin flanked, though neither tall nor graceful.
>
> (JE 141; ch. 13)[13]

The portrait consists of 101 words, nine of which are names of facial features: eyebrows, forehead, hair, nose, nostrils, mouth, chin, jaw, and of course face itself. Directly anteceding these nine names are eight adjectives: broad, jetty, square, black, decisive, full, grim, and good. These two groups, nouns and adjectives for facial parts, are supplemented by altogether three relative clauses that more accurately explain the respective description: "his square forehead, *made squarer by…*," "his decisive nose, *more remarkable for…*," and "his grim mouth, chin, and jaw— *yes, all three were very grim*." The general visuality of this portrait is heightened by verbs of perception, such as "I recognized" and "I perceived," as well as by the opening statement that the fire provides sufficient light. The interpretational aspect of the physiognomic analysis is marked by verbs of mental processing visual data, such as "I knew," "I thought," and "I suppose," as well as by general interpretational adjectives such as "denoting." Finally, the word "physiognomy" itself may be said to have a signaling effect in this context. Where Homer's descriptions are usually restricted to a speaking epithet, the example of *Jane Eyre* demonstrates that the physiognomic portrait extends to all different word types—adjectives, nouns, verbs, and adverbs—and to all parts of the sentence—dependent and independent clauses. Syntactically such attempts at exactness are often marked by parataxis, and stylistically by a *cumulatio*, as can be seen, for instance, in the description of the perfect beauty of Rosamond Oliver in *Jane Eyre*:

> No charm was wanting, no defect was perceptible; the young girl had regular and delicate lineaments; eyes shaped and coloured as we see them in lovely pictures, large, and dark, and full; the long and shadowy eyelash which encircles a fine eye with so soft a fascination;

the pencilled brow which gives such clearness; the white smooth forehead, which adds such repose to the livelier beauties of tint and ray; the cheek oval, fresh, and smooth; the lips, fresh too, ruddy, healthy, sweetly formed; the even and gleaming teeth without flaw; the small dimpled chin; the ornament of rich, plenteous tresses.

(JE 418; ch. 31)

The paratactic structure of this one single sentence is emphasized by its twelve commas and ten semicolons, by its anaphoric structure ("the long ...; the penciled ...; the white ...; the cheek ...; the lips ...; the even ...; the small ..."), and by its 29 adjectives that can be grouped in adjectives of color (dark, shadowy, white, ruddy), size and mass (large, long, rich, full, plenteous), perfection (delicate, fine, regular, even, without flaw), and texture (smooth, soft). They describe nine facial features (eyes, eyelashes, eyebrows, forehead, cheek, lips, teeth, chin, and tresses). This excessiveness of description suggests a scientific enumeration, which tries to completely describe an object in all its different aspects, and as precisely as possible.

Another way to suggest that a certain literary portrait is physiognomic is by mentioning the names of prominent physiognomists. Lavater, for instance, is mentioned in several nineteenth-century novels, such as in Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) and Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869). Lombroso's name is also mentioned in many late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century novels, for instance in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) (see Chapter 5 on Joseph Conrad). Even when such references are sometimes rather ironic, they still include physiognomic discourse in the fictional text (although they doubt its *validity*).

While the mentioning of famous physiognomists (della Porta, Lavater, Lombroso) are explicit references to physiognomic discourse, references can sometimes also be rather implicit: in Chapters 18 and 19 of *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Rochester leaves Thornfield Hall under false pretenses, leaving the Ingrams, who are residing as his guests at Thornfield, alone with Jane Eyre. Later that day, an old "gypsy" woman arrives at Thornfield and asks separately to see the members of the party, in order to apply her knowledge of "the science of palmistry" (JE 225; ch. 18). Blanche Ingram returns visibly frightened from her interview with the "gypsy." Then Jane is asked into the library, where the fortune-telling lady has settled herself, ready for the exertion of her skills. The mysterious old woman begins to read Jane's palm, but soon gives up, saying:

I can make nothing of such a hand as that; almost without lines: besides, what is in a palm? Destiny is not written there [...] it is in the face: on the forehead, about the eyes, in the lines of the mouth.

(JE 229; ch. 18)

This rather direct reference to physiognomics ("written […] in the face") is accompanied by an indirect reference, namely the fact that Rochester—who is the "gypsy" in disguise—is dressed up *as a gypsy*. This refers to the close association of "gypsies" with physiognomics, both in popular belief, and in jurisprudence, for the above-mentioned Vagabonds Act of 1597 penalizes physiognomic practice in general, and mentions "Egyptians," i.e. "gypsies," in particular:

> All idle persons going about any Cuntry eyther begging or using any subtile Crafte or unlawfull Games and Playes, or fayning themselves to have knowledge in Phisiognomye Palmestry or other like crafty Scyence, or pretending that they can tell Destenyes Fortunes or such other like fantasticall Ymagynacions. […] Fellons wandering pretending themselves to be *Egipcyans*, or wandeirng in the Habite Forme or Attyre of counterfayte *Egipcians*; shalbe taken adjudged and deemed Rogues Vagabondes and Sturdy Beggers, and shall susteyne such Payne and Punyshment as by this Acte is in that behalfe appointed.
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> (39 Eliz, c.4.; my italics)

As mentioned earlier, this act was still effective in the early nineteenth century until the "physiognomy" passage dropped out of it in 1824 with the introduction of the Vagrancy Act (5 G4, c.83). The close association of physiognomic practice with "gypsies," however, lived on in the public consciousness, as the peculiar chapter of *Jane Eyre* clearly demonstrates. Such indirect references may serve to suggest a physiognomic framework forming the basis of literary description.

Completeness is another key feature of many realist physiognomic portraits. While the German nursery rhyme "Punkt, Punkt, Komma, Strich; und fertig ist das Angesicht"[14] suggests that only very few elements are necessary to constitute a complete face: two dots (eyes), a vertical line (nose), and a horizontal line (mouth), the examples of the physiognomic portraits in *Jane Eyre* rather seem to contradict the idea of a simple facial code of eyes, nose, and mouth. Such portraits also include eyebrows, forehead, hair, nostrils, chin, and jaw. Furthermore, physiognomic treatises divide the basic elements (eye, nose, mouth) into further subparts. The eye, generally meaning the eyeball (*bulbus oculi*) resting in its socket (*orbit*), is further divided into eyelids (*palpebra superior* and *palpebra inferior*), eyelashes (*cilia*), and eyebrows (*supercilium*). The mouth (*cavitas oralis*) is also subdivided into several parts: the vertical groove below the nose (*philtrum*), which is sometimes considered as an extension of the upper lips (*labium superius oris*), the lower lips (*labium inferius oris*), the teeth (*dentes*), which form two rows, the one embedded in the lower jaw (*mandibula*) and the other in the upper (*maxilla*), the gums (*gingiva*), and for some physiognomists the tongue