

Willkie Collins's *Poor Miss Finch* (1872)

chps 1-19

1. what motivating principle drives Madame Pratolungo towards both her husband and Lucilla Finch? How does this principle play itself out later in the story?
2. which characters seem most aware of the self-constructed nature of human identity?
3. does Lucilla's vision impairment profoundly disable her?
4. which characters actively construct physical difference as a disability in others?
5. does Wilkie Collins employ too much or too little humor, given the novel's subject matter?

chps 20-30

1. does blindness prove more of a barrier in today's reading than it did in earlier chapters?
2. how do narrator Madame Pratolungo's political views shape her opinions of those around her?
3. is Madame Pratolungo faithful to her own political principles?
4. does Wilkie Collins directly or indirectly reveal a consistent opinion about France?
5. in what ways does the period's emphasis on artistic realism manifest itself?
6. does Wilkie Collins appear to be shaping a clear thesis concerning disability issues, or his approach more exploratory than assertive?
7. does Wilkie Collins's cast British women as disenfranchised, as victimized by their culture?
8. do you agree with Madame Pratolungo's constructions of masculinity and femininity?
9. how reliable are the various characters' ideas and perceptions?
10. whose explanation concerning the genesis of Lucilla's odd dislike of dark colors makes the most intuitive sense?

chps 31-41

1. in what new ways does the reading both reify and question the reliability and value of sight?
2. does the beauty of Art necessarily increase with its fidelity to reality?
3. in what ways is our narrator visually attuned to her environment?
4. under what conditions does Madame Pratolungo most enjoy Nature?
5. does Nugent's aesthetic sensibility echo that of Madame Pratolungo?
6. what definition of ideal masculinity emerges from Madame Pratolungo's assorted opinions of the men around her? What role do her eyes play in shaping this ideal?
7. under what circumstances does appreciation of the aesthetically pleasing woman slide into the sexually charged gaze?
8. is it possible for heterosexual men and women to perceive beauty in the opposite sex without exciting sexual desire?
9. which characters have been victimized/stigmatized by the stare?
10. which is Lucilla the object of more frequently, the gaze or the stare? Are they mutually exclusive when she is the object in question? Does Lucilla's gaining her sight alter this equation?
11. do the two oculists who examine Lucilla consider the body and mind as separate or connected?
12. from what disability does Oscar appear to suffer, even before he sustains a brain injury?

chps 41 – end

1. how does Wilkie Collins go about covertly proclaiming his commitment to realism in this novel?
2. does Collins's decision to switch narrative voices and have Lucilla herself describe her experience in Ramsgate through journal writing illuminate her character and motivation in a way that Madame Pratolungo could not?
3. at what points in the narrative is the tone in which a character says or writes something at least as important—if not more important—than what s/he has actually expressed?
4. Nugent successfully replicates the modulations of his twin's voice, along with Oscar's posture and walk. How successful is he in his attempts to imitate Oscar's mode of expressing emotion and affection?
5. how reliable is Lucilla's sense of touch once she has gained her sight?
6. what behavior by Nugent betrays that his interest in Lucilla is at least—if not more—sexual than it is emotional?
7. does Lucilla's new eyesight prove more a blessing than a curse?
8. on which of the following, ultimately, is Lucilla most comfortable relying? Her eyesight, hearing, touch, or imagination?
9. does the data provided by Lucilla's eyes work with or against her instinct/intuition?
10. though Madame Pratolungo enjoys critiquing and categorizing people, she also indulges in sweeping psychological and sociological generalizations that place all humanity under a single classification. Identify a couple such moments.
11. can you identify any apparent contradictions or errors in Wilkie Collins's novel? Can the conflicting ideas or passages in question be reconciled?